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Change through Constancy:

How the Christian Faith Impacts Cultural Identity Adaptation in Cross-Cultural Workers

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by

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## Introduction

One need not search long to observe the impact of globalization on modern society. Technological advancement has enabled information and people to travel across large distances at speeds and in numbers that would have been inconceivable a century ago. Accompanying this development, a stark increase in cross-cultural habitation and interaction may be noted. In the United States in particular, “[l]argely because of immigration trends, cultural and ethnic diversity. . .[has become] a fact of life” (Neuliep, 2021, p. 41). The need for cross-cultural communication and adaptation skills has clearly been established, both for those experiencing greater cultural diversity within their own national boundaries and for those populations living and working across cultural and/or national borders. Pertaining to those who choose to live across cultural boundaries, adapting to a majority culture which contrasts one’s own can be a weighty challenge, and often requires personal cultural identity adaptation. While research on the psychological and sociological phenomena associated with this process is abundant, fewer sources explore the impact of faith on this transition.

The objective of this thesis is to uncover the ways in which the Christian faith impacts cultural identity adaptation in cross-cultural workers. I accomplish this aim through a review of existing literature approaching the subject from psychological and theological perspectives in addition to an ethnographic field study. In discovering the impact of Christian faith on cross-cultural identity adaptation, I hope to outline a framework that may better facilitate this strenuous process in Christian cross-cultural workers. I also hope this framework will prove a helpful tool for cohesiveness in cross-cultural interaction for those Christians living in culturally diverse populations, which is a steadily increasing number.

## Terminology

The implications of culture have made it particularly difficult to define across academia. For the purposes of this thesis, “culture” has been defined as “an accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history and verbal and nonverbal symbol systems” (Neuliep, 2021, p. 51). The meaning of “identity” will be explored in greater depth in the literature review but can be defined on a basic level as “the qualities, beliefs, etc., that make a particular person or group different from others” (Britannica, n.d.). Cultural identity, conceptually, has been defined as “the extent to which one is a representative of a given culture behaviorally, communicatively, psychologically and sociologically” (“Cultural Identity Theory,” 2014).

In this thesis, the term “cross-cultural” will primarily be used when referring to those individuals living and working in a host culture different than their culture of origin (be it permanent or temporary), whom shall be called “cross-cultural workers.” The term “transnational” may be used occasionally, referring to those who have inhabited a new country and adopted parts of the host culture inherently—thus “cross-cultural” is implied when this term is used. However, it should be noted that not every cross-cultural experience necessitates the crossing of a national boundary.

The terms “cultural identity transformation,” “cultural identity adaptation,” “cross-cultural identity adaptation,” and “cultural blending” are used interchangeably and refer to the same process of experiencing a change in one’s sense of cultural identity over time, especially after exposure to a host culture different than one’s culture of origin. Finally, a Christian is considered to be one who “believes in and follows the teachings of Jesus Christ” (Cambridge, n.d.).

## **Methodology**

To discover the impact of Christian faith on cultural identity adaptation in cross-cultural workers, I conducted a two-part investigation. The first portion of my research consisted of a review of existing literature on cultural identity and transitioning cultures from both psychological and theological perspectives. I then analyzed common themes and approaches used by psychologists and theologians and noted areas of interest which I would further explore during the second stage of my investigation.

For the second portion of my research, I spent spring semester of 2023 in Grenoble, France, engaging in participant observation (ethnographic study), in which I studied French culture, learned the French language, and interned with American Christian cross-cultural workers. During this time, I informally learned these workers' stories, as well as documented my own emotional, spiritual, and psychological experience in a journal. I then returned to the United States and analyzed the content of my journal for each month in addition to content from informal conversations on how each worker has adjusted to new cultures throughout their career. These insights were then compared to my findings in literature to reveal several themes surrounding the impact of the Christian faith on cross-cultural identity adaptation. As a disclaimer, because I personally identify as a Christian, my research in literature and field study is influenced by a Christian perspective. However, having a Christian perspective during the field study component proved fundamental for the personal observation results.

## **Literature Review**

Although there is little existing psychological research on the specific impact of Christian faith on cultural identity adaptation in cross-cultural workers, social psychologists have made great strides in cultural research over the last few decades. Because this particular field of

psychology overlaps largely with sociological research and terminology, the psychology review section will include several sociocultural terms and phenomena, evaluated from a psychological perspective. Additionally, during my research, two books in particular, written by Jenny McGill (2016) and Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (2011), proved exceptionally insightful. Because they included well-researched perspectives from the fields of psychology, theology, and sociology, these books are cited often throughout both the psychology and theology review sections.

### Psychology

A foundational concept addressed in psychological literature is that of culture as an important facet of identity. Renowned intercultural theorists Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (2011) establish identity as having an inherent ontological connection to larger society in their book *Questions of Cultural Identity*, stating that “identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation” (p. 2). They also explore the psychoanalytic definition of identity, as “Freud calls it ‘the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person,’” which we first experience as children of our parents (Hall & du Gay, 2011, p. 3). The issue of cultural identity is of particular interest to researcher Jenny McGill, whose book *Religious Identity and Cultural Negotiation: Toward a Theology of Christian Identity in Migration* (2016) evaluates the process of “identity negotiation” (defining relatively stable elements of oneself amid environmental and behavioral change) in cross-cultural scenarios from the perspectives and contributions of psychology, sociology, and theology. Her work confirms and expands on Hall and du Gay’s and Freud’s claims by adding the following:

Identities are derived not only from a person's self-conceptions, but are also derived from the perceptions and declarations of others that have been imposed on that individual. In this way, identity is both produced by and pushed on to the individual by social structures and operates as a "force," as people both accommodate and alter social structures based on their views of themselves. (p. 17)

Therefore, by definition, identity is strongly connected to culture. Hence, cultural identity has also been defined by "the constantly shifting understanding of one's identity in relation to others" ("Cultural Identity Theory," 2014). Because society in any culture may change over time, cultural identity adjusts with it.

