

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF FRONTIER MISSIONS

July-Sept. 1995
Volume 12 Number 3

Contents

- 113 **Editorial: Taking the Bull by the Horns**
Hans M. Weerstra
- 115 **Contextualization that is Authentic and Relevant**
David J. Hesselgrave
- 121 **The Human Universals of Culture: Implications for Contextualization**
A. Scott Moreau
- 127 **Christian History in Cross-Cultural Perspective**
Ralph D. Winter
- 133 **The Tuareg: People of the Veil**
- 135 **Measuring Contextualization in Church and Missions**
Douglas Hayward
- 139 **Great Commission Contextualization**
David J. Hesselgrave
- 145 **The Rejang of Indonesia**
- 147 **Contextualizing the Message Through Use of Case Studies**
Paul J. Fritz
- 155 **Contextualizing the Power and the Glory**
R. Daniel Shaw
- 161 **Should Christians Pray the Muslim Salat?**
Warren C. Chastain

IJFM Editorial Committee

Gary R. Corwin, *SIM/EMIS, USA*
Paul Filidis, *YWAM Research Center, USA*
Todd M. Johnson, *World Evangelization Research Center, USA*
Patrick J. Johnstone, *WEC International, UK*
Bill O'Brien, *Global Center, Samford University, USA*
Edison Queiroz, *COMIBAM, Brazil*

IJFM (ISSN # 0743-2529) was established in 1984 by the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions.

Published quarterly for \$15.00 in Jan/March., April/June, July/Sept and Oct./Dec., by the *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 7665 Wenda Way, El Paso TX 79915.

Editor

Hans M. Weerstra

Associate Editors

Richard A. Cotton

D. Bruce Graham

Managing Editor

Judy L. Weerstra

Editorial Assistant

Rudy Lutz

IJFM Secretary

Barbara R. Pitts

Publisher

Bradley Gill

The *IJFM* promotes the investigation of frontier mission issues, including plans and coordination for world evangelization, measuring and monitoring its progress, defining, publishing and profiling unreached peoples, and the promotion of biblical mission theology. The Journal advocates completion of world evangelization by AD 2000.

The *IJFM* also seeks to promote inter-generational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders, cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology.

Address all editorial correspondence and manuscripts, to 7665 Wenda Way, El Paso Texas, 79915 USA. Phone: (915) 779-5655 Fax: (915) 778-6440.

Subscription Rates: One year (four issues) \$15.00, two years (eight issues) \$28.00, three years (twelve issues) \$40.00. Single copies \$5.00. Payment must be enclosed with orders. Note: Subscriptions are automatically renewed and billed for year by year unless we receive other instructions. When changing your address, please supply both old and new addresses.

Cover Photo: Photo of a Tuareg lad. Used with permission from Adopt-A People Clearinghouse

Copyright © 1995 by the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions

Postmaster: Send address changes to *IJFM*, 7665 Wenda Way, El Paso TX, 79915

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Editorial: Taking the Bull by the Horns

The focus of this entire issue is on the enormous, exciting and crucial challenge of mission contextualization, done in terms of the underlying vision of the final frontiers. Perhaps there is no greater challenge in missions today than proper Gospel contextualization, a task filled with countless complexities.

Dr. Hesselgrave calls attention to the “decontextualization” factor—the process that will help us get an understanding of the authentic Gospel, which is really what we need since that, and nothing short of that, is what we want to take to the unreached nations. Hesselgrave also reminds us of “relevancy,”—the complex factor that will help contextualizers make sense to the target people and recipients.

All of this is absolutely apropos for missions today. The kind of challenges we face in frontier missions, require more than ransack reading, especially about this crucial subject. Our task requires the best contextualization efforts, doing authentic and relevant Gospel communication, and carrying out the best Church planting efforts of its kind, perhaps in all of history.

Furthermore, we must attempt to do it right (without much error) from the start. The lateness of the hour prohibits the luxury of mistakes, (at least not repeating the old ones), unless of course we’re not really serious about the task nor finishing it anytime soon.

Robertson McQuilkin in his powerful booklet *The Great Omission* (Baker 1984), like a modern day prophet, asks the haunting question of why so much still remains to be done. In view of the more than sufficient resources and all time that has elapsed, why have so many Chris-

tian seemingly refused to do much of anything about fulfilling the Great Commission? Why the Great Omission of the Great Commission?

We may not remember the five or so reasons given, plus the clear exposures of each, but one thing is sure, we need to add an additional reason: *Failure of Proper Contextualization*. Literally millions of people, clustered in thousands of people groups (ethnolinguistic peoples as they are now called) still haven’t heard because they have little or no access to the Gospel and so remain without hope, not only because of our lack of concern and love, but because we have failed to properly contextualize the Good News.

Contextualization Failure

History is replete with examples of our failures in this crucial mission necessity. In this issue take a good look at Ralph Winter’s article in on the history of cross-cultural mission communication. It seems that from the birth of the Christian movement, and throughout its expansion, *including* much of mission efforts today, we have failed in proper Gospel contextualization. Except for a few isolated cases here or there, it seems that we have regularly presented the Gospel *a nuestro modo* (according to our own ways), virtually as second nature, without properly contextualizing it for the people *a su modo* (according to their ways). Past failures in contextualizing the Gospel, even dismissing its immense importance, has been one reason the unreached nations and peoples remain unevangelized to this day.

Knowing our Enemy

“But even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age

has blinded, who do not believe lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.” (2 Cor. 4:3-4)

Unless we who are in missions *learn and apply* the all important lessons of contextualization, we only aid and abet this blinding phenomena.

Could it be that good contextualizing takes the bull (the enemy) by the horns and disarms him of his main weapon?

Regardless of our theological slants, or our missiological differences, it is high time to to take action, remove the blinders and become successful at our mission task.

Of course all of this implies an essential prerequisite understanding of the people who would receive the Gospel. “Know your audience” is absolutely crucial for frontier missions. Ignorance of proper contextualization in a frontier mission situation may not only result in wasted effort, but may be outright dangerous to life and limb. Think of the thousands of Muslim and tribal groups and a host of other peoples that still remain to be disciplined. Failure to effectively contextualize the Gospel, or to simply dismiss it as inconsequential, among the majority of the unreached peoples (perhaps in all cases) is to take your life into your hands.

Someone has said: “Today there are no “easy” fields left.” Prior generations, including myself (having been a missionary from 1964 to 1981 in Southern Mexico), were able to go to the easy fields (in terms of worldview distance and the deep rootedness of dominant religions). But for today’s generation the remaining mission fields are more challenging, complex and fraught with danger.

Continued on page 165

Contextualization that is Authentic and Relevant

Contextualization must balance faithfulness to the biblical text with meaningfulness to the audience. The process involves several steps which if overlooked can truncate the task of discipling the nations that still need to be reached.

by David J. Hesselgrave

It has become clear that a wide variety of meanings, methods, and models are attached to the word *contextualization*. Some of them are more consistent with Scripture and the historic Christian faith, and therefore are more authentic, than others. The Theological Education Fund (TEF), originators of the term did not hesitate to speak of “authentic contextualization,” but it seems that for most of them authentic contextualization had to do with contextuality—correctly reading, and relating to the context. Authenticity should have to do with God’s revelation first of all, with faithfulness to the authority and content of the will of God as revealed in his creation, in man’s conscience, and especially, in his Son and his Holy Spirit-inspired Word. We say especially because though all men already share in the testimony of creation, it is the particular task of the Church to share the Christ of whom the Scriptures testify (John 5:39). Of course, in and of itself, authenticity does not assure us that the message will be meaningful and persuasive to our respondents. Therefore we must also speak of effectiveness—of the kind of communication that grows out of an understanding of our respondents in their particular context and out of the active ministry of the Holy Spirit in us and in them.

From this point of view Christian contextualization can be thought of as the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God’s revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and that it is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential

contexts. Contextualization is both verbal and nonverbal and has to do with theologizing, Bible translation, interpretation and application, incarnational lifestyle, evangelism, Christian instruction, church planting and growth, church organization, worship style—indeed with all of those activities involved in carrying out the Great Commission. Something of what is involved can be seen by resorting to the use of a diagram proposed by Eugene Nida and modified somewhat for our purposes. (See Three Culture model on following page.)

The “three-culture model” illustrates that the biblical message came in language and concepts meaningful to sources (prophets, apostles, and Bible authors) and receptors (their hearers and readers) in the Hebrew and Greco-Roman cultures of Bible times. Whether consciously or unconsciously, it has been contextualized to be meaningful to people in cultures in which the Christian message spread, in which the Church emerged, and from which it sends out its cross-cultural missionaries. Their task as well as the task of the churches that grow out of their work, is to interpret (or decontextualize) the biblical message, to limit the intrusion of materials growing out of their own culture.

They then must recontextualize the message to communicate it effectively to respondents in their target culture. The principles and activities involved are complex, as they have already been illustrated in the course of our discussion.

At this point, we will summarize some of the more salient principles before concluding our study with some examples.

The Biblical Text

The adequacy of an attempted contextualization must be measured by the degree to which it faithfully reflects the meaning of the biblical text. Thus, the contextualizer’s initial task is an interpretive one: to determine not only *what* the text says but also the *meaning* of what has been said. It may be useful to think of contextualization as a process with three distinct elements, revelation, interpretation, and application, throughout which a continuity of meaning can be traced.¹

Revelation

The process begins with God’s revelation of His truth in language. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a human author, using linguistic symbols to convey the meaning of that revelation, produced a text. Since the inscription of revealed truth took place under the direct inspiration of God’s Spirit, the correspondence between that which was revealed and the resultant text is guaranteed.

From the interpreter’s vantage point, it must be recognized that the range of possible interpretations which legitimately can be ascribed to the text is limited. Clues to that range of meaning are provided by the generally accepted use of the linguistic symbols at that time, by the author’s particular use of linguistic conventions, and by the original audience’s response, that is, the publicly observable aspect of language of which the author was certainly aware. These factors do not themselves generate meaning. However, they do indicate and limit the specific meaning assigned to the text by the author.

Interpretation

The second element is the reader's or hearer's perception of the intended meaning. The formation of this perceived meaning is affected by the two horizons of the interpretive task—the horizon of the interpreter's own culture and that of the text. The interpreter's own enculturation leaves an indelible stamp on his thought patterns and will certainly affect the way in which he interprets a given message. But in spite of the limitations imposed by the interpreter's ethnocentrism, human language, and the distorting effects of sin, the student of the biblical text is able to gain a more or less accurate understanding of its author's intended meaning. This is possible since the perspicuity of the text and the analytical tools of exegesis, theology and history work to keep the meaning which takes shape in the mind of the interpreter within the scope of meaning prescribed by the text itself.

Application

The third element involves two steps. First, the interpreter formulates the logical implications of his understanding of the biblical text for the culture in which it is to be received and lived out. Second, the interpreter consciously decides to accept the validity of the text's implications or to reject it (or some part of it) and superimpose his own meaning. If he rejects the claims of the text, the continuity of meaning is broken, and he loses touch with the truth embodied in the text. An acceptable contextualization is rendered impossible.

If, on the other hand, the interpreter accepts the claims of the text, he will be able to appropriate its meaning to his own sociocultural environment. The continuity of meaning of the text is unbroken, and Scripture takes on significance in a specific situation. This is not to imply that biblical content *becomes* true. Rather, because it

within the scope of meaning prescribed by the biblical text.

Respondent Peoples and Cultures

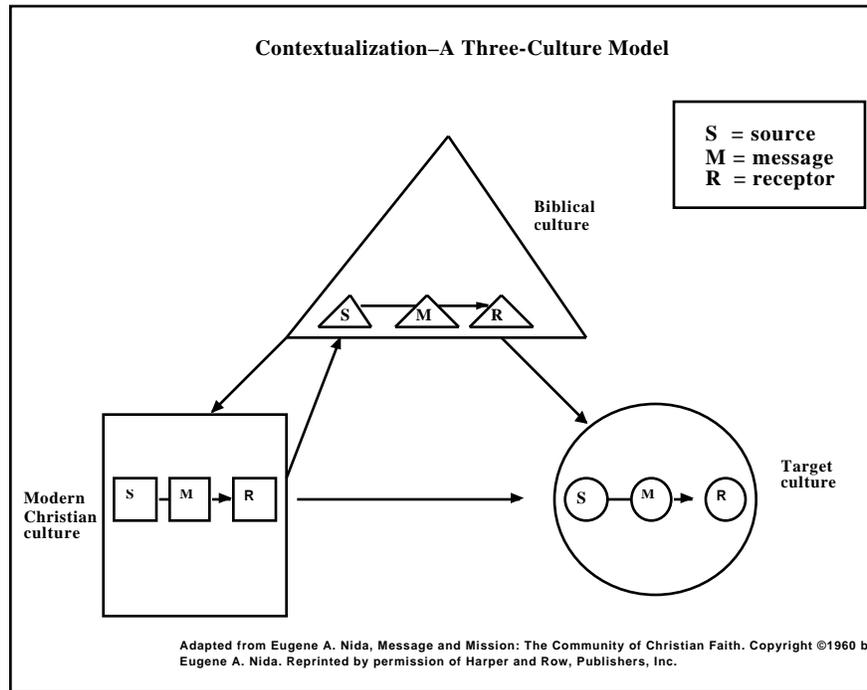
Contextualizers approach contextualization tasks in a variety of ways. The paradigms that they use for doing contextualization tend to reflect the

discipline(s) in which they are schooled (e.g., historical theology, anthropology). When one considers the vast amount of knowledge required to master the relevant communications and social science disciplines, and the diversity of cultural configurations among respondent peoples around the world, one realizes that there is no one correct way of doing contextualization. There are, however, parameters outside of

which Christian orthodoxy will not allow us to venture. In order to understand what is involved in communicating the Christian Gospel consider the following seven-dimension paradigm:

1. Worldviews—ways of viewing the world.
2. Cognitive processes—ways of thinking.
3. Linguistic forms—ways of expressing ideas.
4. Behavioral patterns—ways of acting.
5. Communication media—ways of channeling the message.
6. Social structures—ways of interacting.
7. Motivational sources—ways of deciding.

Eventually all messages must pass through this seven-dimension grid. There is no way contextualization can go around or otherwise escape it. Moreo-



is true it can, if properly understood, be repeatedly applied to specific contexts in an everchanging, multi-cultural world. At this point the interpreter already will have begun to classify biblical content according to its categorical and principial validity. The interpreter may now distinguish between culture-bound aspects of the Christian message which are open to modification from that which is revelatory content which has non-negotiable supracultural validity.

Thus, acceptable contextualization is a direct result of ascertaining the meaning of the biblical text, consciously submitting to its authority, and applying or appropriating that meaning to a given situation. The results of this process may vary in form and intensity, but they will always remain

ver, as the “funnels” between encoder source and the respondent decoder shows, the greater the differences between the source’s culture and the respondent’s culture the greater the impact of these dimensions upon the message and the more critical the contextualization task. Even so, we must keep in mind that these dimensions of intercultural communication interpenetrate one another. They may be separated for analysis, but they combine to form one holistic reality. All of this has been explained in considerable detail in *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*.² Here we can only highlight the basic process.

