


A study on perceptions of immigrant acceptance in Korean society: Focusing on the concept of ὁμοιός in the New Testament

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One of the most significant transformations in 21st century Korean society is its emergence as a multicultural and multireligious context. Historically, Korea has been identified as a 'homogeneous nation', fostering exclusivist attitudes towards ethnic minorities, migrants, and non-Korean religious traditions. In this rapidly shifting global environment, Korean society must adapt, but the role of Korean Christianity in resisting such change cannot be overlooked. Despite Christianity's central teaching of love for one's neighbour, many Korean churches have exhibited exclusivism towards foreigners and immigrants, rooted in two factors: prejudices that identify migrants as potential criminals, and fears that the influx of 'foreign religions' (such as Islam) might threaten Christian identity. While some Korean churches have cooperated with civic groups on immigrant issues, the dominant trajectory of Korean Christian theology often reinforces exclusionary attitudes. Some theological studies have proposed alternatives, but most are confined to the New Testament concept of 'hospitality', which proves structurally inadequate to address deeper challenges of immigrant acceptance. This concept tends to create an imbalanced relationship between immigrants and native residents. This study proposes 'ontological ὁμοιός', centred on incarnation texts in the New Testament, to transcend these limitations. Contribution: This study presents a new theological paradigm to address prejudices and exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants in Korean society. By helping Korean Christianity move beyond its dualistic approach and embrace authentic neighbour-love, it contributes to transforming Korea from a closed to an open society. Most significantly, it advances immigrant reception discourse by introducing 'ontological identification' (ὁμοιός) as a superior alternative to the hospitality framework, establishing a scholarly foundation for multicultural integration within Christian theology.

Contribution: This study provides a novel theological paradigm addressing prevalent prejudices and exclusionary attitudes towards immigrants in Korean society. By helping Korean Christianity transcend its dualistic approach and embrace authentic neighbour-love, it contributes to transforming Korea from a closed to an open society. Most significantly, this study advances immigrant reception discourse by introducing 'ontological identification' (ὁμοιός) as a superior alternative to the traditionally dominant 'hospitality' framework, thereby establishing a more developed scholarly foundation for multicultural integration within Christian theological studies.

Keywords: ὁμοιός; identity; immigrant; acceptance; hospitality.

Introduction

Necessity and purpose of research

BOX 1: Metaphor for ontological ὁμοιός.

I was standing on my head ... Leaves were growing from my body, roots sprouting from my hands ... burrowing into the ground. Endlessly, endlessly ... (Han 2007:180)

This passage from Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*, which won the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature, depicts a scene where the protagonist Young-hye believes she is transforming into a tree.

Through Young-hye, the author employs the image of 'becoming a tree' as a motif demonstrating movement beyond simple animal protection demonstrating a movement beyond a reductive reading of vegetarianism as animal-welfare advocacy toward ontological ὁμοιός (ontological identification). This study argues that the fundamental Christian response to immigrant issues

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must now transcend the concept of hospitality and ground itself in the concept of *ὁμοιός*.

While numerous concepts and adjectives describe changes in 21st century Korean society, one of the most significant is multiculturalism. Factors contributing substantially to this multicultural transformation include various immigrant groups: foreign workers, international students, marriage immigrants, and refugees. Korean society faces an urgent imperative to address the issue of how to integrate these diverse immigrants as societal members and coexist with them. Without proper surveys and responses regarding immigrant acceptance perceptions, existing prejudices, discrimination, and crimes against immigrants – already visible throughout society – may escalate and result in various communal issues.

Since Christianity's introduction to Korea in the late 18th century, it has grown rapidly, with approximately 25% of the total population identifying as Christian, according to various research institutions (Korean Research 2024). Consequently, Christianity has become one of the most influential forces in Korean culture and spirituality. However, it is noteworthy that despite Christianity's remarkable growth and widespread social influence in Korean society, Christian teachings appear not to have sufficiently impacted certain aspects of Christian practice, particularly the 'immigrant acceptance' issue that has rapidly emerged in Korean society recently. Korean Christianity appears caught in an ambivalent dilemma between benevolence and exclusivity regarding this issue; moreover, when it does become actively involved, it often takes a leading role in promoting attitudes and practices contrary to Christian teachings. One of the most controversial immigrant acceptance issues was the arrival of approximately 500 Yemeni refugees in Jeju in 2018. A petition opposing Yemeni refugee acceptance garnered over 710 000 signatures within a month, and a hostile atmosphere towards them rapidly spread online, particularly through social media. Some conservative Christian groups formed alliances such as the 'National Coalition Against Illegal Refugee Applicants and Foreigners' and led rallies demanding the abolition of the *Refugee Act* and the visa-free system. They also systematically disseminated anti-refugee sentiment through Blue House petitions. Certainly, not all Christian groups opposed refugee acceptance. Various Christian organisations, including the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) and the Christian Ethics Practice Movement (CEPM), issued joint statements appealing for refugee acceptance. The immigrant issue is not unique to Korea. The international migration crisis triggered by the Syrian refugee situation in 2016 has become a defining challenge of this era, marking it as an age of international migration. Within the context of accelerating global migration, this study aims to analyse immigrant realities in Korean society, briefly review existing research literature, and ultimately explore biblical ethics towards the other and the Christian community's response to immigrants through the New Testament concept of *ὁμοιός*.

