Strangers in a Familiar Land

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A Phenomenological Study on Marginal Christian Identity

James A. Blumenstock

American Society of Missiology Monograph
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STRANGERS IN A FAMILIAR LAND
A Phenomenological Study on Marginal Christian Identity

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To my wife, Karen, for your unswerving loyalty and faith in me, your willingness to patiently listen to my, at times, esoteric phenomenological ramblings, and your kind and loving perseverance throughout this challenging journey.

To my daughter, Ella, for your understanding when daddy is in the office again, and for your unreserved expressions of love and kindness to help me get through the difficult days.

I dedicate this book to the both of you.

Contents

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Introduction

"From the Gospel of Jesus Christ, people gain an entirely new vision of the world in which they live and to which they are tied with every fiber of their beings."[1] These words from the eminent, twentieth-century Dutch theologian and missiologist Johan Herman Bavinck remind us of the essentially transformative nature of religious conversion. More than merely the acquisition of new beliefs or the performance of new rituals, conversion encompasses nothing less than a thoroughgoing "transfer of worlds."[2] When converts meet with God, personal identities are re-shaped, perspectives of reality are revised, social attachments are reconfigured, and life values are re-aligned. One becomes a "new creature" (2 Cor 5:17) as it were, or, in the words of the Apostle Peter, one is "born again to a living hope" (1 Pet 1:3).

However, for many converts, this deeply transformative experience is also deeply disruptive. In portions of the world where religious, ethnic, kinship, and civic identities are intricately interwoven, and where Christians exist as a minority sub-group within a predominantly non-Christian religious environment, converts face the threat of social marginalization. By converting to what is perceived as a foreign religion, Christ-followers are often considered deviant, disrespectful, or even dangerous by the majority population. They have abandoned the community's religion, and, therefore, the argument goes, they have abandoned the community itself. Their new vision of the world, while personally transformative, puts them at odds with established and expected modes of being and behaving. Since they no longer

1. Bolt et al., *J. H. Bavinck Reader*, 291.
2. Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 157–60.

inhabit the society's "normal" ethical patterns or social identities, they are considered not only different but also patently unacceptable. Within these environments, Christians are, in effect, strangers in a familiar land.

The country of Thailand is one such locale where Christian converts face the realities of a marginalized existence. It is commonly believed in Thailand that to be Thai is to be Buddhist. Unlike the West, where religion and culture are more or less hermetically sealed worlds, Thai society and culture remain thoroughly imbued with religious overtones. Folk Buddhism[3] governs kinship ties, rites of passage, worldview formation, intersubjectivity, self-understanding, and even civic policies and governance. This religio-cultural underpinning to Thai identity and society is compounded by the fact that approximately 94 percent of the population of Thailand adheres to some form of Buddhism.[4] Within this setting, therefore, religious conversion not only threatens one's place in the collective but also calls into question the very essence of one's "Thainess." How do converts navigate this reality of a marginalized existence? How do they understand themselves as both Thai and Christian? What is it like to be a stranger in the land of one's birth?

The purpose of this research is to answer these questions and others like it, not through established theories and formulations but rather from the perspective of the converts themselves. In this book, readers will be taken on a journey into the world of Thai Christians. They will discover the lived meanings implicit in meeting a loving and powerful God, joining an egalitarian and idealistic sacred community, experiencing misunderstandings, ostracism, and ridicule because of one's faith, and negotiating the delicate performance of one's altered religious identity while, at the same time, preserving pre-established kinship and friendship relations. The goal of this study, therefore, is not to explain but to understand, to attune our thoughts and emotions to the pre-reflective narratives of converts, and to co-experience with Thai believers the lived realities of being both Thai and Christian.

3. The phrase "Folk Buddhism" refers to the popular religion in Thailand which is an admixture of Therevada Buddhism and animism, especially the ancestral, spirit cult. See chapter 5 for a full discussion.

4. BDHRL, "International Religious Freedom Report."

NATURE OF THE RESEARCH

The research question being explored in this book is, "What is the experience of in-marginality among late-convert Christians of Northern Thailand who have transferred from the Thai Buddhist lifeworld into the new sociocultural world of Christian belief and identity?" It is pertinent to begin with some definitions in order to clarify the meaning of this research question.

