As Strangers and Pilgrims: Hermeneutical Hospitality as Missiological Paradigm for Ecumenical Dialogue

Como Extranjeros y Peregrinos: La hospitalidad hermenéutica como paradigma misiológico para el Diálogo Ecuménico.

Daniel Jara Jhayya
Máster en Teología. Protestantse Theologische Universiteit - Netherlands

E-mail: danieljaraj@hotmail.com
Fecha de recepción: Enero 2016
Fecha de aceptación: Marzo 2016

Abstract

This paper proposes a new missiological paradigm for ecumenical dialogue in order to deal with the tension between the "religious identity" of the person involved, which is not static, and the openness that the other demands in order to be recognized. Finally, it mentions the notion of feast as a space for hermeneutical openness and encounter where people who is involved in ecumenical dialogue can find recognition, trust in the other can be developed, their own strangeness and fragility can be embraced, and an anteroom of the eschatological reconciliation with those whose differences seem insurmountable can be opened.

Key words: Hermeneutics, Ecumenical dialogue, Hospitality, Reconciliation.

Resumen

El presente artículo propone un nuevo paradigma misiológico para el diálogo ecuménico con el fin de lidiar con la tensión entre la "identidad religiosa" de la persona involucrada, la cual no es estática, y la apertura que el Otro demanda para así ser cabalmente reconocido. Se menciona así mismo, la noción del Festín como un espacio para la apertura hermenéutica y el encuentro, en el cual la persona envuelta en el diáologo ecuménico puede encontrar reconocimiento, la confianza en el otro puede ser desarrollada, su propia extrañeza y fragilidad pueden ser asumidas y constituye una antesala para la reconciliación escatológica con aquellos cuyas diferencias parecen insalvables

Palabras clave: Hermeneutica, Diálogo Ecuménico, Hospitalidad, Reconciliación.

Two Approaches to Mission and Dialogue

In the development of their own identity, different Christian movements, traditions and churches, develop mission and dialogue with those outside their congregations by using different missionary approaches. For instance, a well established church as the Church of England applies an inclusivist model that opens spaces for salvation outside the Christian church but only through the person of Christ. On the other hand, modern Christian charismatic movements as the Vineyard movement are clear examples of an exclusivist missiological paradigm that claims faithfulness to Christian identity as the starting point for any kind of dialogue with other religious traditions or non-believers. Finally, we can consider national traditions as the Russian Orthodox Church which practices dialogue and mission as two different and separate issues but always with an exclusivist understanding of its tradition and doctrine.

What these three perspectives have in common is the recognition of God's will of salvation for all humanity and the fact that these three churches consider their own perspectives as normative for judging those who do not belong to their Christian traditions. This last point has provoked reactions from some theologians like Knitter, who has stated that dialogue from any of these positions is a kind of "dialogue between the cat and the mouse" because "my final word either negates or subordinates your word". Thus, any kind of dialogue will be previously conditioned. In this dialogue "the mouse ends up fulfilled when included in the cat" (Knitter, 1999:33).

In charismatic churches where the exclusivist model is practiced, the idea of "universal salvation" is rejected because it lacks a biblical basis. Thus, passages in the Bible like the one in which Jesus affirms that he is "the way, the truth and the life" and that "no one comes to the Father except through [him]" (John 14:6) are normative for their faith. According to Moyaert, this faithfulness to the written word claimed by these congregations "means a very literal interpretation of the Bible" (Moyaert, 2011:17).

This exclusivist paradigm is based on a pessimistic anthropology that highlights the sinful nature of human beings and a high Christology that emphasizes the divine nature of Jesus Christ as the uniquely valid option for salvation. Only the personal confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior as an epistemological requirement makes salvation possible. Furthermore, culture is understood in negative terms and the main reason why it must be studied is because it will facilitate the proclamation of the gospel.

This theological approach is commonly recognized in evangelical churches and ecclesial supra-organizations like the Lausanne Movement. In his opening address "Why Lausanne?", the evangelist Billy Graham summarizes well the main points of practical mission from an exclusivist perspective: "a) commitment to the authority of Scripture, b) lostness of human beings apart from Christ, c) salvation in Jesus Christ alone, d) Christian witness, e) the necessity of evangelism for the salvation of the souls" (Stott, 1994:14).

