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CONTEXTUALIZATION IN MISSIONS: A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL*

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Evangelical missiologists have debated the validity of using the term "contextualization" in cross-cultural ministries. This article explores the matter from the perspective of one who is not a missiologist but is concerned about world-wide church planting. The recent history of the term is surveyed and the concept is traced through selected events in biblical history. While the term as originated is encumbered with problems, the basic concept has significant strengths. "Contextualization" may be defined as showing the whole Bible to be relevant to the total individual in all his relationships of life. The term is appropriate to use in an informed, biblical manner in relation to separatist missionary effort.

INTRODUCTION

U NITY and diversity as a complementary pair are inherent in the trinitarian God. The one God (unity) brought into being a variegated creation (diversity) and the two are in complementary relationship. In Gen 1:31 God evaluated his creation, "Very good!" These seeming opposites, unity and diversity, also complement each other in the first social institution—"and *they* shall be *one* flesh" (Gen 2:23, 24).

Tension between unity and diversity asserted itself in the fall, demonstrating man's desire to be like God, not different from him. The recently coined term "contextualization," current in missiology, mirrors this as a tension between traditional formulations of doctrine (i.e., traditional unity) and contemporary applications of biblical

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*This article was first presented as a formal paper at a missions consultation sponsored by a group interested in independent Baptist missionary effort, convened on the campus of Grand Rapids Baptist College and Seminary, December 28–30, 1980.

truth in the variegated creation (contemporary diversity). Part of the problem may be a tendency to view tradition as radically distinct from current application, rather than as the opposite end of a continuum.

"Contextualization" is a new word, although contextualization has taken place from the time of the fall. Throughout history, fall-plagued minds have distorted what is good in both the idea and its implementation. This paper explores and evaluates "contextualization" as a current concept in missiology. Part I summarizes the history of the term and offers a definition. Part II traces aspects of contextualization as a biblical idea. Part III identifies stages of the concept and suggests controls over the process. In general, this study attempts to set contextualization within a biblical and theological frame of reference.

PART I. CONTEXTUALIZATION: THE TERM

Contextualization as a term in missions arose in the historical context of an emerging third world. During the past 50 years these countries have obtained political independence. As they struggle for economic independence, they increasingly assert their cultural identity.

In some countries the quest for "cultural identity" is sought, not on ideological terms, as in Marxist revolts, but in the realm of religious concerns. The resurgent political power of Islam is an example.[1] In countries where the government exercises overt economic control, the church's role in such concerns as health and education is often challenged by the government.[2]

Rapid urbanization increases both affluence and poverty, resulting in a variety of alienations which challenge the ability of the individual Christian and the local church to cope and grow.[3] Liberalism was the earliest religious voice to call significant attention to the problems which these phenomena create for church mission. Eventually, liberals coined "contextualization" as the term describing a way to respond to the phenomena. This section surveys the history of the term and provides a definition.

History of the Term

The International Missionary Conference (established in 1921: hereafter IMC) was an outgrowth of the 1910 Edinburgh Conference. In 1947 the IMC worked with the emerging World Council of

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[1]"Your Kingdom Come," a pamphlet published by the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, n.d., 18.
[2]Ibid., 19.
[3]Ibid.

Churches (hereafter WCC) in the Whitby Conference. By this time the tension between "mother churches" and "younger churches" had been resolved by speaking of all churches as "partners in obedience."[4]

At New Delhi in 1961, the IMC became the Committee on World Missions and Evangelism (hereafter CWME) of the WCC. The CWME Bangkok Conference of 1972–73 focused on the "theological imperialism" of the West and provided a platform for "affirming the right of every Christian and every church to cultural identity." This conference urged the non-Western churches to formulate their own response to God's calling "in a theology, a liturgy, a praxis, a form of community, rooted in their own culture."[5]

It is evident that the WCC did confront at a theoretical level the need for a church that was indigenous to the receiving culture. The concept of contextualization was brought into focus at a WCC "consultation on 'Dogmatic or Contextual Theology' in 1971."[6] The consultation chairman wrote concerning the technology-induced crisis in mission:

> The effect . . . has been to lead to a kind of "contextual or experiential" theology which gives preference at the point of departure for systematic theological thinking to the contemporary historical scene over against Biblical tradition and confessional statements constructed on the basis of Biblical texts . . .[7]

Obviously, this is existential contextualization.

Shoki Coe, the General Director of the Theological Education Fund (hereafter TEF), a WCC agency, gave birth to the term contextualization, according to Aharon Sapsezian.

> Shoki and I began to use this word sometime in February, 1972. Long before that Shoki was famous for using the phrase, "Text and Context," and he was pleading for contextual criticism as a necessary counterpart of textual criticism. In a sense this is the prehistory of the words "contextuality" and "contextualization." The discussions in the house around these two words were that we should go beyond the older notion of "indigenization," in the sense that theology would take into account certain aspects of the culture which had been hitherto neglected, such as the social and economic dimensions.[8]

[4]Ibid., see p. 3 for these expressions.

[5]Ibid., 5.

[6]David J. Hesselgrave, "Contextualization Continuum" (hereafter, "Continuum") *The Gospel in Context* 2:3 (1979), 4.

[7]Ibid. Cited on p. 4 from Bruce C. E. Fleming, "Contextualization of Theology as Evidenced in Africa in the Writings of John Samuel Mbiti" (an unpublished Th.M. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1977) 9.

[8]F. Ross Kinsler, "Mission and Context: The Current Debate About Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 14:1 (1978) 24.

At Lausanne (1974) Kato said,

> This is a new term imported into theology to express a deeper concept
> than indigenization ever does. We understand the term to mean
> making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation. In reference to
> Christian practices, it is an effort to express the never changing Word
> of God in ever changing modes of relevance. Since the Gospel message
> is inspired but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of
> the modes of expression is not only right but necessary.[9]

The general concept has been implemented in varying degrees
throughout church history. Many church planters from the faith
missions which arose in the past 150 years have sought to establish
indigenous, encultured churches. At times the missionary himself did
not realize that he was in fact imposing upon the target culture an
institutional form which was neither mandated by the Bible nor in the
best interests of the emerging church in the long term. More incisive
attention to the dynamic of cultural context might have facilitated the
spread of biblical Christianity in some areas.