This brings us to another concept heavily embedded in psychological and sociological literature surrounding the nature of identity: constant change. Indeed, Hall and du Gay argue that identity should be thought of as "the process of becoming rather than being" (2011, p. 4). When change occurs in one's social environment, there is a change triggered in cultural identity. When one inhabits a new cultural environment, for instance as in the case of transnational workers, several complex processes occur internally. Any person who inhabits a host culture different from their own will undergo the process of acculturation. Neuliep's 2021 textbook *Intercultural Communication* states that acculturation is "marked by physical and psychological changes" as a result of adopting a new way of life (p. 405). Research on the process of acculturation, or becoming a part of another culture, signifies this process can be strenuous. Acculturation includes the initial "culture shock," which is accompanied by a decrease in physical and mental health labeled as "acculturative stress," accumulated from an inability to perform basic functions in the same way—whether it be problem solving, the rituals of social interaction, or simply finding a way to communicate effectively in the presence of a language barrier (Neuliep, 2021,

pp. 403–405). Furthermore, the National Library of Medicine confirms that “[a]cculturation stress is widely acknowledged as a risk factor for individuals’ mental health. . . In terms of its impact on negative mental health, Kartal and Kiropoulos (2016) supported that language barriers can be understood as a part of acculturation stress, which is associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety” (Ren & Jiang, 2021). Stone (2021) found that even the children of Christian cross-cultural workers reported feeling significant distress when trying to balance the cultures they were raised in alongside those of the places where they currently resided; they described themselves as “nomads” (pp. 58–60). Stress and change seem to come in tandem.

During this process of cultural identity adaptation, psychologists and sociologists have noted several factors which may act as a form of buffer from this stress by acknowledging and accepting the idea of a constantly changing identity. McGill (2016) cites psychologists Jenny Pak and Dan McAdams, who “have extensively researched [the] idea of a *narrative identity*, the ongoing, developing self-story one tells to oneself[;] McAdams claims that individuals create meaning and identity through storytelling,” and Pak has found this technique especially useful during counseling and therapy sessions with her bicultural or immigrant clients (p. 20).

According to McAdams, each person tells their own mental story as a reference for their sense of identity; as the story progresses, their identity is molded in relation to the events of the story, through which the person formulates a set of beliefs and values they adhere to—and change is simply a natural part of the process. Social psychologist William Swann adds to this concept by emphasizing the theory of “identity negotiation,” by which “individuals negotiate identities that remain relatively stable to match their ‘chronic self-views’ [that] then guide one’s actions, although identity change can still occur under catalytic conditions” (McGill, 2016, p. 19).

Research by Cai et al. (1996), Neuliep (2021), Kadam et al. (2021), and Earley and Ang (2003)

supports the idea that the acculturative stress that is invoked by this process can be buffered by cultural intelligence (defined as the ability to adapt to new cultures), especially through the key aspect of communication. A description of the Intercultural Adaptation Model by Cai et al. (1996) explains that when one adapts their communication tendencies to the host culture—for example, by learning the host’s native language or adjusting to communicate more directly or indirectly according to the cultural preference—it facilitates a smoother acculturation process. Le and Lê (2011) build on this notion in their book, *Linguistic Diversity and Cultural Identity: A Global Perspective*, claiming that language has a significant impact on one’s sense of identity, as it is indeed one of the main identifiers of culture. A study by Andrew Wong (2009) affirmed both this emphasis on communication and Swann’s identity negotiation theory enable bicultural individuals to walk both worlds as needed by observing that East Asians who were raised in Canada could “frame-switch” between their cultural identities based on the context, utilizing different communication techniques for each culture (p. 251). Hence it can be concluded that the acculturation process, with communication as a key component, establishes the foreground for cultural identity adaptation.

Thus, the overall consensus among scholars on cultural identity adaptation delineates an ontological connection of identity to culture, a constancy of change in identity, and a strenuous process of acculturation which can be buffered by a psychological narrative identity approach, an emphasis on identity negotiation, and the application of cultural intelligence through adapted communication techniques.

## Biblical Theology of Cross-Cultural Identity

### Old Testament Inclusion of Foreigners

Although the words “culture” or “identity” are not directly mentioned in the Bible, the concept of cross-cultural habitation and adaptation is nevertheless present in scripture and well explored by Christian theologians. The Hebrew word גֵר (*ger*), translated as “sojourner,” “stranger,” “alien,” and sometimes “foreigner,” is used around 90 times in the Bible, over two thirds of which are found in the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Bible establishing God’s law for the Israelite people (Jobling, 2009, p. 314). In the Deuteronomic law (found in the fifth book of the Pentateuch), God is known to be “the protector of the *gerim*,” those who are characterized by “landlessness” (Jobling, 2009, p. 315). Most frequently in these verses God is creating a place for foreigners among His people—protecting them, providing them food, granting them rights, and including them as accountable to Israelite law and customs (See Ex. 12:19, 20:10, 22:21, 23:9; Lev. 17:15, 19:10, 23:22, 24:22; Num. 9:14, 15:15, 35:15; Deut. 10:18, 10:19, 14:21, 23:7, 24:17). He even goes so far as to command the Israelites that “[t]he alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19:34, NRSV). God uses the painful history of Israel’s exile in Egypt to spur his people towards empathy for the landless, demonstrating the difficulties of cross-cultural habitation.

Outside of the Pentateuch, *ger* describes those living cross-culturally who “may prosper, but more often they are in distress” (Jobling, 2009, p. 315). Indeed, the *gerim* are “often associated with widows and orphans,” indicating the “fundamental assumption that *gerim* will be needy or even destitute, objects of charity” (Jobling, 2009, p. 315). Reminders of God’s treatment of sojourners demonstrate His loving, just, and generous nature as He provides for

them and includes them as members of the disenfranchised—the orphan, the widow, and the alien (Psalm 146:9, Josh. 20:9, Ezek. 47:22, Zech. 7:10, Mal. 3:5). In anticipation of the difficulties these travelers would face, He establishes statutes to protect and provide for them. The inclusion of *gerim* among the disenfranchised signifies a special appreciation of their struggle. Overall, it can be gleaned from the Old Testament usage of the word *ger* that being a sojourner was widely known to be trying and distressing—otherwise, there would be no need for their provisions in the law as members of the disenfranchised.

