The Possibility of a Community of Difference

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> *I have become all things to all men*
> *so that by all possible means*
> *I might save some.*
> *I do all this for the sake of the gospel,*
> *that I may share in its blessings.*
>
> *1 Corinthians 15: 22–23*

IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO TRAVEL THOUSANDS of miles from one's home to practice world citizenship. Nowadays, the global has interpenetrated the local, and the world inhabits our own neighborhoods. The challenge of cosmopolitanism lies in constructing a community of difference, a community able to accommodate world citizens in a localized space. Faced with this challenge, we must answer the question of which strategies of interaction will best enable us to negotiate difference as we practice our cosmopolitan identities and relationships. To the attempt to answer this question, I bring a language-oriented, micro-social perspective on cosmopolitan relations. Scholars often use language as a model for cosmopolitanism. Appiah (2006), for example, uses conversation as a metaphor for cosmopolitanism. Language, however, is more than a metaphor; it is the medium for intercultural relations. Language also represents our cosmopolitan identities and allows us to construct communities of difference. Therefore, a linguistic exploration of cosmopolitanism is quite appropriate. South Asian practices of negotiating language difference from the time before the period of Western colonization offer lessons for contemporary cosmopolitanism. We now know of many vibrant forms of multilingualism and cosmopolitanism from precolonial and premodern times that offer challenging models for contemporary life (see Pollock 2006).

Intercultural Relations in South Asia

LET ME RECONSTRUCT THE PICTURE of South Asian multilingual life as it emerges from the scholarship of South Asian linguists and anthropologists (see Annamalai 2001; Khubchandani 1997; Mohanty 2006; Pattanayak 1984). Since South Asians live in a heterogeneous community where they expect to interact with others from different languages and cultures on a daily basis, South Asians are always open to negotiation. Negotiation of language differences is the norm rather than the exception. Furthermore, there is no expectation of a common language as the basis for these interactions. Sometimes, there is no common language available, and even to expect one would be to impose one's own language as the vehicle for communication. Therefore, both interlocutors start with their own language. How is communication possible if both interlocutors speak in their own language? It is possible because they adopt interpersonal and sociolinguistic strategies to negotiate their differences. Through practices, they unpack the differences in content (i.e., grammatical norms, cultural values, or sociocultural knowledge). In other words, their orientation to linguistic interactions and cultural differences is practice-based and not dependent on knowledge, values, or grammar. In employing such negotiation strategies, they search for consensus and are mutually supportive in an effort to achieve their shared goals. Since what brings them together are goals they hope to achieve (i.e., buying and selling), they try to help each other in reaching a mutually satisfactory outcome. They don't let differences or mistakes break down communication. Through negotiation strategies, the interlocutors co-construct the norms that will facilitate their interaction. These inter-subjective norms are operational only during that particular interaction. When both interlocutors end their interaction and move on to a new interaction with different participants, they have to co-construct a new set of norms that will be operational for that new interaction. The inter-subjective norms will constitute forms and conventions from the language systems they both bring to the interaction. In other words, it may be a hybrid code that belongs to neither party in the interaction.

For this kind of interaction to work, language learning and use must be kept together. Speakers don't come ready with the language they need for each interaction. They come with the preparedness to learn on the spot the type of forms and conventions their interlocutors bring. They then use what they learn about the other's norms to co-construct new norms that will help them in their communication. Furthermore, in this style of interaction, the focus is on repertoire building rather than mastery of a target code. In other words, interlocutors don't try to develop full mastery of the language the other brings to the interaction. They simply try to develop the codes, conventions, and competencies necessary to function in that communicative interaction and achieve their purposes. They thus treat the divergent languages as a continuum in a single system, rather than treating each language as constituting a different and separate system. Through these practice-based interactions and co-construction of inter-subjective norms, local communities may construct new codes in the long term. That is, the new temporary achievement of norms will go some way toward the construction of new contact languages, like pidgins, creoles, and lingua franca which have the possibility of being shared by certain communities. However, these hybrid codes themselves become open for negotiation when contexts and purposes change and new sets of interlocutors meet.