Ways of Perceiving Reality

The concept of worldview has become commonplace in anthropological, theological, and communication materials, and in missiology. Worldview has been defined as the way we see the world in relation to ourselves and ourselves in relation to the world. Though much more is involved, perhaps it can be simplified in terms of a person’s understandings of supernature, nature, humanity, including time.

Hinduism/Buddhism

The monistic worldview of much of Hinduism and Buddhism offers examples. Hinduism (particularly the Vedanta of Shankara) insists that the only reality is the indescribable Brahman. The phenomenal world that we see and touch is illusory (*maya*); the inner Self (*Atman*) is identical with the Brahman, the human problem is ignorance (*avidya*), as a person is caught in an extended cycle of births and re-births (*samsara*) dependent upon his/her karma. Through enlightenment he can be reabsorbed into Brahman.

Buddhism developed in the Indian context and adopted much the same worldview with its ideas of karma, cycles of birth and rebirth, and vir-

tual ignorance of the true nature of the world. It replaced the idea of “self” with “no-self” (*anatta*) and the idea of Brahman with that of Nirvana. The differences between this understanding and the Christian understanding make it apparent that effectively communicating the Gospel to a Hindu or Buddhist requires contrasting Hindu-Buddhistic and Christian understandings of reality including God, the origin of the universe, the human problem, grace, the meaning of salvation, the importance of history, the nature of spirituality, and the destiny of humanity and the universe. Not to do so would invite misunderstanding and syncretism at the deepest level.

Tribal, Chinese, Naturalist

Analyses of tribal, Chinese, naturalist, and other worldviews reveal a similar necessity of “worldview contextualization.” We begin to appreciate the wisdom of Hans-Reudi Weber when he uses the larger biblical narrative to catechize and evangelize in Indonesia. If he did not, the Indonesians might simply fit bits and pieces of Christian information into the worldview picture of their own beliefs and myths.

Ways of Thinking

About the time of World War II, the anthropologist Franz Boas wrote *The Mind of Primitive Man*.⁴ After the war, the philosopher F. S. C. Northrop contrasted Eastern and Western ways of knowing in *The Meeting of East and West*.⁵ They were not alone in highlighting the different ways in which people “think” and “know.” Works emanating from various disciplines converged to demonstrate that while all cultures have their logic, the logic of the various cultures is not entirely the same. E. H. Smith explained those differences by elaborating three ways of knowing:

- 1) The conceptual—corresponding to Northrop’s cognition by postulation.

- 2) The psychological—corresponding to Northrop’s cognition by intuition.
- 3) The concrete relational in which “life and reality are seen pictorially in terms of the active emotional relationships present in a concrete situation”—more or less corresponding to Boas’s “primitive” thinking.⁶

Smith’s approach dispelled the naive notion that there is one “proper” way of thinking and even the more sophisticated idea that there are only two ways of thinking. He not only elaborated three ways of thinking; he clarified the relationship between them and insisted that people of *all* cultures think in these three ways. Differences among cultures in this regard, Smith said, are due to the *priority* given to one or another type of thought. Since all peoples think in these three ways, mutual respect is in order and cross-cultural understanding can be achieved.

Insights such as these constitute the stuff of which authentic and effective contextualizations are made. Armed with an understanding of the penchant for concrete relational thinking among Africans, Chinese, and various tribal peoples, the contextualizer will give more attention to the importance of history, myths, stories, parables, analogies, aphorisms, pictures, and symbols in communicating within these contexts. He will understand the psychological processes of Indians, the contextualizer will adjust to an approach to thinking and knowing that invests a kind of authority in the enlightenment experience that refuses to invest in any product of postulational thinking, whether it emanates from science or Scriptures. Knowing the classical Muslim mind, the contextualizer will be better prepared for Muslim willingness—and even desire—to engage in debate concerning the relative merits of the claims of Christ and Muhamma, including the integrity of the Koran versus that of the Bible.

Ways of Expressing Ideas

Arguments having to do with the degree to which languages differ from each other and the significance of those differences is a crucial one. If Sapir and Whorf are correct in concluding that linguistic differences are deep and abiding, cultural gaps become more difficult to bridge, and the common origin of man and culture in the divine tends to be obscured. On the other hand, if Chomsky and Longacre are correct that deep structures of languages betray significant similarities, cultural gaps can be crossed more readily, and the divine origin of man and culture is more readily seen. The debate, therefore, is most significant to the Christian believer. We assume that there is something to be learned from both emphases, and we will underscore several practical lessons that can be learned from them.

First, a simple truism: People everywhere like to communicate in their own “heart” language—in the language in which they were enculturated.

Second, though individual differences result in varying aptitudes for language learning, almost anyone can learn another language.

Third, in learning a receptor language we should remember that there is no one-to-one correlation between languages. Fourth, not only can we learn a receptor language; we can learn from it. European languages reflect the primary importance of time. A person was, is, or will be sick. Languages which do not require this distinction between past, present, and future may seem strange to us, but they are instructive at the very point of their strangeness.

Ways of Acting

An entirely new dimension is added to our understanding as we examine examples of the many behavioral conventions through which people of the world communicate. Specialists refer

to still other types of nonverbal communication, but kinesics, proxemics, and paralanguage are perhaps the most important. Contextualized communication, then, involves not only *what* we say but *how* we say it. Beyond that, it involves what we communicate when we say nothing or do anything. Even though, as we have said, the contextualization models we use will focus on verbal communication, that should not be construed to mean such behavioral patterns as those involved in gestures, rituals, positioning, tone of voice and the like stand apart from the contextualization process. In fact, when one *reads* Luther one can almost *hear* the tone of voice and *see* the intensity of the man who communicated Reformation truth to sixteenth-century Europe. Also when debating with a Muslim one must know too much agitation or any display of rancor or disdain will undermine the argument of the Christian advocate.

Ways of Channeling Communications

Though he held to stipulated definitions of “media” and “message” (the change of pace occasioned in human affairs), Marshall McLuhan shattered forever the notion that messages can be “put into” any medium and “come out” intact, untainted, and untouched. Not only do media affect the message; in McLuhan’s view they constitute the message. “The medium *is* the message,” said McLuhan.⁷ Literacy made it possible to communicate without the involvement of face-to-face involvement. Moveable type promoted sequential learning and government by law. Electronic media, especially television, are remaking the world into a global village.

But in less grandiose ways, attention to the predispositions and preferences of a respondent culture can help all of us to develop sensitivity in media selection and use. Initiators of programmed textbooks for theological educa-

tion in Africa discovered that even highly motivated African pastors dropped out of the program after several lessons. For one thing the approach used in the textbooks did not “make sense.” Students were required to work out certain problems before looking in the back of the book for the correct answers. From their point of view (concrete relational thinking) it was illogical to have to work out the problems if the answers were already known. For another thing, the books were singularly uninteresting because they contained no pictures. To include pictures and illustrations to the Western mind, would seem a simple thing, but a variety of studies indicate that this is not so.

Bruce L. Cook did extensive research in Papua, New Guinea, designed to answer the question, “What kinds of pictures communicate most effectively with people who can’t read?” He states his conclusion as “rules of thumb,” and his very first “rule” flies in the face of the Western tendency to overlook cultural differences in order to reach a mass audience. It is this: “Sociological and educational differences have the most effect on picture understanding. Picture content is more important than picture style, and pictures of people are most easily understood in non-literate cultures.”⁸

Ways of Interaction

People not only have ways of *acting* in accordance with culturally determined rules of conduct and meaning, they also have ways of *interacting* with each other on the basis of social conventions and understandings. The conventions of social structure dictate which channels of communication are open and which are closed, who talks to whom and in what way, and what kind of messages will be most prestigious and persuasive.

Lucien Pye tells of an election campaign in Jahore State, Malaya, involving two Westernized political candidates.⁹

One of them took his message “to the people” via rallies which attracted large crowds in village after village. Since his reception was so enthusiastic it was assumed, by many that he would defeat his opponent by a wide margin on election day. The election, however, was won by his equally Westernized opponent who had engaged in little direct campaigning. Why? Because in conducting his campaign the popular candidate had bypassed the opinion leaders in the villages he had visited. This omission resulted in distrust and cost him the election. Obviously, success in politics in Malaya is more than “taking your case to the people” or “competing in the open marketplace of ideas.”

Perhaps the classic case of a society where social conventions rule verbal and nonverbal communication is traditional China. About two and one-half millennia ago Confucius articulated the idea of the “rectification of names” and the ways in which rulers and subjects, fathers and sons, husbands and wives, and others should relate to each other. To this day, contextualized communication in Chinese culture either takes these conventions into account or runs afoul of them. This helps to explain why a tract written for individualistic Americans and given a gloss translation for Chinese with their emphasis on family relationships and obligations becomes more of an embarrassment to the Gospel than an embellishment of it.

Ways of Deciding

One reason for communicating interculturally is to encourage people to reach certain decisions which grow out of information and motivations which will be reflected in changed attitudes, allegiances, and courses of action. To a great degree the missionary task can be summed up in Paul’s words, “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord we try to persuade men” (2 Cor.

5:11). But who is qualified to make decisions? What kind of decisions can they make? How are decisions made? The answers to such questions are largely dictated by one’s culture. In many cultures the decisions of children and even older “students” are not really taken seriously. It is only when young people have finished their education and are prepared to settle down and support a family that they are considered ready for serious decision making. To return to the context of traditional China once again, consider the case of an American missionary who presses a Chinese for conversion. Once the decision has been made the missionary is elated. But some days (or weeks, or months) later the Chinese “convert” does an about-face and gives evidence of a lapse of faith.

Conclusion

Christian contextualization that is both authentic and effective is based on careful attention to both the biblical text and respondent cultures. Authenticity is primarily a matter of interpreting the texts in such a way as to arrive, as closely as possible, at the intent of the author through the application of sound hermeneutical and exegetical principles. Biases occasioned by the interpreter’s own culture, can be gradually overcome and in that sense the message can be de-contextualized. Effectiveness is primarily a matter of contextualizing or shaping the Gospel message to make it meaningful and compelling to the respondents in their cultural and existential situation. Both the decontextualization and the recontextualization tasks are best accomplished by persons who are “expert” in the cultures and languages involved, who understand cultural dynamics, and who ideally are themselves bicultural. But both tasks are so important that all who labor in biblical interpretation, and all who undertake to minister cross-culturally, should make

an effort to understand the cultural dimensions of these tasks.

Endnotes and References

1. Percy B Yoder, *Towards Understanding the Bible* (Newton, Kans.: Faith and Life, 1978). 22-23.
2. David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).
3. Robert Redfield, *The Primitive World and its Transformations* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1957), 85-86.
4. Franz Boas, *The Mind of the Primitive Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1938).
5. F.S.C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: MacMillan, 1953).
6. Cf. Edmund Perry, “*The Gospel in Dispute*” (New York: Doubleday, 1958), pp 99-106.
7. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).
8. Bruce L. Cook, *Understanding Pictures in Papua New Guinea* (Elgin, Ill.: David C Cook Foundation, 1981).
9. Lucian Pye, “Communication Operation in Western Societies,” in *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication*, 3d ed., ed. Bernard Berelson and Morris Janowitz (New York: Free Press, 1966), 612-20.

Dr. David Hesselgrave served as a missionary in Japan for twelve years. He is professor emeritus of the School of World Missions at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

[Editor’s Note: With permission this article is adapted and revised from Chapter 15 of *Contextualization, Meanings, Methods and Models* by David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommens, published by Zondervan Publishing House.]

The Human Universals of Culture: Implications for Contextualization

A three level model of how man, his nature and culture helps mold the contextualizer's task: Effective communication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

by A. Scott Moreau

No matter how hard man tries, it is impossible for him to divest himself of his own culture, for it has penetrated to the roots of his nervous system and determines how he perceives the world. Most of culture lies hidden and is outside voluntary control making up the warp and weft of human existence. Even when small fragments of culture are elevated to awareness, they are difficult to change, not only because they are so personally experienced but because people cannot act or interact at all in any meaningful way except through the medium of culture¹

It has long been recognized by the social sciences that we are creatures made for culture and by culture. We cannot escape culture just as we cannot escape our physical bodies. Understanding culture is at the heartbeat of the missionary enterprise² Certainly it is also of core concern in the effort to contextualize the Gospel. At the outset we should note that the goal of contextualization is not to make the Gospel relevant: it is relevant whether or not we recognize it. Rather, it is to enable a people to understand the significance of the Gospel in terms which they can understand. On occasion, this will involve bringing new terms into a culture. However, by and large, it generally focuses on communicating or embodying the truths of the Gospel in a particular people through their language, thought forms, worldview, and way of life. Hence, the process of contextualization cannot be divorced from the process of understanding culture.

What is Culture?

There are almost as many definitions

of culture as there are students of culture.³ It is not difficult to see why! The more deeply we take something for granted, and the more intimately it is tied to our thought processes and ways of living, and the less it is on a conscious level, the more difficult it is to define it. In the broadest sense, we may consider culture to be the diverse and dynamic pattern for living which is shared by a people and transmitted from one generation to another as part of the fabric of life. Without drawing out the metaphor too far, we may consider culture as a type of mental software.⁴ More specifically, we may define culture as a total complex, involving 1) our world view, which refers to a set of assumptions through which we filter our perceptions of life 2) a methodological plan embodying functional, structural, and cognitive elements for applying those assumptions in interpreting and explaining everything around us as well as determining how to live in the world; and 3) the manifestations of the assumptions and methodological plan, seen in the system of living exhibited by the people of the culture (the symbolic and ecological elements.)

Because culture is a transmitted pattern, it is dynamic rather than static. Isolated or alienated individuals within a culture may change rapidly, but the culture as a whole changes far more slowly. Because we are reared in an ethos of culture, we naturally tend to assume that our culture is the best or right one. On a practical level, one result of this is that the members of a given culture will be predisposed to prefer certain methods of systematizing their religious views or doctrine over others.

Culture is not monolithic. There seem to be three levels of culture recognized by social scientists as well as Christian communicators (see diagram.)⁵ The first level consists of the universals we all share as humans. We will explore these later, but they are the dimensions or elements found in every human society, and include things such as language, institutions, values, sociability, and so on.

The second level is that of cultural particulars. These are defined and developed in every cultural pattern. They are the means by which a particular culture meets its universal human needs. While there are a bewildering array of approaches to the study of culture, there are commonalities which every discipline recognizes, as Edward T. Hall notes,

In spite of many differences in detail, anthropologists do agree on their characteristics of culture: it is not innate, but learned; the various facets of culture are interrelated—you touch a culture in one place and everything else is affected; it is shared and in effect defines the boundaries of different groups. Culture is man's medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function.⁶

Contextualization, following the lead of anthropology, focuses most of its attention at this level. It is our contention, however, that contextualization can best be accomplished at this level

The Human Universals of Culture

only if it is well-grounded in the prior level of human universals.