### **New Testament Emphasis on Unity**

The New Testament takes this welcoming to the next level by extending the call of salvation to all Gentiles (non-Jewish people) and thus all cultures. Jesus himself spent the first few years of his life in Egypt among Gentiles to escape the wrath of King Herod before returning to his home in Nazareth (Matt. 2:13-15). It is by and through Jesus that we see a call to unity across cultures and observe the first effects of the Christian faith on cross-cultural travelers and workers. In one of the greatest examples of this phenomenon, Paul the Apostle wrote his epistles with a cross-cultural perspective that was revolutionary for its time. His call to unity in Christ is balanced by a simultaneous acknowledgment of individuality and uniqueness within and between people groups, as demonstrated by his letter to the Romans in which he compares the church to one body with many parts: “and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Rom. 12:4-5, NRSV). The concept of unity amid diversity seems paradoxical, but it worked well for the early Church in Acts 2, where people from many nations and tongues were added to their number daily (Acts 2:4-11, 38-47). Thus, the New Testament emphasizes unity in Christ while

appreciating diversity through the example of the early Church, in addition to Paul's writings and the life of Jesus himself.

### **Language, Unity, and Diversity**

Language is also used in the Bible as a primary indicator of diversity. In the context of his discussion with the Corinthian church of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Paul indicates language as an identifying factor of diversity, using it as an example for the effectiveness of the gift of speaking in tongues (alternative languages spoken through the power of the Holy Spirit) without an interpretation: "If then I do not know the meaning of a sound, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me" (1 Cor. 14:10-11, NRSV). Indeed, Lingenfelter and Mayers (2016)'s book on cross-cultural ministry explains that while many aspects of culture must be understood, the first step in appropriately integrating oneself into a new culture requires learning the language. Furthermore, Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 indicates that a transformation and contextualization for the sake of unity was necessary in his own experience as a missionary and apostle to foreign cultures, as he became "all things to all people, that [he] might by all means save some" (NRSV). Although this statement can be interpreted in varying ways, the common theme is that all people(s) are unique, and cross-cultural experiences built on the foundation of the Christian faith are transformative and unifying.

Through the divine love of Jesus, people of all cultures and communication styles are united. One of Lingenfelter and Mayers's (2016) central theses is that "the bible speaks to all people and all cultures and that Jesus Christ is the only faithful example of divine love in interpersonal relationships and communication" (p. 2). By following the example of Christ in loving communication, we can better blend with those around us, especially amid cultural difference. The prophet Isaiah also foresaw the unification of Jew and Gentile through a call to

salvation and the glory of God (Isa. 66:18). Yet an even greater picture of diversity within unity is found in the Book of Revelation, which prophesies what the Kingdom of heaven will look like: “After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands” (Rev. 7:9, NRSV). Again, the writer uses language as an indicator of cultural diversity and describes a unified yet unique group of worshippers. Both within and outside the boundaries of shared faith, diversity has been anticipated, and the loving nature of Christ in communication and relationships facilitates a cross-cultural sense of unity.

### **Theology of Identity**

General themes of cultural identity addressed by theologians include two dichotomies: identity’s hard and soft nature, as well as identity’s unity and multiplicity. One major Christian identity theorist and theologian, Miroslav Volf, notes the intricacies of the constant shifting of identity, proposing a “soft” (i.e., changing throughout life) rather than “hard” (i.e., fixed and unyielding) conceptualization of identity, affirming psychological findings of identity (2019, p. 19). The 2014 article “Cultural Identity Theory,” adds to this by describing cultural identity as “dynamic and constantly evolving” (*Communication Theory*). Furthermore, Le and Lê (2011)’s book demonstrates the prevalence of this hard and soft dichotomy (but names it “fluid-solid” instead) and recognizes the additional phenomenon of unity in multiplicity, where people can maintain multiple cultural identities simultaneously, brought about by various circumstances. One such circumstance was investigated in Walling et al.’s 2006 study on the re-entry culture shock experienced by short-term student missionaries when they came back from their trips, which found that “cultural identity changes in ways that go unnoticed until they return home” (p.

154). To relate this to biblical worldviews, Volf (2019) comments that Christian ideology would ideally facilitate a people unified in Christ while maintaining cultural uniqueness, just as the Holy Trinity represents unity in diversity—three distinct persons in one unified entity. In their book *Cultural Engagement*, Chatraw and Prior (2019) affirm that “plurality in unity, which is also present in the triune God, is a characteristic of God’s created order” (p. 159). Hall and du Gay (2011) reinforce both the hard-soft and unity-multiplicity dichotomies, claiming that “identities are infinite combinations which always contradict each other,” and that the study of culture should be considered a “‘transformative practice,’ as a singular becoming of a community” (pp. 88, 102). Therefore, not only do theologians find it possible for cultural identities to shift, grow, and coexist despite conflict, but they also depict the results of this process as a deeper reflection of the image of God.

### **A Call to Transcendence**

More than just transformation, scripture seems to pose a call to transcendence above dominating cultural distinctions. In fact, this transcendence is deeply tied to unity. After acknowledging the uniqueness within and between people groups as well as the need for transformation, Paul brings to focus in his letter to the Galatians the greater priority of finding one’s truest identity in Christ, placing primacy on spirituality over any other cultural distinction: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:27-28, NRSV). In the Christian faith, although distinctions exist, the core of one’s being is grounded in faith above all else. Therefore, spirits can be unified across cultural boundaries while still maintaining individuality through a transcension above culture—or rather, a higher prioritization of faith. An example from McGill

(2016)'s book is a study by Roman Williams that monitored international students who came to study in the United States and found that “[d]uring their time abroad, the religious narratives of the host cultural context shaped, even transformed, their identities,” as they “fashioned their personal stories from the larger American evangelical public narrative and Christian metanarrative” (p. 22). This finding not only demonstrates a cultural identity transformation, but a transcendent primacy of faith that allowed for growth without loss of unique cultural origin, as well as a confirmation of the narrative identity approach and identity negotiation theory from psychology. By placing one’s personal narrative within the metanarrative of the Christian faith, a sense of broader purpose, confidence, and fulfillment are fostered, which allow room for growth in identity through transcendence. However, it is important to note that while culture is not given primacy in identity biblically, it still retains its beauty and value in the Christian faith. Rather, as Volf (2019) articulates it, God’s “project” is “to make the world into God’s home and thereby also into the home of God’s creatures—each creature unique and ‘locally rooted’ and each, precisely in its delimited uniqueness and rootedness, constitutively open to all others, both indwelling them and being indwelled by them” (p. 20). We were designed to embrace unity and diversity in the context of community, engaging with culture from a transcendent, biblical perspective.