To succeed at this kind of intercultural communication, South Asians must bring a different orientation to community. Whereas community in the dominant linguistic tradition is based on sharedness (i.e., shared language or culture), South Asians treat community as a group of people

living in a common space. Mainstream linguistics presumes that speech communities are homogenous. In contrast, the notion of shared space accommodates people of diverse languages and cultures living in the same place. In this kind of setting, members are always compelled to negotiate their differences in order to achieve community. Or, to use another metaphor, rather than focusing on a bounded space, South Asians treat all their social interactions as occurring in the contact zone. Community, for them, is experienced in the liminal spaces between languages and cultures.

Since this form of intercultural communication is practice-based, the focus among multilingual scholars is now on describing and formulating the relevant negotiation strategies. Khubchandani (1997) has discussed some of these strategies in his work. He has highlighted the role of two strategies as follows: "*synergy* (i.e., putting forth one's own efforts) and *serendipity* (i.e., accepting the other on his/her own terms, being open to unexpectedness)." These strategies help South Asians "develop positive attitudes to variations in speech (to the extent of even appropriating deviations as the norm in the lingua franca), in the process of 'coming out' from their own language-codes to a neutral ground" (94). Synergy involves both interlocutors working to come to a common ground and managing their different resources to achieve intelligibility. Serendipity involves being always open to new codes and conventions. Through such strategies, multilinguals make "deviations as the norm"—in other words, any nonsystematic or idiosyncratic usage will be negotiated into a mutually shared feature for communication.

Two other features of their interactions enable South Asians to adopt these strategies: "the reciprocity of language skills" and "mutuality of focus" (49). The first feature means that they are able to reciprocate the strategies employed by their interlocutors to achieve intelligibility. What motivates them to reciprocate is their mutuality of focus—i.e., they both come to this encounter because of objectives they share. Their shared objectives in this communicative interaction motivate them to collaborate in making this engagement succeed.

Their strategies of communication are also motivated by certain attitudes they bring to communication. South Asians regard language "as a non-autonomous device, communicating in symphony with other non-linguistic devices; its full significance can be explicated only from the imperatives of context and communicative tasks" (40). In other words, language is an ecological resource for them. They treat contextual features such as the setting, gestures, and tone as affordances for intelligibility and communication. This attitude goes against the Western/structuralist orientation of language as a *sui generis* system that has the power to communicate by itself, irrespective of ecological resources. Furthermore, while the Western modernist tradition prioritizes the rational and cognitive faculty in producing and interpreting speech, the South Asian practice actively employs intuition and spirituality in addition to the body in language communication. As Khubchandani reminds us: "Ancient Indian grammarians talk about the *guna* (power, potency) of language... A message can convey meaning not merely through its intent in isolation (as indexed in the dictionary) but also in the context of identity (as when observing verbal protocol in a formal setting) or through its effect on the participants (as manipulated by observers)" (52).

Though we can only guess how South Asians communicated in precolonial times, we are now able to empirically study contemporary contexts of intercultural communication to identify such

strategies. South Asians now adopt similar strategies to negotiate global English in everyday communication. In fact, we learn that the strategies South Asians display might be shared by other multilingual communities in Africa (Makoni 2002) and South America (de Souza 2002). These strategies lie hidden, if not suppressed, in mainstream linguistics as the discipline has assumed homogeneity as the norm for language interactions, following the structuralist and Chomskyan schools. Some of my colleagues and I study lingua franca interactions in global English to formulate other negotiation strategies of intercultural communication in contemporary society.