1. *Experience*: An immediate unit of meaning for an individual or community within the flow of time that may or may not have been an object of reflection.
2. *In-marginality*: The lived experience of exclusion from mainstream society and its activities and processes.[5] While recognizing that there exist variances of nuance among terms, I will be treating in-marginality, marginality, marginalization, social marginalization, and displacement as synonymous throughout this research.
3. *Late-convert*: Adult converts; that is, those who converted from Thai Folk Buddhism to Christianity subsequent to eighteen years of age.
4. *Christians of Northern Thailand*: Self-identifying Christians who are active church members in and surrounding the city of Chiang Mai, Thailand.
5. *Lifeworld*: The taken-for-granted and pre-reflective world, understood phenomenologically, that encompasses the natural attitude of everyday life.[6]
6. *Sociocultural world:* The unique system of construable signs of a particular community which serves to direct behavior and organize experience along with the intersubjective themes contributing to the formation of an individual's "thinking as usual" and personal identity.[7]
7. *Belief*: The cognitive and affective structuration and re-structuration, both as representing a tradition and one's personal meanings, appertaining to religious alternation.

5. Howat, "Marginality," 413. For more on what I mean by in-marginality, see the discussion in chapter 4.

6. Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 7; Schütz and Luckmann, *Structures 1*, 3–4.

7. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 14, 49; Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 79–82.

8. *Identity*: One's subjective self-understanding that results from appropriating a society's objective reality (i.e., "world") as mediated by significant others.[8]

This research question will be explored utilizing the apparatus of interpretive or lifeworld phenomenology. As a philosophy that studies human experience and "the way things present themselves to us in and through such experience,"[9] phenomenology provides the methodological resources for adequately uncovering the lifeworld of Thai Christians from an emic perspective. Our reflections will proceed based on a series of in-depth interviews that were conducted with seven Thai Christians from Northern Thailand. The meanings disclosed during these interviews will be interpreted through three horizons or referential planes: (1) the social sciences, (2) philosophical phenomenology, and (3) the Christian religious tradition. Overall, this research represents an applied study within the field of the philosophy of religious experience.[10]

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

As a theological educator and missionary who has worked in Thailand for over a decade, I have increasingly become aware of the unique challenges that face the Thai Church as a minority community within a predominantly Buddhist nation. As many scholars have observed, Thai converts encounter a variety of post-conversion, sociocultural adjustments as a result of world transfer, centering on issues of identity re-formation; namely, what it means to be both Thai and Christian.[11] As a result, the church in Thailand has historically struggled in their efforts toward conversion and discipleship within this context.[12] First, proselytization efforts have been hampered. According to a recent study, the top three obstacles to Christian conversion

8. Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 132–33.

9. Sokolowski, *Introduction*, 2.

10. According to Emmanuel Falque, the discipline of the philosophy of religious experience eschews an analysis of a religious "object" by means of logical and linguistic positivism, instead fully examining the subjective experience of the believer so as to attain the essence of religious phenomena. Falque and Shank, *Crossing the Rubicon*, LOC 2155–95.

11. See, especially, Johnson, "Exploring Social Barriers"; Bruijne, "Conversion"; Keyes, "Why the Thai Are Not Christians."

12. For more on the history of Christianity in Thailand, including the challenges faced by missionaries and local Christ-followers, see Smith, *Siamese Gold*.

in Thailand relate to Thai identity. These include national-religious identity ("Thai people are supposed to be Buddhists"), kinship identity ("You cannot break the rules of the family"), and sociocultural identity ("You do not take part in rituals anymore").[13] Given the monopolistic nature of the social world in Thailand, that is, the fact that the entire society serves as the plausibility structure for a religious, namely Buddhist, world, Christianity is summarily dismissed as a foreign religion and conversion is perceived as a betrayal of one's family, nation, and culture. Second, Thai churches have experienced difficulties in member retention, largely due to social disruptions.[14] Religious alternation involves a process of inhabiting a new world while, at the same time, segregating from the potentially reality-disrupting influences of the old world. For many Thai converts, the pressures of the old world prove too great, leading to attrition and reversion if the Christian community fails to produce a sufficiently strong plausibility structure and alternate social reality.