In this way, a clear distinction is created between those who are justified by God's grace through Christ and those who don't believe and live in sin. For the former, in any kind of

encounter with a religious or non-religious other, their Christian identity must prevail. In their understanding, Christian identity is an "impermeable" boundary that separates the justified and the sinner and is characterized by "certainty, conviction, perseverance, trust and agreement. It excludes ambiguity, otherness and interpretation" (Moyaert, 2011:81).

For most of the exclusivists, dialogue is a word that at least arouses suspicion and provokes a defensive attitude. Subsequently, they consider themselves to be those who take more seriously their Christian identity and the faithfulness to the gospel compared with other Christian partners. Among exclusivists, faithfulness to Christian identity and openness to dialogue are two opposite sides of one single scale. Gay explains this wonderfully: "'where your heart is' Jesus might have said in the contemporary context, 'there you will prefer certainty to ambiguity and truth to dialogue' (Gay, 1993:225) Thus, Christian identity becomes a boundary between Christians and non-Christians.

Because of these characteristics, congregations that hold an exclusivist understanding of mission are not enthusiastic about dialogical openness. The other person needs to convert before he can be considered a suitable partner for dialogue. Nevertheless, this does not prevent some of these congregations from beings involved in dialogue with non-Christians, but it is a special dialogue that has conversion as its main goal. As Netland asserts: "Properly defined, dialogue is not incompatible with a commitment to evangelism… informed dialogue is essential if the proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ is to be carried out effectively." (Netland, 1991:301) Thus, in an exclusivist understanding of mission, dialogue mainly relates to the conversion of the other. It is because of this consideration of dialogue as a practice aimed at conversion that for authors like Moyaert, it is very difficult to develop dialogue from an exclusivist perspective (which doesn't mean that cooperation is impossible from this perspective).

A Christian tradition that, by its own logic, agrees with some exclusivist statements is the Russian Orthodox Church. This Patriarchate separates dialogue and mission as part of its ministry. The attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church regarding dialogue and mission is ambiguous: inside its "canonical territories" the Orthodox Church maintains an exclusivist attitude towards any other kind of religious tradition, including other Christian denominations. This makes it very difficult for this church to identify God's revelation in the "canonical territory" in people outside its Christian tradition.

Outside its canonical territory, this Church engages in dialogue but affirms that its primary task in relation to any non-Orthodox confession is "to bear continuous and persistent witness which will lead to the truth expressed in this Tradition becoming understandable and acceptable"[1]. This church develops dialogue from "[…] the firm confession of the truth of our Universal Church as a sole guardian of Christ's heritage and a sole saving ark of divine grace[2]" and its objective is "to

1 The Russian Orthodox Church. Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Basic Principles of the Attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church Toward the Other Christian Confessions (2010) Web Site. Available on: http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/7/5/1.aspx (visit 2015, 22nd July).

2 The Russian Orthodox Church. Department for Ex-

show [others] in fact what they should consider and decide upon if they really believe that salvation is bound up with life in the Church and sincerely wish to be united with her…"

Thus, dialogue in the Russian Orthodox tradition is mainly geared to witnessing and conversion of the religious other. In dialogue, the Russian Orthodox Church looks for "faithfulness to the apostolic and patristic Tradition of the Orthodox Church and the teaching of the Ecumenical and Local Councils." This will unequivocally promote a dichotomy between "our faith" which is "the sole one" and their faith "that is unfaithful to apostolic and patristic Tradition". Because of the imbalance between their beliefs and the other's belief, in dialogue "any dogmatic concessions or compromises in the faith are excluded". In this sense, any attempt at reunification for the non-Orthodox is conditional on changes in the belief of the interlocutor. The Russian Orthodox Church affirms that "the transformation and healing of their dogmatic consciousness and experience" is a precondition for any attempt at reunification.

On the other hand, there are Christian churches like the Church of England that use a different paradigm for mission. According to them, an exclusivist perspective of mission does not do justice to the presence of God in human history and his revelation in different cultures. These churches consider that "an all loving God could not have consigned the majority of humankind to perdition"(D'Costa, 1986:83). These churches developed an inclusivist model of mission in which salvation is possible outside of Christian faith but only because of God's redemption through Jesus Christ. For this reason, Christ is still the center of the salvific act of God, but this Christological salvation is not epistemological as in the exclusivist model, but ontological: an epistemological declaration is not necessary because the sacrifice and redemption of Christ is so complete that it reaches people who had never heard about him.