In one of the earliest studies in this tradition, Firth (1996) discovered what is called the "let it pass" principle. When faced with an unintelligible utterance, multilinguals don't let the communication break down, but proceed with the interaction, ignoring the unintelligible feature. They may decode the utterance later from further occurrences in other contexts or renegotiate it to carry new meaning. Swedish scholar Planken (2005) finds that multiliguals engage in "safe talk" to create "a no-man's-land" (397) before they negotiate their differences in English. What safe talk means is self-deprecating jokes and reflexive statements about one's own differences. After such talk, both interlocutors experience reduced inhibitions and increased solidarity to negotiate their differences. Planken states, "It would seem that by pointing out and acknowledging cultural differences, participants try to create a temporary in-group of (fellow) non-natives, whose common ground is the fact that they differ culturally" (397).

German scholar Julianne House (2003) finds that Asian students in German universities engage in "parallel monologues" and "demonstrations of solidarity" that help negotiation. Parallel monologue means that the respondent begins her response almost anew, repeating the statement or question of the speaker as she tags on her response. Demonstration of solidarity means that when they disagree, Asian students first show affirmation before they latch on their disagreeing comments. Though these strategies may be motivated by the need to save face (which House interprets as based on Asian culture), they also help in intercultural communication. These strategies build a redundancy into the communication; both parties check their mutuality of focus before they construct the next turn in the conversation. Meierkord (2004) suggests that such strategies can be discerned at the micro-level of discourse. Multilinguals adopt the strategies of segmentation (i.e., utterances shortened into clausal or phrasal segments which form the basic informational units) and regularization (i.e., foregrounding of forms that are explicit) in their English. Through these strategies, they make the meaning clear in a language in which both are not native. There are other strategies from traditional sociolinguistics that are also displayed in lingua franca communication. Giles (1984) has introduced the notion of speech accommodation, whereby speakers inch toward each other's forms and conventions through convergence strategies. Gumperz (1982) has articulated sociolinguistic strategies such as repair, rephrasing, clarification, and topic change to resolve potential miscommunication.

I illustrate below the negotiation strategies discussed above through a typical interaction among multilinguals. Firth and Wagner (2007, 808) cite the extract below from a telephone conversation between a Danish cheese exporter (H) and an Egyptian importer (A) in English:

1. A: we don't want the order after the cheese is uh::h blowing

2. H: see, yes

3. A: so I don't know what I can we can do uh with the order now. (.) What do you think we should do with this is all blowing Mister Hansen (0.7)

4. H: I am not uh (0.7) blowing uh what uh, what is this uh too big or what?

5. A: No the cheese is bad Mister Hansen (0.4) it is like (.) fermenting in the customs cool rooms

6. H: ah it's gone off

7. A: yes, it's gone off

Initially, in turn 2, H adopts the "let it pass" principle to proceed with the conversation though it becomes clear later (in 4) that he doesn't understand "blowing." I am told by native speaker scholars (Rod Ellis, personal communication) that "blown cheese" refers to over-fermented cheese; however, the term is rarely used in the progressive, as "blowing." H has to ask for a clarification as A forces him to make a decision about the transaction (in 3). H's shipment might get cancelled. Even here, H is supportive as he himself offers an interpretation ("too big") to negotiate the meaning. The rephrasing A then provides in 5 (i.e., "bad" and "fermenting") helps both to focus better on the meaning. At this point (in 6), H offers another substitute for "blowing"—i.e., "gone off." A displays uptake in 7. Though "gone off" is not as precise and technical as "blown cheese," this is the co-constructed term that both will use for this notion hereafter. It is clear throughout that both A and H are focused on the functions they are here to achieve—i.e., the business transaction—not on making grammaticality judgments. They negotiate their meaning without regard to what native speakers may use in these contexts. Though their sentences are not constructed grammatically and their lexical items are used with idiosyncratic meaning, they achieve their social purposes through English. More importantly, we see that language use and language learning take place together. As A and H negotiate their social functions through language, they also explore the semantic range of the words they are using and learn new words that suit their purposes. Thus they reconstruct words and meanings in their own terms and appropriate English language to serve their interests.