These pressing challenges facing the Thai church pertain primarily to issues of social identity. In addressing the need for qualitative research into this phenomenon, missionary-scholar Alan Johnson writes,

> While in fact there may be some Thai Christians who do not "feel" very Thai I think it is wrong to assume that this applies across the board in the absence of some empirical data. This in fact would be a most interesting study, to talk with Thai Christians about how Thai they feel post-conversion and document how they come to understand themselves as a Thai and a Christian.[15]

This research intends to address this lacuna, not necessarily by presenting empirical data by which we may then generalize conclusions about how all Thai Christians "feel" but, instead, by describing and interpreting the experience of identity formation within the context of marginality as a lived experience. In other words, when tackling issues related to the formation of Christian identity in Thailand, it is necessary, I believe, first to understand the phenomenon, not through theory or quantification but from the privileged perspective of the believers themselves.

By unveiling and disclosing the lived experience of Thai Christians, this research will contribute to ongoing scholarship in several fields. First, a phenomenological description of in-marginality among Thai Christians

13. Bruijne, "Conversion."
14. Mejudhon, "Ritual of Reconciliation [2005]," 1.
15. Johnson, "Exploring Social Barriers," 142.

will assist the fields of missiology and pastoral care by explicating the Thai Christian lifeworld, thus aiding missionary and pastoral efforts in evangelism and discipleship. Second, this research will inform the development of Thai local theologies, providing qualitative data that will reveal "present human experience"[16] as a valid source for theological expression.[17] Third, by utilizing the phenomenological apparatus, this book will contribute to broader discussions in the phenomenology of religion, especially related to Buddhist and Christian lifeworlds and the constitution of religious experience.[18] Finally, this study may be situated within the field of Southeast Asian religious studies as it pertains to understanding Christianity as a minority religion and assisting inter-religious relations in the region. Overall, my primary desire is that this book may aid efforts in the development of a local, theological anthropology that not only assists in new formulations of how "Thainess" and "Christianness" intersect, but also enhances contextualized understandings of Christian identity within any social environment where Christians exist as a marginalized sub-group. Now, let us begin our journey of exploration into the phenomenon of in-marginality as lived among Thai Christians.

16. Bevans, *Models*, 1–2.

17. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*.

18. For more on a phenomenology of Buddhist, religious experience, see Smart, *Buddhism and Christianity*; Laycock, *Mind as Mirror and the Mirroring of Mind*; Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology*; Park and Kopf, *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*; Varma, *Buddhist Phenomenology*.

1

Identity Formation in Sociocultural Perspective

INTRODUCTION

Religious identity formation in contexts of marginalization is a fundamentally social phenomenon. Conversion, as we will see in this book, introduces two revised states of social existence: social segregation on the one hand, in that it displaces the convert from pre-existing religious and social identities, and social integration on the other, in that it immerses the convert in a new and transformative intersubjective community of saints. As we begin our study of this phenomenon, therefore, it is valuable for us first to survey the relevant theorizations within the social sciences to see how they might assist in our adumbration of the structure of marginalization within the Thai context. In this chapter, I will review literature in the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, and psychology to reveal the most relevant theorizations as they contribute to an understanding of the Thai Christian experience of in-marginality.

The chapter is structured into two primary sections: marginality and sociocultural identity formation. In the first section, I will cover marginality theory within three theoretical traditions: stranger as newcomer, "marginal man," and liminality. In the second section, I will survey both the social constructivist and social identity approaches to identity formation, both of which prioritize the essentially social nature of the self-concept.

MARGINALITY

Since the early twentieth century, due to an increase in social mobility, mass communication, and ethnic and political conflicts, sociologists and anthropologists have developed a heightened awareness of the role of the margin for understanding culture and society. Social structures are no longer perceived as stable and exhaustive definitions for all people in a given time and place. Instead, for each social structure, there exist those who live "on the hyphen": neither fully defined nor fully accepted according to the prevailing definitions and identifications of the dominant groups.[1] These individuals may be in a marginal position due to their race, ethnicity, religion, or simply because they are newcomers, but in all cases, they experience unique social and psychological effects. This section will delineate the sociocultural concept of marginality as expounded in three distinct, albeit related, theoretical traditions: the stranger, the "marginal man," and the liminal. I will trace each theory according to the works of its major contributors, highlighting similarities and differences among the traditions as well as key concepts relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.