The reality of immigrants in Korean society

In Korean society, which had long operated under the myth of being a single-ethnic nation, the terms 'multicultural society' and 'multiethnic society' began to be used earnestly in the late 1980s with foreign worker influx and in the 1990s with increasing marriage immigration. The number of foreign residents in Korea, which stood at 300 000 in 1998, surpassed 1 million by 2007. As of 2015, 150 000 of these immigrants had obtained Korean citizenship and become citizens of the Republic of Korea (Ministry of Justice 2015). With increasing immigrant numbers, their children's population also grew rapidly, and Korean society could no longer be considered single-ethnic, with multicultural families accounting for a substantial proportion of the population. In addition, foreign student numbers have increased significantly since 2000, reaching 82 000 as of 2015 (Seol 2017). According to the research by Kim Ji-yoon and Kang Chung-gu, the number of foreigners residing in Korea increased to 2.18 million (4.21% of the total population) in 2017, driven by post-foreign exchange crisis, labour demand and increased marriage immigration, and is projected to reach approximately 2.65 million by late 2024 (Kim & Kang 2018). These figures alone clearly demonstrate that viewing Korean society as 'single-ethnic' is no longer valid; rather, it is transforming into a multiethnic, multicultural society.

Although Korean society is rapidly transforming into a multiethnic and multicultural context, public attitudes towards immigrants remain ambivalent – on the one hand, expressing acceptance grounded in humanistic values, but on the other hand, manifesting exclusion rooted in nationalism and religious exclusivism. Such exclusion is exemplified, for instance, by traditional conservative notions of a homogeneous nation and by anxieties concerning the influx of Islam. Moreover, such exclusion often carries implicit or explicit racist undertones, particularly towards migrant labourers and ethnic minorities, thereby reinforcing discriminatory social structures. Furthermore, immigrants experience differential treatment based on their national origin and skin colour. According to a 2020 National Human Rights Commission survey, 68.4% of immigrants residing in South Korea reported experiencing discrimination (National Human Rights 2020), demonstrating the severity of racial discrimination within South Korean society.

Korean Christians' perceptions regarding discrimination against immigrants do not differ significantly from those of the general public. This raises the question of why Christians struggle to welcome these immigrants. Kim Sang-deok analysed official statements by conservative Protestants regarding Jeju's Yemeni refugees and summarised their arguments against immigrant acceptance. In summary, these arguments include: (1) perceiving Islam as a security threat (terrorism), (2) learning from Western multiculturalism failures, and (3) political strategy centred on anti-homosexuality and anti-Islam sentiments (Kim 2019b). In addition, Kim identifies that some Christians' theological

interpretations derive from dispensationalist eschatology and exclusive missionary perspectives. To them, Islam represents the 'Antichrist' force within dispensationalist eschatology, and Muslim refugee influx is interpreted as Satan's scheme to destroy the church in the end times. Therefore, they regard it is their religious duty to prevent the entry of Muslim refugees into their country. However, in many cases, these negative perceptions stem from religious exclusivism and misinformation (Kim 2019a). At the national level, institutional measures addressing immigrant issues require establishment of legal safeguards, including comprehensive anti-discrimination laws prohibiting all forms of discrimination based on race, nationality, language, etc. Furthermore, the social and political rights of immigrants should be gradually expanded in stages. In the field of education, curricula and programmes must move beyond the existing 'single ethnicity' discourse and instead cultivate the values of universal human rights and cultural diversity in a systematic way. Then, in what direction should ideological and religious foundational research proceed to support such policy directions?

Research methods and design

Immigrant acceptance issues have been studied through various approaches across academic fields, including philosophy, worldwide. However, this article restricts its examination to New Testament sources. The most prominent concept employed in New Testament immigrant studies has been 'hospitality'. The first scholar to systematically study immigrant issues based on the New Testament was John Bell Mathews. Mathews (1964) understood hospitality as a form of God's redemptive act towards humanity, and considered the church to be a community receiving a holy invitation in Christ. Koenig (1985:18f) also studied New Testament hospitality, redefining foreigners and immigrants as 'strangers as promise and mission', noting that hospitality relates to Old Testament nomadic social customs. According to him, New Testament hospitality is not mere social custom but directly connects to the kingdom of God's missionary mission. He presents the theological basis for accepting foreigners and marginalised people as kingdom companions through Jesus' table fellowship and early church hospitality practices (Koenig 1985). Segovia and Tolbert (1995) approaches Scripture through the lens of contextual biblical interpretation, emphasising how it should be read by communities formed through migration and by readers located on the social margins.