Implications for Cosmopolitanism

TO BRING OUT THE UNIQUE WAYS in which South Asians and multilinguals negotiate differences, we must compare the model of intercultural relations we see above with the models of cosmopolitanism articulated by other contemporary scholars. Appiah (2006) considers different possibilities for what would enable cross-cultural encounters. At one point he observes, "The point of entry to cross cultural conversations are things that are shared by those who are in the conversation. They do not need to be universal; all they need to be is what these people have in common. Once we have found enough we share, there is the further possibility that we will be able to enjoy discovering things we do not yet share" (97). Appiah's approach is pragmatic; however, it is often difficult to discover sharedness in the environment of radical multilingualism

and multiculturalism that we find in contemporary encounters. More importantly, although the incidental discovery of features that are common is welcomed by participants, it can be problematic if they go into an interaction with that expectation. If their expectation is not fulfilled, some may turn back from that interaction and fail to make an effort to negotiate their differences. An expectation of sharedness might also lead one group to impose its values and conventions on others. It is for this reason that South Asians don't enter an encounter with an expectation of sharedness. They go ready to negotiate their differences through strategies and practices. The only thing shared for South Asians are social goals and objectives.

What Appiah offers in another context comes close to the model developed in this article:

> [I]n the beginning is the deed: practices and not principles are what enable us to live together in peace. Conversations across boundaries of identity... begin with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own... I stress the role of the imagination here because the encounters, properly conducted, are valuable in themselves. Conversation doesn't have to lead to consensus about anything, especially not values; it's enough that it helps people get used to one another. (85)

Indeed, practices enable us to negotiate differences effectively. Searching for commonalities in principles will either disappoint us or lead us to impose our own principles on others. However, South Asians won't limit this kind of encounter only to imaginative purposes as Appiah does. As we found earlier, even business transactions can work well on the basis of negotiation strategies and communicative practices. Furthermore, the interactions are not necessarily ends in themselves, and they often do lead to consensus. In multilingual encounters interlocutors do achieve a lot together. In addition to accomplishing their objectives, they also construct hybrid codes that merge their differences, at least temporarily. There is a secret behind achieving intercultural understanding incidentally (or as a byproduct) when interlocutors focus more on their transactional goals. Focusing on cultural understanding as an end in itself can foreground differences and make people intransigent.

Another model of intercultural relations that is relevant to the South Asian practice is the contact zones perspective of Mary Louise Pratt (1991). Pratt defines contact zones as: "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). When Pratt describes the liminal spaces valuable for explaining South Asian community encounters, she uses strikingly violent images to describe these interactions (i.e., clash, grapple, asymmetrical, etc.). Of course, Pratt is focusing on contexts of colonization and slavery that involve such violent encounters, but all cross-cultural encounters don't have to involve such stress or force. The South Asian multilingual model is predicated on solidarity and consensus. Differences can be negotiated peacefully and collaboratively when interlocutors are focused on shared goals and conduct their interaction based on practices rather than on principles. It is perhaps because Pratt sees these encounters as stressful that she articulates a place for safe houses, which she defines as "social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, and temporary protection from legacies of oppression"

(40). It appears as if community is assumed as homogeneous and sovereign in Pratt's model; however, in South Asia, community resides in the contact zone.

Yet, Pratt's focus on power remains valuable. Power is not accentuated in South Asian descriptions of conversational interaction, because for many centuries vernacular languages existed only in spoken form, not written. They all had relatively equal status in their own local domains. The written language, which enjoyed power, was Sanskrit. Pollock (2006) argues that the cosmopolitanism of Sanskrit was different from the power exerted by Latin or English. The latter imposed themselves on other communities through military might or political force. Sanskrit existed on a parallel plane to that of the vernaculars but as the universally accepted written language. Other communities used Sanskrit if and when they wanted to write. Around the sixth century AD, the vernaculars developed a written medium when they began to mix Sanskrit into their own literary, political, or religious literature. This unique form of writing, known as *manipralava* in South India (see Pollock 2006, 323), is a linguistically hybrid form. This strategy of negotiation in literacy was not unlike the one we see above in conversational interactions. Local communities merged their codes, made the dominant code impure, and democratized the literate system.