"Contextualization" has been taken up by missionaries influenced
by the Lausanne conference, and the term is used in current literature
by evangelical missiologists. Evangelical missionaries are consciously
seeking to implement its implications.

Definition of the Term

Liberalism. For liberals, contextualization in missions is basically
a theological idea growing out of their total perspective. As noted
above, the contemporary experience controls both biblical and
confessional theology.[10]

Shoki Coe believes that contextualization includes indigenization,
but is more dynamic and features openness to change as a key factor.
The full sociological mosaic defines and conditions the proclamation
of the Gospel and response to it. "Contextualization has to do with
how we assess the peculiarity of third world contexts. . . . (It) takes
into account the process of secularity, technology and the struggle for
human justice . . ."[11]

This approach presumes "a genuine encounter between God's
Word and His world."[12] It seeks to change the socio-economic plight
by "rootedness in . . . (the) given historical moment" and leading the

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[9]Byang H. Kato, "The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism," in *Let
the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. by J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publica-
tions) 1217.

[10]Hesselgrave, "Continuum," 4.

[11]"Your Kingdom Come," 18.

[12]"Your Kingdom Come," 19.

populace out of their plight.[13] The liberal idea assumes that God is doing something redemptive in the target culture—that he is fashioning deliverance from the socio-economic bondage in which the multitudes of the third world find themselves.

De Santa Ana says, "The contextualization of theological reflection means opting for a particular social context, that which is low, at the base of the social pyramid."[14] Such an option "means opposing oppression rather than confirming the powerful in oppressing other social sectors."[15] The contextualizer's task, then, is to enter the culture, discern what God is doing, and work with God to bring about the change which God is (supposedly) fashioning.

Liberalism is concerned about "pursuing truth" by dialogue. Participants come from the major religions of the world. The goal is to achieve "a new . . . interfaith spirituality," "a convergent humanity." Biblical revelation is only one of many religious sources from which to draw.[16]

Neoliberalism. Claiming biblical revelation and Christian tradition as its foundation, Neoliberalism addresses questions raised by the present milieu. Its method is "'enlightened' response to the human predicament." The theologian seeks to proclaim the profound meaning of historical events. The kingdom of God is discovered by "making the world a better place."[17] Gutierrez calls the result "a political hermeneutics of the Gospel."[18]

Neoliberalism and neoorthodoxy are similar in that they both build on the premise that the primary source for theology is "the current historical context." The former asserts the importance of the theologian in formulating theology, while the latter professes to feature the Spirit of God, who illumines the theologian. Human need is the controlling factor for the former, but for the latter, it is the occasioning factor in theologizing. For both, the method for theologizing is to discern truth by experiencing the "tension between living history and the Word of God." The result will be spiritual understanding and identity with Christ.[19]

Evangelicalism. Evangelicals offer a variety of definitions. For Peters, contextualization means to discover and implement the legitimate implications of a biblical text. Applications are suggested but not required by a text, whereas implications are demanded by the

[13]Ibid.
[14]Ibid.
[15]Ibid., 25.
[16]Hesselgrave, "Continuum," 8.
[17]Ibid.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Ibid., 10.

text.[20] Archer sees contextualization as the missionary setting forth his message in the most attractive, culturally suitable form he can devise. Beals simply says, "contextualization is an effort to make the message of the Bible relevant in a given culture."[21] The catch word here may be "effort." It is natural for a person (e.g., a missionary) to take his own pre-understanding of a subject for granted.

Nunez cautions that "to contextualize is not to change the message, but rather to apply it to every dimension of our personality and to all the relationships in our life."[22] Yego rejects popular definitions of contextualization and suggests that it means "making something applicable to the life situation in which one finds himself . . . [to] clarify to the people or make it applicable to their particular situation."[23] Contextualization means "the never changing Word of God in ever-changing modes of relevance."[24]

Summary. Like most terms, "contextualization" is susceptible to as many nuances of meaning as there are people who employ the term. Liberalism's efforts at least sensitize us anew to the desperate socio-economic conditions of unreached billions. They remind us that these conditions acutely affect "how people hear." Further, neo-orthodox writers advocate a form of contextualization that is vigorously consistent with their basic theological commitments in such areas as soteriology, anthropology, and revelation. The consistency is praiseworthy, although the doctrinal base for neo-orthodoxy must be rejected.

Evangelicals properly leave references to specific socio-economic conditions out of their definitions because contextualization is necessary for each stratum of society in every culture. Peters' definition tends to draw attention to the *transcultural demands* of the Bible. Archer emphasizes communicating truth in *culturally attractive forms.* Beals requires the communication of the *whole Bible.* Nunez explicitly recognizes the *total relationships* of the *whole man.*

In summary, contextualization in missions is showing the whole Bible relevant to the total individual in all of life's relationships. The

[20]Cited by Hesselgrave in "Continuum," 5, from George W. Peters, "Issues Confronting Evangelical Missions," in *Evangelical Missions Tomorrow*, ed. by W. T. Coggins and E. L. Frizen, Jr. (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1977) 169.

[21]Paul A. Beals, "Contextualization: Bane or Boon?" Unpublished paper, n.d., pp. 1–2.

[22]Emilio Antonio Nunez, "Contextualization . . . Latin American Theology," *Latin American Pulse* 11:2 (Wheaton, IL: Evangelical Missions Information Service, 1976) cited by Paul A. Beals, "Contextualization: Bane or Boon?," 2.

[23]Josphat K. Yego, "Appreciation for and Warnings About Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 16:3 (1980) 156.

[24]Ibid., 154. In effect, Yego combines the definitions proposed by Beals and Nunez.

process must be deliberate. The sequence for accomplishment must be worked out while one plans his initial thrust into the target culture.

PART II. CONTEXTUALIZATION: THE TERM IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Contextualization should be defined as showing the whole Bible relevant to the total individual in all his relationships of life. This section outlines biblical bases for a rigorous application of the idea. The approach will be to select materials in the approximate order in which God inscripturated them, i.e., in the order of progressive revelation.