This theological posture is commonly called "Catholic" because it is associated with the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. On this subject, the reflections of the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner about the existence of "anonymous Christians" stand out. He recognizes an "anonymous Christian" as a "person [who] lives in the grace of God and attains salvation outside of explicitly constituted Christianity - let us say, a Buddhist monk - who, because he follows his conscience, attains salvation and lives in the grace of God" (Rahner, 1986:135). Thus, God uses very divergent ways in order to offer salvation. This approach is not so much interested in the sinfulness of human beings, but in the origin of human beings as God's creation and their destiny. Churches who support an inclusivist way of performing mission believe that, unlike the exclusivist model, this model keeps a balance between Christian identity and openness to the religious or non-religious others at the same time. Thus, for some inclusivists, "exclusivism is problematic with respect to interreligious dialogue" (Moyaert, 2011:6). Because of this alleged "balance" some authors characterize this model as one that accepts and rejects religious plurality at the same time.

An inclusivist approach to mission moves the center of discussion from sin and human

ternal Church Relations, Dialogue with Non-Orthodox (2015) Web Site. Available on: https://mospat.ru/en/documents/attitude-to-the-non-orthodox/iv/ (visit 2015, 22nd July).

brokenness, as in the exclusivist approach, to connectedness with religious and non-religious others. According to Dupuis, this connectedness "forms the basis of interreligious dialogue and the turn to the religious other"(Dupuis, 1997:346). In this manner, instead of focusing on what the other lacks (regeneration through Christ), as in the exclusivist approach, inclusivists focus on what connect them with the other, which is the universal redemption through Christ. Inclusivists argue that, contrary to the exclusivist model, faithfulness to their religious identity is not a boundary between them and the religious other. Instead of being a boundary, commitment to their faith convictions is the basis for a sincere dialogue: "After all, at the basis of an authentic religious life is a faith that endows that life with its specific character and proper identity." (Dupuis, 2001:228)

Most of the criticism of this approach is directed at what was previously mentioned: the consideration of one's own perspective as normative for judging those who do not belong to one's Christian tradition. Authors like Moyaert affirm that "Soteriologically, there is an asymmetry between Christianity and the other's religion." (Moyaert, 2011:23). Thus, other religious traditions can be used by God in order to save people, but this doesn't suppose any kind of parity between those traditions and Christianity; it is because of the person of the Christian Messiah that salvation is an ultimate option in any other belief. This is a confessional perspective that is used as a basis for judging any other tradition and non-believers and also creates a kind of hierarchical relationship. The asymmetry that this relationship supposes can easily relate to a false sense of superiority of one religious tradition over all the others, which will condition any dialogue.

The inclusivist model produces discomfort among exclusivists because it does not establish clear boundaries between who is saved and who is not. The inclusivist approach produces a sense of ambiguity that differs markedly from the sense of certainty that the exclusivist model creates. Besides, exclusivists argue that the inclusivist approach relativizes mission and evangelization as two redundant activities: "If we all will be saved in the end, why develop mission?" In my opinion, the answer to this question resides in the lack of seriousness that some authors believe the inclusivist approach has regarding the specific otherness of every religion. First, it is a mistake to think that every religion and all religious practices are almost the same and have the same intrinsic value. There are religious practices in the world that clearly oppress people and have institutionalized many kinds of violence, and the Church must denounce these practices. Second, this approach uses Christian categorizations and doctrines in order to understand the religious other, which again does not do justice to the otherness of the religious other. In this sense, theologians like George Lindbeck reject an inclusivist approach to mission because of the "artificial" connection it creates between "Christian experiences" of salvation and totally different religious traditions. According to Lindbeck it is necessary to appropriate first the Christian language and Christian skills in order to experience reality in a Christian manner. As he affirms: "the notion of anonymous Christianity […] is from this perspective nonsense, and a theory of the salvation of non-Christians built upon it seems

thoroughly unreal" (Lindbeck, 1984:62).

In addition, some theologians criticize precisely what many people consider to be the strong point of the inclusivist approach; that is, the claim of a supposed balance between faithfulness to Christian identity and openness to the religious other (implying that both are opposite). Critics of this model agree that inclusivism "reaches its limit precisely in the tension between the universality of God's salvific will on the one hand and the particularity of the divine incarnation on the other"(Moyaert, 2011:33). For theologians like Hick, this is an "unstable and untenable middle position"(Hick, 1988:7).