The Stranger

Modern sociology's treatment of marginality arguably began with Georg Simmel's (1858–1918) concise but influential essay entitled "The Stranger."[2] The German philosopher pictured society as a web of interactions between people. The form of these interactions could be isolated from their content allowing the sociologist to study relationships that differ in substance but display the same formal properties. This approach, known as formal sociology, underpins Simmel's treatment of the stranger as an isolated social type or a "specific form of interaction"[3] that may appear in different societies at different times throughout history but displays similar behavioral patterns.[4]

For Simmel, the stranger is not a wanderer who comes and goes but the person who comes today and stays tomorrow. While being close in distance, the stranger is also remote. The stranger's position as a member of a society involves being both outside it and confronting it. Economically,

1. See Fine and Sirin, "Hyphenated Selves."
2. Simmel, "Stranger."
3. Simmel, "Stranger," 402.
4. "Simmel, Georg."

they are the outside merchants who settle down in the place of their industry while retaining a sense of mobility. Because they are not committed to the particular values of the group, they interact with the group objectively, openly, and with a high level of freedom. The nearness of the stranger allows the group to identify with them according to certain general characteristics such as national, social, or generally human qualities, but their farness is experienced in the lack of personal and particular relational features held in common.[5] The stranger *par excellence*, according to Simmel, were the European Jews who, despite being resident in European nations, have historically been categorized, in the first place, as inhabiting a particular social position as distinct from other citizens.[6] In other words, the Jew, like the stranger in general, "may be a member of a group in a *spatial* sense but still not be a member of the group in a *social* sense . . . *in* the group but not *of* it."[7]

Simmel's seminal essay initiated two major research traditions in sociology: the newcomer tradition and "marginal man" theory. These two traditions, while sharing significant theoretical commonalities, have produced divergent themes and angles of analysis.[8] In the following section, I will provide an extensive discussion of "marginal man" theory, but here I will briefly cover the newcomer tradition as developed by Schütz.[9]

Alfred Schütz[10] (1899–1959) played an enigmatic role in the history and development of modern sociology. While a phenomenological philosopher by trade and conviction, Schütz's forays into the social sciences have both shaped the direction of contemporary sociology[11] and instigated the consternation of fellow phenomenologists.[12] Indeed, classifying him as a phenomenologist or sociologist has proven difficult even in this research, requiring a dual treatment of his work. As a phenomenologist, Schütz's

5. Simmel, "Stranger," 402–7.

6. Simmel, "Stranger," 403, 408.

7. McLemore, "Simmel's 'Stranger,'" 86.

8. For an elaboration of this two-traditions thesis, see McLemore, "Simmel's 'Stranger.'"

9. Besides Schütz, Margaret Mary Wood had also produced a significant sociological study on the stranger. See Wood, *Stranger*.

10. Two Anglicized spellings of this German name—Schütz and Schuetz—are extant in the literature. I have chosen to utilize the former.

11. Most significantly as the professor and mentor of Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger. See Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*.

12. Most notably and famously, Aron Gurwitsch. See Schütz et al., *Philosophers in Exile*; Natanson, "Alfred Schütz."

understanding of the constitutive nature of the lifeworld will be discussed in chapter 2. Here, however, I would like to survey his sociological contributions to the concept of the stranger as most fully expressed in his 1944 essay, "The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology."[13]

