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LINES OF FLIGHT AND FAITH: REIMAGINING CHRISTIAN MISSION THROUGH DELEUZIAN LITERARY CONCEPTS

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Abstract

This study, *Lines of Flight and Faith: Reimagining Christian Mission Through Deleuzian Literary Concepts*, observes the connection of Gilles Deleuze's philosophical concepts and Christian missiology, offering a fresh framework for understanding missionary activity. By engaging with Deleuze's ideas of nomadology, the fold, immanence, and assemblages, this study reinterprets Christian mission as a dynamic process of movement, transformation, and multiplicity. Deleuze's concept of deterritorialization is applied to the Apostolic journeys, suggesting that mission involves continuous adaptation rather than rigid territorial expansion. Furthermore, the fold serves as a metaphor for spiritual conversion, while the concept of immanence challenges traditional transcendental approaches to the divine. This paper also observes missionary communities as assemblages, stressing the multiplicity of evangelistic efforts and the expansion of the collective faith body. By synthesizing Deleuzian philosophy with theological insights, this work proposes new pathways for missiological thought, emphasizing fluidity, interconnectedness, and the ongoing process of becoming in Christian mission.

Keywords: Deleuze, Christian mission, nomadology, deterritorialization, immanence, the fold

Introduction

The juncture of philosophy and theology has long been a fertile ground for intellectual exploration, and in recent years, Gilles Deleuze's thought has become increasingly influential in rethinking religious concepts. This paper pursues to build upon the rich relationship between Deleuze's philosophical ideas and Christian theology, particularly in the context of missiology. The concept of mission, traditionally understood as the propagation of Christian faith through evangelism, has undergone significant revaluation in light of global, post-modern realities. Deleuze's notions of nomadology, immanence, and the fold offer new tools for interpreting mission as an ever-evolving process. In particular, Deleuze's ideas of deterritorialization and assemblages open up innovative ways of understanding the relationship between faith, space, and community. Engaging with Deleuze requires a departure from traditional hierarchical structures, moving toward a vision of mission that is decentralized, fluid, and continuously adapting to the complexities of contemporary life. Through this interdisciplinary dialogue, this study aims to offer fresh insights into the ongoing process of Christian mission, transforming it from a static project into a living, breathing practice deeply intertwined with the world it seeks to engage.

II. The Intersection of Faith and Philosophy

In contemporary academic discourse, the connexion of faith and philosophy offers a productive ground for examining the complexities of belief systems, particularly when engaging with concepts that challenge traditional theological frameworks. Christian mission, as an evolving practice, is often seen as rigidly defined by ecclesiastical norms. However, the infusion of Deleuzian literary and philosophical thought provides

new trajectories for rethinking both the foundations and expressions of faith in a modern context. In particular, Gilles Deleuze's notions of *lines of flight*, *deterritorialization*, and *rhizomatic structures* prompt a reconsideration of how mission, as a religious and cultural phenomenon, transcends conventional boundaries. Deleuze's work, in conjunction with his frequent collaborator Félix Guattari, challenges the linearity often associated with religious expansion, advocating instead for a fluidity and multiplicity that mirrors the spiritual journeys present in Christian evangelism. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 23-25)

The convergence of Deleuzian philosophy with Christian thought may appear unconventional, yet it echoes the long-standing dialogue between philosophy and theology. This dialogue is reflected in the works of figures like Søren Kierkegaard, whose existential approach in *Fear and Trembling* brought philosophical rigor to the exploration of faith, particularly the individual's relationship with God. Similarly, in *The City of God*, Augustine's integration of Platonic philosophy with Christian doctrine set a precedent for engaging secular thought in the service of theological exploration. These works laid the groundwork for a broader understanding of how philosophical inquiry enriches theological reflection, providing new frameworks for interpreting scripture, religious experience, and the nature of divine intervention. (Kierkegaard, 2006: 46)

Building on this tradition, Deleuze's philosophy offers a dynamic means of engaging with Christian mission. His rejection of static, hierarchical structures in favour of more interconnected, relational systems is particularly pertinent in a postmodern world where institutional authority is increasingly questioned. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop the

concept of the *rhizome*, a decentralized network that contrasts with more rigid tree-like structures of knowledge and power. Applied to Christian mission, this concept invites a revaluation of missionary practice, emphasizing the potential for horizontal, rather than vertical, growth. This resonates with missiological perspectives that advocate for intercultural dialogue and the mutual exchange of spiritual insights, rather than imposing a monolithic interpretation of the Gospel. Mission, in this view, becomes a fluid, adaptive process, not confined by geographical or cultural borders but unfolding across diverse contexts, much like the rhizomatic structures Deleuze describes. (Bell, 2009: 82)

Moreover, Deleuze's concept of *detrterritorialization* presents a compelling lens for examining the nature of religious expansion and the dissemination of Christian faith. Traditionally, missionary activity has been understood as a form of territorial conquest, where new lands and peoples are *won* for Christ. However, through a Deleuzian framework, detrterritorialization reframes this activity as a breaking free from immovable spatial and cultural boundaries. As described in *Anti-Oedipus*, detrterritorialization involves not just physical displacement but also the transformation of thought and identity. In the context of Christian mission, it highlights the ways in which faith transcends institutionalized religion, spilling over into new social and cultural spaces. This perspective challenges the colonial legacy associated with missionary work, proposing instead a model where the Gospel is not confined to any one nation or people but constantly reinterpreted and recontextualized. (Deleuze, 1983: 61)