Genesis 1–11

The first command. One might argue that the issue of contextualization was introduced at the moment Adam first experienced personhood. The infinite God created finite man and then communicated with him in "finite" ways, i.e., ways which allowed man to internalize and live out God's message. It is clear from Gen 1:26ff. that God intended man to dominate, appreciate, and utilize the environment which God prepared for him. The fall included the first instance of man abdicating to his environment against the explicit Word of God.[25] It occasioned radical changes in the content, means, and forms of divine communication, due to the change in the receptors.

The Noahic Covenant. The perverted mind which gave priority to the creature's thoughts rather than those of the Creator precipitated the flood crisis (Gen 6:5–7). God permitted that mind-set to be entrenched in the post-flood world (Gen 8:21). God also reiterated the original mandate to man to dominate his environment, but some new controls were introduced, including capital punishment and, by implication, attendant political processes (Gen 9:1–6ff.). Another change which intensified the hostility within the environment was a dietary addition. Ultimately this permission to eat flesh formed the broad background for Paul's metaphor describing interpersonal relationships among "believers" (Gal 5:15). The adverse effects of the inter-relationships between perverted thinking and hostility among creatures mushroomed.

The Tower of Babel. Instead of filling the earth (Gen 9:1), the population gravitated together in a deliberate attempt at urbanization. The tower was ultimately an attempt to dethrone God (Gen 11:1–9) and the unity of language (with a corollary of broad cultural unity)

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[25]Bruce J. Nicholls, "Towards a Theology of Gospel and Culture," in *Down to Earth*, ed. by Robert T. Coote and John R. W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 56. For NT commentary on societal upheaval as in Genesis 3–11, see Romans 1–2.

was abused. The divine judgment at Babel immediately accounts for the linguistic, ethnological, and political diversity in the world (Gen 10:5, 20, 31). Growing directly out of the tower of Babel are many problems of cross-cultural communication. The issue of contextualization in the proclamation of God's message begins to crystallize in Genesis 10 and 11.

Genesis 12–Malachi 4

Abraham. Abraham was a child of his environment. Sometimes, although chosen by God to be a recipient of paradigmatic revelation from God, in moral obstinance, he wrongly conformed to his environment (Genesis 12, 16).[26] At other times, with apparent divine approval, he utilized local customs (Genesis 23) and military conventions (Genesis 14). In the latter episode, Abraham himself significantly rejected a particular practice, but did not impose his personal conviction upon his companions (Gen 14:21–24). God dealt with Abraham within his cultural context, and his faith matured within the same context (e.g., cf. Gen 12:1–3 with Gen 22:15–19). Several other OT individuals experienced their relationship with God in a similar way. Although the Lord intended that his people represent him to the nations (Exod 19:5 and perhaps Isa 43:8–10), with few exceptions, transcultural outreach with God's message was never characteristic of Israel.[27]

The nation. OT contributions to contextualization are mostly negative. The persons cited, with the exception of a few true prophets and others, failed to demonstrate how to live godly lives in the real world. For instance, Abraham compromised the character of God, as at Pharaoh's court. What was occasional in the account of Abraham became characteristic of the nation. Abraham compromised outwardly in the moral and civil realm, but compromise by the nation was demonstrably rooted in theological syncretism (Josh 24:2, 15; Hos 2:8–13).[28]

The Ministry of Christ

The Babylonian captivity "cured" Israel of syncretism between Yahwism and polytheistic idolatry.[29] During intertestamental times an intense devotion to the Torah matured. By the time of Christ a

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[26]Gleason L. Archer, "Contextualization: Some Implications from Land and Witness in the Old Testament," in *New Horizons in World Mission*, ed. by David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 200–202.

[27]Ibid., 200.

[28]Ibid., 200–201.

[29]Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Exile and Return* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962) 124–25.

new and more subtle syncretism flourished under the Pharisees, whereby they confused the traditions of men with the commandments of God in the name of fidelity to God.[30]

Christ is the classic example of contextualization of God's message without compromise. By means of the incarnation God perfectly contextualized his communication (cf. Hebrews 1–2). He met his target culture where it was and as it was in the man Christ Jesus, his sinless Son (Heb 2:9–18; 4:15).

John 3. John 3 and 4 illustrate the particularity of Christ's approach. A key to the juxtaposition of these accounts seems to be in John 2:23–25. The passage may be charted in free translation:

> Many believed (ἐπίστευσαν) into his name (2:23).
> Jesus was not entrusting (ἐπίστευεν) himself to them because he knew all (2:24).
> He had no need that any inform him concerning man (i.e., "tell him what people were like") because he knew all.
> He himself knew what was in man (i.e., "he understood human nature").[31]

The last word of John 2 and the third word of John 3 is "man" (ἄνθρωπος); then the episode with Nicodemus follows. Having emphasized Christ's knowledge of human nature in the final verses of chap. 2, John proceeds to show how Jesus, the Jew, confronts the leading Jewish rabbi. It is sufficient to observe that Christ deals with the man on the basis of an informed biblical anthropology. He utilized the role of a Jewish rabbi, a role common in the cultural milieu he shared with Nicodemus.

John 4. The next episode presents Christ communicating in a limited cross-cultural setting. His knowledge of the Samaritan woman explicitly demonstrates either prophetic insight, or perhaps is an instance of his omniscience (John 4:19, 29, 39). He neither ignores nor offends her cultural sensitivities, nor does he compromise his message. Beginning the conversation by putting himself in the woman's debt (4:7), he concludes with a forthright claim for his message. This claim shows that her religion is hollow (John 4:22ff.).

All accounts of such events in the life of Christ show that he was the Perfect Proclaimer. Some pertinent examples from John 2:23–4:26 include a command of a working biblical anthropology; a functional appreciation and utilization of the cultural context of the audience; and a sufficient command of the basic message to allow the

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[30]Archer, in *New Horizons*, 212; cf. Mark 7:6–13.
[31]J. B. Phillips, *The Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1952) 193.

messenger to use a variety of metaphors and facts.[32] Contextualizing the message for an individual, as in John 3 and 4, suggests ways of doing the same for a population.