The third level of culture reflects the fact that each member of a particular culture chooses what elements of the culture to accept and what to reject and has varying skills in applying those elements (a sort of “cultural competency” which may parallel “linguistic competency.”) This is the level of individual idiosyncrasy. While our diagram shows only three levels, certainly many further subdivisions are possible. These may be national, linguistic, or racial. Within a culture, further divisions may be made among groupings of extended families or clans, which in turn may be divided into nuclear elements before reaching the individual level. However many levels are shown, the fact that all draw from a pool of human universals is not changed.

Human Universals

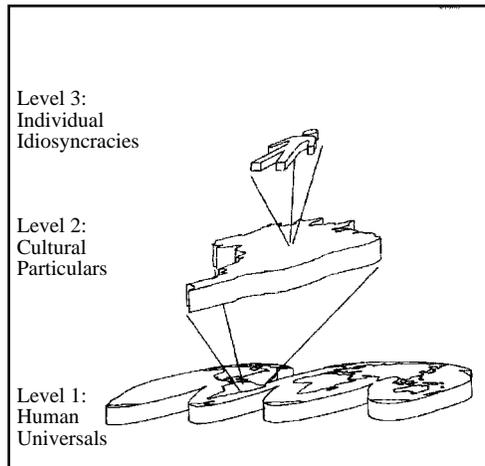
People of all races and ethnic identities share the fact and experiences of being human. Universals found in every culture include, among other things, language, thought, the process of enculturation, myth frameworks, authority structures, and the many institutions necessary for survival of human societies (eg, kinship, economics, education politics, recreation, various types of association, health, transportation, etc..) Proper contextualization in any single culture or sub-culture must be founded on awareness of the human universals and their manifestations within the local context. Those universals help to shed light on the particular setting and ground local expressions of Christian truth in the larger scale of God’s created order. Thus, these universals will be important for the contextualizer whether he or she is working among an unreached people group in Mali or hardened secularists in New York city.

Image of God

The first and perhaps the most signi-

cant universal is that all people are made in the image of God. The debate among theologians over the meaning of “in God’s image” has endured for millennia. One of the more comprehensive views has been concisely summarized by Millard Erickson:

The image refers to the elements in the makeup of man which enable the fulfillment of his destiny.... The image itself is that set of qualities that are required for these relationships and this function to take



place. They are those qualities of God which, if reflected in man, make worship, personal interaction, and work possible.... Man qua man has a nature that includes the whole of what constitutes personality or selfhood: intelligence, will, emotions. This is the image in which man was created, enabling him to have the divinely intended relationship to God and to fellow man, and to exercise dominion.⁷

The implications of being made in God’s image for contextualization are manifold. For example, all humans are built to reflect God in all that we are. Being created in God’s image, vertical communication is not only possible, it is vitally necessary for us as human beings. All of us have an in-built need and desire to connect to the One we image. Thus, we exhibit not only physical needs but “soulful” ones as well. Appropriate contextualization will recognize and respond to this need found in all people. Another implication of being in God’s image is that despite the

bewildering variety found among the world’s cultures, godly values are built into all people. Even though the people of any culture may choose to ignore them or try to suppress them, they will surface as points of contact through which the Gospel may pass and be starting points for the contextualizing process

Purpose of Existence

Intimately linked to being made in God’s image is the universal that all people have a purpose for their existence (Gen. 1:27; Isa. 43:7.) We were created to exercise God’s rule over the earth and all of its creatures, and we are separated from the rest of creation by virtue of that purpose. All of creation, then, is to be utilized by humankind in meeting our needs. Before the fall, this would have been done sinlessly. Thus, we have a physical purpose for being here which is linked to living in a godly fashion with the rest of the created order, utilizing and harnessing it to meet not only our needs as people but the needs of all that God has created. Contextualization in any setting must grapple with the issues of proper use of resources and the human responsibility in maintenance of the harmony of the created order. This has both positive and negative connotations. The former seeks to ensure that created resources are utilized to the benefit of the local people. The latter emphasizes prevention of irreparable exploitation and greed which destroys the harmony which God has given.

Glorifying God

Further, and more significantly in terms of purpose, we were made by God to glorify Him (Isa. 43:7). Contextualization in any setting must set forth the Gospel message that we are more than illusion or random specks of dust on a ball of dirt—we have both dignity and a reason for living. We are created to glorify God, and are capable of doing so within the constraints of the culture in which we grow up. While it is true that

our culture dominates us, it is also true that we have been given both the responsibility and the ability to respond in ways which glorify the Creator and reflects his Kingship over the created order. Every human being is significant, and all seek to connect to the fact of their significance. They do so in a bewildering variety of fashions. Contextualization should seek to harness the energies used in searching for significance and channel it in the direction which gives greatest satisfaction—glorifying the Creator through exercising the gifts bestowed on the creation.

Our Physical Nature

A third human universal is that all people of all cultures are physical in nature (Gen. 2:7.) As obvious as this is, it still carries implications which cannot be ignored. As physical creatures we basic foundational needs which all cultures must face: food and water, shelter (whether a cave, cardboard shack, or castle), health (both maintenance of health and healing), and reproduction. The physical nature of our environment will have an impact on our culture, worldview, and communication patterns, a reality well recognized by environmental anthropologists. Contextualization efforts in every culture must account for the physical nature of humanity and the impact of that reality on life. This has implications for a multitude of issues, including the pace of life, the rhythms, the means used to ensure health, issues of appearance and attraction, and so on. Contextualized theology must acknowledge the fact of our physical nature and grapple with the implications of that nature as a means of glorifying the one who chose to create us as physical beings.

Human Sexuality

Intimately linked to our physical nature is our sexuality. We were given our sexuality at the time of creation—it did not come after the fall,

and is thus part of God's normative plan for all people. There are biblical regulations which govern the sexuality of all people (e.g., celibacy outside of marriage.) Being created a two-gender species, contextualizing the practices of Christian living involves not only dealing with the variety of gender-related roles but in the sharpness in distinguishing those roles between the genders.⁸ For example, the current wrestling in American evangelicalism over

Contextualizers must grapple with the fact of man's fallenness... and the ultimate goal of God's restoration of the created order.

women's roles in ministry is as much cultural as it is biblical, and understanding that fact may be a helpful step in making progress in the ongoing debate. The same will be true in working among a frontier people, who will carry their gender-role preconceptions into churches planted among them.

A final universal implication of our physical nature is the inevitability of death, a fact facing all cultures. Some choose to deal with it through ancestral belief systems, others through denial of physical reality, others by reincarnation, and others by implicit denial of death. All cultures have a myriad of rituals (e.g., burial, mourning, anniversaries) associated with death and in each case, a biblical perspective must be brought to bear on the cultural perspective.

Thinking Creatures

A fourth human universal is that all people are thinking (psychological and cognitive) creatures (Gen. 2:16:18. Adam understood and was able to

choose his own path in response to God's command. We also see Adam's ability to name all the animals (2:19-20) as evidence that people are endowed with psychological creativity and the ability to exercise it in appropriate ways. Being made in the image of God as thinking creatures implies that communication among peoples of different cultures is not only possible, it is necessary.

Thus, for example, the theological reflection of a multi-cultural community of people can benefit every participant as each shares the image of God and creatively reflects that image in culturally meaningful ways.

Linked to both the physical and cognitive nature of people is that we are developmental as a species. Every human in every culture progresses through phases of development as a person. This does not mean that the phases are the same in every culture. However, the fact that all cultures recognize development (e.g., through rites of passage such as naming or initiation ceremonies) must be recognized by those engaged in contextualizing.

Also linked to our psychology is the reality of emotions found in every culture. They may be experienced and expressed differently, but they are a common human phenomena. A contextualized mission approach will engage the fact of emotions and emotional expression in a culture in a way that will enable a people to emotionally connect with their God.

A Context of Relationships

Growing out of our sharing God's image, all people are social creatures (Gen. 2:18-25). We exist in the context of relationships. People need other people to live as God intends us to live. The sociological myth of independent individualism found in Western cultures, encroaching in urban environments world wide is a myth, in the sense of being an untrue perspective. We

are created as relational beings and engaging in the process of relating in a way that fulfills our God-given social needs. This needs to be faced by contextualizers in every culture.

Our social nature is not limited to people—we are also socially related to God (whether we acknowledge His existence or not) and the means by which this relationship is to be experienced is at the heartbeat of contextualizing mission theology and methods.

In addition to the general social sense of relationship, man and woman are creatures of a special relationship which engages our social, psychological, physical and spiritual dimensions i.e. marriage. This relationship, as established by God, enables the propagation of the race as well as meeting needs of intimacy built into us as people. Men and women are uniquely fitted to each other socially, biologically, and psychologically. Contextualizers in every culture must address the issues of marriage, which range from what is acceptable as a ceremony which concretizes the union to the manner of relating within the marriage to the significance of marriage (e.g., whether it is necessary) to the importance of children to the number of spouses, etc.

Our Fallenness

On the negative side, Scripture presents a perspective not acknowledged in the social sciences, namely, all people have to deal with the fact of living in a fallen world—and death is our ultimate reminder. Biblically speaking, the world is not just composed of fallen individuals. The story of Genesis 4-11 indicates clearly that the whole created order is fallen, and the people as well as the systems which people create are affected. They are systems which dominate us and constrain us towards death rather than life.⁹ This death is not just physical, it is also spiritual (our relationship with God), psychological (to ourselves) and social (our relationship

with others.) We may debate the extent of the influence of sin on those who have been declared to be new creatures in Christ, but the fact of degeneration is one all people and all cultures will face until Christ's return. Contextualizers must grapple with the fact of man's fallenness, the means of confronting it (indeed, whether or not it should be confronted is debated in evangelical circles), and the ultimate goal of God's restoration of the created order.

In light of this, all people and all cultures stand in need of redemption. Contextualizers in every culture will wrestle with ways to make this element of the Gospel message clear to the members of the culture. Tied to this is the fact that we are all capable not only of being deceived but we all too often actively participate in the deception of Satan, who stands as a enemy to all cultures in the world. At the same time, God's work on the cross stands as a paradigm that the best efforts of Satan can be turned upside down and used by God to accomplish His purposes. Therefore, when contextualizers see things in a culture tainted by deception, they need to look also for ways God can turn what they see upside down by "taking the offensive and overcoming evil with good" (paraphrase of Rom. 12:21.)

Another important given in all cultures is that all people have access to general revelation about God (Rom. 1:20-21). The self-revelation of God has been manifest since the creation of the world. It is through God's visible creation that His invisible attributes are clearly displayed. As a result, humankind has no excuse for denying God. "This result of God's self-manifestation in His creation is not a natural knowledge of God on men's part independent of God's self-revelation in His Word, a valid though limited knowledge, but simply the excuselessness of men in their ignorance."¹⁰ Through general revelation, people can see their need for God, but because of sin, perception is distorted and

we all too often deny our need. Thus, it is not possible to construct a full-scale 'natural' theology with which all humankind will agree. Even so, several implications for the contextualizing process should be seen. For example, there will always be a common ground or a point of contact between the believer and the nonbeliever, or between the Gospel and the thinking of the unbeliever. All persons have a knowledge of God, though that might be denied or suppressed (especially in more secularized environments.) Another implication is that there is a reality of some knowledge of divine truth outside the special revelation. Further, we may gain a clearer understanding about the specially revealed truth by examining the generally revealed truths. We may understand in more complete detail the greatness of God, and comprehend more fully the image of God in the human race, when we attend to general revelation. This should be considered a supplement to, not a substitute for, special revelation. God is just in condemning those who have never heard the Gospel in the full and formal sense. No one is completely without opportunity. All have known God, if they have not effectually perceived him, it is because they have suppressed the truth. Thus all are responsible and in every culture contextualization will need to declare this as a truth from God's special revelation of Himself.

Conclusion

The list of human universals is not intended to be exhaustive, but suggestive. As has been seen, the issues related to culture, what we share in common as human beings, and the process and goals of contextualization are rich, complex, and multi-faceted. The fact that every human has been enculturated is predicated on our nature as learning beings who are able to learn a multitude of adaptation systems. The fact that we share significant universals

serves as an encouragement that relevant contextualizing is not only possible but necessary. It also impels us to engage in contextualization in our own culture. One danger of laying out human universals as we have done is that of reducing the contextualizing task—of striving for uniformity in the answers to the problems every culture faces. The common ground of solution is Christ's work in the incarnation, cross, and resurrection—a fact of history of relevance to all peoples and cultures at all times in human history. The multifaceted nature of human cultures serves as a reminder of the reality of a multifaceted application of that work in ways which makes sense to people clustered in local cultures.

Endnotes

1. Edward Hall. *The Hidden Dimension* (New York; Anchor Books; 1983), p 188.

2. Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 1988), p.59.
3. In 1952, Alfred Louis Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge, Mass.:The Museum, 1952), pp. 38-40; 149 brought together for analysis at least 164 definitions, and use close to 300 definitions in the book.
4. Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*(New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 991) p. 4.
5. See Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations*, p.6 and David J. Hesselgrave, *Cross-Cultural Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. 1984.)
6. Edward Hall, *Beyond Culture* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1981), pp. 16-17.
7. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), pp. 513-4.
8. See the discussion in Hofstede- *Cultures and Organizations*, ch.
9. Walter Wink, in *Engaging the Powers:*

Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), translates *kosmos* ("world") as "domination system" and presents a penetrating analysis of ways our cultures not only shape us, but dominates and constrains us in ungodly directions.

10. C. E. B Cranfield, *Romans International Critical Commentaries* (Edinburgh: J & T Clark, 1975), p. 116

Dr. A. Scott Moreau is Associate Professor of Missions/Intercultural Studies at Wheaton College, teaching in the areas of Contextualization, Intercultural Communications, and Folk Religions. He served for 10 years in Africa, primarily teaching in a seminary in Nairobi, Kenya. He is currently working as the general editor of The Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions, due out from Baker Book House in 1998.

Christian History in Cross-Cultural Perspective

A great deal of Donald A. McGavran's insight can be traced to the unique advantage he had of growing up in India as a third generation missionary.

by Ralph D. Winter

There before McGavran's eyes were not only the expectable ethnic and linguistic divisions of the sub-continent (in which every given geographical area has its own area culture)—what is called *horizontal segmentation*. He early encountered the *vertical segmentation* of the world's most rigidly stratified system of social classes. The very fact that India's castes long constituted a highly visibly quasi-official structure meant that his perspective as he traveled in other parts of the world remained highly sensitized to social barriers (those barriers arising from other than racial and linguistic differences), even in places where no overt social categorization of such things existed. No wonder he has been accused of reading into a situation social differences that did not exist. In some such cases he has merely pointed out differences people wished to ignore. As a matter of fact, many nations too long have looked down on India's overt social prejudice without recognizing their own covert castes.