A final quote from Chatraw and Prior (2019) eloquently summarizes the biblical approach to transcending culture, affirming many of the points made by other theologians and scriptures discussed:

The Christian's life will at times be foreign, even offensive, to the norms of any given society. The gospel positions us at critical distance from our particular cultures. So while the indigenizing principle emphasizes that God does not simply obliterate the social,

familial, or vocational dimensions of an individual who becomes a Christian, the pilgrim principle reminds us that the cultural strands that are built into the fabric of an individual need to be transformed by Christ. . . . the gospel points us forward to unity found in Christ, and diversity found in an array of beautiful artistry and ingenuity within different cultures. As Christians, our unique ethnic and cultural features are not removed. Our identity in Christ and our membership in his kingdom transcends, but does not erase, our cultural particularities. Thus, our cultural particularities are appreciated, but not idolized. (pp. 340-341)

Although certain Christian values may conflict with those of a given culture, it is important for followers of the faith to allow themselves to become transformed by Christ in every aspect, including culture, in an effort to be better representatives of him and keep him central to their identity. The beauty of this balance can be found in the sense of unity amid diversity which is woven throughout both individuals and societies. Overall, we see that while Old Testament literature highlights God's provision in light of the difficulty of cross-cultural living, New Testament literature including scripture highlights themes of inclusivity, unity, diversity, and transcendence through the primacy of faith-based identity in cross-cultural experiences.

### **Findings**

The findings which will now be discussed include the observations I made of the French people and culture, those I made of myself, and those I made of other American Christian cross-cultural workers in France who shared their lives with me during my experience studying and interning abroad. These findings were drawn from the journal in which I logged my daily experiences in France, in addition to informal interviews or conversations held with the cross-cultural workers during or after my term abroad. To preserve confidentiality, when citing these

workers, I will be using aliases. For succinctness, any reference made henceforth to the American Christian cross-cultural workers I met during my experience in France may be shortened to “workers” (or “worker”). I found the most efficient way to communicate my observations was chronologically, organized by month. Because the large majority of my time in France was during the months of January, February, and March, these months will be the organizational markers for this section.

As a disclaimer, the reader should know that I am by no means a professional anthropologist or an expert in French history, politics, or culture. These are mere personal observations drawn from the experience of an American who lived in one city in France for a period of approximately three months. Furthermore, because these are personal observations, the writing style in this section will be less formal and more emotionally descriptive, similar to a narrative style. The reader should also know that living in a foreign locale for three months is typically not enough time for one to be completely absorbed into a new culture or adopt a new cultural identity. Nevertheless, even if one does not identify as a member of their host culture after a short term abroad, the experience may still affect transformation in identity by impacting one’s values, beliefs, worldview, and/or practices at some level. This, by definition, does increase the degree to which this person is a representative of their host culture (“Cultural Identity Theory,” 2014).

### **January**

The beginning month of my term abroad was in essence my transition month, when I experienced the brunt of culture shock and learned to slow down enough to participate in the French lifestyle. During the first week, I felt as if I was in “go-mode,” where I was so focused on the tasks I needed to do that I barely gave myself any time to process my experience emotionally.

I realized after a few days that I had numbed myself by suppressing my emotions so that I might be able to work most efficiently toward the goal of normalizing. This decision, in fact, was counterintuitive. In my attempt to be more efficient logistically, I set myself back by delaying my emotional adjustment. I wanted progress to come quickly and smoothly, when in reality living the French lifestyle meant slowing down, taking the long way home, and stopping to smell the roses. It felt as if I was accustomed to living on this 100-mile-per-hour train ride, and I had to attempt to jump off mid-ride and slow to walking pace without immediately landing flat on my face. Eventually, I grasped this idea and allowed myself to feel again. Thus came my first cultural observation: life in France is slower than in the States.

Living slowly was a problem for me, as it entailed addressing head on one of the most American cultural traits I had: goal-orientation. Slowing down meant not being so task-oriented that I neglected the people and experiences around me. When you walk into a store or get on the bus in France, it is customary to greet the clerk or driver with a kind, “*bonjour!*” (“hello!”) and a subsequent, “*merci, au revoir!*” (“thank you, until we meet again!”) upon exit, lest you be perceived as arrogant and ungrateful. When you schedule lunch with someone, it is acceptable to arrive a bit late, but never to leave early—whatever and whoever is in front of you at that moment should be given prime importance. If the conversation is stimulating, it is almost expected that you clear the rest of your afternoon so the good fellowship may continue. It went against my fundamental nature to learn to do such things—I felt I was being inefficient with my time and wasting it on unimportant things—but I soon came to realize how valuing people and experience over tasks was a beautiful thing, something I should have adopted long ago. Tasks will always be there, but people will not; life is fleeting, and it is best to enjoy people while you have them. This was one area of painful growth, which largely contributed to my culture shock.

The brunt of my culture shock I experienced on my eleventh full day in France, when I emotionally broke down (the result of bottling up my emotions for the first week). It was then that I realized how irritable and overcontrolling I was being—and how my poor roommate was suffering because of it. After some prayer time and reflection, I realized that I felt as if my life was out of my control, and thus was compensating by trying to control every insignificant thing—like what time we had to do certain housekeeping tasks. To cope with this loss of control in a healthy way, I turned to my faith. I surrendered my future and my present to God in prayer, trusting that no matter what happened to me, God loves me and would work everything out for good.

Accompanied by the culture shock was an immense sense of intimidation and isolation. I was overwhelmed by the task before me; to learn French, live as the French, and learn to be an adult living in an apartment and making meals for the first time, all while continuing my studies and interning was a daunting thought. I was also away from all the people whom I had ever known (minus my roommate, another student from my university) and everyone who loved me, separated by a nine-hour time difference, which made calling nearly impossible. I felt utterly alone (although the weight of this would not fully hit me until the next month). I struggled to fall asleep at night long after I should have been adjusted from jet lag because my thoughts would run wild as soon as I stayed still, preventing me from relaxing. To help me get to sleep, I once again turned to my faith and downloaded a mobile Christian meditation application called Abide. Every night, I would listen to a narrator with a soothing voice calmly lead me through a devotional based on scripture with the white noise of a brook playing in the background until I fell asleep. I maintained this bedtime ritual nearly every night I was in France, and even for a time after I returned to the States. Focusing on the goodness of God as I fell asleep helped

silence my worrisome mind and relax my body. My faith became my only relief from the torment of my negative thoughts and emotions. I wrote in my journal one night, “I’m not sure I can do this, but He can. I am sure of this: God is good” (January 11, 2023).