Philosophers such as Paul Tillich have also explored similar intersections between faith and philosophy, particularly in his work *The Courage to Be*, where he argues for the necessity of integrating existential philosophy into Christian theology. Tillich's approach to the *ground of being* anticipates some of Deleuze's ideas on immanence, where God is not viewed as a distant transcendent being but as deeply embedded in the world, intertwined with the unfolding of human history. This shift from a transcendent to an immanent conception of the divine opens up new avenues for reimagining mission. It suggests that missionary work, rather than being a process of bringing an external truth to a new context, is instead a process of uncovering and amplifying the divine already present within that context. (Tillich, 2001: 48)

Furthermore, the intersection of faith and philosophy invites a deeper reflection on the nature of belief itself, particularly in light of Deleuze's rejection of fixed identities and stable meanings. Faith, in this framework, is not a static set of dogmas but a dynamic process of becoming, always in flux and open to new interpretations. This resonates with the thought of philosophers like Jacques Derrida, whose concept of *différance* in *Of Grammatology* destabilizes fixed meanings and highlights the fluidity of language and interpretation. Similarly, for Deleuze, faith could be understood as a kind of perpetual detrterritorialization, where the believer is continually moving beyond the limits of established doctrine into new realms of spiritual understanding. (Derrida, 1976: 182)

In examining the node of Deleuzian philosophy with Christian mission, it becomes evident that the two fields, far from being incompatible, offer complementary insights. Deleuze's emphasis on multiplicity, fluidity, and detrterritorialization provides a valuable framework for rethinking mission as an open-ended, transformative process. This approach aligns with contemporary missiological thought, which increasingly emphasizes the importance of intercultural engagement, contextual theology, and the rejection of a one-size-fits-all approach to evangelism. By drawing on Deleuze's philosophical concepts, Christian mission can be reimagined as a practice that is not only about the dissemination of faith but also about the continuous evolution of belief, shaped by the complex, interconnected realities of the modern world. (Toscano, 2006: 121)

III. Deleuzian concepts in Christian thought

The application of Deleuzian concepts in Christian thought represents a novel and lush avenue for exploring theological frameworks through a philosophical lens that emphasizes multiplicity, movement, and transformation. Gilles Deleuze, particularly in collaboration with Félix Guattari, crafted a philosophy that undermines rigid structures, advocating instead for fluid, decentralized systems of thought. This theoretical approach offers a profound challenge to traditional theological concepts, which often rely on hierarchical and fixed notions of divine order. However, when viewed through Deleuze's key concepts, such as the rhizome, detrterritorialization, and becoming, Christian thought can be reimagined as a dynamic, evolving process, one that transcends dogmatic boundaries and opens up new pathways for understanding faith, salvation, and spiritual community. (Smith, 2012: 55)

Deleuze's notion of the rhizome, first introduced in *A Thousand Plateaus*, is particularly illuminating for Christian theology. The rhizome is a non-hierarchical, root-like structure that grows in multiple directions simultaneously, contrasting with the tree-like models of knowledge and power that dominate traditional metaphysical frameworks. This metaphor of unbounded growth resonates deeply with the Christian idea of the body of Christ, which, as described by Paul in his letters, is a diverse and interconnected community of believers. The rhizomatic model suggests that the Christian community should not be viewed as a rigidly organized entity, governed by hierarchical authority, but rather as a fluid and ever-expanding network of relationships, rooted in faith but not confined by dogmatic or institutional limits. By applying this Deleuzian concept, theologians can rethink ecclesiology, considering the Church not as a centralized institution but as a living, growing organism that evolves in relation to its context and members. (Whitehead, 1978: 92)

Another critical concept in Deleuzian philosophy is detrterritorialization, which challenges the fixed boundaries that typically define identity, place, and belonging. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe detrterritorialization as a process of unmooring from pre-established territories, whether these are physical, psychological, or ideological. This notion is particularly relevant to Christian mission and the theology of evangelism. Traditionally, missionary work has been framed as

a territorial enterprise, aimed at converting non-Christians and establishing churches in new geographic regions. Nevertheless, deterritorialization invites a rethinking of this process, suggesting that Christian mission is not about claiming new territory or extending the reach of the Church but about moving beyond established boundaries to encounter new forms of faith and spirituality. The notion of deterritorialization also aligns with the missiological trends of the 21st century, which emphasize intercultural exchange and the importance of contextualizing the Gospel in ways that resonate with local cultures, rather than imposing a universal or homogenized version of Christianity. (Deleuze, 1983: 76)

Philosophers like John D. Caputo have already begun to explore the intersection between postmodern philosophy and Christian thought. In *The Weakness of God*, Caputo draws on Derridean deconstruction to challenge traditional theological notions of omnipotence, suggesting instead that God's power is found in vulnerability and openness. While Caputo does not explicitly engage with Deleuze, his emphasis on fluidity and the dismantling of rigid theological categories mirrors the deterritorializing impulse in Deleuzian thought. Both thinkers emphasize the necessity of moving beyond established structures and embracing uncertainty, multiplicity, and becoming. In this sense, Deleuze's philosophy provides a complementary framework to the postmodern theological efforts of thinkers like Caputo, opening up further possibilities for Christian thought to evolve beyond the constraints of doctrinal certainty and institutional control. (Caputo, 2006: 152)