The Great Commission. Christ commands global proclamation of the gospel by his apostles and their converts (John 17:18–21; Matt 28:19–20). The pattern for proclamation was anticipated by God's first command to man, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28a). The first three imperatives are repeated in the Noahic Covenant, and at that point the imperatives assume all the implications of the fall (cf. Gen 8:20–9:1). Since the earth is to be filled with depraved people, it is not surprising that the savior wants his followers to go so as to disciple people in all nations (ἔθνη; Matt 28:19).[33]

Acts 2–14

Acts 2. Acts 2 portends needs and patterns for contextualization of the Christian gospel. The miraculous gift of speech enabled 120 Jews to communicate the gospel in as many as fifteen different languages (Acts 1:15; 2:8–11). The most obvious principle is that people need to hear the gospel in their own language.

Acts 6. Acts 6 suggests an additional consideration. The Hellenistic Jews complained that their widows were being slighted. The congregation selected Hellenistic Jews to supervise the table ministry. This was a psychologically adroit move approved by the Spirit of God.

Acts 7–8. Saul, with relatively strong ties to the Judaic, Greek, and Roman world, was "impressed" with the gospel in Acts 7 and 8. In time these ties would facilitate his adeptness at contextualizing the message. Phillip, the Hellenistic deacon, evangelized some Samaritans and an Ethiopian court official. These instances illustrate the rapid ripple effect. Reaching key people, who may be bilingual and

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[32]This treatment of Christ's contacts with Nicodemus and the woman assumes Christ's full deity. The discussion is couched in "limiting" terms in order to emphasize reachable skills.

[33]The cross-cultural phenomena implicit in worldwide evangelism are strikingly embedded in the four-fold societal factors, repeated three times in Genesis 10. The LXX specifies the *land* (γῇ), the *language* (γλῶσσαν), the *people* (φυλαῖς, i.e., *ethnic group*), the *nation* (ἔθνεσιν, i.e., "The multitude bound together by like habits, customs, peculiarities," in brief, perhaps a *political entity*). The geographical, linguistic, ethnic, and political factors are emphasized in Gen 10:5, 20, 31. The root ἔθνος- is the same as the one attributed to Christ in Matt 28:19. For ἔθνος-, see Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, 4th edition (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895) 226–27. For φυλή see G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937) 475.

bicultural, minimizes some of the problems of contextualizing by E-2 or E-3[34] evangelists.

Acts 10. Peter's traumatic foray into cross-cultural evangelism to reach Cornelius demonstrates the need for cultural flexibility. This may include subjugating well-entrenched cultural and ritual preferences for the good of gospel outreach. Such subjugation for Peter was controlled by special revelation.

Acts 11; 13:1–3. At Antioch, Jewish believers from Jerusalem were reaching Jews. Hellenistic believers from Cyprus and Cyrene, by way of Jerusalem, were reaching Greeks. This resulted in a "biracial" church with significant Gentile tendencies and the consequent problems (Acts 11:19–21). For some obvious reasons, the Jerusalem church dispatched Barnabas, a Levite born in Cyprus (Acts 11:22; 4:36). Barnabas in turn sought Saul, whose qualifications for cross-cultural communication are suggested above. When the Holy Spirit selected Saul and Barnabas for their first mission to Galatia, the Antioch leaders probably considered the choice to be neither accidental nor mystical, but reasonable. This dramatic penetration with the gospel was spearheaded by men who had demonstrated an ability to relate to the multi-cultural settings of the target areas.

Acts 13:4–14:28. The first stops on the initial journey were at opposite ends of Cyprus. Common ground for contextualization was found in 1) the local Jewish population and 2) Barnabas' connection with the territory. At Pisidian Antioch, the initial contact was in a synagogue which had a mixed audience of Israelites and God-fearers, i.e., proselytized Gentiles.[35] The content of the message was Israelite history leading up to the advent, death, and resurrection of Messiah. The audience was assumed to have some knowledge of the OT.

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas followed the same pattern and received an interracial response (Acts 14:1), but persecution drove them out of town. At Lystra the team encountered a large number who worshipped the Greek pantheon and thought Paul and Barnabas were gods incarnate. Paul and Barnabas sought to contextualize the gospel (Acts 14:15), so instead of appealing to Israel's history, they

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[34]See C. Peter Wagner and Edward R. Dayton, eds., *Unreached Peoples '80* (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook, 1980) as follows: E-1 evangelism is mono-cultural evangelism. E-2 and E-3 indicate cross-cultural evangelism of increasing degrees of differences between the evangelist and his target (p. 379). E-2 or 3 is the initial missionary task force (cf. Paul at Thessalonica). This is a pioneering team whose objective is to win a circle of converts and begin to teach them in a way that is properly contextualized for their culture. This should be considered the nurturing stage. Such a church should be nurtured until the missionary task can be completed by E-1 methods (pp. 8–9).

[35]F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) 100. See also Acts 13:16, 43.

appealed to cosmology, world history, and common grace in the Bible. They were sensitive to the aspect of the biblical message most suitable for leading up to the gospel. This is broadly similar to Christ's approach to Nicodemus and then to the Samaritan woman.

Paul and Barnabas' own persecutions, evident to their audiences in South Galatia, gave credibility to their teachings about suffering and the Christian life (Acts 14:22). The structure of church organization was apparently simple and readily understood by the local respondents to the gospel.[36] Whatever characterized the apostolic approach and whatever their expectations for maturity in new converts, churches were established with a striking quickness.[37]

Acts 15

Salvation and circumcision. The incipient interracial conflict of Acts 6 had gone beyond its local "meals for widows" problem. By the time of Acts 15, non-proselyte Gentiles had come into the circle of faith in distant places. Fundamental theological issues had been raised. The question was, "What is the saving gospel?" Some converted Pharisees included circumcision as part of the gospel (Acts 15:1, 5). Circumcision was also representative of other regulations (Acts 15:10, 19).