Finally, one of the greatest weaknesses of an inclusivist missiological approach is precisely the little importance that this approach attaches to the strangeness and singularity of other religious traditions. Inclusivism glosses over all kinds of particularities in other religions in order to value one single salvific element that is Christ's universal offer for redemption, while almost all the practices and features of these religious traditions are dispensable. Because many of these elements have no relation with Christian faith, inclusivism "runs the risk of remaining blind to that which cannot be 'integrated'(Moyaert, 2011:82).

The two missiological approaches previously analyzed, exclusivism and inclusivism, are, first of all, artificial subdivisions that cannot be found in a "pure state" in any Christian congregation. These approaches or models are used in order to pedagogically explain and group missiological styles that coincide in most of their characteristics. In the case of the exclusivist approach, dialogue with the religious and non-religious other is almost completely aimed at the transformation and conversion of the other as a missiological goal; there is almost no room for any kind of conversion of the self as a result of the encounter. This perspective separates Christian identity and the other's otherness as two irreconcilable extremes in dialogue. In practice, from this perspective, a successful dialogue is one in which, in the end, the other becomes like me, embraces my faith and my Christian faith remains unscathed, stronger and unchanged.

On the other hand, the inclusivist approach pretends to keep a balance between faithfulness to Christian identity and openness to dialogue, but the asymmetrical relationship this proposes creates an imbalance between the two sides; the otherness of the other is almost not taken into account, the other is understood in Christian terms and all kind of religious practices and beliefs are, in practice, secondary to the salvific act of the Christian Redeemer.

The tension between openness to the other and faithfulness to Christian identity may be considered more evident in international and more ecumenical Christian congregations where ecumenical dialogue is practiced. In these communities, the otherness of the others is not limited to one or two national, ethnic or socio-economic types; on the contrary, they are characterized by a multicultural reality. This will definitely challenge the way each ecumencial congregation performs mission to those inside the community and outside the community. In my opinion, in order to perform mission in these congregations and have a fruitful dialogue, it is necessary to develop a hermeneutical openness

which allows the strange to become more familiar, and the familiar more strange, as Kearney affirms (Kearney, 2003:51). According to Moyaert, although Paul Ricoeur did not write about Christian dialogue, his hermeneutics "offers new and challenging perspectives for exploring the openness for the other further" (Moyaert, 2011:236). Next, I will develop a missiological paradigm for ecumenical congregations and ecumenical dialogue, based on the hermeneutics of hospitality of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur and some Christian theologians who have worked on this topic.

Hospitality as Missiological Paradigm for Migrant Churches

Central to Christian mission is the tension between openness to the other, his context, culture and reality on the one hand and faithfulness to Christian identity characterized by its values and traditions on the other. This is a tension that marks the manner in which the Church performs mission, relates to intercultural efforts and understands itself in the world. Some Christian traditions like those already studied reflect this tension in different ways. For example, the Anglican Church states dialogue between its religious identity and the context as part of its mission, while the Vineyard movement practices an "instrumentalized dialogue" as part of its mission in order to be faithful to its religious convictions.

In the case of the international and ecumenic churches this is a kind of double tension. On one side, its religious identity relates to the surrounding culture of the host location and on the other side, this same identity deals with the cultural background of members from many different places, ages and religious backgrounds. Regarding this double tension, it is necessary to consider that neither the "religious identity" of the congregation, nor the "local culture" where the church is located, nor the "personal culture" of the attendants are static elements, but they influence each other, they are dynamic and in constant transformation. To quote Baumann, each instance of identity or culture exists only "in the act of being performed, and it can never stand still or repeat itself without changing its meaning"(Baumann, 1999:26).

It is because of this tension between faithfulness to Christian identity (Tulud, 2010:127) and openness to the other inside and outside of the congregation that I consider the hermeneutics of hospitality to be an appropriate paradigm for a relevant and faithful ecumenical dialogue. In this respect, hospitality involves both: a practice of receiving the other, the stranger; and it also involves a hermeneutical openness that makes possible a fruitful dialogue between the members of the congregation with consideration for their respective cultural backgrounds and between the Christian congregations.