Another cultural observation I made that took some intentionality in adjusting to was French environmentalism. Generally, a French apartment will have a small washing machine, no dryer, and no dishwasher—although this varies by occupant. Energy is expensive and resource consuming, and hence is conserved whenever possible, by every means possible. I did not have a car to use (as many French do not), which worried me at first, since I had only ridden a bus once in my entire life prior. I had to transition to using public transportation, which was shockingly clean and reliable (until the protests, which I will touch on later). Therefore, I learned to take the bus or tram or walk wherever I needed to go. On days when I walked to places, I tried to be home before 11:00 P.M., because at that time every night, the streetlamps in the suburb where I lived would turn off as part of the city’s conservation efforts. There were many occasions when I walked home in utter darkness, with nothing but the moon and starlight (if it was a clear night) to guide me, aside from my phone’s flashlight. At first I felt very fearful on these walks, but I was never once attacked or threatened, and most of the time I was the only pedestrian out on the street. I learned to love my night walks, marveling at how the moonlight glistened off the snowcapped mountains surrounding the city. The stars comforted me, as I saw the same constellations in France that I would see at home. Nevertheless, this transition was incredibly difficult for the first month, as I had to learn how to factor in the bus and tram schedules to get to places, as well as air-dry my clothes (since we had no dryer) and wash clothes more frequently (since our washer was so small).

During this time, my faith offered me relief in many ways. Firstly, going to the bilingual international church which I attended was a great comfort. It offered a place to find community with people who shared my faith, whom I felt safe around. It also provided some sense of normalcy amid such a drastic cultural change. Indeed, one American Christian cross-cultural worker, whom I shall call Shana, worked in Bangladesh for 14 years before spending 13 years in France, and explained that “the first year is painful with a purpose.” In her experience, God is the one constant and source of stability; He is the only one Who “knows the sacrifices [you’ve made], helps you forgive, and [helps you] stay when you want to leave” (personal correspondence, 2023). Additionally, one spiritual revelation that consoled me greatly was the idea of Christ’s humanity. Jesus himself was a traveler and knew what it was like to move to a new city (and even country) full of strangers and have to start from scratch. He was fully God yet fully human; and thus, He fully understood how I felt. To feel seen and understood was a great comfort for me during culture shock. In the words of another worker I became acquainted with, whom I have called Rockelle, “having Jesus as a comfort of someone who sees and understands everything is priceless” (personal correspondence, 2023).

More than just understanding how we feel, Jesus offers reassurance by reminding us of the importance of why we choose a cross-cultural life. Another worker, Alexa, explained to me that one reason her Christian faith had the “largest impact on [her cultural] adaptation [is] because we have the example of Jesus and incarnational ministry, shedding our comfort and privilege to be able to adapt to help people” (personal correspondence, 2023). In conversations with almost every cross-cultural worker I encountered in France, I found a consensus that, in general, the importance of cultural identity diminishes in transition. It does not matter as much to which group you belong, as long as you have your faith. Thus, the discomfort and struggle of

living in another culture seemed to pale in comparison to the reason that motivates them to do so and the faith that sustains them through it all.

Overall, the month of January was filled with major cultural adaptation challenges, which I coped with through faith as I learned of the French values of slow living and environmentalism. I also observed many workers who rely on their foundation of faith as a personal grounding, motivating factor in my journey.

## **February**

The month of February taught me about the French values of authenticity and friendship, the bittersweet taste of loneliness, and some more troubling aspects of the French cultural experience. It was this month when I started taking a French language course at a local French university, made my first international friends, and subsequently learned the nuances of French friendship. At schools in the U.S., we tend to have a “popularity culture,” where we mold ourselves into whatever version is the most liked by the largest number of people. We may have many friends, but we tend not to be our true selves around them. In France, authenticity is a core cultural value, which makes friendship very different than my American experience. Most people will have a very small circle of friends—or even just one friend—with whom they can be their true self, and they invest in their relationships to an extent that is uncommon in American culture. In order to be friends at this level with a French person, however, it takes time. Trust is something hard earned, rather than automatically given. Because authenticity is accompanied by honesty, if a French person does not want to be friends with you, you will know. They will only invest time in friendships that they think might be worthwhile. Several of the workers confided in me that friendship was a key point of cultural tension, and learning to gain trust was one of the most difficult things they dealt with upon first arrival. Hence, when I made my first native-born

French friend, I was ecstatic. She agreed to help me practice French while she practiced English, and we would meet every week or so at her apartment or mine, share a meal, and talk about our lives and worldviews. She taught me what true authenticity looked like in relationship, and it left me reevaluating the nature of my own friendships.

It was a humbling experience to see from the outside how inauthentic my American friendships really were. Ultimately, this awareness contributed to a growing sense of loneliness. Not only did I have no one who truly knew me and loved me in France, but I realized how few friends I could be authentic with back home without risk of judgment. I cannot fully explain how, but after some prayer and reading from a book my mentor had assigned me to read, the feeling of loneliness that ached inside me seemed to carry a tinge of tender sweetness and hope. I knew that God was with me, which meant I was never really alone, but I also realized that loneliness was a reminder that even if I had people around me who knew and loved me, I would still be longing to dwell fully in the presence of the only One who knew the depths of my soul and loved me unconditionally. I knew that this longing would be fulfilled in life after death, walking with Jesus through the gardens of the New Jerusalem—the promised paradise for those who knew and loved God on Earth, finding salvation through His son Jesus (Rev. 21:1-4). Thus, my faith brought me hope for the future and comfort in my present.

Although I discovered many beautiful aspects of French culture that I learned to value more in my own life, such as authentic friendship, I also learned some cultural challenges through my French friends, including the implications of the French policy of *laïcité* (secularism). Through my experience at the French university, I became friends with several Arab French ladies, who participated by varying degrees in the Islamic faith. They were all born in France and spoke French primarily, but they had ethnic roots from various Arab countries.