Doctrinal clarity and cultural deference. The cities reached by Apostolic witness all had a pocket of Jews. James insisted that salvation is by grace apart from works of the law (Acts 15:11, 19). He did recommend that the biracial churches contextualize their stance in deference to the Jewish element so that Jews could thereby be won to the gospel. Ericson verbalizes the two-pronged impact of this decision:

> The early Jerusalem church gave recognition to *two different contexts.* The first is the context of Jewish Christians who continued to observe the customs of Moses. The second context is the mixed community comprised . . . [of Jews and Gentiles] in fellowship on compromise terms.[38]

Now all believers would be of equal status and enjoy full fellowship.[39] This is a model for crossing cultural barriers so that the message can

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[36]Ibid., 97, 104.

[37]W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of Saint Paul* (Hartford, CT: S. S. Scranton, 1914) 176, 895. Comparing Conybeare's data, churches on the first missionary journey were apparently established in less than one year.

[38]Norman R. Ericson, "Implications from the New Testament for Contextualization," in *Theology and Mission,* ed. by David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 75.

[39]Ibid., adapted.

be contextualized. Without compromising Bible truth, two cultures had been molded. A certain deference was accorded the "weaker brethren," i.e., the Christian Jews.

Right practice and cultural sensitivity. Things contaminated by idols would offend Jews, who were strict monotheists, but also presumably would be offensive to non-Jewish adherents to biblical faith. Fornication is always immoral. Abstinence from meat killed by strangulation was a Jewish dietary provision, probably related to abstinence from blood.[40] Abstinence from blood, while taken up into Mosaism, applies to all descendants of Noah (Gen 9:4). Thus, James is not advocating regulations which are merely Jewish, but rather regulations germane to a biblical world view. However, the Jews were particularly sensitive in these matters. Bruce summarizes James' part:

> . . . and it was in considerable part thanks to James' practical wisdom that a serious problem which might have brought an unbridgeable cleavage in primitive Christianity, was settled in a spirit of concord.[41]

Acts 15 and the Epistle of James. The James of Acts 15 was probably the author of the epistle of James. That letter, so reminiscent of Israel's wisdom tradition, with its universalizing of godliness, breathes the same spirit as is evident in James' leadership of the Jerusalem Council. The epistle may both complement and supplement Acts 15 as a guide for contextualization. The epistle may also be useful in a sense similar to that suggested for 1 Corinthians 13 (see p. 105 below).

1 Corinthians, Colossians, Philemon

Meaning of behavior. 1 Corinthians 8–10 is cast in a context in which the congregation is basically Gentile. This was a third kind of context in comparison with the two-fold context of Acts 15.[42] The Corinthian issue of "food offered to idols" was addressed after the Jerusalem letter began circulating (Acts 15:23ff.).[43] At Corinth Paul

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[40]Bruce, *Spreading Flame*, 109.

[41]Ibid., 105.

[42]The two contexts in Acts 15 are 1) the Jewish context and 2) a Jewish-Gentile context. The context at Corinth is basically Gentile.

[43]The intuitive model of interpretation would take no notice of this fact. See Rene Padilla, "Hermeneutics and Culture: A Theological Perspective," in *Down to Earth*, eds. Coote and Stott. To summarize Padilla, the intuitive model draws immediate personal application from the biblical text for the life of the interpreter. There is no particular concern to describe the biblical context of the passage (pp. 64–66). An implicit strength of this approach is that it views the Bible as immediately useful to the literate non-specialist individual; however, the approach is susceptible to allegorizations which have no demonstrable connection with the text.

made no appeal to that letter because the particulars here were of strictly Gentile concern. His appeal was to transdispensational truth. Idols are nonentities (1 Cor 8:4) and no food has "intrinsic religious value."[44] The implication is that any food can be eaten by anyone (cf. 1 Cor 8:9). Further, the Lord's table is "authentically what the idol banquet purports to be" (1 Cor 10:16).[45] The conclusions which Paul draws may be summarized: 1) Christians *may* eat meat offered to idols—in an absolute sense, the culture notwithstanding (cf. 1 Cor 10:19); 2) Christians must not eat in idol temples, i.e., more broadly, they must flee from idolatry (1 Cor 10:14, 21). Thus Paul has evaluated a cultural phenomenon on the basis of explicit biblical revelation. Whether a Christian should exercise his liberty in this cultural issue is determined by the "meaning and effect" such participation would have on the unsaved, the weaker brother, or his own conscience.[46] If the *meaning* of a particular behavior is intrinsically contrary to biblical revelation, it is forbidden.

Biblical and cultural norms. Paul utilized the cultural context in the case of incest at Corinth. In addition to stating a *revelational absolute*, that incest is immoral for all believers (1 Cor 5:1, 9), he called attention to a *cultural norm* of that society, which forbade incest. This implies that aspects of contemporary ethical systems should be employed when the ethical factor agrees with biblical standards. Some common ground between a foreign culture and biblical absolutes may readily be apparent, while other dimensions of common ground in that same culture may surface only after effort to understand the culture. The issue here is not common ground between the target culture and the messenger's culture, but common ground between target culture and biblical absolutes.[47]

Spiritual and social equality in Christ. In 1 Corinthians Paul confronted several issues of immediate relevance to the local assembly. In the letters to the Colossians and Philemon, he addressed two sides of a societal matter as it affected the Christian community. Greco-Roman society categorized members of households as wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters. Paul addressed each of these in his letters, but says the most to slaves. As a result, the equalizing gospel (Gal 3:28) was misconstrued by some convert slaves so that they became inappropriately aggressive. The apostle cautioned that Christ will deal with unjust masters. While the slaves are to be

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[44]Ericson, "Implications," 75. Note also that Paul's appeal in 1 Corinthians 8 is to biblical cosmology and anthropology, as in Acts 14 at Lystra.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Ibid., 76.

[47]I am indebted to Ericson, "Implications," 76–77, for the substance of this paragraph.

submissive (Col 3:25), the Christian master must treat the converted slave as a brother, both spiritually and socially (Phlm 16–23).[48]

Summary

This summary outlines principles and observations from the preceding biblical survey of factors which facilitate contextualization. Dangers in the contextualizing process are also included. The method is to list the factors as they surfaced in the survey.