In any case, one of the durable common denominators among those associated with McGavran in the amorphous church growth school of thought is a parallel sensitivity to the central importance of the profound cultural diversity within the community of mankind.

This sensitivity is the basis of what may be called here cross-cultural perspective. Cross-cultural perspective is what makes possible contextualization. Cross-cultural perspective goes to the very heart of Christian theology and historiography as these disciplines have developed across the centuries, since it sheds new light on the problem of unity versus uniformity in historic dimensions.

Examples of the Problem

A number of years ago representatives of the Lutheran World Federation went to great lengths to persuade the Batak Christians of Northern Sumatra to subscribe to the "Non-Altered" Augsburg Confession.

One millennium earlier, on another mission frontier in the middle of another island (not nearly as large as Sumatra) a small group of men earnestly tried to persuade a Celtic Christian leader that he ought to subscribe to the Roman way of acting out the Christian faith.

In these two cases the external advocates of uniformity were only partially successful, since the group being persuaded possessed a good deal of autonomy and naturally preferred its own way of doing things. In both cases, unfortunately, the external advocates were not themselves readily able to distinguish between the universal and the particular elements in their own faith.

Historically speaking, as in the period preceding the Protestant Reformation, advocates of a foreign formulation of Christianity are at first successful and do not until much later face the insurgent nationalism of the surviving cultural tradition which may eventually demand its own indigenous Christian formulation.

In the Philippines, for example, the Roman tradition swept in along with a colonial power, and while the Roman witnesses to the faith are to be credited with the fact that a great amount of painstaking and quite enlightened mission work was conducted throughout the whole of the Philippines, there eventually came a time when an immense sector of the

Philippines church under Bishop Aglipay declared its independence from Rome in much the way that Luther had. To this day the Philippine Independent Church endures to this day as the largest non-Roman church in the country.

These are only a few of many possible examples which demonstrate one of the most unique and surprising things about Christianity—that it is by nature a faith that both welcomes and encourages cultural pluralism. In this sense, if Christianity must be called a religion at all, it is the only world religion of this kind. This little understood fact is clearly perceived only by means of what is also rare: *cross-cultural perspective*. First, let us discuss what cross-cultural perspective is, and then proceed to indicate some of the bright new hues which Christian history takes on when viewed from cross-cultural perspective.

A Biblical-Historical Analysis

Cross-cultural perspective is not a new skill forced upon us by the sudden smallness of the modern world. You might say that God has always had cross-cultural perspective since He was the One who was pleased to create the diverse *ta ethne*—the various tribes and tongues and families of mankind. But fallen man has never clearly seen things from God's point of view. It is almost a truism that the languages of man, apart from those affected by Christian insight, rarely if ever possess words for mankind in the generic sense. Typically, languages divide the world into *us* and *them*. We are the humans and those others are the non-humans. We are the Jews and they are the Gentiles. Even the most

primitive tribes employ this semantic distinction.

Yet man has not always been content with this kind of implicit blasphemy. We recall how exercised Alexander the Great was over the diversity of his new far-flung domain. He launched one of history's most novel experiments when he married off thousands of his own soldiers to Middle Eastern maidens. The Romans allowed a great diversity in their empire for practical reasons, but they never solved the problem of diversity on a theoretical level, and never surmounted the ethnocentrism of their hierarchical political structure. It is not surprising that the Roman mentality, perhaps bolstered by the earlier Alexandrian idealism would encourage the development of a culturally monolithic Christianity. There have been great arguments about where the center of Christendom should be located—Rome, Constantinople, Rheims, Canterbury—but the assumption is always that there has to be some one specific place as a center. This in turn implies cultural uniformity.

One of the most striking uniquenesses of the Bible is that it both recognizes the endemic xenophobia of Jew against Greek and nation against nation, but it goes on to propose a breath-taking solution. It says in effect that God can not only speak Hebrew, but Greek; that is, God was not only able to reveal Himself among and to the Hebrews in their language and culture, but the essential revelation was just as capable of being clothed in the words and cultural forms of the pagan Greeks.

Striking Parallels

Literally hundreds of parallels can be traced between almost everything that is said or done in the early Christian tradition and what is found in the environment of the ancient world. In its theological terminology, for example, Christology became a strong rope of three weak strands. One strand derived from the Hebrew apocalyptic concept of a Messiah. Another was the term for Lord (*kurios*), which had long been employed by the mystery cults of Eastern origin and also in

the Roman emperor worship. The third prominent strand was the Greek philosophical concept of the Word (*logos*). Each one of these key words in the Bible is thus paralleled by an identically pronounced word in the corresponding non-Christian environment.

These parallels between the Bible and the ancient world have been disputed by some who feel it is desperately important to maintain that early Christianity in all its forms was entirely unique. But those who would attempt to chip away at specific parallels between Christian and pagan forms are not only fighting a losing battle, but—in terms of cross-cultural perspective—are also fighting the wrong battle.

For one thing, we must not suppose that the message of Christianity, clothed in the new garments of the Greek world, was damaged by this new clothing. This supposition is the consistent and understandable, but erroneous assumption of many Jews (even many Christian Jews) in ancient times and still of today. Some Christian scholars have stumbled on the cultural differences and classified Paul's gospel a new religion rather than the essential Jewish revelation in Greek clothing.

The attempt to employ cross-cultural perspective does not in itself guarantee that there will be no distortion—it does not insist on the real possibility of distortionless cross-cultural communication. However, we must not be startled that so many pagan words or forms were employed, or that it seems really possible for the Christian message in its essential integrity to be faithfully transmitted. Even those who are most eager to detect the employment of new forms must admit that the new forms are generally given a new twist and a modified meaning. Where no modification has taken place, the unmodified meaning of the adopted forms is not necessarily something which is in conflict with Christian truth.

We are not suggesting that there is something so magical about the Christian message that post-biblical attempts to clothe it in new words and forms have

always been successful. This is very important to say. The fact that contextualization or "reclotting" can be accomplished, that it has been done, that it must be done, does in no way imply that the task is easy, or that it involves no dangers, nor does this mean that beyond the Bible there have never been any mistakes in the process. As a matter of fact, there are likely always mistakes in the process, mistakes which may take centuries even partially to rectify. This fact is the reason why the various national churches of the world today must be dependent upon each other: they all are involved in some misunderstandings—but not the same ones, and in symbiotic fellowship together their inadequacies tend to point each other out.

No Simple Task

There seems to be neither a simple nor an infallible way to determine whether a given utilization of a pagan form has been proper or entirely successful. Here we see the openendedness of the continuing need to evangelize and to re-express the faith. The adoration of the Virgin as a case in point, which first gained momentum in the context where the cult of the virgin Diana was already prominent, may not have been as helpful an employment of pre-existing ritual and belief as the comparatively harmless adoption of December 25th as the birthday of a Son in place of a celebration for the sun. Yet however safely removed the celebration of a December 25th Christmas now is from any original pagan connotations, it must be noted that we are still obligated to a constant and unrelenting attempt to obtain or maintain an authentically Christian meaning for the celebration. The Christian celebration of a Christmas on December 25th is probably neither harmed nor hindered by the fact that it was once another sort of festival. Even if it has been a totally new creation by Christians, its continuing Christian usefulness would not thereby be guaranteed by a supposedly "pure" origin.

In other words, suppose that 2,000 years ago the entire language and culture of early Christianity had been cut out of new

cloth such that there were no possibility of tracing any Christian word or form to any pre-existing language or culture. Today, two thousand years later, would we have a purer or safer form of God's revelation (truth) in our hands? Would it necessarily be closer to the message which God is speaking to mankind? Would not even these brand new forms and words be susceptible to the loss of their Christian meaning? The answer must be yes.

Therefore, we come full circle to the observation that pagan forms can as easily gain new Christian meaning as newly minted "Christian" forms could lose their originally pure meaning. It would appear that God is not in the business of replacing cultures but transforming them.

We discover something else by means of cross-cultural perspective: the Bible is provisionally multicultural *internally*. Suppose God had allowed a written revelation to be encapsulated in a single culture, whether Hebrew or Greek, would not that kind of monocultural revelation have been, 1) much more seriously subject to a mere mechanical external transmission, 2) less successfully interpreted as a universal faith, and indeed, 3) would not its internal meaning have been less reliably understandable than it is in the case of a multicultural Bible such as we have, which helpfully portrays truth in cultural transition?

It is not always possible to be sure of the reasons God has had in what He has done, but it is tantamount to a linguistic theorem that if the same truth is propounded by two different men in two different languages and cultures as totally dissimilar, say, as Hebrew and Greek, that the result will inevitably be more reliably interpretable 2,000 years later.

Anthropologically sophisticated missionaries today are applauded in their straightforward attempts to allow people to be culturally authentic in their expression of their Christian faith. Is it not then curious that we could be disturbed to discover that a similar openness to various

cultural forms existed in the ancient world as the Christian movement took upon itself Greek, Roman, and Celtic garments? Why is it a good procedure for a careful missionary linguist today to select key words from a primitive vocabulary in order to express Christian faith, but it is not so easy to conceive of the New Testament epistles being written as the result of such a process? If we believe this process in the New Testament was carried on under unique inspiration, does that mean we are not to see the process itself as an example

We must not suppose that the message of Christianity, clothed in the new garments of the Greek world, was damaged by this new clothing.

to us? Indeed, is it not our very conviction regarding its inspiration that makes it so valuable an example?

Quite confidently then, we may look on the experiences of the early church as a divinely preserved, full-blown case study of the missionary adaptation of the Christian message to Greek linguistic and cultural forms. We misunderstand God's intent if we suppose that the precise words chosen in that particular feat of communication were somehow better (in their unmodified pagan usage) than other words that may be chosen in a parallel way in other cultures. The inspiration of the Bible thus does not lie in the contemporary secular meaning of the key words employed but in the unique use the biblical makes of otherwise quite ordinary words. Least of all must we feel that the procedure of dipping into pagan vocabularies was illicit. We must confidently expect that such borrowing was done, and for the same reason we must confidently continue to recommunicate and to retool contemporary words and forms as we meet new cultures in other places around the world today. We must do the same as we face new developments in our own culture with the change of generations. The great

value of the Bible is therefore not merely that it constitutes the one inspired case of truth transmitted cross-culturally. It is of special strategic and missionary value as it stands as an inspired example, not only of the gospel in two different cultures, but as an inspired example of the process whereby a cross-cultural bridge of communication may be built between two cultures.

The New Testament as Example

Every book written on the subject of the New Testament—indeed every student of the New Testament—is forced to observe the clash of cultures in the period of the early church. Some expositors have tried to make Paul out to be the originator of a "new religion" by treating the changes as evidence of heresy. Others have treated the changes as the result of a

new dispensation in which God himself takes a new approach in certain things. Some may agree that new forms were employed while effective communication of the same basic message took place. In the latter case, however, their discussions often focus more attention on the details of the new formulations than they do on the nature (and limits) of the contextualization process whereby those new formulations were achieved. That is, their emphasis does not seem to anticipate the necessity later on in mission history of similar cross-cultural reformulations to take place, and therefore they deprive themselves of the great value of the Bible in casting light on those later reformulations.

Indeed our whole attitude subtly and profoundly changes toward what happened within the pages of the New Testament once we sense the essential repeatability—*and the necessity for repetition*—of the process whereby Paul bridged over to the Greek culture. In a parallel way Luther demanded that there be a bridge to the Germanic culture area and helped to build that bridge. Just as Paul defended the Greek Christians against Roman formulations which, in effect, became

legalistic in the Hellenistic situation, so Luther stoutly defended the Germans against the imperialism of a Roman formulation. Bultmann and Fletcher, in their demythologizing and "situation ethics," have groped ineffectively but with the same problem, trying to achieve aspects of a new formulation for our generation. With greater clarity of purpose, I feel, Leslie Dewart has noted the distance the modern world has drifted away from Greek thought and has called for a massive "dehellenization" of the present-day Roman tradition to communicate to a no-longer Hellenic world, and so on. In a significant development, American scholars in the colonial period thrust away the tradition of studying the pagan classics in college and embraced Hebrew as the divine language, which they expected to be spoken in heaven; college presidents delivered commencement addresses in Hebrew. Specifically, this latter was a case of attempted restoration rather than reformulation. But in the process of rejecting Hellenistic molds, some real Americanization did take place under the guise of Hebraicization. Thus the process of cultural reformulation has gone on again and again down through history but has not always been clearly recognized as a necessary or wholesome process.

Cross-Cultural Analysis of Christian History

Thus the early moments of the Christian movement expose it and sanction a cross-cultural perspective in which the diversity of cultural forms is not seen as an obstacle to the expansion of the faith or even a nuisance. We do well, therefore, not to consider human diversity a part of the *problem* of the Christian mission but an essential feature in an exciting *solution*. This solution is for all mankind the wholesome fullness of God's redemption which ideally reaches man in all his diversity (without condemning the diversity itself), resolving the profound alienation between man and God which is the source of all man's sufferings and evil. The outward sweep of the Christian

movement is therefore the story of a long succession of encounters between a universal faith and many particular contexts.

Rather than to try to condense or even list all such encounters in Christian history in which the Christian mission has endeavored to cross cultural bridges, it may be well to explore the varied experiences of a single ethnic group outside of the Mediterranean world, one concerning which we have at least some continuous evidence.

While no one example is ideal, it should not be surprising that we would choose a society beyond the furthest reaches of the Roman legions, living in island isolation as well. Such might be the minimal conditions that would provide a laboratory of investigation concerning the possibility of local diversity being compatible with a universal faith. It has been said that:

...Ireland was the only head-taking, cattle-raiding culture to be converted to Christianity while retaining its tribal economic and social structure...(Scott, 1967:193).

This of course is a reference to the period of the early expansion of Christianity. There are many such societies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which have undergone similar experiences. Indeed, the relevance of this ancient example to modern times provides part of the impetus of our discussion.

The primary literature alone highlighting the whole Irish experience is voluminous. A brief treatment can only sketch the basic outlines of the encounter of this people with Christianity. It may also be noted that only comparatively recently has the subject itself undergone the kind of objective scholarly study it has long merited. Anglo-Saxon scholarship, for reasons which may appear more clearly below, has to be supplemented in such studies by French, German and Norwegian scholarship, the whole "Irish question" seemingly having postponed objective English investigation of the subject. Speaking of this tendency, Charles Thomas (1965:259) explains that:

Nearly all general accounts of the period tend to be unevenly biased in favour of the Germanic-speaking invaders... The reasons for this are complex, but the main one is probably that, until the present century, almost no major historian of the period had any knowledge of, or indeed interest in, the story of the Celtic-speaking peoples of early Britain.

Indeed, with the continuing hostilities in the north, feelings on the Emerald Island are running so high that it is not possible even now to speak of events that happened fifteen centuries ago without being enmeshed in arguments that have misleading emotional overtones. Nevertheless, it is the worldwide experience of the emerging new nations that had brought into being so many parallels that many ancient questions long considered closed may be resurrected with new impetus and insight. Ours is pre-eminently the age in which the minority voice is going to be heard.