Enter Imperial Cosmopolitanism

I HAVE BROUGHT OUT THE COMMENDABLE features of precolonial modes of intercultural communication in South Asia to guide cosmopolitanism in contemporary times. However, one may point out that South Asia displays anything but cultural harmony today. It is one of the most factious regions in the world. How do we explain this inconsistency?

To answer this question, we have to ponder the implications of Western European colonization since the sixteenth century. South Asian scholars have pointed out that colonization had dire implications for language and social life in the region. Mohan (1992) documents how unitary constructs of linguistic identity and speech community were put to use in colonies to categorize people for purposes of taxation, administrative convenience, and political control. The stock question in the censuses about one's native or mother tongue is confusing for locals when their mother speaks one language, their father another, and the family a third for domestic communication. In fact, the mother herself may have grown up with that same level of multilingualism during her own childhood, making the "mother tongue" even more plural. For people who grow up with multiple languages in their everyday life, unitary notions of identity are reductive. Worse still, these notions of identity and community began to reproduce social life in the region. As Khubchandani (1997) observes: "Until as recently as four or five decades ago, one's language group was not generally considered as a very important criterion for sharply distinguishing oneself from others.... Following Independence, language consciousness has grown, and loyalties based on language-identity have acquired political salience" (Khubchandani 1997, 92).

We have to grapple with the fact that colonization imposed another notion of cosmopolitanism in the region. We can analyze *Macaulay's Minutes* (1835) as an example of what I would label

Imperial Cosmopolitanism. Macaulay's project is to prove that English is the intellectually superior language for native education and social progress. He also claims that English is an emerging global language, spoken in other colonies, thus facilitating contact with diverse communities. He goes on to argue for the intrinsic superiority of English in relation to the local lingua francas, Sanskrit and Arabic:

> Whoever knows that language [English] has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said that the literature now extant in that language is of greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. (Macaulay 2007, 472)

The rationale of Macaulay's argument, that one language has to be chosen for education in India and for interaction with other communities, is a logic alien to South Asia. Furthermore, Macaulay treats languages as intrinsically endowed with knowledge. In South Asian communities, language helps co-construct knowledge in intercultural encounters. The idea that the superior language has to be chosen as the vehicle for learning is also new to South Asia. As we saw above, South Asians negotiate between languages and treat them as having equal status.

The promotion of English is also motivated by the benefits for colonial rule. Macaulay goes on to articulate the function of English in South Asia as follows:

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (Macaulay 2007, 474)

English is a vehicle not only for intercommunity relations outside South Asia but also for inside with the British. It is clear that the colonialists will not stoop to learn the languages of the locals, but expect the natives to use their language to speak to them or speak through local translators. This is a far cry from the local practice of negotiating between different languages one to one, on equal terms, in a direct manner.

Furthermore, it is clear that English is expected to change the values, worldview, and knowledge traditions of the locals. This orientation of imposing one's language and culture on others is also inimical to South Asia. Interlocutors co-construct hybrid codes and cultures. The colonialists don't want to go through the humbling and collaborative experience of negotiating languages and cultures. They desire a communicative practice where they are in control. They engage in inter-community relations on their own terms. From such assumptions and expectations, English emerged as the cosmopolitan language in this region and elsewhere. In addition to establishing a hierarchy of languages, with English superior to the local languages, Macaulay expects that the English-educated locals will refine the vernacular along the values of English. This one-sided hybridization—i.e., the vernacular transformed by English and not vice versa—is also alien to the local practice. Ironically, the locals went on to appropriate English anyway, and we now have

nativized varieties of English such as Indian English or Sri Lankan English, which serves as a testament to the local intercultural practice of appropriating and hybridizing languages through negotiation strategies.