Genesis 1–11. Man under God must control his environment (including his response to culture) and must not be controlled by that environment. The perverted mind develops a culture that is both useful and abhorrent. Immorality and physical hostility must be rejected, and multifaceted cultural differences must be acknowledged.

Genesis 12–Malachi 4. Sinful cultural practices must be rejected, while "neutral" practices may be utilized. Individualized practices of "living faith" are allowable, but should not be imposed upon others. Cultural conformity may be a symptom of theological syncretism.

The ministry of Christ. Cultural differences in individuals should be learned and utilized with discernment to advance the gospel. The message should be mastered so well that it can be communicated in culturally relevant ways without compromising its meaning.

Acts 2–14. Circumstances at Pentecost demonstrated the need for crossing the language barrier, while Acts 6–8 suggests the advisability of reaching new targets with servants who have roots in both the sending and target cultures. Peter had to adopt a stance of cultural flexibility controlled by specific revelation. Paul and Barnabas were sent to new regions partly because they had demonstrated their effectiveness in multi-racial settings. As they pursued their mission, they sought appropriate "common ground" as points of contact. They encouraged organizational structure that was readily acceptable to and usable by the local group.

Acts 15. The cause, means, and authority for salvation must be clearly distinguished from culture and ceremony. Doctrinal clarity must not be sacrificed in deference to culture, but cultural factors which are doctrinally neutral should be utilized. Furthermore, it should be remembered that what seem to be cultural factors may have roots in universal teachings of Scripture.

1 Corinthians, Colossians, and Philemon. Specific acts of behavior may have varying significance in different locations. Cultural standards should be exploited for the gospel when they coincide with biblical norms. The practice of spiritual and social equality in Christ will facilitate legitimate contextualization of the message.

[48]Ibid., 77, adapted.

PART III. CONTEXTUALIZATION: AN EVALUATION OF USEFULNESS

Validity of the Term

A mixed value. Like many words in theological and missiological jargon,[49] "contextualization" is not a biblical word, and it is a fluid word. Just as words such as "election," "repent," "missionary," "witness" and "call" mean what the user means, so it is with "contextualization." Buswell has rightfully cautioned against discarding the word "indigenization," but he sees some value in the newer word.[50]

A liberal origin. Liberals apparently gave birth to the word and associated it with socio-economic unrest. They may use the terms basic to classic fundamentalism in connection with "contextualization," but they empty those terms of their biblical and orthodox meanings and infuse them with new meanings. However, in spite of its origin, "contextualization" seems to be a useful term.

A proposed definition. "Contextualization is showing the whole Bible relevant to the total individual in all his relationships of life." This does go beyond indigenization.[51] When planting the gospel in new soil, the goal is to affect the total life of the society. Intermediate goals include 1) salvation and spiritual growth of individuals, 2) the effect of the saved on their families and community, 3) the establishment of a local church that meets the criteria of the NT with respect to definition, structure, function, and program, and 4) a biblical relationship between the saved and the social institutions of the target culture. The proposed definition assumes a thoroughgoing biblical anthropology that goes beyond a "trichotomy vs. dichotomy" discussion or a definition of personality as "a being who possesses intellect, emotion, and will."

Biblical Basis for the Term

The Bible survey in Part II has shown the need for 1) meeting the sinner where he is, 2) leading and equipping the saved person to become what God desires, and 3) challenging the saved person to live

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[49] *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: C. & C. Merriam, 1953) 451, under "jargon," c. "The technical . . . vocabulary of a science . . . sect . . . or other special group."

[50] J. Oliver Buswell, III, "Contextualization: Theory, Tradition and Method," in *Theology and Mission*, ed. by David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 93–95, 106.

[51] This is particularly so if "indigenization" focuses primarily on the church organization rather than on the people. For a discussion of some problems with the term "indigenous" see Edward R. Dayton and David A. Fraser, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 357–58.

a godly life within the target culture. Contextualization attempts to realize this three-fold purpose in stages.

Stages of Contextualization[52]

If the gospel is contextualized, then its clothing is the everyday life of its recipients. There are six identifiable stages of contextualization. The suggested order is logical, but in fact the stages are interwoven.

Penetration. The pattern in the early church indicates that a first contact (penetration) was by someone who had significant cultural ties with the target. The gospel must be spoken in the idiom of the district. Acts 17 is a possible guide to the components of the initial message: God, personal and transcendent (24, 26, 29), the Creator (24–26), man the creature (26), man in need of God and repentance (27, 30), righteous judgment to come, God's Man, Jesus, his death and resurrection (18, 31).[53]

Translation. The Bible is the absolute standard (cf. Isa 8:20), the saving message (Rom 10:17), and food for growth (1 Pet 2:2; Heb 5:13, 14). NT use of the LXX illustrates the need to contextualize the message by translation. Two basic theories of Bible translation prevail. Formal correspondence seeks to stay as close to the grammar and idiom of the source as possible, whereas dynamic equivalence translation is more free.[54] The translator seeks to recombine "the meanings of the Bible . . ." in such a way that the resulting combination 1) gets across the essential meanings in the source language and 2) stimulates a response in the hearer of the translation equivalent to that which resulted from the original hearing.[55]

The latter approach is more contextualized, but more apt to misconstrue the God-breathed text. The former risks being nonsensical to the receptor. Translation should tend towards formal correspondence, while explanation must have dynamic equivalence.

Information. The informational stage recalls the penetration and intensifies instruction in basics. The communication should adapt

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[52]I have relied heavily upon the structure and materials in Ericson for this discussion. See Ericson, "Implications," 79–81.

[53]See also J. I. Packer, "The Gospel: Its Content and Communication," in *Down to Earth*, eds. Coote and Stott, 110–11. Packer suggests as basic topics: "God our Maker, man's sin, Christ, faith, repentance, discipleship, new life, new relationships, and new goals."

[54]Charles H. Kraft, "Dynamic Equivalence Churches in Muslim Society," in *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*, ed. by Don M. McCurry (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research and Communications Center, 1979) 119.