In this sense, the Christian tradition of hospitality can serve as a source of inspiration for ecumenical dialogue. As Tulud Cruz mentions, "Hospitality is a way of life that is fundamental to the Christian identity". Hospitality, as a practice that includes respect and care for the other, not only provides a safe haven and support for the stranger, but it also enriches the understanding of the local church about its responsibilities, its place in the world and its mission. A motivation for hospitality lies in the idea that God reveals himself in the stranger, the other. This is a valuable theological

principle for ecumenical dialogue. Thus, the stranger becomes a source of God's revelation. As Jansen says: "God enters the picture as a God incognito, to whom we offer or we do not offer hospitality. […] and, without knowing whom we are dealing with, we discover with surprise the attitude with which we met God." (Jansen, 2002:99) Finding God in the other is an ideal with a long history in the Christian Church. For example, in the tradition of the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), Christ reveals himself in the foreigner, but only when he is invited to stay and share bread with them, when they are hospitable to him. Thus, the other acquires relevancy and becomes a bearer of God's revelation for the Church. As in the parable of the Good Samaritan, it is the completely other, the strangest person on the road, who gives the opportunity for the coming of the Kingdom of God. In the words of Sacks: "The religious challenge is to find God's image in someone who is not in our image, in someone whose colour is different, whose culture is different, who speaks a different language, tells a different story, and worships God in a different way."(Sacks, 2004) As in the story of the Magi from the East, to find God's revelation requires a peregrination to the encounter with the other and attentiveness to God's signals.

Ricoeur's anthropology of oneself as another links up well with Jesus commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39) and can provide good insights into the position from which ecumenical congregations develop mission. If we take seriously the words of Jesus: "Learn from me" (Matthew 11:29), then we can argue that learning about incarnation, i.e. taking the place of the other, becoming like the other, is a biblical and doctrinal basis for performing mission. In this sense, becoming a stranger is in the first place an ontological requirement for Christian mission. As Groody affirms: "God's identification with humanity is so total that in Christ he not only reaches out to the stranger but becomes the stranger." (Groody, 2009:13) According to Barth, incarnation is a mystery that "offends". It offends precisely because becoming a stranger and incarnating his vulnerability defies the values of a society that claims the affirmation of the self, his needs and interests. Incarnation is a challenging concept because it invites us to abandon a "self-serving" identity in order to embrace the identity of the "other", the one who presents himself as needing attention, as needing recognition but as rich at the same time because he is the bearer of God's message. Barth believes that "The mystery [incarnation] reveals to us that for God it is just as natural to be lowly as it is to be high, to be near as it is to be far. To be little as it is to be great, to be abroad as to be at home." (Barth, 2004:192) Being a stranger is part of the identity of God's people (Ex 23:9, Deut 24:18) and God is interested in becoming a God for the stranger (Deut. 10:17-18, Ps 146:9).

The New Testament and the gospels contain plenty of exhortations about the hospitable character of the Church. Jesus calls himself a stranger: "I am not of this world" (John 8:23) and recognizes the labor of the Church for those who are strangers like him: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Matthew 25:35). Tulud Cruz summarizes this well: "Jesus himself by his incarnation and by being an itinerant preacher, took the conditions of a stranger. Moreover, Jesus advocated for the

care of the stranger."(Tulud, 2010:125) By reaffirming the hospitable character of ecumenical churches, we remember that the incarnation, life, ministry and death of Jesus were marked by strangeness and his entire ministry relied on the hospitality that was provided by people along the way. Ecumenical congregations have a model of self-giving love and vocation in the incarnation of Christ, in which God actively decides to empty himself of everything but love. In order that he can be completely identified with the other, he immerses himself completely in a situation of vulnerability in a real act of human-human solidarity.

Through incarnation, it is possible to understand that mission in ecumenical congregations requires us to open dialogical spaces where those in the congregation not only recognize the other, but become like the other in what Küster calls the third space, that is, the space "into which one can only return as a changed person" (Küster, 2003:23) This is a space where those involved in dialogue are open to learning from the other and sharing who they are with the other, where each has something to offer and receive, both are guests and hosts; it is "the space in which human beings have become migrants"(Hoedemaker, 2010:23) This is closely related to the dialectic of appropriation and expropriation proposed by Ricoeur, in which he affirms that people must lose themselves as a precondition for finding themselves by receiving the other (Moyaert, 2011:262)