Pohl (1999) emphasises that in early Christianity, hospitality meant not treating neighbours well, but welcoming strangers, especially those unable to reciprocate. She argues that Jesus sacrificed his life so that people could be welcomed into the kingdom of God, which establishes the most profound and intimate connection between hospitality, grace, and sacrifice. She emphasises that hospitality is neither optional for Christians nor reserved for the specially gifted; rather, it must be practised as an essential component of the faith community (Pohl 1999).

Amy G. Oden also addressed the issue of immigrant acceptance through hospitality. She investigated early church hospitality practices through primary sources from approximately 40 early Christian documents. She presented historical evidence of how early Christian communities cared for pilgrims, the sick, and strangers, laying the theological foundation for the practice of hospitality in the contemporary church. According to her, biblical hospitality means welcoming strangers, with strangers representing all vulnerable population groups (Oden 2001:15). Furthermore, gospel hospitality is God's welcome, ultimately welcoming into God's abundant life – into God's own life (Oden 2001:25). Musa W. Dube, a feminist theologian from Africa, interprets the presence of 'foreign others' in Scripture from both postcolonial and gendered perspectives. Recognising that the Bible was written from androcentric and ethnocentric standpoints, she critiques its potential to reproduce colonial structures of oppression and calls for interpretations that privilege the perspectives of immigrants, women, and the marginalised (Dube 2000). This concern for the voices of the displaced and the marginalised resonates with broader theological efforts to reimagine Christian identity in pluralistic contexts. Luke Bretherton advances this trajectory by connecting hospitality and otherness to the moral pluralism of contemporary multicultural societies. He explores how the church community may embody God's holy community precisely in its relationship with strangers, the 'other' who challenges and reshapes communal identity (Bretherton 2006). Such engagement underscores the church's vocation not merely to extend benevolence but to be transformed in the encounter with those at its margins. Similarly attentive to the perspective of migrants, Liew (2008) links Asian immigrant identity to biblical hermeneutics, showing how themes of otherness and cross-border migration provide theological resources for understanding the immigrant experience. His work demonstrates that Scripture, when read interculturally, can empower immigrant communities to articulate faith in ways that affirm their identity and agency. Katongole (2011) extends this discourse from an African perspective, examining the intersections of migration, violence, and hospitality. He underscores the church's responsibility not only to welcome the stranger but also to foster reconciliation with the other and to generate a new social imagination that resists cycles of exclusion and violence. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza likewise foregrounds the voices of the marginalised within biblical texts.

As a feminist theologian, she highlights how interpretive practices can recover the suppressed presence of others, thereby exposing the dynamics of exclusion while simultaneously advancing visions of hospitality and inclusion (Schüssler Fiorenza 2011). Jipp (2017) synthesises many of these concerns by reading the New Testament through the lens of hospitality. He contends that hospitality functions as a central mode of salvation in the New Testament, particularly in the Pauline epistles, and thus provides the theological foundation for a church that both receives and is transformed by the stranger.

Another scholar, M. Daniel Carroll R., drawing on his South American mixed-race background, comprehensively analyses the concept of stranger in the Old Testament through the New Testament hospitality ethics, suggesting that the command of obedience to government mentioned in Romans 13 be interpreted alongside the scriptural direction in Romans 12 to practise hospitality. He explores various Old and New Testament scriptural passages related to immigrants, arguing that immigrants possess intrinsic value through creation in God's image and tremendous potential to contribute to society and the common good (Carroll 2020). Groody (2016) also viewed the Bible itself as filled with migration stories, seeing immigrant issues not merely as social and political problems but as profound theological and spiritual issues defining the meaning of human existence.

He further argues for seeing the human face of each immigrant and God's face within each immigrant (Groody 2022). Peter C. Phan developed immigrant acceptance into a theological theme (Immigration Theology). He transcended hospitality to propose the theological concept that God himself is a migrant and immigrants are the '*imago Dei migratoris*' [the migrating God's image] (Phan 2016:845). The Father God is the 'first migrant' who entered the world through creation, the Son Jesus is the 'typical migrant' who migrated from heaven to earth through incarnation, and the Holy Spirit continues migrating into our hearts to dwell there (Phan 2016:860). Therefore, human migration becomes participation in the 'migrating God's' activity.