At this point, however, cross-cultural perspective may likely be considered a bias in favor of the Irish tradition. This may as well be confessed. We will certainly get nowhere if we do not recognize mechanisms of prejudice of one kind or another. In one sense cross-cultural perspective precisely consists of the ability to anticipate, to recognize and to tolerate prejudice between disparate cultures. The Irish situation is rich with examples of prejudice.

Jerome may or may not have been reporting accurately when he recalled an encampment of Irish cannibals from his experience in Gaul (D'Alton, 1936:36), nor can we credit him with objective charity when he referred to the famous Celtic scholar Pelagius as an "Irish dog." What is apparently incontrovertible is that some of the Irish became Christians at a fairly early date and that they were for a long time, mainly for geographic reasons, beyond the power of emperor or pope. These were the conditions that fostered, or at least allowed, considerable indigeneity in their resulting Christianity. Harold Cook (1971:46) quotes O'Donovan with approval, saying:

Patrick engrafted Christianity on the pagan superstitions with so much skill that he won the people to the Christian religion before they understood the exact difference between the two systems of belief and much of this half-pagan, half-Christian religion will be found not only in the Irish stories of the Middle Ages, but in the superstitions of the peasantry of the present day.

Cook goes on to summarize:

This is what we should naturally expect. The remarkable thing is that this syncretistic tendency did not go further and pervert the basic Christian message. Perhaps it was the emphasis on the scriptures that provided the safeguard. It is certainly notable that in the last century after Patrick Ireland became a major center of Christian learning, even attracting students from the Continent. Moreover, it is beginning to send its own missionaries far and wide, even as far as Italy itself.

In the attempt to understand early insular Celtic Christianity and specifically Irish Christianity, our chief problem is that the preservation of their story was, for one reason or another, constantly left in the hands of non-Irish groups.

Pelagius and Bede

Pelagius is a case in point. What we know of his teaching remains today primarily in the writings of his opponents against words of his disciples. Looking back we can recognize possible discrepancies in differing cultural connotations of the same Latin words, with the result that those of different backgrounds employed different explanations (theological formulations). If grace had a sinister meaning for Pelagius (as for example in the Theodosian Code) implying favoritism (Hughes, 1966:20,21) we can almost assume the need for honest divergence between Celtic and Roman theologians.

Less significant theologically, perhaps, are the divergences between the Insular Celts and the Western tradition in the matter of tonsure and Easter date. In this case, the offending diversity was not homemade but came simply from the opposite end of the Mediterranean. Yet beneath these two tangible symbols of

independence from Western Roman customs was the much more important discrepancy that was probably based somehow on Irish tribal structure: the Celtic form of monasticism. This too derived from the East, but if it had not had some kind of resonance with indigenous social structure it may not have been so durably opposed to the implantation of the Roman diocesan system of territorial bishops.

Unlike those classical instances of Roman religion being planted by force in Saxony and in eastern Europe, in Ireland Rome's physical power was always totally inadequate to enforce any kind of uniformity. Bede's ostensibly pro-Roman account paints Augustine's mission to England in bold strokes, but clearly records that the only force available to his mission (as he tried to win over the Celtic Christians) was what could be called threats about the afterlife coupled with the assumed prestige of the see of Peter—as against John the Beloved on whose word the Celts relied.

Meanwhile, by the Synod of Whitby in the Seventh Century, Rome was handicapped profoundly by the centuries of confusion in the Mediterranean itself induced by the Barbarian invasions in the West and subsequent see-sawing between Gothic and Eastern Roman military power. Irish scholars, for whom Latin was never a native tongue, were finally needed to teach Latin in the city of Rome. (This would be like black African Christians coming to the United States to teach English in the year 2030, following one-half century of Chinese occupation of North America). For similar reasons, it was Irish scholarship traditions that were reinstated on the Continent—with the help (of course) of Anglo-Saxon scholars whose own scholarly formation, if not always their actual training, derived from Celtic centers of learning in Ireland or England.

Eventually the Danish (Viking) invasions became a violent force inflicted against the Irish Christian tradition, but not a force conforming them to Roman Christianity except in the sense that their scholars fled to the Continent, taking with

them manuscripts and learning in even greater abundance than had the steady stream of Irish missionaries. This exodus greatly enhanced the curious development whereby the Irish system of private confession became the "Roman" confessional, the Irish collar the "Roman" collar, and the Irish orthography, the "Carolingian" minuscule. To this day the "Roman" alphabet, except for upper case letters, is really Irish not Roman. Even Irish manuscript illumination became known for a time as "Anglo-Saxon" (Zimmer, 1891:16).

In many other ways Irish Christian virility first saved the Roman tradition and then itself became labeled "Roman." The Irish have been generalized as savage in the fourth and fifth centuries, and as saints in the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries. Then, with the destruction wrought by the Vikings in the ninth and tenth centuries the shattered remains of Irish Christianity became looked upon as much too rebellious a deviation from the Roman tradition. This view perhaps underlay the reasoning behind the pope's "gift" of Ireland to the Norman conquerors in 1164, which for the first time sent what could be called Roman(ized) force across the Irish sea. As a result, a drastically heightened antagonism between the Irish and the English (whether Anglo-Saxon or Norman) laid the basic for a final ironic twist at the time of the Reformation. Now the Irish, in order to continue to differentiate themselves from the now suddenly anti-Roman Anglo-Saxons on the larger island decided finally they would rather be Roman than Protestant. It is significant that the "gift" of Ireland to England was made by a pope who happened to be the only Englishman ever to be a pope.

The Irish people thus represent in a tragic and classical sense the plight of the people in a minority culture who at best can only choose between the dominant flavors of their environment, lying low as the major powers clash, choosing first one and now another of the foreign traditions, whichever seems best to favor their local free expression.

The Tragedy and Irony

The tragedy is that the Christian tradition itself has not more clearly enunciated the principles inherent in cross-cultural perspective. The Irish from early times have never been a tightly knit society. The very existence of rival clans and tribes and perpetual feuding favored the development of a Christianity which was by no means perfectly uniform in Ireland itself. It was not the Irish who were perplexed about achieving any kind of uniformity. Pluralism would not have been hard for them to understand. Kathleen Hughes (1966:104) observes that:

Celtic clerics seem to have been untroubled by the diversity of practice. Why should they be? The church had endured such problems for centuries, and the popes had no clear official pronouncement. 'Let Gaul, I beg, contain us side by side, who the kingdom of Heaven shall contain' writes Columbanus to the Gallican synod. To him, even in the mist of the Easter controversy, there were matters which seemed of far greater importance in the life of the church than liturgical diversity.

The greatest irony of all—looking now beyond the Irish illustration to the experience of many other minorities encountered by the advancing wave of Christianity—is the fact that at about the time all of these questions seemed resolved in the Western world, the whole profusion of cultural diversity within the Christian Church has burst forth as the result of the missionary movement in the non-Western world.

The angriest problems in the world today are not international imperialism but questions of conformity within national states—in a word, civil wars: Vietnam, Nigeria, Sudan, and (here we are again) Ireland. The question is how long the Amharas can dominate the Gallas in Ethiopia, whether the Kikuyus shall forever dominate the government in Kenya, whether a handful of whites shall run the country in Rhodesia, etc. The reason these problems are so nearly insoluble is the same: 700,000 Celtic people who speak Welsh do not feel that

their potential contribution to the larger world is ideally fulfilled in the present political structure. There is not space to mention the Basques, the Bretons, the Navajos, and other over-run minorities still encapsulated in the Western world, whose minority cultures are not treated with adequate cross-cultural perspective by secular political powers.

However, the failure of secular rulers to view things with Christian cross-cultural perspective is no excuse for Christian strategists to ignore the heightened urgency of the whole problem as the world Christian family struggles to understand and accept both its unity and diversity.

The ecumenical movement will become a tyrannical power if cross-cultural perspective does not prevent its projection of simplistic democracy as the only means for disparate Christian tradition to sit down in fellowship together. The Christian family is more complex than the small town in which a pure democracy has been made classical. Both union churches (single congregation) and united denominations can proceed with democratically correct procedures to trample on the minority cultures. Homogeneous churches in one social stratum in India are not the most likely instruments of evangelism within other strata holding drastically different customs and traditions. Only monolithic concepts of unity can blind us to the healthy diversity God has intended among his people and the peoples of the world.

In Conclusion

There is no particular value in opening ancient wounds and re-arguing issues long thought to be settled unless this holds promise for superior insight into the modern situation. Despite the outbreak of hostilities in Ireland and the continued existence of many unresolved problems of cultural diversity within the Christian tradition in the Western world today, it may still be possible that historical studies are the only studies which offer ready opportunity for the understanding of cross-

cultural perspective at an objective level and distance. Who knows what specific tensions in overseas countries may be resolvable only if parallels can be deeply and intelligently drawn between the present and conflicts long ago? At least it is with this profound hope that this has been written.

Bibliography

- Cook, Harold R.
1971 "The Celtic Church in Ireland" from *Historic Patterns of Church Growth*, Chicago, Moody Press
- D'Alton, E. A.
1913 *History of Ireland*, London, The Gresham Publishing Co.
- Hughes, Kathleen
1966 *The Church in Early Irish Society*, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd.
- Scott, William Henry
1967 "Celtic and the Conversion of Ireland," *International Review of Mission*, Vol. LVI, no. 222
- Thomas, Charles
1966 "Celtic Britain and the Anglo-Saxons" in *The Dawn of European Civilization*, edited by David Talbot Rice, New York, McGraw-Hill Co.
- Zimmer, H.
1891 *The Irish Element in Medieval Culture*, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons

Dr. Ralph Winter is President of William Carey University located in Pasadena California. He served as a professor of missions at Fuller Theological Seminary and also was a missionary to Guatemala .

[Editors Note: This essay is a revised edition of Chapter 17 of *God, Man, and Church Growth* (Eerdmans, 1973), edited by Alan Tippett, a *festschrift* in honor of the late Dr. Donald McGavran's 75th birthday. Since the writing of this essay, a number of books have appeared which confirm the remarkable contribution of the mission scholarship of the Celtic Church. Note John T. McNeil's groundbreaking work, *The Celtic Churches, 200 AD to 1200 AD*, and also *Light from the West*, and more recently the popular book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*.]

Measuring Contextualization in Church and Missions

Mission leadership should not take for granted that their church planting efforts are indeed the local expression of faith, but rather submit it to evaluation and scrutiny in light of the following indicators for measuring contextualization.

by Douglas Hayward

One of the beautiful features of the old three-self formula was its simplicity. Because missionaries could count the number of pastors, evangelists and church leaders who were operating under their own support systems, governing their own churches and proclaiming the Gospel to their own people, it was so very easy to measure whether you had accomplished your three-fold objectives. Unfortunately the old three-self formula did not really measure indigeneity, it only measured independence. Every trait of the three-self formula could be fully operational, but the church might, nevertheless, still be a foreign organization with an alien message.

As dissatisfaction with the three-self formula grew, missiologists began to cast about for a new term to capture the dynamic of what transpires when the Gospel enters into a culture and is embraced by a people group. Among the most popular contenders in this new search has been those who uphold the concept of "contextualization".

It first appeared in mission literature in the early 1970s, and in the more than two decades since, mission evangelicals have adapted, defined and defended its proper use. While all of this discussion has been most helpful we still need to ask, how can we tell when we have a contextualized message and a contextualized church?

In response to this need for some measurable guidelines by which to determine whether contextualization is taking place in a given culture or people group, I propose various characteristics that ought to be evident in and integral to the process of making the Gospel at home in a given cultural con-

text. I would propose that church planters, mission executives and frontier missionaries carefully examine their ministries for evidence of developments within each of these factors and that they evaluate their strategies accordingly.

Local Vernacular

To be truly at home in a culture, the people must be able to hear the Word of God, as well as expositions on it, and descriptions of appropriate responses to it, in their own language in which they feel the most comfortable. As such, Bible translation and preaching in the local language are foundational for contextualization to take place. For those societies that are highly literate, the production of Christian literature by national believers will become still one more marker that the Gospel has become an integral part of a culture.

A legitimate question to ask in this respect is does the whole Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament have to be translated in order to have a contextualized church? The answer is: It is possible to have a contextualized church which only has in its possession a translation of the New Testament, but such a church will be vulnerable to an overemphasis on New Testament themes without the basis and perspective that comes from God's earlier revelation as found in the Old Testament.

My own experience and that of other missionaries who have worked in cultures where the New Testament was translated first and was then followed up with a translation of the Old Testament has been that if contextualization was already at work in the culture, the addition of the Old Testament further

deepened and matured the contextualization process that was already underway. However, it has also been the experience, that if contextualization has been thwarted by an overly controlling mission agency or church body seeking to establish a Westernized church, that the introduction of the Old Testament has resulted in break-away churches patterned after Old Testament models by believers in search of their own form of contextualization.

Expression of Faith

Someone has declared that the most segregated place in America is the Sunday morning worship service. It might be equally true to declare that the most ethnocentric practice in the world has been the forced replication of Western church services. Western worship patterns, translations of Western hymns and monologic preaching are the standard fare in churches all around the globe. A contextualized Gospel on the other hand requires that worship be performed in a manner that truly excites and elicits adoration, praise, submission and obedience to Almighty God. Contextualized worship, therefore, may have to move outside the confines of a church building, spend more time in singing and dancing than in preaching, incorporate new liturgies or rituals that speak to the needs of a people that evoke prayer times and confessionals and would speak to the deepest needs of the human spirit.

Worship Patterns

How then, does one go about measuring contextualized worship patterns? By noting, among other things, the music

of a believing community. Is it only the music of other cultures and peoples, translated into the local language, or is it music whose words have been written by national believers, sung to the accompaniment of indigenous instruments and in the ethnomusicological style of the culture. Furthermore, is it still being written, reflecting the dynamic faith of the current generation of believers. Interestingly enough, our own Western music tradition reveals that virtually every revival and awakening in the West has resulted in a burst of new hymns and praise songs that express the spiritual renewal of God's people.

Other worship practices that we need to evaluate and compare in respect to local practices versus Western practices are the use of dance and rhythm, the making of vows, the giving of gifts and offerings, the timing and content of worship events, and the focus of worship which ought to reflect a people's perception of God and the manner in which they can most meaningfully apprehend Him. In this respect I am reminded that a dominant theme for worship in the North African Church of the early Church Fathers was obedience and submission, whereas in some areas in Asia I sense a worship theme centering upon reconciliation and restoration in keeping with the shame nature of their cultures. I am also reminded that in Native American cultures purity and personal communion are central focuses in traditional worship patterns that Native American Christians would do well to recognize and practice.

Theological Reflection

Systematic theology as we know it in the Western world has emerged as a response to the philosophical, intellectual and religious challenges of the Mediterranean world. Our theology has become distinctly propositional and apologetic in addressing the challenges to biblical teaching arising from this cul-

tural context. As a consequence of this focus, there is little contemporary reflection in Western theology on ancestor veneration, dialogic teaching, the principles of ying and yang, the biblical practice of divination, the testing of oracles, and a host of other issues that arise in believing communities in the non-Western world.