Practicing a truly ecumenical dialogue with the religious other also requires what Moyaert calls "hermeneutical openness", which is "to receive the world of the religious other […] Hospitality is not absorbing the other". Being hospitable also involves recognizing the "world of the religious [or non-religious] other", i.e. acknowledging that the other has something to offer and that God's revelation cannot be completed until that something is finally shared. Practicing a truly ecumenical dialogue means abolishing an asymmetrical relationship in which one receives the other and helps him, in order to create a horizontal relationship between equals in which both are guests and each side recognizes himself as a stranger. Thus, hermeneutical openness involves a serious consideration of the distance between Christian identity and the strangeness of the other not as a boundary that separates, but as making space for the richness of the other, as Thele affirms: "making room in one's own abode to receive the other"(Thele, 2003:131)

This presupposes an acceptance that the identities of both sides are fragile, are in constant change, challenged by a multicultural context and formed by some strange elements that are unknown to the person. According to Ricoeur, keeping in mind the idea of being a stranger oneself encourages hospitality: "Because we ourselves are strangers, we must be hospitable to other strangers." (Ricoeur) The Christian Church as a group of people marked by strangeness is also affirmed in the New Testament: "Dear friends, I urge you, as strangers and pilgrims" (1 Peter 2:11), and when the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews talks about great figures of the Scriptures, he affirms that "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, […] and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). In ecumencial dialogue, it is only when one recognizes the fragility

and strangeness of their own identity in the first place that a real hospitality can emerge. Following Moyaert's reasoning: "The fragility of identity consists in the fact that personal identity always contains a strangeness". (Moyaert, 2011:263) This strangeness makes people in dialogue equal between each other, since both are looking for God and finding God's revelation and themselves in the other.

By "receiving the world of the religious other", we also state that there are differences in the manner Christianity is lived, experienced and developed in different parts of the world, and in ecumenical dialogue these differences can collide with each other or they can nurture each other. And this "act of receiving" is also a call for a hospitable welcome to those who do not recognize themselves as Christians but want to become part of dialogue; they have value and not only because they are "potential Christians". Of course, this hermeneutical openness cannot be based on pessimistic anthropologies but must rest "[on] a belief in the "readability" and thus comprehensibility of the creation, and the trust in faith that God also reveals himself in the other"(Moyaert, 2011:267)

Nonetheless, it is naïve to assume that all kinds of differences can be overcome by the appropriation of God's revelation in the religious other and the rise of a "mixed faith" that incorporates all kinds of beliefs from different people. In fact, this is not the goal at all. Hospitality is not a unifying force; there are and will always be differences between the host and the guest or the two guests that participate in dialogue. And sometimes these differences can be irreconcilable. Ricoeur's hospitality does not pretend to create "a harmonizing consensus of the familiar and the strange"(Moyaert, 2001:258). Ricoeur believes that his hermeneutics offers spaces for conflicts because they are part of life, and sometimes these conflicts can be due to the practical impossibility of understanding what the other says. Here, pneumatology can be relevant. Hospitality is primarily encouraged by the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit makes it possible to accept the strangeness of the other and to understand strange languages. The Spirit sets people in motion toward others, toward strangers." The Spirit is the one who guides Christ's followers towards truth (John 16:13) and the one who surprises the Church according to his will: "The wind blows wherever it pleases" (John 3:8). The Spirit does not eliminate differences, but as in Pentecost "[he] makes them accessible" (Sundermeier, 1996:211).

In multicultural ecumenical congregations, an attitude of hospitality and hermeneutical openness to the strange is in my opinion a credible option for dealing with the tension between the "religious identity" of the congregation, which is not static but in constant change, and the openness that the other demands from the congregation in order to be welcomed. By keeping a "closed" identity that does not leave room for the strange, the congregation risks overlooking the revelation of God through the other, the strange. On the other hand, by opening up to any kind of religious practice without restriction, the congregation would lose those features and practices that make it unique in the first place. The biblical revelation tells us that the other, the strange, is a place of God's revelation and, as Moyaert asserts, is "a tradition on which hermeneutical hospitality rests" (Moyaert, 2011:313).