We have examined Christian immigrant acceptance studies through 'hospitality'. Existing studies emphasise that hospitality transcends simple liking or preference. In other words, hospitality should be understood as Christians' fundamental way of life, transcending utilitarian relief or missionary approaches. Furthermore, it argues that responsibility for accepting others is not limited to individual practice; rather, the entire church community must transform itself into a hospitality subject. Ultimately, this hospitality must expand into more comprehensive social responsibility, including institutional foundations and legal protection systems throughout society.

While hospitality functions as a core category in Christian immigrant responses, we must reconsider whether it sufficiently expresses Christianity's basic spirit theologically and whether it possesses conceptual limitations. This is because hospitality discourse fundamentally constrains structurally recognising immigrants as equal rights holders and equal neighbours.

Hospitality presupposes existential asymmetry between host and immigrant. In this structure, the host occupies the position of substantial resource and power owner, while the immigrant, as guest, is placed in a subordinate position, dependent on others' help for survival. The host holds decisive authority over whether hospitality is extended and can withdraw it at any time.

Accordingly, hospitality becomes an unstable state for immigrants, entirely dependent on the host's arbitrary 'goodwill', positioning immigrants as charity and protection objects rather than rights subjects. Thus, hospitality possesses the structural limitation of reproducing power hierarchy. To address the aforementioned limitations of hospitality discourse and construct an alternative theological framework, this article explores the applicability of 'identification' [ὁμοιός] as a new paradigm for immigrant reception.

Textual study

Christian acceptance of others is not achieved through unilateral hospitality or charitable giving, but through identification [ὁμοιός] which recognises shared existential conditions and embodies them in practice. This transcends simply helping others, constituting a mutual recognition process wherein both oneself and others share the same human frailty and dependence. This identification's theological foundation is rooted in Christology.

Philippians 2:6–8

BOX 2: 'ὁμοιώμα' as incarnational reality.

2:6 ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἄρπαγμόν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, 2:7 ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· 2:8 καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ (NA28; eds. Nestle et al. 2012).

Verses 2:6–8 are commonly termed the Christ hymn [*Christushymnus*], describing how Jesus, a divine being, became human. Earlier, Paul presented Jesus' example of accepting others to the Philippian Christians, who were divided and troubled (2:2–4), urging them towards unity and single-mindedness (5f). Structurally analysing this passage, verse 6 forms a clause with relative pronoun ὃς as subject and participle ὑπάρχων [to exist] as base, with main verb in simple past tense ἠγήσατο [to regard]. In verse 7, ἐκένωσεν [to empty] becomes the main verb, followed by three consecutive participial phrases: 'μορφὴν δούλου λαβών / ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος / σχήματι εὐρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος'. This structure forms a narrative pattern of 'high status' (v. 6), 'emptying' (v. 7a), 'taking on' (v. 7b) and, 'becoming' (v. 8).

The key term examined here is ὁμοίωμα, definable lexically as 'similarity', 'equality', 'likeness', 'shape', or 'form' (Bauer 1988:1150; Menge 1997:490). Paul employs this term not to denote 'complete identity' or 'simple similarity', but rather in a profound theological sense. He uses this term to explain the relationship between Jesus-God, the divine being, and Jesus-human, the earthly being. Paul first distinguishes ὁμοίωμα from ἴσος, which denotes essential, status-based divine identity. He then views ὁμοίωμα as actual equality, meaning Christ did not merely 'appear human' but assumed equal human conditions. Gordon Fee theologically compares these terms, distinguishing ἴσος as pre-existent status and ὁμοίωμα as incarnational reality (Fee 1995:210–213). Similarly, Michael

Gorman argues that while Paul describes cruciform self-emptying [ἐκένωσεν], the pre-existent ἴσος is not abandoned but revealed in ὁμοίωμα (Gorman 2009:24–29). Stuhlmacher (1992) distinguishes between ἴσος, denoting sameness with God [*Gottesebenbildlichkeit*], and ὁμοίωμα, emphasising human form [*Menschengestalt*], thereby focusing on essence and form. Thus, Paul employs ὁμοίωμα to explain that Jesus Christ's incarnation is an equality event wherein humanity coexists without losing divine identity. If ἴσος refers to essential God-identity, ὁμοίωμα refers to equality in participating in human existence. By distinguishing these terms (ἴσος and ὁμοίωμα), Paul seeks to differentiate clearly Jesus' incarnation in both form and meaning for his readers.