One of these ladies wore a hijab—a head scarf worn by Muslim women as a symbol of modesty—and confided in me that it is very difficult to practice religion in France because it is considered rude to show your devotion to faith publicly—such as through wearing a hijab. She explained to me that the French government holds to the policy of *laïcité* (secularism), which indicates complete freedom from religion (yes, freedom *from* religion, not freedom *of* religion as we are used to hearing in the States). Although this policy has good intentions (and is understandable considering the brutal religious history of France), for people like my hijab-wearing friend, it has made practicing her faith quite challenging. She told me a story from her school days growing up in France, whereby she was required to remove her hijab upon entering the building and was nearly kicked out of school for refusing to comply at first. She could not fight the government, so she was restricted from abiding by her rules of faith at public school. Coming from my culturally biased perspective that has always known freedom of religion and expression of faith, this policy seemed troubling to me. My friend later expressed that as soon as she finishes college, she plans to move out of France to some other country where she can practice her faith more freely. This example illustrates the challenging implications of French secularism.

Another issue that lies heavy on the hearts of my French friends and fellow workers is the prevalence of ethnic prejudice and discrimination, as well as the marginalization of immigrants. France has a large immigrant population from North Africa and the Middle East, and like most countries, it is not free from prejudice. My worker friend Alexa, whom I mentioned earlier, carries a particular empathy for Arab immigrants, as she has seen the impact of prejudice on the Arabic community first-hand. Alexa lived in Lebanon for six years prior to moving to France, is fluent in Arabic, and considers herself largely culturally Lebanese. She observed how, because

she had been born in the U.S.A., she was often given favor over other applicants for housing in the city, whereas her Arab friends were denied housing outside of a certain area. In the midst of this redlining, Alexa frequently volunteered at the community center in the Arabic neighborhood and was eventually invited to teach English classes there to help the community gain valuable skills, which are favored in job applications. I am grateful for Alexa's beautiful heart that fights against prejudice however possible. As another example, one lady from the French church I attended had been working in an anti-human-trafficking organization for nearly a decade and found that most of the prostitutes were immigrants from North Africa or Eastern Europe who had been tricked by someone claiming to offer them a legitimate job opportunity abroad, but instead they took their documents and forced them into sexual slavery. They had little chance of escaping to a life outside of their trafficker, as they had no documents, no education, and no money. Moreover, often they could not even speak French. Thus, immigrants are often taken advantage of and frequently marginalized through prejudice and redlining practices.

All in all, the month of February marked for me a new era of authenticity, the start of beautiful friendships throughout loneliness, and an awakening to more negative aspects of the French culture. My faith continued to bring me comfort and hope amid my challenges.

### **March**

March was a whirlwind of emotional pitfalls and spiritual and cultural revelation. Because I recognized that this was the last month of my experience in France, I started thinking about my future and making decisions about what to do after graduating from college. This inherently led to worry. I enjoyed my time abroad and wanted to have more cross-cultural experiences before going to graduate school, but I worried that I would lose momentum, not follow through with my plan to go to graduate school, and not fulfill my potential. Faith became

my answer once again as I learned to trust that as long as I was doing what I felt God was calling me to do, He would make the most out of it. The only approval I needed was His, rather than my living by what the world defines as success. I also experienced grief, as I was mourning the loss of potential futures, preparing not to see my family and friends for extended periods of time during my travels and leaving the beautiful friendships and life I had made in France. I was, however, encouraged by the progress that I had made in learning the French language, which I attributed to God's grace. This realization gave me hope that no matter where I was in the world, God would give me the grace to make beautiful new relationships and learn the culture and language well.

One cultural revelation I had during this month was of the French value of advocacy for justice. I had known in previous months that *grèves* (protests) were going on for some reason, but it did not affect me much until March, when the protests intensified enough to obstruct my daily life. Some of the buses and trams were off schedule or not running at all because protests had blocked the streets and tramways, which meant I had to find alternative means of transportation. I remember walking through the campus of my French university and watching a mob of student protestors march through the street, shouting chants which sounded cool but were unintelligible to me. I admired how passionate they were without being violent. I think my favorite memory of the protests was when I was sitting in a café and suddenly stunned by the sound of the song "Y.M.C.A." by the Village People at full blast in the city square nearby. I could not restrain my laughter. I approached my French friend about it later and she explained that protests, for the young people at least, are treated as something fun and unifying. Once again, I found myself admiring cultural differences. From what she had explained, the French wanted their voices to be heard by the government. They believed their president had been abusing his

power and wanted to put a stop to it; they valued justice more than their comfort and were willing to do uncomfortable things to get the attention they wanted—which may have started off with blasting “Y.M.C.A.,” but weeks later included burning trash in the city streets. Thus, one of my final lessons in French culture was an appreciation for creative, unifying ways to advocate for justice.

The biggest revelation from my French experience came toward the end. I wrote in my journal how I felt I was being both “deconstructed and built up.” I was able to see my cultural values and how American culture had shaped me clearer—in both favorable and unfavorable ways. To realize that other ways of life exist, ones which are no less beautiful, was wonderfully humbling. There is no singular “correct” or “superior” way of life. Admittedly, I experienced much pain that accompanied this growth, but I found myself a different person by the end of my journey. Rockelle related my experience to hers, although since she had lived in France for over two and a half years (whereas I had only spent three months there), her transformation had progressed far beyond mine. She also described herself as having been broken apart and put back together into something new, and she felt her cultural identity to be roughly 50% French and 50% American. When new Americans arrive to work with her in France, she confided, she often feels a cultural disconnect because of how deeply engrained she has become in the French lifestyle. I must admit, although when I returned to the U.S. full reentry shock faded after about a month or two, a certain disconnect with my American friends and family has remained ever since. Something inside me has changed indefinitely. Another worker friend, Destiny, explained how her faith has played into her transformation. She sees her identity like an onion and feels that Jesus has helped her “peel back outer pieces and put on other layers on top that get grafted in.” Nevertheless, her core identity in Christ has stayed the same. This peeling back and grafting

in while maintaining a core identity of faith has created a sort of cultural blending effect in myself as well as the workers I interned with, whereby the French culture began to blend into our identities.