The development of local theologies, therefore, without necessarily abandoning the achievements of Western theology, must address new themes, new concerns and incorporate new discussions pertinent to their new cultural environments. These new developments must of necessity address such issues as God among the local gods and spirits, the meaning of salvation vis a vis the promise of competing faiths—which offer freedom, release and power; the nature of the believers' behavior and practices as they live Godly lives in their particular cultural settings, i.e. bride wealth, dowry, polygamy, communal houses, disparity in wealth, etc. There must also be lengthy and profound discussions on theological terminology in the languages of their respective cultures as words are molded and brought into the service of describing the transcultural nature of God and His revelation.

Local Metaphors

One of the interesting assignments that I give to students in my classrooms is that of asking them to read 50 of the Psalms and to record all of the images of God that they can find. This typically includes terms such as "my high tower, my shield and my sword, a rock and a high place" along with a host of others all indicating mental and cultural images that were important to a pastoral culture and an emerging nation-state. Then I ask them to record all the images of God in the Gospel of John. They discover there that God is spoken of as: the Word, the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Door, a Vine

and its branches, as well as other images that reflect a mercantile culture, an educated elite and questions of philosophical importance. I then ask them to list the images of God that are important to our culture.

This last question indicates whether contextualization at the conceptual level is taking place in a culture. It takes place when people can perceive God in images that are a part of their lives. For some this will be to image God as being like a great Banyan tree, or the Gospel as a bamboo shoot thrusting out of the soil, or the comforting work of the Holy Spirit as being likened to a pole supporting a sagging stock of ripening bananas. It happens when people can praise God for His long arm of salvation that reached out to them, a people farthest from God, or when they compare the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to the paltry power of man. These new and powerful images of God and His purposes, are constantly being reinforced by a people's daily contact with the ubiquitous presence of these images and their faith is reinforced in the mundane surroundings of their lives.

Symbols and Images

One of the chief characteristics of what it is that makes humanity different from the animal kingdom is our ability to create and communicate through symbols. Mankind is an inveterate symbol maker. Symbols express ideas, focus motions, encapsulate complex concepts and inspire devotion. Symbolic representations are a part of every culture's religious behavior and when contextualization takes place appropriate cultural symbols and artistic representations are bound to emerge.

The nature of these representations will vary from culture to culture. It may be an actual art form that utilizes a cultural art style to portray biblical materials. As such the image of the Madonna and Child emerged out of

Egypt as a Christian adaptation of the ancient imagery of Isis. In China there are artistic representations of the life of Jesus in which Chinese scholars are portrayed as worshipping wise men or inquiring scribes. On the other hand, many African church men have created elaborate symbols to be placed on holy vestments and worn on their bodies, while in Bali and New Guinea believers have adapted the architectural styles of their culture to create new places of worship that symbolically prepare people for worship and point toward the God of the Scriptures who is the object of their worship. Whether it be an elaborate Celtic cross, or the simple sign of the fish, believers need a visual focus for their faith. One that speaks to their hearts and can become uniquely their own.

Normative Communication Channels

As any class in communication theory will declare there are a variety of ways to communicate information, ideas, feelings or needs to someone else. Our concern here is with the task of communicating spiritual truth which is often hedged about with cultural restrictions. At least one missionary I know almost lost his life for starting to tell a Bible story to uninitiated young people who their elders did not believe were ready to hear the "spiritual secrets" of mature adults.

While our culture tends to rely on teaching and preaching (expository preaching at that) as the chief form of conveying religious truth, this is not acceptable in all cultures. One of the boldest examples of contextualization in communicating the Gospel is that of the Heliand, in which the Gospel was re-written as a ballad and was sung in the mead halls of Saxon Germany in the

9th Century. In other cultures preaching may indeed be appropriate but more in the style of a harangue, and in some instances would be carried on more as an interactive dialogue of questions and answers. Narration and story telling, dance and drama are yet other variations which are being used by believers in

Contextualized worship may have to move outside the confines of a church building, spend more time in singing and dancing than in preaching, incorporate new liturgies or rituals that speak to the needs of a people that evoke prayer times and confessionals and would speak to the deepest needs of the human spirit.

Indonesia, Asia and Africa. It is these culturally appropriate communication styles that need to be explored, encouraged and developed in order to facilitate the transmission of God's truth in a manner suited to its hearers in their cultural setting.

Ethics and Values

Every culture has its own concepts of right and wrong and sometimes these have to be altered and brought into conformity with biblical standards. In other instances specific behaviors and values must emerge from biblical principles that have been carefully thought through and applied to the culture. In such instances the question emerges, what does a godly believer do in this culture to facilitate being "in the world," but not enslaved by it or contaminated by it?

In answer to such a question believers have to ask themselves what constitutes modest dress even if men

in the culture only wear a gourd and the women a grass skirt. Does incest and marriage regulations have to follow a standard society system that places half of the women of the tribe into the category of being classified your sister? Do incest and marriage regulations apply to New Testament believers? Can

Christian young people choose their own marriage partners, and is burial of the deceased more pleasing to God than cremation?

These and a host of other cultural practices, confront every believing community and the extent to which they are able to look at Scriptures, wrestle with the solutions, make their own choices and feel relatively justified in their choices that is the measure of their having contextualized godly living into their culture. All too often biblical standards with Western overtones have been imposed on

new believers in non-Western cultures, who have often accepted such harsh realities, and have sought to live by them, only to discover that they were being culturally alienated and the Gospel was being clothed (sometime almost literally) in foreign (unacceptable) garb.

Assembly, Leadership and Politics

The Church is a unique institution, the likes of which exists no where else in the history of human social organization. It has a distinctive membership, with shared goals and a unifying corpus of beliefs that bring direction and commonality to their activities, and yet it has taken on a myriad of structural forms that has allowed it to take root in virtually every possible cultural setting or historical period.

Believers have come together in homes, monasteries, wandering bands, funeral societies, religious orders,

churches and para-church societies. Leadership in these structures has ranged from little or none, to eldership, to authoritarian. Whatever it may be, what is important to our discussion is the manner in which believers organize themselves and establish appropriate leadership in order to facilitate their desire to function as a fellowship of believers.

From the perspective of wanting to measure the extent to which contextualization has taken place in respect to leadership we must evaluate what qualities are required for other leadership roles in the community and then compare these to leadership roles in the church. If there are radical differences, such as requiring a diploma from a recognized Christian (Western) institution, approval by a foreign/outside agency, or other denominational requirements, then, church leadership probably can not be considered to be contextualized. Furthermore, if church leaders have been vested with authority far in excess of traditional or non-church leaders then again we probably do not have a contextualized church.

Church leaders, in a contextualized church will be at home in the culture, will operate in accordance with leadership standards in the culture, and will find affirmation for their leadership from the members of the society they serve. Their churches or congregations will also be organized in such a way that members of the society will feel comfortable in supporting the church and of identifying with it. (An exception can be made, of course, for believers in cultures hostile to Christianity and the Church.) Given these broad parameters, then, suffice it to say that a contextualized church will look more like the host culture than a foreign culture and any deviation from the cultural norms of the society must be suspect other than for those practices that are unique to the work of the church, especially those associated with baptism, communion, and anointing.

Members of Society

Christianity has often been viewed as an enemy of the state, a destroyer of the culture, or at the very least a marginal contributor to the life of the people and their culture. Being insignificant in the total life of the culture does not mean that the church or the believing community is not contextualized. Nor does being persecuted by the state or members of the surrounding community mean that contextualization has not taken place. When these conditions exist, though, it does complicate the process for contextualization. Such activities reject and isolate believers so that no matter how adaptable they become they are never accepted as a part of the culture. Their only recourse is to seek to satisfy their own need for cultural compatibilities within bounds of the oppressive situation.

In less extreme situations, and in particular where the church has already taken root and is attracting a body of believers, it will become natural for the church and its members to gain in respectability, power and influence. It is at this stage that contextualization must be considered again. Does the church demonstrate a capacity to serve as a responsible institution in meeting the needs of the well-being of the society. Does it function as salt, light, oil, or in other ministrations that bind up the wounds or meet the needs for community harmony and development? Can it serve the spiritual well-being of the believing community while at the same time serving the well-being of societal structures? With all due respect to the prophetic nature of the Gospel message, if the church never moves beyond that of calling for revolution it can hardly be considered to be a contextualized church.

Discipleship

In this regard, if Christianity has been

embraced by a body of believers, if it is meeting their deepest spiritual needs and if they are comfortable with the manner in which it is a part of their lives, then an emotional bonding will arise commanding a sense of loyalty and a long standing commitment to both their church and the Lord Jesus Christ. Under such circumstances believers will find it difficult to even imagine life without their church and their faith. It will have become part of the very fabric of their lives.

Under such circumstances it is all too easy for complacency, sin, and backsliding to take place so that watchfulness must be maintained. Under such conditions what is called for is a revival of that which a people believe belongs in their culture—a vital living faith.

Conclusion:

Have we done the job that we have set out and have been given to do? That of:

1. Proclaiming the Gospel to every tribe and culture.
2. Planting the church where ever there are communities of believers.
3. Making the Gospel at home in all cultures.

Measuring our progress has never been easy, but as we look at each of these indices or indicators we get some idea of what we should be looking for and where we should target our efforts and our strategies to accomplish our task. After all, it is God's Church, the Body of Christ that we are commanded to serve and to plant among all the peoples of the earth.

Dr. Douglas Hayward is Associate Professor of Missions of Intercultural Studies at Biola University in La Mirada, California.

The Tuareg: People of the Veil

The "Lords of the Desert" struggle for survival.

Let's pray for them and believe what our Lord said: "Again I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." (Matt. 18:19)

by Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse

A group of older, Tuareg women, relatives of a six-day-old baby, solemnly march around the child's tent. The maternal grandmother carries the baby as the other women chant a blessing on the tent and also an exorcism of the "Old Woman":

The Old Woman is leaving,
Fatima and Aisha are entering.
Shoo! Shoo! Fatima and Aisha will be
cutting your hair tomorrow.

After several times around the tent, the leader plunges a knife into the sand, symbolizing the end of the threat to the mother and child. Thus begins the naming ceremony feast, one of the central activities of close relatives in the Tuareg camp.

"Old Woman" is an indirect name for the most feared bush spirit, which the Tuareg believe threatens the life of the newborn and the mother. Animistic and Islamic beliefs are combined in this tribal ceremony. Fatima and Aisha are the names of the wife and daughter of the prophet Mohammed.

Women of the Tuareg are among the freest in the Muslim world. They are highly respected, and monogamy is the rule. It is the women who instruct the children in the ways of the tribe and who own the tents and household items. Social rank and inheritance come through the female line.

A Glorious Past

An aura of mystery surrounds

the Tuareg who have roamed the great expanses of the Sahara Desert in Africa for well over a millennium. The noble warrior class, light-skinned, tall, and regal, were once fierce warriors called "Lords of the Desert." They fought on camels and controlled the caravan routes across the vast Sahara, a land mass equal to the size of the United States. The Tuareg are known as "men of the veil" because their most distinctive feature is the blue turban, which all men wear

United more by their Tamashek language and customs than by race, the estimated one million Tuaregs are scattered over the Sahel of North Africa, with Niger having the largest concentration. Due to recent civil wars in Mali and Niger, there are about 35,000 refugees in Mauritania. (See map below.)

Islam

Distinct social castes operate among the Tuareg. At the top are the noble warriors who, until recent history, controlled the major wealth of the people. The *marabouts*, or religious leaders, have vied for social position since the introduction of Islam in the 7th century. Lower on the

social scale are the blacksmiths, yet they play an important role in Tuareg society. They still make ceremonial swords, saddles, leather goods, and amulets to ward off evil spirits.

The lowest caste is the black Tuareg, descendants of slaves who were captured in centuries past to care for the cattle and gather firewood. They are now free but often remain a part of the family clans to which they were attached.

Since the 1950s, these social struc-



The Tuareg: People of the Veil

tures have undergone dramatic changes. Two decades of the most severe drought in memory hit the Sahel in the 1970s and the mid-1980s, killing most of the cattle, camels, and goats. With most of their herds gone and national states wanting to keep them within their respective borders, the nomadic lifestyle of many Tuareg virtually came to an end. Although many Tuareg have lost their herds, their vision remains to regain their former nomadic way of life. They dream of the day when they will have enough animals to travel with their families on the trek north to the great plains of the Azawad.

Tuareg Facts

Religion: Islam,

less than 1% Christian.

Population: 1 million,

(located in Chad, Mali, Niger, Algeria, and Mauritania).

Language: Tamashek (various dialects).

Diet: Goat meat and mutton, fresh camel meat, goat milk, cheeses, dates, peanuts, cereal from millet, and grain.

Health Care: Poor, few doctors and medical clinics.

Literacy: Low literacy rate.

Recreation: Story-telling, camel racing, singing (women) Islam feats.

Christianity

Mission work among the Tuareg was begun by SIM as early as 1914. In recent decades, mission service groups such as World Vision have worked among them, and some of this labor has resulted in conversions. Mostly men, these few believers are widely scattered and face great obstacles.

Portions of Scripture and Christian stories have been translated into the ancient written script, which some of the Tuareg can read. The people's Islamic beliefs have been merged with ancient animism, and while these are tightly interwoven into their social structure, many of the former noble class and younger people largely ignore these beliefs.

Pray for the Tuareg!

**Pray for the few dozen believers* who have been courageous to take a stand for the Lord Jesus. They have faced persecution, ostracism from their families, and difficulty in finding jobs and wives.

** Pray about the greatest need of the rural communities, which relate to rebuilding a balance between their nomadic way of life coupled with their need to conserve a fragile ecology.*

** Pray for those still in refugee camps and also for those uprooted from their traditional lifestyles, those living in urban situations, learning new means of employment, and coping with broken families.*

** Pray for Bible translators, working on several books of the Bible and for translation into several dialects used by the Tuareg in different countries. Also, pray for the raising up of an indigenous, contextualized church.*

** Prayer is needed for the health and protection of the missionaries working under very difficult conditions. The people are generally hospitable. However; bandits have destroyed mission property and threatened missionaries and their families.*

For additional information and prayers cards on Unreached Peoples write or call the:

Adopt-A-People Clearinghouse

P.O. Box 17490

Colorado Springs, CO 80935 U.S.A. Tel. 719-574-7001; Fax: 719-574-7005

Great Commission Contextualization

Contextualization must be done in light of the overall purposes of God and His redemptive plan for the world. Failure to contextualize without the “big picture” fragments the understanding of Scripture and significantly hinders the Church from fulfilling its mission.

by David J. Hesselgrave

The “rule-makers” say that one should never begin an address... or a letter with an apology. However, I have not heard of a rule that dictates that one should not begin with a confession. To the contrary, an old adage has it that confession is good for the soul and it says nothing about whether one begins or ends with it. So at the very outset, I confess that for all my missiological life and most of my missiological tenure I erred rather grievously. My sin was more one of omission than commission but nevertheless it was a costly mistake.