Based on this discussion, examining 2:7 more specifically regarding the meaning of ὁμοίωμα, we see that ὁμοίωμα is not simply imitating external appearances or forms, but rather Jesus' reality manifested in actual (equal) human form. Therefore, ὁμοίωμα emphasises not merely that Christ became human, but that the divine being followed the condition of actual equality with humans, transcending mere similarity. In 2:7, Paul explains to the Philippians how Jesus became human: through 'emptying' [ἐκένωσεν]. The condition for becoming the other is self-emptying.

Emptying oneself to accept the other's situation is the way of embodying divine identity. Self-emptying is equality's prerequisite and the sole way of making equality possible. This approach provides theological insight into how the church should treat immigrants and refugees. Transcending traditional charitable perspectives or unilateral assistance paradigms, the church must seek mutual and transformative ways of encountering others, modelled on Christ's self-emptying. Specifically, this means the church must relinquish existing privileged positions and cultural superiority and enter the experiential world of immigrants and refugees. Jesus, a divine being, emptied himself to become human and ultimately submitted to death.

This transcends understanding or empathising with others' pain; it means others' pain becomes one's own pain. It refers to deep solidarity wherein one feels immigrants' pain as their own, transcending the asymmetrical relationship between oneself, who helps immigrants, and immigrants, who receive help. It is existential equality wherein the other's anxiety becomes one's own anxiety. If my interests and safety fill me, we cannot move towards 'ὁμοιός'. Thus, self-emptying refers to dismantling one's own perspectives and standards for viewing and evaluating the world, and instead placing the "other's" perspective at one's center (Galatians 2:20). Christ chose to renounce divine privileges and stand equally with humanity. He abandoned self-centredness and emptied himself to make room for others. This means the Church's immigrant ministry must transcend mere hospitality to involve 'self-emptying' to share their suffering and ultimately become like them. To accept immigrants, refugees, and foreigners, we must

empathise with their pain and make room for them. However, this does not mean abandoning our identity [ἴσος; identity]. As Paul explains, just as Jesus followed God's example by becoming human without abandoning divine identity [ἴσος], we must recognise ourselves as the same beings [ὁμοίωμα] as immigrants, refugees, and strangers, even as we make room for them by emptying ourselves without losing our identity.

Romans 8:3

BOX 3: 'ὁμοίωμα' as divine self-limitation.

8:3 τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου ἐν ᾧ ἠσθένη διὰ τῆς σαρκός, ὁ θεὸς τὸν αὐτοῦ υἱὸν πέμψας ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας καὶ περιῆμαρτίας κατέκρινεν τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐν τῇ σαρκί, (NA28; eds. Nestle et al. 2012).

This passage also alludes to Jesus' incarnation, addressing God's direct intervention to resolve what the law could not accomplish by sending his Son. As in Philippians 2:7, Paul states that God sent his Son into a body assuming sin's form [ὁμοιώματι] to eliminate sin. The Greek word 'ὁμοίωμα', corresponding to 'the form of sinful flesh' [ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας], is employed here subtly to mean complete equality, but not essential identity. Christ actually assumed human flesh, yet was not sinful. Here, the 'distinctiveness' between Jesus and humans is revealed. Although Jesus is fundamentally the same as humans under sin's influence, he is distinct from humans in being free from sin (Moo 1996). Here too, Paul uses ὁμοιώματι to speak of Jesus' equality in entering humans' 'same conditions', but simultaneously, although placed in sin's situation, he is not dominated or assimilated by it but rather judges it (Dunn 1988).

In conclusion, Paul presents a consistent Christological paradigm through the ὁμοίωμα concept in Romans 8:3 and the self-emptying incarnational theology in Philippians 2:6–8. This suggests that God's redemptive intervention is achieved not through transcendent distancing but through immanent participation in human existence. God does not observe humans' physical condition, powerless under sin's dominion, from outside, but enters their existential situation and forms an ontological bond with them. This divine self-limitation signifies substantial participation in human suffering and limitations, while simultaneously providing an immanent basis for redemptive resolution. Therefore, 'ὁμοίωμα' should be understood as a concept revealing God's redemptive love's theological radicalism reaching human existence's most vulnerable points, transcending mere morphological similarity.

This has profound implications for immigrant acceptance issues. True solidarity transcends existing charitable hospitality model limitations – that is, unilateral kindness acts bestowed by stable subjects upon others. It means deliberately dismantling privileged positions and social safety nets, entering immigrants' existential conditions of social exclusion and structural discrimination, and pursuing substantial equality [ὁμοίωμα]. Just as Christ's ὁμοίωμα

[assuming sinful flesh's form] accomplished redemptive solidarity through complete existential identification with humanity, the church's immigrant acceptance also requires transformative practices embracing their social suffering and cultural alienation within its own identity.