From Imperial to Dialogical Cosmopolitanism

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE COLONIALIST orientation toward language relationships and those of the South Asians should be clear. I will label the South Asian model dialogical cosmopolitanism. It contrasts with the model of cosmopolitanism introduced by Britain—i.e., uniting the world through their own language and becoming global citizens through the power of a single language. Though dialogical cosmopolitanism has been used by scholars of the Latin American tradition, such as Mandieta (2007), I use the label here to capture the features unique to South Asian cosmopolitanism. While there are similarities between the diverse multilingual and postcolonial cosmopolitan traditions, the articulation of the South Asian model in this article should aid a comparison of these models.

The differences between imperial and dialogical cosmopolitanism are reflected in their orientations toward language and communicative practices. Imperial cosmopolitanism is influenced by orientations to language promoted by modernity, a movement that coincided with colonization. The values informing South Asian language practices are, on the other hand, premodern, but, in an interesting way, they also anticipate many of the developments in language practices in anti-Enlightenment or postmodern orientations. Table 1 summarizes the language practices in the contrasting models of cosmopolitanism. Though I haven't introduced the features of modernist linguistics in detail in the preceding discussion, their features are well known.

Table 1

Imperial Cosmopolitanism	Dialogical cosmopolitanism
predefined grammar	emergent grammar
formal competence	everyday performance
individual enterprise	social practice
cognitive mastery	contextual adaptation
rules of correctness	strategies of negotiation
homogeneous speech community	contact zone
native speaker norms	multilingual appropriation
rational process	multisensory practice
form as resource	environment as affordance
closed models	open models
systematized constructs	mixed constructs

My argument is that the values promoted by modernist linguistics lead to imperial cosmopolitanism, while the values undergirding anti-modernist linguistics facilitate dialogical

cosmopolitanism. For example, the assumption that language comes ready-made with a preconstructed grammar and a focus on grammatical correctness prevents openness to ways in which grammar may be appropriated and hybridized by multilingual speakers as they collaborate on performing their social functions. Furthermore, the idea that competence is individual puts the onus of intelligibility on the speaker/user and prevents all parties from negotiating on equal terms to co-achieve meaning. The assumption that all speakers should approximate native-speaker norms prevents non-native speakers of English from negotiating language on equal terms with others and appropriating the language according to their own values and needs. Also, the treatment of language as a rational medium with form (grammar) treated as the main carrier of meaning prevents interlocutors from being responsive to ecological resources as available means to negotiate language. Finally, the drive to construct models that treat language as a separate, self-contained, sui generis, and static system prevents speakers from being open to accepting the hybrid codes that evolve out of language contact situations, systems that keep reconstituting themselves in the changing contexts of contact.

Let me now formulate the features of dialogical cosmopolitanism emerging from the language practices we see in South Asia:

- Negotiate on equal terms
- Start from your positionality
- Focus on practices, not content; process, not product
- Co-construct norms for engagement
- Jointly accomplish goals
- Be open to critical reflection and reconstruction of values as much as you are willing to share
- Embrace hybrid outcomes

Dialogical cosmopolitanism is always open to negotiation and never assumes the pre-existence of shared values. Sharedness is achieved. The negotiation is based on a respect for each other's norms and values. No attempt is made to impose one's own norms on the interaction or to resort to finding a neutral norm that does not belong to either party. Both parties adopt the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities they bring with them as the starting point of their interaction. Thus, the negotiation starts from the full context of one's own social positionality. This is not a negotiation that starts from nowhere; instead, it is rooted in one's background and context. Communication works because the parties do not focus on values or norms (whether cultural or communicative) but on practices that enable them to achieve their shared goals behind the interaction. While values and norms may turn out to be divisive, practices and negotiation strategies keep the parties open to joint accomplishment of their goals. In the process of adopting the negotiation strategies, both parties co-construct the norms and conventions that will guide their interaction. An attitude of solidarity guides their interaction, as the interlocutors realize that refusal to negotiate will impoverish both of them and defeat the goals and outcomes that brought them together to this interaction in the first place. The interaction provides a non-threatening opportunity to share one's own values and practices with the other, as much as it provides an opportunity to reflect critically on one's own values by benefiting from the encounter with the other. As much as the final shape of the intended goals will be negotiated and co-constructed, the