Schütz approached the type of the stranger from a social psychological and phenomenological perspective. To begin, Schütz described the stranger as "an adult individual of our times and civilization who tries to be permanently accepted or at least tolerated by the groups which he approaches."[14] The immigrant is the outstanding example, but a stranger may be anyone who enters a relatively closed social group of any size or form with the intention of remaining within that group. Essential to Schütz's thesis is his concept of the "cultural pattern of group life" or "thinking as usual." Society, he argues, provides for its members a "graduated knowledge of relevant elements."[15] This knowledge consists of a pre-theoretical set of "recipes" bequeathed by a culture "for interpreting the social world and for handling things and men in order to obtain the best results in every situation with a minimum of effort by avoiding undesirable consequences."[16] That is to say, cultures provide for its members "typical solutions for typical problems available for typical actors."[17] As long as social life is relatively stable, the knowledge handed down in the tradition is deemed reliable, and the recipes are accepted and applied by others in the group, members will follow the cultural pattern as a matter of course. However, the stranger, for whom the cultural pattern is foreign, must "place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group."[18] Since they do not share in the history and traditions of the group, they must interpret group behavior based on their own cultural pattern. When they approach individuals, they are unable to treat them as mere performers of typical functions but only as individuals. This prevents them from developing a coherent picture of the group and a reliable set of expected responses. As a result of this dissonance between two divergent patterns of thinking as usual, the stranger becomes remote, hesitant, and distrustful. As Schütz explained, "The

13. Schütz, "Stranger." See also Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*.
14. Schütz, "Stranger," 499.
15. Schütz, "Stranger," 500.
16. Schütz, *On Phenomenology and Social Relations*, 81.
17. Schütz, "Stranger," 505.
18. Schütz, "Stranger," 502.

cultural pattern of the approached group is to the stranger not a shelter but a field of adventure, not a matter of course but a questionable topic of investigation, not an instrument for disentangling problematic situations but a problematic situation itself and one hard to master."[19]

The "Marginal Man"

It was a student of Georg Simmel, Robert E. Park (1864–1944), who first coined the term "marginal man" to refer to a socio-psychological personality type who experiences the antagonistic clash of cultures at a personal level.[20] Park, a central figure in the Chicago school of sociology, adapted and expanded Simmel's treatment of the stranger in his 1928 article, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man."[21] In it, Park espoused a catastrophic theory of progress by which cultural differences arise and cultures advance through cooperative and competitive interactions such as migration and war.[22] Through migration especially, societies are secularized and individuals are emancipated as "primitive" cultures progress toward "civilization" through the cross-pollination of new cultures and the interbreeding of races.[23] While cities best represent the locale of racial assimilation and amalgamation, it is in the "marginal man" where cultures subjectively come into contact and collision.[24]

Following Simmel, Park's "marginal man" was a stranger, a wanderer who was not bound by local proprieties and conventions but was emancipated and enlightened. As a result,

> [He was] a new type of personality, namely, a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now sought to find a place. He was a man on the

19. Schütz, "Stranger," 506.

20. I recognize the gender exclusive nature of the term "marginal man" but will follow its usage as a specific sociological theory represented in the literature. Throughout this book, I will utilize quotation marks to signify this term as an established sociological label and not this author's own perspective on gender.

21. Park, "Human Migration."

22. Park, "Human Migration," 882–84; Goldberg, "Robert Park's Marginal Man," 200.

23. Park, "Human Migration," 887–88, 890.

24. Goldberg, "Robert Park's Marginal Man," 201.

> margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused.[25]

For Park, as for Simmel before him, it was the European Jews who, due to their mobility and symbiotic relationship with the larger community, exemplified this personality most fully. They were the "first cosmopolite and citizen of the world" whose pre-eminence in trade, keen intellect, and idealistic sophistication made them a hallmark "city man."[26]

Internally, however, the mind of the "marginal man" harbors the conflict of the divided self: inner turmoil and intense self-consciousness produced by the internalization of the conflict of cultures. Far from transitory, this period of crisis and the concomitant psychological effects become relatively permanent features of the self, resulting in the formation of a personality type. Park believed this personality type, the "marginal man," is ordinarily a person of mixed blood who participates in two worlds. However, significant to this research, he also states, "The Christian convert in Asia or in Africa exhibits many if not most of the characteristics of the 'marginal man'—the same spiritual instability, intensified self-consciousness, restlessness, and malaise."[27] Whoever may appropriately fit within this category, it is in the mind of the "marginal man" where Park believed one may best study the processes of civilization and of progress.