[55]Dayton and Fraser, *Planning Strategies*, 360.

rigorously to the Bible and to "the sentence structures . . . (and) national and ideological patterns of the community."[56]

Indoctrination. The indoctrination stage attempts to cover major doctrinal themes. It begins to implement and inculturate the implications of "all Scripture is . . . profitable for doctrine . . ." (2 Tim 3:16; NASB translates the noun as "teaching"). The amount of doctrine covered and the depth of exegesis must be in graduated stages within this phase. Some "niceties of thought . . . characteristic of the Gospel" are appropriate here.[57] Ericson understandably favors his own area of expertise in implying that the NT is the text at this stage.[58] However, Genesis 1–3 is marked by simplicity of expression.[59] It fleshes out by means of "character and story the values and conflicts that are central" to interpersonal relationships between God and man, man and man, and man and Satan.[60] It immediately brings the creation motif to the surface. Paul used this in the early stage of his gospel proclamation among people who had no knowledge of biblical revelation.[61] It is difficult to explain the facts of the gospel[62] without the factual revelation of Genesis 1–3.

This stage should be profoundly characterized by "the contextualization of theology" to the target church.[63] Paul alludes to a form, pattern, or outline of apostolic teaching (cf. Acts 20:27; Rom 6:17; 1 Tim 1:13). This pattern did not necessarily follow the same style of logic used in current American orthodox theology texts. Any theological discussion should be natural to the receptor in terms of jargon, idiom, and principles of arrangement.

Persuasion. God's Word demands a response, and this response must be particular, whether in concept or act. "Systems of persuasion . . . in the language and . . . ideological patterns of the people" are crucial.[64] The persuasion stage is analogous to "reproof, correction . . . instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:17).

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[56]Ericson, "Implications," 81. Ericson vigorously rejects using isolated proof texts at this stage.

[57]Ibid., 82.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Genesis 1–3 will also challenge the best efforts in literary analysis and textual exegesis. See, for example, Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 33–42.

[60]Ibid. See p. 20 for the quotation and related items.

[61]E.g., Acts 14:15ff.; Acts 17:22ff.

[62]E.g., Rom 3:23; 5:12; 1 Cor 15:3–4; et. al.

[63]For a provocative essay see John Jefferson Davis, "Contextualization and the Nature of Theology," in *The Necessity of Systematic Theology*, 2nd edition, ed. by John Jefferson Davis (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) 169–90.

[64]Ericson, "Implications," 82.

Propagation. "The believing community ... must speak to the society" in which it lives.[65] This communication of the message is the embodiment of the "Walk in God's way" biblical motif. It will rebuke, enhance, and interact with the customs and institutions of its society.

The first five stages are "responsible, authoritative presentations" and explanations of canonical Scripture.[66] Propagation is the doing stage. Although it is "somewhat tentative" and hopefully self-correcting, the doing should be an enculturated expression of a Bible-saturated mind (Pss 1:1–2ff.; 119:11; Rom 12:2).[67] The convert at this point compares favorably with "the man of God ... perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim 3:17).

The Thessalonian church. Paul's method with the Thessalonian church and their response illustrate the six stages of contextualization. The team went to the synagogue first—the common ground for penetration (Acts 17:1–3). Jason's house was the site for the information and indoctrination stages (Acts 17:4–7). The indoctrination is striking when one notices the number of major doctrines to which Paul alludes in his letters to Thessalonica, bearing in mind that these allusions assume a broader comprehension than the words of the letters suggest. These people imitated the message and manner of life of the messengers—the persuasion stage (1 Thes 1:5, 6). Their widely known conversion documents the propagation stage (1 Thes 1:8–10). As a result, although Paul's stay was perhaps only five months long, Thessalonica was called "the mother of all Macedon" by one Antipater and through the early Christian centuries earned the title "the orthodox city."

Degrees of Contextualization

The degree of contextualization increases as the message moves from the inerrant original to a rootedness in a 20th-century culture.[70] The original text was already contextualized. Its vocabulary, syntax, and literary structure expressed precisely what God wanted to say to the original audience. That message was the core to be transmitted to

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[65]Ibid.; cf. Matt 5:13–14; Phil 2:12–16.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Cf. Col 3:16; Phil 2:12, 16.

[68]M. N. Tod, "Thessalonica," *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 5, general ed., James Orr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) 2970.

[69]Ibid., 2971.

[70]For a helpful article on the tension and resolution of tension between these focal points, see John R. W. Stott, "The Authority and Relevance of the Bible in the Modern World," *Crux* 16:2 (1980) 11–19.

other cultures. Translation allows for the least amount of variation from the original.

The information stage requires the interpretational process. The three-fold context of 1) the Bible, 2) the messenger, and 3) the recipient makes this stage less concrete than the preceding stage. Contextualized expressions are obviously needed. The indoctrination or systematizing stage calls for contextualized devices for arranging blocks of material. It is instructive to recall the Semitic use of acrostics. Paul's argument with an unnamed opponent provides structure in Romans 2–7.

The amount of contextualization for persuasion exceeds what is needed in doctrinal rearrangement of biblical material. As humanly devised vehicles for internalizing the message increase, so does the risk of distorting the message.

Risk of distortion is greatest when there is an attempt to live in a biblical way. Such living involves adapting to the society in some things (1 Cor 9:19–22; John 17:15; Gal 6:10a). It also involves a separateness and exerting an unwanted godly pressure (Matt 5:13–14; John 17:14, 16; 1 Cor 7:14; Phil 2:15). The persuasion and propagation stages are the most vulnerable, in increasing order, to fostering syncretistic "Christianity."[71]

Problems with Contextualization

1) The term is fluid and complex.
2) Its anthropological and cultural connotations expose treatments that are often more humanistic than biblical.
3) Over-emphasis on implementing the concept could dilute basic evangelistic effort.
4) Preoccupation with contextualization could dull commitment to the doctrine of total depravity, as that doctrine relates to all cultures.
5) The process of thinking about contextualization may be plagued by the effects of a darkened mind, even in the regenerate.[72]

Strengths of Contextualization

1) Contextualization acknowledges the *imago dei* in all men and a corollary truth that there is likely to be something of value in most cultures.
2) An emphasis on the process of contextualization helps the messenger to understand and use the perspective of those in the target culture.