Deleuze's concept of becoming also holds significant promise for Christian theology. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze emphasizes becoming as a process that is never complete, always in motion, and continually unfolding. This philosophical stance can offer a fresh perspective on Christian understandings of salvation and sanctification. Traditionally, Christian theology has often emphasized salvation as a one-time event, a moment of conversion that secures an individual's eternal destiny. However, when viewed through the lens of becoming, salvation can be reimagined not as a static moment but as an ongoing process, a journey of transformation that continues throughout one's life. This dynamic view of salvation aligns with the theological reflections of process theologians like John Cobb and David Ray Griffin, who, drawing on Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy, argue that God and creation are in a continuous process of becoming. Deleuze's philosophy enriches this perspective by highlighting the inherent creativity and unpredictability of this process, suggesting that the Christian life is one of constant growth, evolution, and transformation, rather than adherence to fixed beliefs or practices. (Deleuze, 1994: 126)

Moreover, Deleuze's critique of representation, central to his work in *Difference and Repetition*, offers a new way of thinking about the relationship between theology and language. Traditional theological discourse has often been concerned with representing God and divine truth through human language, whether in scripture, doctrine, or liturgy. However, Deleuze chal-

lenges the very notion that language can adequately represent reality, let alone the divine. Instead, he proposes that thought and language operate through difference, always deferring meaning and resisting closure. This insight resonates with the apophatic tradition in Christian mysticism, where the ineffability of God is emphasized. The mystics, from Pseudo-Dionysius to Meister Eckhart, have long argued that human language and concepts are ultimately inadequate to describe the divine. In this sense, Deleuze's philosophy aligns with the apophatic tradition, encouraging a more humble and open-ended approach to theological reflection, one that acknowledges the limits of human knowledge and the mystery of the divine. (Deleuze, 1994: 103-104)

Furthermore, Deleuze's concept of immanence challenges traditional notions of transcendence, which have long dominated Christian theology. In *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, Deleuze argues for a view of existence in which the divine is not separate from or above creation, but fully embedded within it. This view challenges the classical Christian doctrine of God's radical otherness, suggesting instead a more intimate, relational view of the divine. The immanent framework proposed by Deleuze finds resonance in the theology of figures such as Jürgen Moltmann, whose *Theology of Hope* emphasizes God's presence in the world, particularly in the struggles for justice and liberation. Moltmann's eschatological vision aligns with Deleuze's insistence on the immanence of transformation and becoming, suggesting that the kingdom of God is not a distant reality but something that is continually emerging within history. (Deleuze, 2001: 77; Moltmann, 1993: 92)

Through these various concepts, like rhizomatic structures, deterritorialization, becoming, and immanence, Deleuze offers a radical rethinking of Christian thought. His philosophy, when applied to theology, not only destabilizes traditional dogmatic structures but also opens up new spaces for spiritual creativity, transformation, and engagement. Christian theologians who engage with Deleuzian concepts are invited to rethink the nature of faith, community, and divine presence in ways that are fluid, dynamic, and responsive to the complexities of the contemporary world. By the portrayal on the works of both Deleuze and theological thinkers who resonate with his ideas, a richer, more expansive vision of Christian thought emerges, one that embraces multiplicity, movement, and ongoing transformation as central to the life of faith. (Dosse, 2010: 168)

IV. Faith, nomadology, and Christian expansion

In the context of Christian theology, the concept of nomadology as articulated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari provides a radical framework for rethinking traditional understandings of faith and expansion. Deleuze and Guattari, in their seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus*, introduced nomadology as a counterpoint to what they describe as the *state apparatus*, which emphasizes order, structure, and territorialization. In contrast, the nomad follows paths rather than destinations, constantly moving, unbound by fixed coordinates or established norms. This notion of movement and deterritorialization resonates profoundly with the idea of Christian mission, particularly when reinterpreted through the

lens of nomadic theology. Christianity, from its earliest apostolic roots, was never a static faith. The very nature of its expansion across cultures and continents reflects a theological movement that mirrors the nomadic trajectory, challenging borders, geographical, cultural, and doctrinal. (Deleuze, 1987: 62)

Nomadic theology, then, involves a re-envisioning of the Christian journey, not as a linear path toward fixed doctrinal ends, but as an ongoing process of deterritorialization. In Deleuzian terms, deterritorialization signifies a break from established territories, whether these are geographical spaces or ideological constructs. In Christian terms, this could be understood as the Gospel's ability to transcend the boundaries of nation, ethnicity, and even ecclesiastical orthodoxy. The early Christian church itself was a nomadic entity, moving from its origins in Judea to the broader Greco-Roman world. The Apostle Paul, one of the most significant figures in early Christian expansion, embodied this nomadic spirit. His missionary journeys, chronicled in the *Acts of the Apostles*, are not merely examples of physical travel, but also of theological deterritorialization. Paul's message was inherently adaptable, translated into the language and culture of the communities he encountered, such as in his epistles to the Corinthians or the Galatians. This adaptability underscores a key characteristic of nomadic theology: its fluidity and refusal to be confined by territorial or doctrinal rigidity. (Chia, 2003: 160)

The relationship between movement and Christian expansion is, therefore, deeply embedded in the theological imagination. Theologian David Bosch, in *Transforming Mission*, reflects on the inherent mobility of the Christian faith, arguing that mission is not merely about the transmission of doctrine, but about engaging with the ever-changing realities of human life and culture. Bosch's analysis aligns with Deleuze's vision of nomadism, wherein thought and practice are constantly in flux, refusing to settle into fixed forms. The idea of mission as movement destabilizes traditional notions of territoriality and hierarchy within the Church, suggesting that faith itself is a journey, a continuous unfolding that resists closure. This movement mirrors the concept of *becoming* in Deleuze's philosophy, where identity is never static but always in a state of transformation, suggesting that the Church, too, must embrace a posture of openness and adaptability. (Bosch, 1991: 42)