Nearly a decade later, Park refined his understanding of the "marginal man," stressing that the emergence of this personality type results not only from cultural contact but cultural conflict. The "marginal man" is one who lives in two not merely different but antagonistic worlds. They arise at a time and place where new peoples and cultures are coming into existence, making them "the individual with the wider horizon, the keener intelligence, the more detached and rational viewpoint."[28]

Park's theoretical adjustments were expressed in his introduction to the 1937 book *The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict,*[29] written by one of his students at the University of Chicago, Everett V. Stonequist (1901–1979). Under Park's encouragement and counsel, Stonequist not only set out to analyze further the validity of the "marginal man" hypothesis but also to clarify and expand the theory through a systematization of the

25. Park, "Human Migration," 892.
26. Park, "Human Migration," 892.
27. Park, "Human Migration," 893.
28. Park, "Introduction," xvii.
29. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*. See also Stonequist, "Problem of the Marginal Man."

representative types, life phases, personality traits, and levels of adjustment. He began his study with an expanded definition:

> So the marginal man as conceived in this study is one who is poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds, one of which is often 'dominant' over the other; within which membership is implicitly if not explicitly based upon birth or ancestry (race or nationality); and where exclusion removes the individual from a system of group relations.[30]

The social worlds in which the individual resides may include historic traditions, languages, political loyalties, moral codes, religions, or any combination of these, but these worlds must come into conflict and become internalized as acute personal difficulty or mental tension for the marginal personality type to appear.[31]

"Marginal men," as conceived by Stonequist, include two representative types: the racial hybrid and the cultural hybrid. The racial hybrid is the person of mixed racial ancestry whose biological origin places them between the two races. Their physical features set them apart from both parent races, presenting a difficulty for the community as it relates to social identification and role enactment. Examples include the Eurasians of India, "Cape Coloureds" of South Africa, and the "Mulattoes" of the United States.[32] Cultural hybrids, on the other hand, are those who, through migration or cultural diffusion, internalize the norms, mores, and patterns of two or more cultures. For Stonequist, the greatest examples of cultural hybrids include the previously colonized peoples of Asia and Africa, Jews, immigrants, and the "American Negro."[33] Following Park, Stonequist highlighted the Christian convert in non-Western cultures as an exemplary model of the cultural hybrid. He or she "is one who has been pulled out of the old order of things without necessarily becoming a part of the new order."[34] After abandoning their own customs and traditions, they fail to imbibe the missionary's

30. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 8.

31. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 3–4.

32. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 10–11. These terms for biracial categories, which may be considered insensitive or inappropriate, are Stonequist's and, thus, do not represent the position or opinions of this author.

33. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 54–119.

34. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 61.

Western traditions properly. As a result, they experience a break with their tribe, sometimes including severe social ostracism.

It is important to note, however, that in all cases of cultural hybridity, it is not the mere mixing of cultures that creates the "marginal man" but the experience of group conflict that flows from cultural differences.[35] When conflicting groups are in a relationship of inequality, members of the subordinate group will seek to adjust themselves to the dominant group that is believed to possess greater prestige and power. Marginal personalities emerge, therefore, as subordinate group members; after being partially assimilated and psychologically identified with the dominant group, they are never fully accepted by that group.[36]

Individuals in this marginal situation will experience at least three significant phases of personal development: (1) lack of awareness of the racial or national conflict, (2) crisis period during which the individual consciously experiences this conflict, and (3) period of adjustment or maladjustment to the situation.[37] Positively, the individual may adjust to the marginal situation by becoming a leader in the subordinate group (nationalist role) or by mediating between the clashing cultures (intermediary role). Indeed, the "marginal man's" insight into two cultures and their ability to analyze problems from more than one angle may instill in them a creative, international mindedness.[38] Negatively, however, the internal tension and continual restlessness caused by the marginal situation may lead to a breakdown in individual "life-organization" which may result in crime, delinquency, suicide, or psychosis.[39] The level of adjustment varies by individual and the degree of identification and subsequent repulsion by the dominant group, but it is ultimately a matter of psychological integration whereby the "marginal man" faces the realities of their social situation and attempts to cope through various means.[40]