Through this *ὁμοίωμα* approach, the church secures theological basis to function as God's alternative community against structural evil – the systems of discrimination and hatred – within society. This should be understood not as mere social improvement but as eschatological testimony of the kingdom of God's values being realised in reality.

Additionally, Paul employs *ὁμοίωμα* three more times in Romans (Rm 1:23; 5:14; 6:5); but since these instances relate little to the 'identification' meaning in terms of 'solidarity' and 'participation' that this study addresses, I will only briefly introduce their meanings. To begin, Romans 1:23 (*ἐν ὁμοιώματι εικόνης*; in an image's form) and 5:14 (*ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως Ἀδάμ*; in Adam's transgression's form), *ὁμοίωμα* is employed to identify the relationship between God and humanity, and between humanity and sin, in a negative sense. Humans worship the created order's image and commit sin in the same manner as Adam's transgression.

However, in Romans 6:5 (*εἰ γὰρ σύμφυτοι γεγόναμεν τῷ ὁμοιώματι τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἐσόμεθα*): If we have been united with him in his death's likeness), Paul employs *ὁμοίωμα* in a way transcending the simple 'likeness' or 'similarity' used in 1:23 and 5:24, using it as a tool to express the real union of the saints' death with Jesus' death, transcending simple 'form' or 'similarity'. According to him, the death that saints undergo symbolically in baptism is not physically or literally the same as Jesus' death on the cross, but it is the same in its spiritual significance and identification with Christ's sacrifice. In other words, these two events are not merely similar events, but an actual union leading to the oneness of the believer and Jesus. Paul viewed the believer's participation in Christ's death as a means of entering 'resurrection', that is, new life (Haacker 2003:115).

Hebrews 2:14–17

BOX 4: 'ὁμοίωσις' as ontological identification.

2:14 ἐπεὶ οὖν τὰ παιδία κεκοινωνήκεν αἵματος καὶ σαρκός, καὶ αὐτὸς παρηλιώσω μετέσχεν τῶν αὐτῶν, ἵνα διὰ τοῦ θανάτου καταργήσῃ τὸν τὸ κράτος ἔχοντα τοῦ θανάτου, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὸν διάβολον, 2:15 καὶ ἀπαλλάξῃ τοὺς ὅσοι φόβω θανάτου διὰ παντός τοῦ ζῆν ἔνοχοι ἦσαν δουλείας. 2:16 οὐ γὰρ δήπου ἀγγέλων ἐπιλαμβάνεται ἀλλὰ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ ἐπιλαμβάνεται. 2:17 ὅθεν ὤφειλεν κατὰ πάντα τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ὁμοιωθῆναι ἵνα ἐλεήμων γένηται καὶ πιστὸς ἀρχιερεὺς τὰ πρὸς τὸν θεόν, εἰς τὸ ἰλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ λαοῦ (NA28; eds. Nestle et al. 2012).

This passage also concerns Jesus' incarnation and is a key passage related to 'identification with the other', this article's theme. The author of Hebrews first employs the word *μετέχω* (v.14) to describe Jesus assuming humanity, meaning 'to participate, to share, to be with'. This implies that Jesus' incarnation is not merely external resemblance; rather, Jesus fully participated in humanity's limited circumstances and existential conditions. Jesus did not merely observe from

above or simply sympathise with humans' hardship and suffering but actively entered the existential '*Sitz im Leben*'.¹

This theme reaches its climax in the *ὁμοιωθῆναι* [to become like] concept. It peaks in the 'becoming the same' concept. The word *ὁμοιόω*, meaning 'to make the same', clarifies that Jesus' incarnation was not limited to one aspect, but was accomplished 'in all things' [*κατὰ πάντα*]. That is, it is 'becoming the same' [*ὁμοιόω*] in all things except sin, including human limitations, suffering, fear, weakness, and death (Heb 4:15) (Bauckham 1998). It was because of this ontological and comprehensive identification that he could become the high priest representing humanity (v. 17) (Attridge 1989).

Here, too, we see that identification with others begins with 'participation' [*μετέχω*]. Moving away from a secure social status towards others' existential conditions who are exposed to uncertainty and social risk provides a core theological principle for immigrant acceptance policies and the church's missionary approach. Welcoming immigrants requires more than mere emotional sympathy or one-time charitable acts; it demands participatory intervention in the pragmatic realities they face. This presupposes direct and experiential understanding of the structural issues they encounter, such as social exclusion, racial prejudice, and legal instability.

Through such participatory solidarity, the church builds substantial partnership with immigrants and secures theological justification for transformative practices confronting institutional discrimination and social injustice they face. It also embodies the gospel's social implications and becomes a channel through which God's justice and reconciliation in His kingdom are realized in concrete history.

Hebrews 4:15

BOX 5: 'ὁμοιότητα' as incarnational identification.