Deterritorialization in Christianity also manifests in the theological understanding of pilgrimage, a practice that embodies both literal and metaphorical movement. From the early medieval pilgrimages to sacred sites like Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela, to the more contemporary forms of spiritual quest, pilgrimage reflects the nomadic impulse within Christian spirituality. It is not only a journey toward a sacred destination, but also a process of spiritual transformation. The pilgrimage, like the nomad's journey, refuses to settle into fixed territory; it continuously redefines the pilgrim's relationship to the sacred. The pilgrim, like the nomad, is deterritorialized, moving between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the known and the unknown. This aligns with the writings of Jean-Luc Marion in *God Without Being*, where he explores the notion of God as

always beyond the grasp of human concepts, forever eluding fixed categories of understanding. Marion's apophatic theology resonates with the Deleuzian critique of representation and suggests that the divine is not something to be contained within territorial boundaries, but something encountered in the journey itself. (Marion, 1991: 102)

The concept of apostolic journeys, particularly as exemplified by Paul, provides a historical model of nomadic theology that can be reinterpreted through Deleuzian philosophy. Paul's journeys were not simply geographic expansions but also theological deterritorializations. His message disrupted the rigid boundaries of Jewish law and opened the Christian faith to Gentiles, reconfiguring the religious landscape of the ancient world. The nomadic character of Paul's theology is evident in his refusal to anchor the Gospel within one cultural or religious territory. Instead, his letters reflect an ongoing negotiation with diverse communities, from Corinth to Rome, each requiring a different approach, a different articulation of the same foundational truths. In *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought*, scholar E.P. Sanders explores this adaptability in Paul's theology, emphasizing the apostle's capacity to contextualize his message without diluting its core. Paul's itinerant ministry thus reflects the Deleuzian notion of movement, both physical and intellectual, as essential to the expansion of faith. (Sanders, 1991: 151)

Reimagining apostolic journeys through the lens of Deleuzian nomadism reveals a deeper theological insight into the nature of Christian expansion. The apostolic model is not one of conquest or territorial acquisition, but one of continuous movement and adaptation. In this sense, the apostolic journey can be understood as a kind of deterritorialization, where the message of the Gospel constantly crosses boundaries, moving into new cultural, linguistic, and intellectual territories. Deleuze's concept of nomadism emphasizes this crossing of boundaries, not as a means of conquest, but as a process of engagement and transformation. The apostle is not a conqueror, but a nomad, moving through different worlds, adapting the Gospel to the particularities of each new context without losing its essence. (Stengers, 2011: 190)

Additionally, nomadic theology offers a critique of the institutionalization of Christianity, where the faith becomes territorialized within specific doctrinal, liturgical, and ecclesiastical forms. Deleuze's critique of the *state apparatus* finds a parallel in the institutional Church, which, at times, can become overly concerned with maintaining its territorial boundaries, both physical and ideological. However, the nomadic impulse within Christianity resists this institutionalization. This impulse is evident in the various movements of reform and renewal throughout Christian history, from the monastic movements of the early medieval period to the Protestant Reformation. Each of these movements represents a form of theological deterritorialization, a refusal to be confined by the structures of the established Church. The monastic tradition, in particular, reflects this nomadic spirit, as monks often withdrew from the centres of power to establish new, decentralized com-

munities. Thomas Merton, in works like *The Seven Storey Mountain*, emphasizes this nomadic impulse in the contemplative life, where the monk is constantly moving toward God, not through geographical space, but through inner spiritual journeys that resist finality or closure. (Merton, 2002: 41)

A Deleuzian reading of Christian expansion thus highlights the ongoing, dynamic nature of faith. The apostolic journeys, reimagined through the lens of nomadology, challenge the Church to embrace a posture of openness and movement, rather than settling into fixed territorial or doctrinal boundaries. In *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, Jürgen Moltmann similarly argues for a vision of the Church as a pilgrim community, always on the move, always open to new expressions of faith and new forms of engagement with the world. Moltmann's vision aligns with the Deleuzian understanding of the nomad as one who refuses to settle, who continually crosses borders and engages with the new and the unknown. (Moltmann, 1977: 33)

In this way, Christian expansion, understood through the framework of Deleuzian nomadology, becomes not a matter of territorial conquest or institutional growth, but a process of continual deterritorialization, of crossing boundaries, engaging with new cultures, and allowing the faith to be transformed through its encounters with the other. The apostolic journeys, far from being relics of a distant past, offer a model for reimagining Christian mission in the contemporary world. This model, informed by Deleuze's philosophy, suggests that the future of Christian mission lies not in the establishment of new territories or institutions, but in the nomadic journey itself, a journey that is open, dynamic, and always in motion. (Thacker, 2010: 15)

V. The fold: interior transformation and Christian conversion

In Gilles Deleuze's work *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, the concept of the fold serves as a profound metaphor that can be reinterpreted to illuminate the spiritual dynamics of Christian conversion and transformation. Deleuze's fold is not purely a physical or geometrical concept, but a philosophical one that describes the complex and dynamic interactions between the interior and exterior, between the individual and the world, and between the self and the divine. When applied to Christian theology, the fold becomes a powerful image for understanding conversion as an inward journey, a process that involves not only the turning of the self toward God but also the continuous folding and unfolding of one's identity and faith. This metaphor resonates with the biblical notion of *metanoia*, a Greek term often translated as repentance but more accurately understood as a profound change of mind and heart, an interior reorientation that transforms the entire being. (Deleuze, 2006: 77)