Arguably Stonequist's greatest contribution to "marginal man" theory—and certainly the most controversial aspect of his work—was his categorization of the "marginal man's" personality traits. Consequent to the crisis experience in which the marginal individual experiences his or

35. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 88.
36. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 121.
37. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 121–23.
38. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 178–79.
39. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 159, 202.
40. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 208–9.

her world as disorganized and problematic are a number of psychological effects, both positive and negative. Fundamentally, the "marginal man" will develop a dual personality by which one imagines the self through two disparate looking-glasses, thus creating an internal mental conflict.[41] This internal conflict may lead, secondly, to an attitude of ambivalence or divided loyalty: the state of being torn between two courses of action leading to often-contradictory opinions and behavior.[42] Third, marginal situations may produce excessive self-consciousness and hypersensitivity. Perpetually conscious of their anomalous position, the "marginal man" may feel excessively deficient or inferior in light of the group's social definition. This hypersensitivity may result in withdrawal, excessive egocentrism, rationalization, or aggressiveness.[43] Not all personality traits are adverse, however. Stonequist identified two traits in particular that are weighted in the "marginal man's" favor. First, because of their in-between situation, the "marginal man" is an able critic of the dominant group and its culture. They are both an insider and an outsider, allowing them to note the contradictions and hypocrisies tacit in the dominant culture. Second, the "marginal man" is a skilled thinker. If, as Stonequist argues, perplexity and confusion provide the fertile ground for reflection, then the marginal person will likely experience more intense, creative, and objective mental activity.[44]

Given the complexity of the "marginal man's" psychological constitution, it is no wonder that Stonequist, like Park before him, identified the "marginal man" as the "key-personality in the contacts of culture" and the "crucible of cultural fusion."[45] Writing at a time and place where urbanization and modernization were rapidly bringing cultures into conflict, Stonequist's treatment of the mind of the "marginal man" was not only timely but also seminal for later sociological theorization. Indeed, the concept of marginality seems to touch upon not just the few who live on the hyphen, but upon the many who exist in an ever-shrinking world. For the

41. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 145. Stonequist alludes to W. E. B. DuBois's seminal work on the plight of African Americans in the early twentieth century and their experience of "double consciousness." The double conscious individual, DuBois writes, always feels his or her "two-ness . . . two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 8).

42. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 146–47.

43. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 148–52.

44. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 155.

45. Stonequist, *Marginal Man*, 221.

purposes of this research, "marginal man" theory offers a useful horizon for adumbrating the constitutive structure of the Thai Christian religious experience of in-marginality.

The Liminal

The sociological conception of marginality, including both stranger and "marginal man" traditions, finds its anthropological counterpart in the concept of liminality. Although initially proposed by French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957) in his book *The Rites of Passage,*[46] liminality was most fully developed in the work of symbolic cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1920–1983).[47] For both Gennep and Turner, liminality is the special state in a transition ritual wherein one is betwixt and between two fixed points in the social structure.[48] Gennep had identified three stages of rites of passage: separation, margin (or limen), and re-aggregation. Separation removes the ritual subject from his or her position in society while re-aggregation returns him or her to a new status within that society, although inwardly transformed and outwardly changed. Between these stages of social structure[49] is a period of anti-structure when the initiand is neither here nor there; suspended, as it were, in a marginal state outside of society's roles, statuses, and norms. It is in this inter-structual sphere, Turner believed, where the basic building blocks of culture are exposed and great myths, philosophical systems, and works of art are generated.[50]

Turner developed his understanding of liminality by observing the ritual practices of the Ndembu people of Zambia. Passage rituals, particularly initiation rites, he observed, involve a process of transitioning initiands from one status in society to another. The in-between or liminal phase, however, places the transitional-beings or "liminars"[51] in a state of

46. Gennep, *Rites of Passage*.

47. Turner, *Ritual Process*; *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*; "Variations"; "Betwixt and Between."

48. Pentikainen, "Liminality."

49. Defined as the "more or less distinctive arrangement of mutually dependent institutions and the institutional organization of social positions and/or actors which they imply" (Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 272).

50. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 128; "Betwixt and Between," 55.

51. Turner utilizes numerous designations for those in the liminal phase: transitional-beings, liminal *personae*, liminaries, liminars, among others. For the sake of consistency, I have chosen to use the term "liminar" to refer to a person in the liminal state and

structural limbo. They become invisible or even structurally "dead" to their society. They are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."[52] This removal of status may be symbolized through stripping the initiands naked, sending them away to secluded areas, and even treating them as corpses by forcing them to lie motionless in the posture of customary burial.[53] Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox. They no longer fit in structural categories, and, as a result, are considered unclean, undifferentiated, and poor. The former life is stripped away so that a process of "growth, transformation, and reformulation of old elements in new patterns" may emerge.[54] Consequently, the liminal phase becomes a stage for reflection, creativity, and religious experience.[55]

During the liminal period, initiands enter a very simple social structure of complete submission to the instructor and complete equality with one another. Spontaneous, immediate, and concrete social bonds, falling under the principle, "each for all, and all for each," form among liminars.[56] Turner labels this sense of comradeship "communitas." Relying heavily on Martin Buber, Turner describes communitas as an existential and spontaneous "I and Thou" relationship wherein individuals confront one another directly and without the constraints implicit in structural differentiation.[57] As initiands are leveled and stripped of all social rank and status, a sentiment of humankindness emerges whereby participants experience a sense of "we're in this together." These bonds often last a lifetime, even after the ritual is over, and the initiands return to their respective statuses in society.

For Turner, liminality and communitas are not limited to the ritual processes of traditional cultures. The betwixt and between period, along with its concomitant sense of comradeship, can be identified in religious movements such as the early Franciscans,[58] religious social processes such as pilgrimages,[59] and modern social movements such as the hippies of the

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"initiand" to refer to the individual as he or she experiences all phases of a given ritual.

52. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 95.
53. Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 48; *Ritual Process*, 95.
54. Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 49.
55. Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 53.
56. Turner, "Betwixt and Between," 50.
57. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 47.
58. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 140–50.
59. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, 166–210.

1960s.[60] The sheer variety of liminal experiences in both traditional and modern cultures led Turner to distinguish between liminal and liminoid phenomena. Liminal phenomena, he argues, reside largely in the tribal genres. They are tied to natural breaks in the flow of sociocultural processes (such as calendrical or biological rhythms), centrally integrated into the total social process of a given community, and tend to have a common meaning for the community's members. In contrast, liminoid phenomena appear in industrialized genres. They are tied to the leisure sphere of individual life, develop outside or on the margins of central economic and political processes, are largely plural, fragmentary, and experimental, and tend to be more idiosyncratic and quirky.[61] Whereas in a liminal ritual the liminar looks forward to returning to a stable, integrated social order, "in the liminoid there is no returning to where the world was before, only movement into a future that continually undermines both the prevailing order and the nature of the sacred within the society."[62]

Several other implications of Turner's theory of liminality are also pertinent. First, liminality may become a permanent feature of an individual's or group's lived experience. In traditional rites of passage, liminars are removed from society only to be eventually re-aggregated. There is always the expectation of return. However, for some the liminal period becomes a permanent condition. The Christian, for instance, is one whose entire religious life is marked by passage: "A stranger to the world, a pilgrim, a traveler, with no place to rest his head."[63] He or she has an expectation of returning "home," but that home is beyond earthly existence. Therefore, his or her lived experience on earth is that of liminality. Jaclyn Colona and Guillermo Grenier claim that Cuban exiles in America present another example of permanent, albeit structured, liminality.[64] As exiles, Cuban Americans do not seek integration with American society but continually long for re-aggregation into the Cuban national and geographical social structure. However, in this indefinite time of betwixt and between, the exilic community's identity becomes that of liminality. They coalesce into enclaves, forming a density and diversity of structural relationships, all the while regarding "their ancestral homeland as their real and ideal home

60. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 112–13.

61. Turner, "Variations," 43–45.

62. Roxburgh, *Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality*, 48.

63. Turner, *Ritual Process*, 107.

64. Colona, "Structuring Liminality."