4:15 οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ἀρχιερέα μὴ δυνάμενον συμπαθεῖν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις ἡμῶν, πειρασθέντα δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας (NA28; eds. Nestle et al. 2012).

Hebrews 4:15 is a crucial passage presenting incarnational identification's theological culmination. The author of Hebrews develops a unique Christological perspective by interpreting Christ's incarnation not as a simple ontological change but as emotional and existential solidarity with the suffering humanity.

The verb 'to sympathise, to suffer with, to have compassion' [*συμπαθεῖν*] implies mutual empathetic participation transcending simple sympathy or understanding (Menge 1997:649), suggesting a participatory Christology wherein Christ actually experiences and shares our weakness (Moffitt 2011). This is not cheap sympathy given from a distance, but deep inner unity wherein one feels others' pain and suffering as one's own. In this sense, the expression 'one who has been

1. *ὁμοιόω* shares the same etymology as *ὁμοίωμα*.

tested in every way' [κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα] suggests that Christ's incarnation is primarily empathetic identification with the suffering other (Vanhoye 2000).

Here, ὁμοιότητα is the noun form of ὁμοίως, meaning 'likeness, similarity', and in this context, refers to becoming identical in all aspects of human existence. Christ's likeness is not based on abstract or imagined empathy, but on actual, experiential identification. The reason he knows human suffering and weakness is that he has passed through all hardships humans experience.

This hermeneutical approach provides an important theoretical framework for theological discourse on identification with others. In particular, incarnational identification constitutes a theological basis for solidarity with socially disadvantaged and marginalised individuals (Westfall 2005) and presents a core paradigm for the church's social responsibility and missionary practice.

The author of Hebrews demonstrates a structure progressively deepening Christ's incarnation's theological understanding. The ontological identification presented in chapter 2 – that is, Christ's 'sharing in human flesh' (2:14) and 'becoming like his brothers in every way' (2:17) – addresses the incarnation's essential dimension. In contrast, at 4:15, the discussion shifts to experiential identification. The expression 'He is not unable to sympathise with our weaknesses but has been tempted in every way just as we are' emphasises that Christ not only assumed human nature but also actually experienced human beings' concrete experiences and sufferings.

What we can understand is that identifications core is 'sharing in suffering'. Beyond external and intellectual empathy dimensions, we must internalise immigrants' pain, suffering and anxieties resulting from being subjected to discrimination and go so far as to 'share in their suffering'.

John 1:14

BOX 6: 'λόγος' as ontological identification.

1:14 καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθατὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας (NA28; eds. Nestle et al. 2012).

Although the key concept of this study, ὁμοίως, is not employed directly in John 1:14, it is considered an essential text in incarnation theology. In this verse, John declares that the eternal and divine Logos [λόγος] became [ἐγένετο] finite and material flesh [σὰρξ], thereby presenting ontological identification's theological culmination.

In particular, the verb ἐγένετο [became] suggests not mere appearance or docetic manifestation, but actual and essential ontological change. This means the Logos has completely entered human existence conditions, constituting a Christological paradigm bridging the fundamental gap between divine nature and human nature. John's incarnation

declaration possesses theological continuity with the ὁμοίως concept in Pauline epistles and Hebrews, providing a foundation for understanding how Christ's identification with humanity is completed on an ontological level. In particular, the word ἐσκήνωσεν in 'dwelt among us' means to pitch a tent [σκηνή] and dwell, live, or reside in it (Menge 1997:626), which evokes the tabernacle where God dwelt as mentioned in the Old Testament (Brown 1966). In other words, God is no longer a being dwelling in heaven but has become a being moving and walking alongside us on this earth.

In conclusion, the fact that Logos became weak flesh [σὰρξ] rather than a glorious king or philosophical being presents a fundamental paradigm for identification with the other. True identification is not a benevolent approach supporting the other's weakness through existing power or resources, but rather the act of abandoning one's own strength and ontological superiority and directly entering the other's weakness. In the context of immigrant acceptance, this means accepting their social position and ontological vulnerability as one's own existential condition and entering their limited circumstances. This approach transcends mere coexistence to pursue co-presence – that is, complete solidarity in the same living space. The author of the Gospel of John testifies that it is precisely in this actual identification of Logos that he witnessed 'the glory of the Father's only Son' (1:14) (Bauckham 2008). This suggests that when identification with the other transcends mere emotional empathy and enters immigrants' concrete reality to form complete solidarity, that place paradoxically becomes the place where God's glory is most clearly manifested. This theological insight provides the basis for the church's immigrant acceptance to become the present realisation of God's kingdom, transcending mere social service.