I was nurtured and subsequently ministered on a “simple gospel” basis: the idea that we are to encapsulate the Gospel into two or three (or four or six things) that “God wants people to know,” and that if a person assents to those and accepts Christ, subsequently he/she will be saved; and that leaders are free to nurture converts in any way that suits personal preferences and preunderstandings.

Now I still believe that there is something to be said for that approach. In one sense the Gospel is “simple.” Aided by the Spirit of God, anyone can understand it. One need not be a theological expert in order to be truly saved. But the larger truth is that the Gospel is inclusive of the whole of biblical revelation from Genesis to Revelation. Even the bad news is part of it in the sense that the Good News is hardly recognizable as good apart from it. Moreover, we are called upon to disciple the nations by teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded. There is an inclusivity—a wholeness—in the Great Commission whether one interprets the object of “teach” to be “observing/obeying” or “all things Christ commanded.” If we take our Lord seriously our task is indeed

an encompassing and exacting one—much more than many of us have thought it to be. At various times both missionaries and national leaders employed a variety of “discipling approaches” but few seemed satisfied with any of them. One approach after another was discarded until most fell into some more or less comfortable pattern and settled for that.

Over the years I have come to believe that an omniscient God has already provided the key to both world evangelization and effective contextualization. In effect, and with your indulgence, I therefore propose to outline the progress of my thinking over a generation and illustrate the contextualization process as I now understand it

Definitions and Preunderstandings

It will not be necessary for me to elaborate my commitment to propositions having to do with the verbal plenary inspiration and the perspicuity of Holy Scripture, the necessity of Gospel proclamation, the convicting and illuminating ministries of the Holy Spirit and the priesthood of all believers. However, there are certain terms and assumptions that require special attention.

First, I use “biblical theology” in the more technical sense to refer, not just to theology that is biblical, but to theology that is the “...confessional recital of the acts of God in history; together with what must be inferred from those acts” (Wright 1991:101). Both the biblical record of those acts and, therefore, biblical theology are characterized by unity of plan and purpose, chronological development, a largely, but not exclusively narrative form, objectiv-

ity, and normativity. With B. B. Warfield, I believe biblical theology to be basic to the entire range of theologizing as classically conceived, whether exegetical, expositional, systematic or practical (Davis 1978:144-45).

Second, as intimated above, many and often elaborate definitions have been conferred on the neologism “contextualization.” I define it here in terms of “cultural meaningfulness.” Since my interest is in contextualization with a view to fulfilling the Great Commission, I will use the term to refer to the process of communicating the biblical Gospel in such a way as to make it meaningful to the people of any given cultural context. This stipulated definition is simple but important. Contextualization has been defined so as to include socio-political involvement, incarnational lifestyle, application as over against exposition of the biblical text, and so on.

Third, Scripture itself as the Word of God written constitutes the most authentic and effective instrument of contextualization. This is so because its divine Author has so ordered history and so inspired certain human authors that the cultural settings, languages, literary genres, events and actors of the Bible—as well as the meaning of the text itself—bear the stamp of what I will call “transculturality.”

Contributors: “Way-Show-ers”

From my earliest days at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, I enjoyed the good company of the Old Testament scholar, Walter C. Kaiser. Only later on did I begin to understand the relationship that existed between approach to biblical theology and his mis-

sionary spirit. You will understand something of this by ruminating on the following quotation from his *Toward an Old Testament Theology*:

Our proposal is to distinguish sharply biblical theology's method from that of systematics or the history of religion. There is an inner center or plan to which each [Bible] writer consciously contributed. A principle of selectivity is already evident and divinely determined by the rudimentary disclosure of the divine blessing-promise theme to all men everywhere as the canon opens in Genesis 1-11 and continues in Genesis 12-50. Rather than selecting that theological data which strikes our fancy or meets some current need, the text will already have set up priorities and preferences of its own. These nodal points can be identified, not on the basis of ecclesiastical or theological camps, but by such criteria as: (1) the critical placement of interpretive statements in the textual sequence; (2) the frequency of the repetition of ideas; (3) the recurrence of phrases or terms that begin to take on a technical status; (4) the resumption of themes where a fore-runner had stopped often with a more extensive area of reference, (5) the use of categories of assertions previously used that easily lend themselves to a description of a new stage in the program of history; and (6) the organizing standard by which people, places, and ideas were marked for approval, contrast, inclusion, and future and present significance (Kaiser 1978: 11-12).

In effect, Kaiser is saying that certain basic hermeneutical principles are implicit in the biblical text itself if we pay attention to them. This becomes tremendously important in circumstances where (1) sound principles of biblical interpretation are widely disregarded in sending churches; and, (2) such principles, when introduced to members of the receiving churches, seem to be imposed upon the text by foreign "experts" rather than growing out of Scripture itself.

Timothy M. Warner first crossed my pathway when some years ago I became exercised over the direction that so much of Christian counseling was taking, following as it was upon the heels of humanistic psychology. One of

my colleagues at TEDS, Warner became more and more involved in spiritual warfare and a deliverance ministry. It is a long story, but I will just say that one day before his departure for another ministry I went to his office. During the ensuing discussion Warner made a statement that was to be confirmation of the direction my own thinking and writing was taking at the time. He said, "Dave, I have become convinced that truth encounter must precede power encounter." He went on to explain that a great number of Christian people themselves—many of them already in Christian service (!)—have not really grasped a biblical worldview and as a consequence live frustrated, defeated lives. He was in process, therefore, of building his counseling ministry upon the foundation of a reexamination of the relationship between the Triune God, men and women, the spirit world, and the self as it unfolds in Scripture beginning with Genesis and working straight through the Old and New Testaments.

Very late in my teaching ministry at TEDS, the Lord brought the anthropologist Paul Hiebert to be a faculty colleague. His arrival occasioned a re-study of his "critical contextualization" writings and that has provided what may prove to be one of the final pieces in completing the contextualization puzzle. Hiebert takes a very common sense view of the nature of language—the view of "critical realism" (Hiebert 1989). That is, meaning is to be found in the correspondence between the mental image of the word-user and the outer reality to which the word refers. "Critical realism" avoids two extreme—it opposes the view that says that meaning is to be found only in persons and that one must somehow get "into the head" of the message source in order to discover his/her meaning. It also opposes the opposite view—namely, that meaning is inherent in the signs and forms themselves. The former view leads to over-contextualization by making even the signs and forms of the Gospel,

such as doctrinal formulae and water baptism, almost totally subjective and cultural. The latter view leads to under-contextualization by making certain forms of the receiving culture inherently evil and by insisting on certain (Christian) linguistic and behavioral forms without bothering to inquire into the meanings assigned to them in the receiving culture.

"Critical realism" insists that meaning is to be found in the relationship between signs/forms and reality; that it is discoverable by a careful examination of context; and that, insofar as possible, the people of the receiving culture context must contribute to that process.

Process Principles

Perhaps we are now prepared to begin to put the pieces together in such a way as to view the larger dimensions of contextualization as herein conceived. Three principles apply throughout that process.

First, Great Commission contextualization strategy begins with a practical application of Scripture as seen through the lens of biblical theology. Scripture must become not only the substance but also the strategy—not only the message, but also the method—of authentic and effective Gospel contextualization. If God has revealed His will and plan, then almost by definition the strategy He employed in doing so takes priority over human strategies. If God has chosen certain methods of communication in Scripture, then insofar as those methods are reproducible, they take precedence over our own methods.

For example, one of the most effective means of communication is story-telling. It may then be advantageous for me to begin my Christian witness by telling the story of how God has dealt with me personally—with how he has changed my life and given me hope for

the future. But Great Commission contextualization as proposed here requires me to move early on to the story of God's dealings with mankind, not just to inferences gleaned from that story. This may well be part of the "all things that I have commanded" of the Great Commission!

Second, if God's revelation to mankind is to become meaningful—really "meaning-full"—to the people of any given culture, those who introduce it and those who carry it forward (the "planters" and the "waterers") must allow the Gospel message as unfolded in Scripture to inform every aspect of the discipling ministry. Missionizing, evangelizing, catechizing, counseling, preaching, worshiping—these and other discipling-related activities are not to be separate and unrelated ministries developed by the "experts" in each of these ministries. All must work in line with one divine "blueprint" and complement each other.

Thirdly, if the Gospel is to be understood by people of various languages and cultural contexts, the divine Word must, of course, be transmitted in the thought forms and symbol systems of those peoples. The Old and New Testaments do not constitute a replica of some heavenly document. Unlike the Koran, the Bible is translatable. Moreover, the Bible writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write their respective portions of the one story in ways that were meaningful to their particular audiences and at a critical juncture when it was imperative that people representing a variety of languages and cultures simultaneously hear and understand the Gospel on that first Pentecost. It is that same Holy Spirit who gave the "gift of tongues" enabling Parthians, Medes, Elamites and others to do just that (Acts 2:10).

In our own case, however, the situation is quite different. We must labor

diligently to understand both the original language/culture of the Bible writers and the language/culture of contemporary respondents with a view to proper translation and interpretation. When we do that we soon discover that there is no one-to-one correlation between the linguistic and non-linguistic forms of Scripture, our own culture, and respondent cultures. For example, *hamartia* in the New Testament may translate as "sin" in the United States and *tsumi* in

...a good number of Christian people themselves—many of them already in Christian service-(!) have not really grasped a biblical worldview and as a consequence live frustrated, defeated lives.

Japan, but not only are the word symbols different, their meanings are quite different as well. Again the ritual of bowing in the Old Testament, bowing to an audience in America and bowing before the portrait of the deceased at a Japanese funeral, while appearing to be the same act, nevertheless have radically different meanings.

These examples are simply indicative of the fact that at the earliest stage of missionizing in Japan, qualified informants were greatly needed. At later stages the Japanese church as a priesthood of believers became (or should have become) a "hermeneutical community" deciding how the Scripture is best understood and applied in the Japanese cultural context. While often overlooked, this is what is involved in the discipling of the *panta ta ethne* of the Great Commission.

The Process Analyzed

Now perhaps, we are somewhat better prepared to analyze some specific proposals that will serve us when evalu-

ating, comparing and contrasting what I have called "Great Commission Contextualization" with two other approaches—one quite traditional and the other very contemporary. The setting is a village in the Central African Republic. (For most of us that will assure enough cultural distance to make more objective analysis possible.) The particular issue involved is that age-old problem of polygamy and the contextualization focus will be upon one of

the qualifications for local church *episcopoi* (overseers) as we have it in Paul's first letter to Timothy, Chapter 3 verse 2: "the husband of one wife."

First, consider the "under-contextualization" approach of C. Caverno and some missionaries to Africa. The attitude and action of many missionaries and

not a few of their national counterparts vis-a-vis polygamy and I Timothy 3:2 has been informed by people like C. Caverno who have analyzed the practice of polygamy in one dimension only—the moral dimension. In an article that appears in the 1939 edition of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* he wrote:

Polygamy has been and is the open blazon by the human race of sex vice. . . There is hypocrisy beneath the word polygamy. It is an attempt to cover up by the term "plural marriage" what is not marriage and cannot be marriage. There is no particular need of defining what the condition is, so long as we can look upon it as a violation and negation of the marriage relation. The very use of the term from any language covering a like condition is an attempt—"to steal the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in" (Caverno 1939: 2416).

Caverno goes on to explain that polygamy is primarily the outcome of tribal wars when victors took women captive as concubines and slaves. In polygamy, he says, "Woman is reduced to

the position of ministrant to man's unmodified sensuality" (Ibid.).

Please pay special attention to the phrase "in any language;" to his explanation of polygamy in terms of tribal wars; and to his insistence that unbridled sensuality is the root cause of polygamy. That he could easily be challenged on all three counts does not seem to occur to him. His judgment is strictly moral and, to a lesser extent, theological.

It is important to understand that a previous generation of missionaries largely would have concurred. I remember discussing the subject of polygamy in tribal Africa with the late Walter Trobisch, author of the best selling books *I Loved a Girl* and *I Loved a Boy*. He spoke of the growing desperation he experienced when his Africa mission colleagues almost unilaterally decided to refuse communion to polygamists until such time as they had divested themselves of all but one wife. Those missionaries were not without compassion. However, given their understanding of the biblical text, the roots or "polygamy," and the immoral nature of the practice as described by such scholars as Caverno, they felt that they had no choice. To accept polygamists as members of the congregations in good standing would be to compromise Christian truth. To refuse to accept them helped to assure missionaries that church leadership would not fall into unworthy hands. Polygamy had to be rejected out of hand.

Nevertheless, as Trobisch himself probed the issue from an African perspective, he concluded that iconoclastic denunciation of polygamy in this fashion was tantamount to exorcising the house only to let more devils in. The natives did indeed have some most bizarre notions regarding sex and marriage, but Trobisch found that those notions functioned quite well as practical safeguards against physical and social dangers. Though polygamy did indeed

entail some negative consequences, in the African context the moral code did not militate against it; it protected wives from serial pregnancies; it made provision for women who might otherwise be left helpless; it provided the husband with ready and willing labor for his gardens; and it enhanced the husband's prestige and status in the village. To force the polygamist to divest himself of all but one wife, on the other hand, had cruel consequences for those wives who suddenly found themselves without solace or support.

Little Improvement

Now we might be tempted to think that this is a scenario of the past when missionaries were not anthropologically informed and were less sensitive to cultural concerns, and when national leaders were more willing to conform to foreign domination. Not entirely so, as time has passed, the problem of polygamy is not as great as it once was due to a variety of factors. But it is still there. Perhaps more importantly, our approach to a variety of issues in church and mission shows little or no improvement whatsoever. As often as not we fail to study the text carefully we oversimplify the nature of language and culture; we do not consider the difference between form and function; and (perhaps most importantly) we do not take time to explore emic (insider perspective) understandings and interpretations. Under-contextualization is very much with us today.

Far removed from the approach informed by the likes of scholars such as Caverno is the approach informed by scholars such as Charles Kraft. Kraft believes that meaning is to be found in persons, not in words or rituals themselves. In his understanding, the Bible is a cultural sea with supracultural truths floating around on it. The Bible is not revelation as such, but nevertheless all of it is potentially revelatory. As for cultures, they are divinely ordained and give

evidence of their divine origin in the ways that they order life and values and allow societies to maintain themselves (C. Kraft 1978).

Given these assumptions, one approaches the list of qualifications for church leadership in I Timothy 3:3-9 very differently (Kraft 1978). The qualifications were not normative and meant not to be applied "as is" to every cultural situation. Rather, they mirrored the expectations and values of Ephesus and the larger Greco-Roman world in which Paul and his colleagues labored. In that cultural context, adherence to the list of qualifications as they appear in Paul's letter resulted in the kind of church leadership that merited the respect and admiration of the community. *In the eyes of the public of that time and place* adherence resulted in church leadership that was, in Paul's words, "above reproach" (I Tim. 3:2).