Does this mean that the tension between faithfulness to Christian identity and openness to the other is finally resolved by hospitality hermeneutics? The answer is no, this tension cannot be definitely resolved, specially because there is neither a correct proportion nor exact formulas. Each new situation, each new other will require a different interpretative effort, and for this reason looking for God will always require hermeneutics. Moyaert argues that believers "must live in the midst of tension" (Moyaert, 2011:278). Thus, believing will always be related to searching. In a certain sense, hermeneutical hospitality intends to create an attitude for dialogue instead of defining when the sides should "be open" and when they should "remain closed" to the other.

Ecumenical Dialogue: Space for a Welcoming Feast

To finish, I would like to mention one notion that is linked to the Christian tradition of hospitality in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The notion of the Feast relates well to "the tradition of hospitality, a tradition in connection with hermeneutical openness" (Moyaert, 2011:300). Feast as a space for hermeneutical openness and encounter is a place where people can find recognition, trust in the other can be developed, one's own strangeness and fragility can be embraced, an anteroom of the eschatological reconciliation with those whose differences seem insurmountable can be opened and the believer can find new motives for encounter with the religious or the non-religious other. Hermeneutical openness as a place for a feast means providing room in one's abode to welcome the different.

In Christian tradition, the table as an opportunity for sharing and openness has a long history. The table used to be one of Jesus' preferred places for meeting the other and is an image in the book of Revelations for the eschatological reconciliation between the creation and God. Solidarity is one of the consequences of being part of the feast. The differences are not an obstacle to sharing the table in an attitude that is not focused on what makes them different but on what connects them: the necessity of finding the other and celebrating with him. By celebrating together, solidarity and community can be experienced, as Sundermeier affirms: "nowhere am I so present with others and at the same time myself as during a feast"[3].

Finally, hermeneutical hospitality reminds us that Christian pilgrimage is a journey characterized by the surprises of God, as on the road to Emmaus, and that the strange is where God is revealed and experienced. Since its beginnings, Christian faith has been lived in community, experienced in the communion with the other, and mission is achieved in communion with the different.

> "How should koinonia be realized now? What significance does it have? One must insist: theology may never isolate itself. It always seeks exchange; it seeks brothers and sisters, however differently they may think. Indeed, precisely because they think differently, we must come together and learn from the other." (Sundermeier 1994: 307)

Bibliografía

3 See: T. Sundermeier, Den Fremden Verstehen (Göttingen: 1996).

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics IV.1: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London, New York: 2004)

Baumann, Gerd. *The Multicultural Riddle* (New York: 1999)

D'Costa, G. *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (Oxford: 1986)

Dupuis, J. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: 1997)

Dupuis, J. *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (New York: 2001)

Gay, G.M. *Plurality, Ambiguity and Despair in Contemporary Theology* (New York:1993)

Groody, Daniel. *Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees* (Notre Dam: 2009)

Hick, J. G*od and the Universe of Faiths* (London: 1988)

Hoedemaker, Bert . "Blind Alley or Through Traffic? On the Predicament of Mission History". In: *Mission Revisited: Between Mission History and Intercultural Theology* (Berlin: 2010)

Jansen, M. *Languages to God: Signposts by Paul Ricoeur* (Amsterdam: 2002)

Knitter, P. *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (New York: 1996)

Küster, Volker. *Who, With Who, About What?* (Kampen: 2003)

Lindbeck, George. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post Liberal Age* (Philadelphia: 1984)

Moyaert, Marianne. *Fragile Identities* (Amsterdam: 2011)

Netland, H.A. *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: 1991)

Rahner, Karl. *In Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982* (Crossroad: 1986)

Ricoeur, Pul. "Strange Oneself" (2015) Home Web Site. Available on: http://www.saint.germain.free.fr/conferences/conferences99/ricoeur.htm (visit 2015, 10th July).

Sacks, J. *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid a Clash of Civilizations* (London: 2004).

Stott, J. *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement, 1974-1989* (Cambridge: 1994), xiv.

Sundermeier, T. *The Strange Understanding: A Practical Hermeneutics* (Gottingen: 1996)

Sundermeier, T. *Pluralisms, Fundamentalisms, Koinonia* (Amsterdam: 1994)

Thele, N. I*nterreligious Dialogue: Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: 2003)

Tulud, Gemma. *Pilgrims in the Wilderness: Towards an Intercultural Theology of Migration* (Leiden, Boston: 2010)

Tulud, Gemma. *Pilgrims in the Wilderness: Towards an Intercultural Theology of Migration* (Leiden, Boston: 2010)