The idea that enabled this cultural blending most effectively was rooted in faith: the lens of a “Kingdom culture” (referring to the Kingdom of God). One worker named Caesar defined “Kingdom culture” thusly:

Culture is a collection of behaviors, values, rituals and beliefs shared in common by a particular group. Kingdom means the rule of a Sovereign over a people and a territory. Therefore Kingdom Culture takes place when a people submitted to God adopt a Biblical worldview, and choose to live in community that models the behaviors, values, and common best practices derived from God’s Word, thus establishing a preferred way of living and relating to one another that is in contrast with the world’s cultural values and worldview.

Adhering to a Kingdom culture at the core enables Christians to adapt to any host culture they choose by discerning whether certain core cultural aspects align with biblical values, abiding by those practices which align—regardless of their unfamiliarity—and responding with grace to those which do not. Destiny regularly asks herself a helpful question: “Is it unbiblical/harmful or just not what I’m used to?” For example, when I learned of French authenticity in friendship, I admired it but almost grieved for the friendships I might lose while adopting it. Nevertheless, when filtering the concept through scripture, authenticity aligns with biblical values. Thus, I surrendered my pride to Jesus and let him change my heart to be more like his. Alexa also commented on this, affirming that “every culture has things that need to be valued and challenged by Kingdom culture[; t]hese things inform how I relate to my host culture.” Caesar

added that even for certain values that may not feel positive, such as the French tendency to distrust until trust is earned, it is important to humble oneself and “learn their social language.” One may choose not to relate to certain cultural practices that conflict with biblical values, such as those that may cause bodily harm to oneself or others, but by the grace of God, they may embrace many other cultural aspects, such as language, social customs, and cuisine, so that they may be most effective without losing their core identity. The reader should note that while certain biblical values, such as those clearly outlined in Christ’s preaching and other areas of scripture (e.g., love, forgiveness, compassion, justice, etc.), many more require personal reading and interpretation of the scriptures to discern, especially in relation to specific cultural situations. To detail every biblical value and evaluate each potential cultural value that aligns or misaligns with scripture would require another academic endeavor entirely; thus, I will not be conducting such an extensive theological venture in this work. Nonetheless, it remains clear that while faith values would ideally remain consistent at the core of one’s identity according to Kingdom culture, outer-level and mid-level layers of identity are expected to change in cross-cultural experience.

Across all workers whom I encountered, they agreed that change through cultural adaptation of practices and values is a necessity for effectively integrating into a host culture. Alexa said it was important to remember that “our identity is always changing.” Destiny remarked, “[y]ou can’t be effective and stay the same.” Indeed, without learning the social language, you are “no longer relevant,” as Rockelle has noted. Caesar and Shana, who have spent over two decades living in cultures not of their origin, have observed that at minimum, adaptation of practices is essential in cross-cultural living. Furthermore, they claim a change in practices yields a change in values. For them, spending more time with people (in ways that

could be considered excessive by Americans) after moving to France eventually led them to deeply value people over tasks. The cultural value was adopted through its corresponding practice. Change in one is accompanied by change in the other. Caesar also emphasized the importance of adaptation to the Christian faith through the “biblical value of becoming all things to all men that I might reach some,” which is found in 1 Corinthians 9. When I was reintroduced to this concept in the context of cultural adaptation, it led me to draw connections between my faith and my host culture that further facilitated cultural blending.

Some key moments of blending came through observing how Christianity could be practiced in ways that embodied French values and culture, and how French Christianity was incredibly beautiful and unique. My American church upbringing differed greatly from my French church experience. The Christian concept of communion promotes the value of fellowship through sharing a meal together; both food and relationship are values largely amplified in the French culture. Thus, rather than having an early morning church service and rushing out to beat the crowd to lunch every Sunday in typical American fashion, my French church held an evening service followed by a potluck, which would allow the members of the church to actually commune together. During service, we lounged in a cozy space lined with couches and chairs where we would participate in worship (in both French and English), listen to preaching (in both French and English), and have small group discussions. Then, after a closing prayer, everyone would reset the room with tables so we could eat together. After the meal, many stayed to clean the floors, reset the furniture, and wash dishes. It was a beautiful expression of togetherness, service, and love, which expanded greatly my appreciation for the French culture. In France, I learned to adopt authenticity as my own personal value, and no longer viewed spending “excessive” amounts of time with people as inefficient, but rather a Kingdom value

worth harboring. I joined the worship team at my church and expanded my French language skills by learning songs in French. I saw how the French culture could indeed blend with my soul beautifully and seep into my cultural identity.

My last month in France illuminated important spiritual and cultural truths that changed me from the inside out. My emotional journey pushed me toward faith, and in my faith I found the key to adapting to another culture. Although my inner core stayed the same, my outer and mid-level layers of identity were very much changed upon return to the States.

### **Connections to Literature**

Many assertions made in the literature were illuminated by my experience in France and by the experiences of my more seasoned coworkers. First, the Old Testament indication of the difficulty of cross-cultural living was certainly found justified. Not only did I observe physical, logistical barriers and prejudice that make immigration strenuous, but I personally observed the tumultuous mental experiences associated with cross-cultural living. Psychologically, as research from Neuliep (2021) anticipated, I did experience the acculturative stress from culture shock during my transition to a different host culture—hence the initial emotional suppression and subsequent overcontrolling tendencies, high irritability, and emotional lows of grief and loneliness. I also came to understand the influence of culture on one’s identity development and how although I may not have identified myself as French when I returned home, my practical habits and internal values had shifted largely to reflect French culture. Recalling the definition of cultural identity as “the extent to which one is a representative of a given culture behaviorally, communicatively, psychologically and sociologically,” spending time in France had led to a shift in my values, behavior, ways of thinking, and in my self-conception of identity in relation to those around me; it created a change in my cultural identity (“Cultural Identity Theory,” 2014).

Through this personal transformation, I also came to see the truth of identity experiencing constant change. This adaptation was something to embrace rather than fight.