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[71]See Charles H. Kraft, "The Contextualization of Theology," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 14:1 (1978) 35–36.
[72]Jer 17:9; 2 Cor 4:4; 11:2–3.

3) An emphasis on the process, considered in biblical perspective, helps the messenger assess his own values and priorities.
4) The effort to contextualize forces one repeatedly to stress in detail the interrelationships between the absolute authority and dynamic usefulness of God's Word.

Controls for Contextualization

Presuppositionalist Apologetics

The messenger must enter his task on the basis of two presuppositions: 1) his God is the God of the Bible and this God is the only God; 2) the Bible is the only explicit, inerrant revelation of the character and will of God. Therefore, the Bible is the judge for all matters of belief, daily conduct, and culture of all people (Heb 11:6; 1:1–2; 2 Pet 1:19–21).

Some Biblical Absolutes

Imago dei. The fact that everyone possesses the image and likeness of God establishes the profound worth of every individual and gives sufficient reason to treat all people properly (Gen 9:6; James 3:9).

Christian love (1 Cor 13:4–7). The messenger loves individuals in the target culture, realizing that genuine love is active rather than abstract. It will act with self-restraint and kindness, without jealousy, without boasting, without arrogance. It will not act unbecomingly, nor in a self-seeking manner, nor in a reactionary way to provocation, nor will it bear a grudge. It will bear all things; it will trust without being naive; it will be optimistic and endure patiently under stress.[73] The implications and benefits for contextualizing God's message are obvious. This approach is tantamount to a universal language.

Obedience to explicit Bible commands. Biblical commands must be obeyed (cf. 1 Cor 7:10) whether they are transdispensational commands or those especially germane to the church age. A biblical imperative which in principle is universalized in the Bible is binding in all cultures. Antecedents to many imperatives may be found in Genesis 1–11, which is addressed to the whole human race.[74] The Lord's table and baptism by immersion exemplify commands for the church age.

Specific commands not nullified elsewhere in the Bible must be applied universally, and these must be understood in the way the

[73] A free-rendering of 1 Cor 13:4–7, but see NASB and NIV.
[74] J. Robert McQuilken, "Limits of Cultural Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (1980) 117–18.

author intended.[75] The Bible must identify the recipients of specific commands. Since the Scriptures were intended to mold cultures, one should hesitate to use culture, ancient or modern, as the sole reason for muting a command.

Man's total depravity. The unregenerate mind is blinded (2 Cor 4:4). The regenerate mind, whether of the messenger or receptor, is subject to deception (2 Cor 11:3). This may hamper discernment in what constitutes legitimate contextualization of the message.

Theological-Hermeneutical Considerations

Verbal inspiration. A high view of inspiration exerts control over the use of culture in biblical interpretation. In dynamic equivalence interpretation, the enduring principle is sought by laying back the actual words of the text. That principle is then applied to the contemporary culture. Verbal inspiration requires that the words must not be sacrificed to the "enduring principle." To circumvent the words is tantamount to inspiration only of thoughts. This tension exists because God conveyed much truth "in the living context" of a specific language and culture rather than dictating "a series of theological propositions in a celestial language."[76]

A grammatico-historical hermeneutic. This method of interpretation guards against reinterpretation of the plain meaning of the text. Such reinterpretation may intend to contextualize more readily the particular teaching into the target culture.[77] The interpreter must study the historical-cultural context of the Bible in order to understand the intended meaning of the biblical author. Only the intuitive model of hermeneutics can avoid this step.[78]

Clarity of Scripture. The basics for biblical living in any culture are clear when the translation is adequate (Ps 119:105).[79] Some contemporary approaches to issues like divorce, the role of women, and abortion may give precedence to cultural factors over obvious statements of Scripture. However, regardless of cultural factors, the plain sense of Scripture should control interpretation and application.

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[75]Ibid., 121.

[76]Ibid., 115.

[77]Ibid., 124. Sproul dramatizes the problem of re-interpretation along dynamic equivalence lines. He shows that the U.S. constitution was interpreted by the grammatico-historical method until Oliver Wendell Holmes. Since that time, the constitution often has been interpreted by the contemporary climate. See R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977) 45–46.

[78]See 43 above.

[79]J. I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," in *Inerrancy*, ed. by Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 217. Packer cites Calvin, who claimed that God spoke "with a contemptible meanness." On Scripture clarity, also see Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, 15–17.

Distinction between interpretation and application. The author's intended meaning and proper enculturation of that meaning are elucidated by separate processes. Application requires that one understand the cultural context of the contemporary recipient.[80]

A saturated mind, spiritual discernment, and godly counsel. Messengers and receptors benefit from minds massively conditioned by broad biblical content (Pss 1:1–2; 119:11; Heb 5:14). All believers have the potential to discern what is of God (1 John 2:20–29; 4:1–4). By implication, this discernment could extend to proper enculturation of the message. The two parties may provide mutual godly counsel in working together for the spread of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 7:25, 40). These three factors guard against unscriptural contextualization.

<div align="center">CONCLUSION</div>

Summary

This paper has defined "contextualization" as showing the whole Bible to be relevant to the total individual in all his relationships of life. This definition is radically different from the meaning which liberalism assigns to the term. In the biblical survey, principles have been identified which both aid in contextualization and suggest some of its pitfalls. Part III has outlined the stages and risks in the process of contextualization and listed problems, benefits, and controls for using the concept.

Conclusion

"Contextualization" is a legitimate term describing one aspect of cross-cultural propagation of the gospel. It designates a means toward a goal. The term is, therefore, appropriate for use in relation to separatist missionary effort.

This examination of the term has focused upon the cross-cultural setting for contextualization. Several principles for contextualizing the message have surfaced. Due to the fact that people differ within the smallest groups, many of these principles are useful for contextualizing biblical teaching in any community.

[80]Padilla, "Hermeneutics and Culture," 64–65. Padilla suggests a "contextual" approach to hermeneutics because it "adds an appreciation of the role of today's world in conditioning the way the contemporary readers are likely to 'hear' and understand the text." This approach recognizes that the evangelist must "transpose the message from its (historical Biblical) context into the context of present day readers," so that the intended impact for the original biblical audience will be realized in lives in the target culture.