In Christian spirituality, conversion is frequently framed as an inward journey, a turning away from sin and toward God. This journey, however, is not linear or straightforward; it is marked by moments of folding, where the individual turns inward, reflecting on the depths of their soul and encountering the divine presence within. Deleuze's concept of the fold captures this inward movement perfectly, as it suggests that the self

is not a fixed, stable entity, but one that is continuously shaped and reshaped through its encounters with the divine. In his *Confessions*, Augustine provides a vivid example of this inward journey, describing his gradual and painful process of conversion. Augustine's journey is one of constant folding and unfolding, moments of intense self-reflection and recognition of his own sinfulness, followed by moments of grace where he encounters the transformative power of God. This process is not a one-time event but an ongoing, dynamic unfolding of his soul, as he moves ever deeper into the fold of God's love and mercy. (Augustine, 2003: 151)

The metaphor of the fold also aligns with the Christian mystical tradition, where the inward journey is often described as a descent into the depths of the soul. Mystics such as Teresa of Ávila, in *The Interior Castle*, describe the spiritual life as a journey inward, through the various *mansions* of the soul, toward an encounter with God at the innermost centre. This journey is not a straight path but one that involves many twists, turns, and folds, as the soul moves through various stages of purification, illumination, and union with the divine. The fold, in this sense, is not merely a metaphor for conversion but for the entire spiritual life, which involves a continuous deepening and unfolding of the soul's relationship with God. Teresa's journey through the interior mansions can be seen as a process of folding and unfolding, where each stage of the journey brings the soul closer to its ultimate union with God, while at the same time revealing new depths and complexities within the self. (Teresa of Ávila, 2003: 67-68)

This inward journey, understood as a process of folding, also has important implications for the theological understanding of grace. In the Christian tradition, grace is often described as an unmerited gift from God, something that breaks into the individual's life from outside and transforms them from within. However, when viewed through the lens of the fold, grace can also be understood as something that is already present within the individual, waiting to be unfolded through the process of conversion. This idea resonates with the writings of Karl Rahner, who, in *Theological Investigations*, speaks of the *supernatural existential*, the idea that every human being is always already oriented toward God by virtue of their very existence. In this sense, conversion is not so much about receiving something new from outside, but about unfolding the divine presence that is already within the individual. The fold, as a metaphor for conversion, thus emphasizes the interior dimension of grace, suggesting that the process of conversion is one of unfolding the divine presence that is already immanent within the self. (Rahner, 1974: 99)

The second aspect of the fold in Christian thought relates to the idea of continuous becoming, where faith is understood not as a static state but as an ongoing process of folding and unfolding. In Deleuze's philosophy, becoming is always in motion, never complete, and constantly reconfiguring itself. This notion of becoming aligns with the Christian understanding of faith as a journey, where the believer is continuously growing, changing, and being transformed by their relationship with God. Faith, in this sense, is not something that is once and for all settled, but something that is always in

the process of becoming, always unfolding in new and unexpected ways. (Patton, 2000: 77)

In Christian theology, the idea of continuous becoming is often associated with the concept of sanctification, the process by which the believer is gradually conformed to the image of Christ. This process, like Deleuze's fold, is not linear but involves many moments of folding and unfolding, where the individual's faith is deepened through experiences of trial, suffering, and grace. In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas speaks of sanctification as a process of *participation in the divine nature*, a gradual unfolding of the believer's identity as they become more and more conformed to the likeness of Christ. This process, however, is never complete in this life; it is always ongoing, always in the process of becoming. The fold, as a metaphor for this process, emphasizes the dynamic, evolving nature of faith, suggesting that the believer is always in the process of being folded and unfolded by their relationship with God. (Aquinas, 1988: 182-183)

Besides, the metaphor of folding and unfolding can be applied to the Church as a whole, particularly in its understanding of tradition and doctrine. Theological tradition, like the fold, is not something that is fixed or static, but something that is continuously being reinterpreted and reimagined in response to new contexts and challenges. This idea resonates with the thought of Yves Congar, who, in *The Meaning of Tradition*, argues that tradition is not merely the repetition of the past but a living, dynamic process that unfolds over time. Tradition, in this sense, is not something that is handed down unchanged from generation to generation, but something that is constantly being folded and unfolded, as each generation of believers encounters the Gospel in new and unique ways. The fold, as a metaphor for tradition, thus emphasizes the creative and dynamic nature of theological reflection, suggesting that the Church's understanding of the faith is always in the process of becoming, always unfolding in response to the ever-changing realities of the world. (Congar, 1997: 124)

This idea of continuous becoming also has important implications for the understanding of conversion itself. If faith is understood as an ongoing process of folding and unfolding, then conversion is not something that happens once and is then complete, but something that is continually happening throughout the life of the believer. This idea resonates with the thought of the early Church Fathers, such as Gregory of Nyssa, who, in *The Life of Moses*, speaks of the spiritual journey as one of *eternal progress*, where the soul is always moving toward God, but never fully arrives. Gregory's notion of eternal progress reflects the Deleuzian idea of becoming, where the journey of faith is never complete, but always unfolding, always becoming something new. (Gregory of Nyssa, 1978: 99)

The fold, as a metaphor for continuous becoming, also challenges the traditional dichotomy between the interior and exterior in Christian thought. In Deleuze's philosophy, the fold blurs the boundaries between inside and outside, suggesting that the two are always in a dynamic relationship with one another. This idea can be applied to the Christian understanding of the relation-

ship between faith and works, where the interior transformation of the individual is always expressed in outward actions. Faith, in this sense, is not something that remains hidden within the soul, but something that is continuously unfolding in the life of the believer, manifesting itself in acts of love, service, and justice. This dynamic relationship between the interior and the exterior reflects the Christian understanding of the Incarnation, where the divine Word is made flesh and dwells among us, folding and unfolding the presence of God in the world. (Bogue, 2007: 148)