interlocutors may themselves leave with changed perspectives and values as informed by the peculiarity of the other.

Implications for Christianity

WHILE I HAVE DEVELOPED THIS MODEL of dialogical cosmopolitanism from the perspectives of language and culture in South Asia, it is important to ask how this model relates to the Christian faith. Let me focus on a moment in church history to explore the connections.

I am fascinated by the early experience of cosmopolitanizing the church. The terms of engagement with the Gentiles, as members of the early church struggled to accommodate non-Jews, clearly show stresses in negotiation. We learn in Galatians 2:11–14 that Peter and Barnabas struggle to find their footing. Peter initially had eaten with the Gentiles in Antioch but distances himself from them when Jews from Jerusalem arrive on the scene. And this vacillation occurs after the whole church had met in Jerusalem and decided to accept Gentiles into the faith. However, the early church makes remarkable progress in practicing a dialogical cosmopolitanism. Consider the terms in which Gentiles are accepted into the church. As the interaction with Gentiles increases, the terms of acceptance are revised. Initially, in Acts 15:22–29, the apostle had agreed to drop the insistence on circumcision and only advise that Gentiles abstain from the pollutions of idols, from fornication, from what is strangled, and from blood. In Galatians 2:1–10, even these requirements are overlooked. Paul's expectation is that the Gentiles would contribute to the poor in the church. In I Corinthians 10:18–29 Paul goes even further to argue that one might eat food sacrificed to idols for the sake of the weaker brother. Achieving a shared faith involves sacrifices and accommodations.

What we further see through this dialogical encounter is the deepening of the understanding of faith in relation to works, and grace in relation to rituals, among the Jews themselves. If Jews developed a different attitude toward Gentile traditions, they also developed a critical self-reflection and reinterpretation of many of their own customs. In Romans 4:9–12, Paul reinterprets the role of faith in the life of Abraham and others in the Old Testament. In other epistles he goes on to reinterpret circumcision as the circumcision of the heart rather than of the flesh. In all these discourses the reinterpretation occurs in the context of accommodating Gentiles into the church. In dialogical fashion the encounter leads to changes in both parties.

This style of dialogical engagement is not restricted to the early church. Christ himself engages with others in this form. In his encounter with the Cyro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24–30), he allows himself to be persuaded and changes his footing. Though he initially defines his mission as restricted to his chosen people, he gives in to her plea to cure her daughter, persuaded by her argument. Perhaps some might consider this an outcome already anticipated by Christ, the hesitation designed to test the woman's faith. However, I like to consider this as an existential encounter in which Christ's position is negotiated actively during the interaction. The picture I get of the Gospel is one that is evolving in time and place. Referring specifically to the encounter with Gentiles, Paul argues in Ephesians 3:8–12:

> Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the

dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things; to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly *places* might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access in confidence through our faith in him.

Paul reminds us that the acceptance of Gentiles into the church is a mystery which God chose to reveal gradually in later times. Even the principalities and power of the heavenly places realize the plan of God only later, through the engagements and struggles of the church. Many evangelical Christians might be comfortable with the idea that God's plan is temporal, as long as it can be shown that this idea is found within the body of Scripture. What is challenging is to realize that revelation goes on even now as we engage with people of other faiths and ideologies. Although I will always start my engagement with others from an evangelical standpoint, I am also open to having my faith critiqued and deepened through my encounter with others. After all, we know that God has often used Gentile kings to punish his chosen people and bring them to reason and faith in the Old Testament.