Conclusion

This study sought to explore Christian responses to immigrant issues by moving beyond the 'hospitality' concept, which has been most widely accepted to date, and instead examining the 'ὁμοίως', or 'identification' concept, which the New Testament presents as a more fundamental alternative.

Until now, immigrant discourse has primarily focused on 'hospitality' or 'love' towards immigrants, based on the New Testament command to 'love the stranger' [Φιλοξενία].

However, this approach has the limitation of being a dichotomous structure between the 'subject' (the church) and the 'object' (immigrants). Hospitality often depends on the host's goodwill, and within this concept, immigrants could never become citizens and are forced to remain eternal outsiders required to behave like guests. Therefore, under the hospitality concept, a fundamental sense of caution towards the other, along with the dichotomous framework of 'guest' and 'us', always exists.

As mentioned in the introduction, the protagonist Young-Hye's 'becoming a tree' in *The Vegetarian* is a complete rejection of violence in the human world and a longing for

complete identification with plants, which are nonviolent and receptive beings. She does not treat trees as objects to be 'loved' or 'protected'. Rather, by becoming a tree herself, she breaks down all boundaries between herself and trees. This is an act transcending emotional empathy or rational understanding and pursuing an 'ontological unity' in which she relinquishes her very existence.

This is the most radical form of 'ὁμοιός', which is the opposite of exclusivity, moving beyond declaring 'you and I are the same' to practising 'I become you'. 'ὁμοιός', meaning 'becoming the same', possesses the following advantages in immigrant acceptance contexts.

Firstly, ὁμοιός is actual equality through 'self-emptying' [ἐκένωσεν]. In Philippians 2:6–8, Paul explains that Jesus, a divine being, is an example of equality wherein he did not lose his divine nature while coexisting with humanity. And the method making this possible was 'self-emptying'. That is, emptying oneself to accept the other's situation was the way in which Jesus assumed divine identity. It was not a matter of maintaining one's stable position while accepting the other, but rather an act of relinquishing 'master' and 'subject' privileges. While the concept of hospitality is based on the 'master-guest' structure, ὁμοιός allows us to meet others on equal terms through self-emptying, overcoming this unequal relationship. This requires Korean churches, which possess a sense of being God's chosen people and a sense of superiority, to humble themselves before immigrants.

Secondly, ὁμοιός means descending to 'sinful flesh's' place. The words in John 1:14, 'The Word became flesh' [σὰρξ ἐγένετο], and the expression in Romans 8:3, 'He came in the likeness of sinful flesh' [ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας], show that Christ's incarnation transcended outward similarity to become the essence of His divine and human existence. God's chosen way to resolve humanity's sin was to send his Son to become human, entering the very heart of human existence dominated by sin (Romans 8:3). Christ did not merely observe sinful humanity from afar with compassion, but entered their sinful existential reality himself, thereby becoming 'one with them'. He came in flesh's form [σὰρξ], which became the starting point for overcoming sin, to liberate sinful humanity from sin. Just as Jesus did not regard human sin as 'others' problem' but as his own problem, the church must confess that immigrants' economic, legal, and social difficulties are not just their problems, but problems that we and our entire community must solve. In this way, immigrant issues must be addressed by respecting their culture and way of life, entering their world, and walking together on a path of mutual transformation. Just as Jesus came in flesh's form, the Korean Church can resolve the theological challenge of entering immigrants' 'blood and flesh', thus becoming a true community of hope achieving genuine unity in a divided world.

Thirdly, ὁμοιός refers to incarnational identification through concrete participation [μετέχω]. Hebrews 2:14–17 and 4:15 testify that Christ 'became like his brothers in every way [ὁμοιωθῆναι]' and 'was tempted in every way as

we are [καθ' ὁμοιότητα]', so he 'sympathises with our weaknesses [συμπαθῆσαι]'. True identification transcends rationally understanding others' pain to an inner unity wherein we feel their pain as our own. This calls for the church to practise 'sharing in the suffering of others' with concrete pain lying beyond immigrant statistics, and it is through this experiential solidarity that effective intercession and advocacy become possible.

Without empathetic solidarity that treats immigrants' suffering as one's own, policy and institutional support tends to remain a form of impersonal charity.

In conclusion, if 'hospitality' is the first step in opening the church's doors to immigrants, ὁμοιός is the New Testament's ultimate call to transcend that threshold, live with them, suffer with them, and ultimately become one body. In today's world, where immigrant issues are intensifying, the Korean Church stands before a theological challenge to transcend charitable hospitality's limitations and walk the path of incarnational identification, 'emptying oneself to become one with the other'. Only through this radical self-emptying practice can the Church become a community of hope witnessing to true koinonia in a divided world.

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Chung-Yeon Kim: Data Curation, Investigation, Visualisation, Writing – original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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