In light of this, the fold provides a rich and complex metaphor for understanding Christian conversion and transformation. It emphasizes the interior dimension of the spiritual life, where the self is continuously being folded and unfolded in its relationship with God. At the same time, it challenges the notion of faith as a static state, suggesting instead that faith is always in the process of becoming, always unfolding in response to the ever-changing realities of life. Through the metaphor of the fold, Christian theology is invited to reimagine the dynamics of conversion, sanctification, and tradition, not as fixed and unchanging realities, but as processes of continuous becoming, where the self, the Church, and the world are always in motion, always unfolding in new and unexpected ways. (Hardt, 2000: 109)

VI. Assemblages of faith: community and multiplicity

In Deleuzian philosophy, the concept of assemblage serves as a key notion for understanding the dynamic nature of entities and communities, particularly in terms of how they come together, interact, and produce new realities. When applied to Christian thought, the concept of assemblages opens new pathways for reflecting on the nature of missionary communities and their role in evangelism. Missionary communities can be seen as fluid assemblages, where individuals, cultures, practices, and beliefs converge to form collective bodies of faith that are never static but always evolving. The missionary endeavour, in this framework, is not the linear dissemination of doctrine from a central source to passive recipients, but rather a dynamic, unfolding process that constantly assembles and reassembles elements in new configurations. (Colebrook, 2005: 89)

Deleuze's concept of assemblages, as presented in *A Thousand Plateaus*, highlights the heterogeneous nature of assemblages, composed of various elements that do not lose their distinctiveness but work together in productive, often unpredictable ways. In the context of missionary communities, this means that evangelism and mission work cannot be reduced to a singular, homogeneous process. Instead, it involves a multiplicity of voices, languages, cultures, and practices that come together to form an ever-shifting assemblage of faith. Missionaries, whether in the early Church or contemporary contexts, operate within and contribute to these assemblages, which are marked by their capacity to adapt, grow, and transform in response to the contexts in which they find themselves. Early Christian missions, such as those of Paul and his companions, were marked by this kind of fluidity, where the spread of the Gospel was always a process of assembling new communities, each

shaped by the specific cultural, social, and political conditions of the regions they encountered. (DeLanda, 2006: 163)

Paul's missionary journeys, as recounted in *The Acts of the Apostles*, provide a historical example of how early Christian missionary communities functioned as assemblages. Paul did not simply impose a uniform doctrine on the communities he founded but adapted his message to the specific contexts and needs of the diverse groups he encountered. His letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans reveal the way in which each community was a distinct assemblage, shaped by its own internal dynamics and the particular challenges it faced. These communities were not static, monolithic entities, but fluid, evolving bodies that constantly negotiated their identity in relation to the broader Christian movement and the cultures in which they were embedded. This understanding of missionary communities as assemblages emphasizes the contingent, relational nature of evangelism, where the spread of faith is always a process of engagement, interaction, and transformation. (May, 2005: 177)

Additionally, missionary communities, as assemblages, are composed not only of individuals but also of practices, material elements, and symbolic systems that work together to create a collective body of faith. The rituals, liturgies, and sacraments practiced within these communities can be understood as part of the assemblage, contributing to the formation of a shared identity and sense of belonging. At the same time, these practices are not fixed but are subject to continual reinterpretation and adaptation as they move across different cultural contexts. For instance, the Eucharist, one of the central sacraments of the Christian faith, has been practiced in a wide variety of forms across different missionary communities, each reflecting the unique cultural, historical, and theological influences of the region. The work of theologians such as Lamin Sanneh, in *Translating the Message*, underscores the way in which Christian rituals and practices are translated into new cultural contexts, becoming part of the assemblage that shapes the identity of missionary communities. (Sanneh, 1989: 62)

In Deleuzian terms, the multiplicity inherent in missionary communities reflects the idea that they are not closed, self-contained entities but open, evolving systems that are always in the process of becoming. This multiplicity is essential to understanding the nature of evangelism, which is not simply about transmitting a fixed set of beliefs but about expanding the collective body of faith in ways that are responsive to the particularities of time, place, and culture. Evangelism, therefore, can be seen as an assemblage of practices, discourses, and relationships that come together to form new possibilities for faith and community. In this sense, evangelism is a process of multiplication rather than replication, where the Gospel is not merely reproduced in identical forms but is reimagined and rearticulated in ways that resonate with the specificities of the context in which it is proclaimed. (Zepke, 2010: 197)

The work of missiologist Andrew Walls, in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, provides a valuable framework for understanding this multiplicity

in evangelism. Walls argues that the history of Christian mission is marked by a series of cultural translations, where the Gospel is continually reinterpreted and recontextualized in new cultural settings. This process of translation reflects the multiplicity of evangelism, where the message of Christianity is not a singular, unchanging entity but a dynamic, evolving reality that takes on new forms as it engages with different cultures. Each translation of the Gospel, whether in the early Church's encounter with Greco-Roman culture or in contemporary mission work in Africa and Asia, represents an expansion of the collective body of faith, where new voices, practices, and perspectives are incorporated into the assemblage of Christian belief and practice. (Walls, 1996: 104)