It appears to me that while we have a well developed theology of content (i.e., faith), we do not have a nuanced perspective on a theology of practices. Consider what it means for God to choose his people through which he will reveal his plan to humanity but also to sustain the whole of humanity irrespective of one's faith: "for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). It appears that God adopts a distinction between content and practice in exercising his sovereignty. Though revelation is reserved to his chosen people, he continues to sustain everyone at the level of practice. Nor is this a practice without love. What does it mean to express one's agape love even to those who don't deserve it? In other words, there is a tension in the scripture between holding an exclusivist faith and an inclusive human community, shared through our common image of God. A way to resolve this tension is to adopt faith as the basis of the church but also to adopt practices for engagement with others. Though we are not *of* the world, we are *in* the world, and we have responsibilities and obligations to others.

But does this mean that practices are free of theology or values? Practices function at a meta-community and meta-cultural level. They do have the advantage of helping us negotiate cultural and community differences by rising above intra-community biases and preferences. Practices are reciprocal, relational, and pliable; they help negotiate inter-community relations. They help us sidestep differences in theology and culture as we engage with others. However, practices are also informed by values and ideologies. Nothing is value free. I see the practices of God and Christians in the world as motivated by love. Similarly, the practices of multilinguals are motivated by solidarity and consensus-orientation. It is not surprising that we find practices motivated by love and solidarity among non-Christians. They derive from our common image of God. Having said that, we have to admit that there are inter-community practices motivated by selfishness and power seeking (i.e., imperial cosmopolitanism) that Christians need to challenge.

I must also clarify the point that the more effective cultural negotiations occur when people come together to achieve transactional goals. These shared goals can be material or non-material. In some cases, people come together in market places for material objectives. In other cases, there

are objectives that involve cultural understanding, aesthetic pleasure, or spiritual search. Whatever it is, a shared goal keeps the interlocutors negotiating their differences constructively in order to achieve their expectations from that encounter. However, the treatment of cultural or theological understanding as an end in itself is problematic. If two people get together and say, "Let's sit down and debate whose faith is superior," I think this will lead to a pointless, if not dysfunctional, exercise. But if one says: "I am going through a dark period in my life, and I would like to get your advice," this is a transactional goal and can lead to a dialogical theological engagement. By the same token, if someone is talking to another only with the intention of converting that person (without relating to the real human needs the other person has), there is nothing shared or transactional about this encounter. This leads only to imperial cosmopolitanism. This is not to deny that there are conversion experiences that are dialogical when they are motivated by the right attitude and context.

TO SOME EXTENT, THE ARTICULATION of my position on cosmopolitanism in this article has itself been dialogical. I have drawn from my South Asian, multilingual, and postcolonial backgrounds to engage with the scriptures as an evangelical. As a scholar, I am happy to negotiate with other scholars from different belief systems on common projects of intellectual inquiry or social change. Though I start from my position as a South Asian evangelical, I am open to learning from my engagement with others, critiquing my positions, and moving to more hybridized and richer positions. I want to have the humility to let God speak through the social encounters he has arranged for me. To think that I have nothing more to learn is to be proud. To fear that open engagement with others will damage my faith is to underestimate God's power and sovereignty. My faith and social positions do influence my teaching practice. As an instructor of English, I strive to teach students negotiation strategies that will enable them to engage with others of different languages and cultures. I remind Anglo-American students that rather than resting on their status as native speakers, they should treat English as a language commonly owned by diverse people around the world, with whom they have to negotiate on equal terms. I encourage both native and nonnative students to shift their perspectives from correctness to contextual negotiation; from mastery of a single code to developing a repertoire; from individual achievement to social collaboration; from treating their first language or culture as problems to treating them as resources; and from being product-focused to being process-orientated in their negotiation of diverse languages and cultures.

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