The literature makes it clear that identity is bound to change, even if one remains in their culture of origin indefinitely. This idea is not only supported by intercultural theorists such as Hall and du Gay (2011), but also theologians such as Volf (2019), Le and Lê (2011), and Chatraw and Prior (2019), who note the fluidity, multiplicity, and stability of identity. This record bears witness to Destiny's metaphor of being peeled back like an onion and having outer layers be removed, added, and exchanged while the core of faith stays the same. In other words, her identity in Christ transcended culture, as was emphasized in the passage of Galatians 3:27-28, where Paul promotes unity in Christ across cultural boundaries by stating that in Christ, "[t]here is neither Jew nor Greek." Throughout my cultural experience, I was unknowingly renegotiating my identity as McGill (2016) explains to adapt to a French lifestyle while holding on to my foundation of faith. It was less daunting to let go of old cultural habits and take on new values when I thought of them as Kingdom values, which in actuality were more representative of my core identity, as well as when I thought of my life as a small part in the larger biblical timeline that God has established. Above all, I aimed to follow Jesus' example in traveling, adapting, and treating his hosts with loving kindness, reinforcing my theological findings from Lingenfelter and Mayers (2016) on Christ's being the prime example of "divine love in interpersonal relationships and communication" (p. 2). This way of thinking allowed for a smoother cultural blending process.

Jesus demonstrated that love can and should cross cultural boundaries within and outside of the faith, which motivates us to adapt communicatively. The idea of using communication and language learning as a facet of cultural intelligence was indeed covered by researchers such as

Cai et al. (1996) and Neuliep (2021), but worker Caesar took this a step deeper by stressing the necessity of not only learning the literal language of the host culture, but also the “social language.” By learning the complex sociological cues of the French—like how friendly to be when meeting new people, how to accept distrust initially and earn trust slowly, how to give greetings in buses and stores, and how to be authentic yet unoffensive—I showed love as Christ would to members of this unique culture. Even within the faith, accepting and appreciating the unique aspects of French Christianity underscores the New Testament’s emphasis on unity amid diversity. I sang as the French did, ate with them, and enjoyed a very different kind of fellowship than what I had previously known. The importance of this expression of transformation was not only clearly addressed by my fellow cross-cultural workers, but also by scripture in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (which Caesar also happened to mention), a passage that establishes the need to “become all things to all people” to be the most effective steward of the love and message of Christ. Hence, we see a beautiful transformation of cultural identity driven by the love of Christ, encouraged by the writings of Paul, and expressed both within and beyond our faith communities.

### **Conclusions and Application**

My cultural transformation and that of my coworkers provides evidence of a greater force at work that has allowed us to adapt to our host cultures more smoothly while remaining grounded in our core identity. Although this was not directly stated by any literature I researched, the setup for the process itself was supported by themes deduced from the scholarship. By finding comfort, hope, motivation, and constancy in our Christian faith, the storms of acculturative stress that would naturally cause many to quit and return home were calmed and dealt with in a healthy manner. This resilience would not have been possible without a

framework set out for us on which to filter and discern our inner and outer layers of identity—“onion layers,” if you will. This framework can be found in scripture, summarized by the concept of a Kingdom culture. When Christians understand the core of their identity to be their faith in Christ, the outer layers of culture can be altered more easily to blend with their host culture, so long as they are being aligned with core Kingdom values. Each of the assertions made and experiences found in light of cultural blending (i.e., identity adaptation) from the previous section echoes the biblical values that Christ established while he was proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom of God.

The experience from which I have been speaking was limited specifically to transitioning from American to French culture, but the core concepts that helped me to transition remain true (affirmed by the conversations I had with workers who had been to multiple countries) and could be applied to any culture. While some cultures may contrast biblical values to larger degrees, and some cultural adaptation journeys could be more painful than others, the framework of comparing cultural values to Kingdom values and adopting ones that align in humility and love should still enable smoother transition for Christians living and working among a host culture different from their own. Recalling the explanation by Chatraw and Prior (2019), “[o]ur identity in Christ and our membership in his kingdom transcends, but does not erase, our cultural particularities” (p. 341). In fact, it is important to remember that maintaining a combination of cultures in one’s “identity onion” is not only possible, but it is a natural, beautiful example of the nature of God which has been instilled in creation—after all, He is three persons in one entity. Culture is a valuable, wonderful gift from God that can be used to demonstrate His nature. By applying the Kingdom culture framework in cultural adaptation, we are reminded to value faith

over any worldly culture. Christian faith can thus become a catalyst for cultural identity transformation – a source of constancy which promotes change.

We can also make use of the narrative identity approach by viewing our lives from the perspective of the biblical narrative's being the grand story of which we are a part. When Christians understand themselves to be the Lord's instruments, waiting for Christ to return and living under the mandate to "proclaim the good news" of the Kingdom of God (Mark 16:15) and "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19), we find beauty, goodness, and purpose in our struggle to adapt. When we live and work out of love, grounded in Kingdom values, we become living examples of the Good News in any culture we inhabit. It was this approach that left my fellow workers and me with a sense of peace and purpose greater than the many storms we were facing amidst cultural identity adaptation. Thus, through a biblical narrative identity approach, Christian faith can also become a grounding anchor through intense seasons of external and internal change.

Overall, scholars have found that culture and identity are complex ideas that can create significant emotional and psychological distress when deeply altered. My experience in France and the lessons of my fellow cross-cultural workers demonstrated that Christian faith acts as both a core stabilizer and catalyst for change during cultural identity adaptation, especially through the application of a Kingdom culture mindset in combination with a biblical narrative identity approach. Through constancy of faith, Christians in cross-cultural work experience a smoother and more transformative cultural identity adaptation process. Although my field study was limited to American Christians living in France, I believe this framework is applicable to any variation of cross-cultural transition. It is my hope that this framework may be absorbed and applied by those Christians intending to do cross-cultural work, as well as those who may be

currently living in a community of contrasting majority culture, allowing their transitions to be eased. Additionally, those Christians living in multicultural communities may find these techniques to be useful when interacting frequently with members of other cultures, as they promote not only individual spiritual growth, but a cross-cultural sense of unity. Furthermore, the concepts of a Kingdom culture and biblical narrative identity approach would be healthy and helpful tools for any modern Christian, as we endeavor to grow into the fullness of who God has called us to be. It is my prayer that current and future generations will not stay stagnant in who they have been taught to be by their societies but rather strive for a holy cultural Christ-likeness, embracing simultaneous unity and diversity, keeping Christ at the core of their identities.

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