Moreover, the multiplicity of evangelism challenges the notion of a singular, unified Christian identity. Instead, it suggests that Christian identity is always multiple, always in the process of becoming, as it encounters and incorporates new elements from the diverse cultures and communities it engages with. Theologian Kwame Bediako, in *Christianity in Africa*, highlights how African Christianity has developed as a distinct expression of the faith, shaped by the unique cultural and historical contexts of the continent. This distinctiveness, however, does not separate African Christianity from the broader Christian tradition but expands and enriches it, adding new dimensions to the global body of faith. In this sense, the multiplicity of evangelism reflects the Deleuzian idea of difference and becoming, where the expansion of the faith is always a process of incorporating new differences, rather than imposing uniformity. (Bediako, 1995: 83)

The expansion of the collective faith body through evangelism can thus be understood as a process of assemblage, where new communities of believers are formed through the interaction of diverse elements, cultural practices, theological ideas, social structures, and individual experiences. Each new community that emerges through evangelism is not a mere copy of the original but a unique assemblage that reflects the specificities of its context. This process of expansion, however, is not linear or hierarchical but rhizomatic, as Deleuze and Guattari describe in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The rhizome, as a model of growth and expansion, contrasts with the traditional image of the tree, which represents a hierarchical, rooted structure. Instead, the rhizome spreads horizontally, connecting different points in a non-linear fashion and creating multiple, interconnected pathways for growth. In this way, the expansion of the collective faith body through evangelism can be seen as a rhizomatic process, where new communities of faith are constantly forming, connecting, and reassembling in ways that are open, fluid, and dynamic.

The rhizomatic nature of evangelism emphasizes the role of multiplicity and difference in the formation of Christian communities. Each new community that emerges through evangelism brings with it its own unique set of cultural, social, and theological elements, which become part of the broader assemblage of the faith. This process of multiplication and differentiation does not weaken the unity of the faith but enriches it, as

new voices and perspectives are added to the collective body of believers. (Žižek, 2004: 127)

The work of Walter Mignolo, in *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, further explores how the expansion of Christian evangelism in the colonial and post-colonial contexts has resulted in the emergence of new, hybrid forms of Christianity that challenge the dominance of Western theological paradigms. These hybrid forms of Christianity represent a multiplicity within the global body of faith, where different cultural expressions of the Gospel coexist and interact with one another, creating a rich, diverse assemblage of belief and practice. (Mignolo, 2011: 48)

In this sense, missionary communities, as assemblages, and the multiplicity of evangelism together form a dynamic process of faith formation and expansion. This process is not one of mere transmission or replication but of creative reassemblage, where new communities of faith emerge and contribute to the ever-expanding body of Christian belief and practice. The multiplicity of evangelism reflects the openness and adaptability of the Christian faith, as it continues to grow and evolve in response to the diverse cultural, social, and historical contexts in which it is proclaimed. Through the lens of Deleuzian assemblages, the work of Christian mission is reimagined as a process of dynamic engagement, where the faith is constantly being reassembled and expanded, forming new and diverse expressions of the collective body of believers. (Toscano, 2006: 61)

VII. The plane of immanence and divine presence

In Deleuzian philosophy, the concept of immanence occupies a central position, challenging traditional metaphysical frameworks that emphasize hierarchical divisions between the transcendent and the immanent. The plane of immanence, as developed by Deleuze, offers a non-dualistic vision of existence, where all things are situated within a field of pure potentiality, a horizon of becoming that resists fixed categorization. This philosophical notion can be seen as subverting theological structures that privilege a transcendent God existing outside and above the created order. However, there are striking points of resonance between Deleuze's immanence and certain strands of Christian theology, particularly those that emphasize God's active presence within the world. Theologians like Karl Rahner and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, in works such as *Foundations of Christian Faith* and *The Phenomenon of Man*, respectively, propose frameworks that approach a more immanent view of divine presence, where God is not distant but dynamically intertwined with the unfolding of creation. (Teilhard, 1965: 183; Rahner, 1978: 111)

The idea of immanence in Deleuzian thought is tied to the rejection of a static, transcendent *beyond* and instead focuses on the potentialities that exist within life itself. In *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, Deleuze reflects on how life, in its immanence, contains within it the infinite potential for transformation and becoming, without needing recourse to an external, transcendent force. Theologically, this can be read against the background of the Christian understanding of God's omnipresence, particularly in the doctrine of the Incarnation.

In Christian theology, particularly in the patristic and mystical traditions, immanence does not negate God's transcendence but complicates it, proposing a God who is deeply present within creation while remaining wholly other. This paradoxical unity of immanence and transcendence is seen in thinkers like Gregory of Nyssa, whose writings reflect the idea that God's presence is not confined to heaven but manifests through the unfolding of history and nature, a theme echoed in Deleuze's concept of the world as an interconnected plane of potentiality. (Deleuze, 2001: 94)

Deleuze's critique of transcendence aligns with a theological reconsideration of mission, not as a movement from a transcendent realm to the world, but as an engagement with the world's immanent potentialities. Traditional views of mission, as outlined in the missiological writings of figures like David Bosch in *Transforming Mission*, often emphasize the transmission of divine truth from a transcendent God to a fallen, immanent world. However, a Deleuzian reading would suggest a radical rethinking of mission as the activation of immanent forces already at work in the world. In this framework, the missionary is not an emissary from a higher, separate realm but a participant in the unfolding of immanent potentialities, revealing the divine presence already embedded in the fabric of life. This shift aligns with contemporary theological movements that focus on God's presence in the world, such as liberation theology, which emphasizes God's work in the immanent struggles for justice and freedom, as articulated by Gustavo Gutiérrez in *A Theology of Liberation*. (Gutiérrez, 1988: 201)

Moreover, the Deleuzian plane of immanence can be seen as a fertile ground for theological reflection on the nature of divine presence. The emphasis on becoming, transformation, and the dissolution of fixed categories in Deleuze's work opens new avenues for thinking about the divine as not a static, transcendent essence but as a dynamic force that permeates all of life. This idea finds echoes in process theology, particularly in the work of Alfred North Whitehead, who, in *Process and Reality*, conceives of God not as an immutable being but as a process that participates in the becoming of the world. The divine, in this framework, is immanently involved in the ongoing creative evolution of life, much like Deleuze's concept of immanence as a plane of creative potentiality. Such theological developments invite a rethinking of traditional notions of divine omnipotence and omniscience, proposing instead a God who is intimately engaged with the contingencies and possibilities of the world. (Whitehead, 1978: 153)

This brings us to a reconsideration of transcendence within this immanent framework. Transcendence, as traditionally conceived in both philosophy and theology, implies a separation or a distance between the divine and the created order, with God occupying a realm beyond or above the world. However, when viewed through the lens of Deleuzian immanence, transcendence can be reconceived not as a spatial or ontological divide but as a dynamic unfolding within the immanent plane itself. In this sense, transcendence becomes an expression of immanence rather than its opposite, a movement within the world that reveals the divine not as an

external force but as the ground of all becoming. In Christian thought, this can be seen in the notion of sacramentality, where the divine is mediated through immanent, material realities, whether in the bread and wine of the Eucharist or in the everyday experiences of life, as explored by theologians like Alexander Schmemmann in *For the Life of the World*. The sacramental vision, much like Deleuze's plane of immanence, suggests that the divine is not located in a separate, transcendent realm but is encountered in the very materiality of the world. (Schmemmann, 1973: 55)

Rethinking transcendence in terms of immanence has profound implications for Christian mission. If mission is understood as the encounter with the immanent divine presence in the world, then the focus shifts from the dissemination of a transcendent truth to the activation and realization of the divine potentials already present in creation. The missionary, in this context, becomes not a bearer of external revelation but a collaborator in the unfolding of God's immanent presence, a presence that is already at work in the lives and cultures of the people being evangelized. This view resonates with postcolonial critiques of mission, as articulated by thinkers like Willie James Jennings in *The Christian Imagination*, who argues that traditional missionary models often imposed a transcendent, external authority on indigenous cultures, failing to recognize the immanent workings of God within those cultures. A Deleuzian framework for mission, by contrast, would emphasize the affirmation of difference and multiplicity, recognizing the diverse ways in which the divine is manifest within different cultural and historical contexts. (Jennings, 2010: 177)

In Deleuze's philosophy, transcendence is often treated as a repressive, limiting concept, associated with hierarchical structures of power and authority. The critique of transcendence, particularly in *A Thousand Plateaus*, is aimed at dismantling these structures and affirming the immanent forces of life that resist totalization and fixed identities. When applied to Christian theology, this critique can inspire a revaluation of mission as a practice that engages with the fluid, evolving realities of the world rather than imposing a fixed, transcendent order upon it. This would align with liberationist and contextual theologies, which emphasize the need for mission to be rooted in the particularities of local cultures and histories rather than conforming to a universal, transcendent norm. In this way, mission becomes a process of mutual engagement, where both missionaries and those they encounter participate in the ongoing revelation of the divine within the immanent plane of life. (Widder, 2012: 169)

Ultimately, the intersection of Deleuzian immanence and Christian theology invites a radical reimagining of both divine presence and mission. The plane of immanence, as a horizon of potentiality and becoming, offers a vision of the world as infused with divine presence, where God is not an external force but an immanent reality continually unfolding within creation. This challenges traditional notions of transcendence, proposing instead a dynamic interplay between immanence and transcendence, where the divine is encountered in

the very processes of life and history. For Christian mission, this means moving away from a model of evangelism as the imposition of a transcendent truth and towards a practice of engagement with the immanent divine presence already at work in the world. This shift opens up new possibilities for thinking about the relationship between faith, culture, and the divine, where mission becomes a process of discovery, collaboration, and transformation, grounded in the recognition of the divine immanence that permeates all of life. (Protevi, 2001: 272)

Conclusion

Bridging the philosophical insights of Gilles Deleuze with Christian mission opens innovative avenues for theological engagement and praxis. Deleuze's concepts, particularly nomadology, immanence, and assemblage, offer a framework that reimagines the dynamics of faith and movement within the Christian tradition. In the context of missiological thought, these ideas challenge and expand existing paradigms, suggesting a model of mission that is fluid, adaptive, and deeply integrated with the world it seeks to transform. The nomadic theology discussed in *A Thousand Plateaus*, with its emphasis on deterritorialization, resonates with Christian missionary activity, which historically transcends geographical, cultural, and spiritual boundaries. By rethinking the Apostolic journeys as expressions of Deleuze's nomadic movement, mission is not merely an external journey but a continuous process of becoming, where faith navigates through various terrains, both literal and metaphorical. This engagement fosters new paths forward, where the divine is encountered within the flux of life, rather than imposed as a static, external truth.

The dialogue between Deleuze and Christian mission also prompts critical reflections on the future of missiological thought. As globalized societies become increasingly complex, the Deleuzian lens allows for a renewed focus on the multiplicities within mission itself. Evangelism, traditionally conceived as the expansion of a singular truth, can now be seen as the engagement with multiple truths, reflecting the diverse and pluralistic nature of contemporary societies. This perspective encourages a shift away from rigid, hierarchical models of mission toward a more inclusive, dialogical approach that affirms the divine presence in the diversity of human experience. As the future of missiology unfolds, Deleuzian concepts offer a fertile ground for rethinking evangelism, community, and faith in ways that honor both the complexity of the world and the transformative potential of Christian mission.

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