By way of contrast, the current North American context is very different. Our culture acknowledges such things as the equality of women, the capability of young people, the legitimacy of divorce in many situations, and so on. According to Kraft, this should result in a culturally-nuanced interpretation and application of the biblical text. To begin with, insofar as order reflects priorities, the order of leadership qualifications might be changed so as to reflect, for example, the value that we in North America place upon youthful vigor as over against senior status and maturity.

Secondly certain items should be changed somewhat: as concerns marital status, it seems that in the first century Greco-Roman context irreproachability ("without reproach") demanded that a man not take a second wife after the death or divorce of his first wife. American congregations experience no problem at all with remarriage after the death of a spouse. Most (but not all) would have a problem with the remarriage of a pastor (at least) after divorce,

not so much with lay remarriage, and more and more churches are putting women in top leadership roles in accord with societal changes. “The husband of one wife,” therefore, contextualizes into “faithful to one spouse (at a time).” Thirdly, we may choose to add such things as administrative ability and personableness to the list. Kraft calls this “dynamic-equivalent transculturation.”

Returning to our African village mission/church scenario, the specific problem is polygamy and the focus is on 1 Timothy 3:1-9, especially verse 2. Since Kraft’s missionary experience was among the Higi of Nigeria, those who would employ his approach in our village situation would have no difficulty knowing how to proceed. In the beginning, they would translate (not just interpret) the passage differently. First, the village culture valuing membership in the “royal class,” maturity, and hospitality very highly, these would be placed at the top of the list of leadership qualifications.

Second, “the husband of one wife” qualification would be omitted and “one who manages his own household well” would be modified. As we have seen in the African context, plural wives often elevate a man’s social status and prestige. Moreover, “managing a household well” is deemed to be demonstrated best in a polygamous household for any man should be able to manage a household with only one wife in it! (The Kru of Liberia have a saying, “You cannot trust a man with only one wife.”) So the solution would be to delete “the husband of one wife” and change “one who manages his own household well” (verse 4) to “one who manages his own (polygamous) household well.”

Dynamic-equivalent transculturation in our Central African Republic will involve a process. Those who pioneer the work will need to be armed with an understanding (misunderstanding?) of language and biblical revelation that allows for this kind of (over?) contextualization. They will then be free to translate 1 Timothy 3:1-9 (and the rest of Scripture) in the manner indicated, and they will teach the Scripture accordingly. Polygamy, therefore, will present no

Over the years I have come to believe that an omniscient God has already provided the key to both world evangelization and effective contextualization.

real problem initially. At the same time they will be aware of the fact that monogamy is both the ideal of Scripture and the direction in which world cultures are moving. Polygamy should be, and will be, replaced by monogamy. That being the case, over time and as national leadership emerges and is trained, both the original translation and attendant interpretation and instruction will be modified to reflect the biblical ideal and macro-cultural realities.

It goes without saying that this approach entails significant difficulties for those who would employ it, even though polygamy itself may not appear as an immediate problem. Not only will the emerging church have to cope with problems that accrue to social change, but eventually the contextualizers will be forced to explain how it is that the Bible could seemingly say one thing at one time and something else at another time. But, of course, the explanation for that state of affairs reveals why, for the conservative contextualizer, Kraft’s approach entails not only significant difficulties, but insuperable ones

The Biblical Narrative

Third, we will turn to a “Great Commission contextualization” scenario as advocated here. It begins with quite different understandings and assumptions of the nature of symbols and rituals, revelation and contextualization, and the Great Commission and world evangelization as such.

Whether our Central African Republic village represents virgin territory or has already had a Church planted for a generation or more, the contextualization approach advocated here will likely be much the same. However *church planters* may make their initial contacts, identify with the people and gain

a hearing, they will quickly introduce the Bible narrative—first communicating chronologically the great events and themes and then over time filling in the gaps. In whatever state “*church waters*” may find an existing church, very possibly they will find it necessary to begin at the beginning and proceed in much the same fashion.

As indicated above, the Great Commission contextualization process will then be carried forward by learning the significance of local culture language and customs from the villagers; by rehearsing and applying lessons learned from the events and themes of biblical revelation; and by employing and reinforcing the methods of biblical theology in all ministries of the mission and church. In this way, whether in evangelism, catechizing, counseling or preparing leadership, Christian believers will become well informed on such matters as Adam and Eve’s relationship to God and each other; the marriages of Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon; the selection of O.T. judges, kings and prophets as well as New Testament apostles, elders and deacons;

the Church, and so on.

Insofar as polygamy is not a moral issue in the village, it may not emerge as a significant problem early on. However, it is obvious that at some juncture it will surface as a primary concern. When it does, Great Commission contextualization will build upon the foundation already laid and exhibit four critical characteristics. First, the matter will be considered in the church—the “body of Christ,” the “company of the committed,” the “hermeneutical community.” Second, those who lead this process will be prepared to encourage open discussion concerning local understandings related to polygamous marriages. Third, leaders will both teach and model basic principles of Bible interpretation.

Fourth, the problem will be discussed in relation to the various contexts of Scripture: monogamy and polygamy in the Old Testament; the teachings of Jesus including his teaching on divorce; the New Testament epistles with special attention to the Pastoral Epistles; the context of First Timothy including the doctrinal section immediately preceding the list of qualifications in chapter 3; and, finally, the events and imagery of the Book of Revelation. Bathed in prayer and concern for God’s greater glory, this kind of discussion can be expected to lead to mutually acceptable decisions.

Our immediate reaction may be that this seems like an extremely arid and laborious task. But, if it seems so, I suggest that you recall the multiplied hours you have likely spent in Bible studies that were little more than a recital of proof texts and personal opinions. I suggest that you also remember the seemingly endless hours spent on questions of far less importance in church business meetings. Also I ask that you consider how many church divisions and world compromises might have been avoided if local congregations would have met in prayer and around the Word of God in this fashion.

The Prognosis

Perhaps all of this is another case of “old men dreaming dreams.” The very idea of any large grouping of missionaries, evangelists, counselors, and pastor/teachers subordinating their carefully studied—or at least, habitual—approaches to the framework of biblical theology seems idealistic in the extreme. The notion that it would make any significant difference if they did may seem to be hopeful but quite impractical. Not so! After going through “Walk Through the Bible,” “Divine Drama,” “Bible Panorama” and similar studies, even Christians who have been in the church for many years often exclaim, “I’ve never seen it this way before.”

In my estimation, Great Commission contextualization is our most hopeful strategy if we are serious about world evangelization. Not only does it best meet the requirements of Scripture itself, it also qualifies on the basis of sound principles of communication, anthropology, psychology and other social science disciplines.

To be sure habits are not easily changed. Though storytelling is one of the earliest and most important arts known to man, telling and retelling redemptive history and prophecy does not seem sophisticated enough for moderns and post-moderns who are beholden to human sciences. We have become so addicted to the idea that some strategy of man’s devising (once baptized with the holy water of Bible proof texting) is key to world evangelization that we cling to that idea even though recent history shows that one key after another fails to turn in the lock. Could it be that, despite all our emphasis on understanding receptor cultures, we have failed to understand how captive we are to our own culture and its worldview?

Were someone to ask me what I believe to be the greatest missiological strategy ever devised I would now answer, “Tell them the story of Jesus.

Write on their hearts every word.” I would remind us all of that which we may already know—namely, that He is the Seed of the woman in Genesis 3, the Bright Morning Star of Revelation 22, and that indeed, the whole Bible relates the “story of Jesus.”

References Cited

- Caverno, C. 1839, “Polygamy.” In *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. V, p. 2416. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939.
- Hiebert, Paul. 1987, “Critical Contextualization.” *Missiology* 12 (July): 287-96. 1989, “Form and Meaning in the Contextualization of the Gospel.” In *The Word Among Us*, Dean S. Gilliland, ed. pp. 101-20. Dallas: Word.
- Kaiser, Walter C. Jr. 1978, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Kraft, Charles, 1978, “Interpreting in Cultural Context.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 21, no. 4 (December) pp. 357-68. 1979 *Christianity in Culture*. Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Warfield, B.B. 1978, “The Idea of Systematic Theology.” In *The Necessity of Systematic Theology*, second ed. John Jefferson Davis, ed. pp. 127-68. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Wright, G. Ernest. 1991, “Biblical Theology (OT). Introduction.” In *New 20th Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* J.D. Douglas, ed, pp. 101-104. Grand Rapids: Baker.

Dr. David Hesselgrave served as a missionary to Japan for twelve years. He is professor emeritus of the School of World Mission at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School currently.

[Editors Note: This article was adapted from an address given to the Tenth Conference of Reformed Missionaries in Latin American October 15, 1995 in Curacao, Antilles Netherlands.]

Contextualizing the Message Through Use of Case Studies

Comprehension may best occur within the context of a story—a case study. Here is an article that shows us the wisdom of their use especially in light of Christ’s own use of them and various lessons to be gleaned as we contextualize the Gospel to the unreached nations.

by Paul J. Fritz

It comes as no surprise to users of case studies that most people would rather see a sermon than hear one any day. Showing someone a picture of real life is always better than telling them what you think happened. Stories have a way of involving all five of our senses in a suspenseful way that makes the audience hunger for more. Stories have a way of helping people learn inductively through associations with things that are familiar, compelling, and easily identifiable. Certain stories or case studies bring a measure of reality that rings with truth. Stories can make the old truths seem as fresh as the new morning air. Conflict and suspense makes a story irresistibly arousing. With the right amount of dramatic twists, a good story can evoke emotions and responses like nothing else.

Balancing a sense of humor, descriptions, interpretations, and analysis can make stories accomplish the four essential purposes of any message:

- 1). Inform—by capturing the audience’s interests and sense of vital needs.
- 2). Persuade—by giving them positive proofs of the benefits of learning the stories’ lessons or convincing them of certain errors to avoid.
- 3). Apply—by suggesting guidelines for implementing the ideas in the story along with the examples of the best ways to solve similar problems.
- 4). Inspire—by stimulating their sense of motivation for thinking, believing, or acting in ways commensurate with the truth.

An African Case Study

Take for example, a pastors con-

textualization and application of biblical truths by means of the following story: A woman in central Nigeria wanted her husband to pay more attention to her needs, but nothing seemed to work. Finally, she became so desperate that she visited a traditional medicine man. She told the herbalist, “I want my husband to cater to my needs and love me as he once did. Now he treats me as one of his animals or possessions. Can you help me make my husband love me?”

The herbalist did not want to admit that he could not solve such a difficult problem. Especially since the woman could wreck his credibility in the community if she told others about the herbalist’s inability to solve her problem. So he thought of a solution which will be nearly impossible to carry out. He turned to the woman and said, “Go and search for a hyena with a new born calf. Then squeeze the milk from the udders of the mother hyena and bring it to me. I will then make a special potion of medicine that will solve all your problems.”

The woman was so desperate for a solution that she went in search of a mother hyena deep into the bush. Finally, she found a nursing hyena and her calf, but she was afraid to approach it. Days rolled into weeks and weeks into months and yet the woman refused to quit until she found a way to get what she wanted. Eventually, someone suggested that she approach the mother hyena with some meat in order to win its confidence. Quickly, she rushed to the market and bought a small amount of meat that she could hold in her hand.

Initially she was afraid to get too close to the hyena so she just threw the meat where the mother hyena could find it, but eventually she drew closer to the mother. After several attempts of bonding with the hyena, the woman moved close enough to touch the hyena and stroked its back comforting it with her soft voice. The next day, the woman gained the mother hyena’s confidence to the point that she could touch every part of the animal’s body. Now the time was ripe for the woman to extract some milk from the mother hyena’s udder. The next day she took plenty of meat to keep the animal contented.

While the animal was enjoying the meat, the woman gently snuck up under the powerful hyena and proceeded to milk her udder until she filled a small bowl of milk. She was so delighted that she almost tripped and spilled the precious milk on her way home that evening. Joyfully she presented the hyena’s milk to the herbalist who said, “I commend you for your valiant efforts and want you to wait for a short time.” As the woman waited the herbalist wondered what he was going to do, now that his back was to the wall. Exasperated he said, “Woman I have seen that this milk is truly from a mother hyena but I have no special powers or medicine that will make your husband love you and shun all other women. But go and show love to your husband just as you have shown special care for the mother hyena. Then your husband will love you exceedingly beyond all that you can even imagine!”

The woman went home and

began to fry special meat for her husband, determined to care for him like never before. Do you know what happened? The husband's attitude changed completely. Soon he began to love his wife in ways that everyone in the community marvelled at. Women throughout the village came to ask the wife, "What is your secret? We will do anything to be loved as you!" The woman began at the point of the husband's felt needs and won his love through initiating love! She no longer waited to be loved, but set love in motion by her own initiative.

Advantages in Using Case Studies

Let's notice how case studies or stories can help us in evaluating the framework of people's thinking. First, they give us enough details of similar problems to the ones we are facing to help us understand possible alternative solutions. Case studies allow us to simulate an actual occurrence of events without endangering our resources, time, or efforts. We are able to look at a situation from hindsight, evaluating if someone's decisions were the absolute best at the time.

Furthermore, we can look at a variety of hypothetical situations and consider a whole range of possible factors that need considerations in light of present realities. Case studies help us ask intelligent questions about how to improve our relationships, endeavors, and decision-making. Through case studies a person can more clearly understand the gap between one's present reality and the ideals of a culture. Once identified, there can be a clearer understanding of how the real can be moved closer to the ideal. At that point a greater sense of reality of other peoples' experiences can be brought to life.

The case study does not have to put the learner into the pressures of the warfare until one is completely prepared to go to battle. In a case study, the person is involved with reading, thinking, analyzing, applying, evaluating,

synthesizing solutions, and discussing with others the contextual factors surrounding the case. When one reacts to a case study they are putting themselves in the shoes of another and stretching their imaginations. Proverbs 23:7 says, "As a man thinks within himself, so he is!"

Collecting Data

Case studies or storytelling also allow for collecting valuable insights from various people's experiences. Someone has rightly said, "If we do not learn the lessons from history we are bound to repeat them!" Experiences have a way of sharpening our set of discerning perspectives. Once a person is cheated, they are less apt to be cheated in the same way twice. Some of the best lessons I have learned in life come from my own mistakes. Thankfully, I am not limited in my learning by my own experiences or I would have to make a great deal of blunders. Case studies have a way of gathering the best from others' experiences to garner principles that guide major decisions. Not only does this facilitate open mindedness, but it enhances one's appreciations for what others have gone through. Case studies allow one to view a difficulty from dozens of different perspectives without actually having to experience a situation first hand.

Christ's Use of Case Studies

1. *He allowed people to put themselves in many difficult identities, roles, and responsibilities.* This allowed the people to appreciate the Canaanite woman's plight recorded for us in Matt. 15:21-30. Many could vicariously imagine how the woman must have felt in such a desperate condition. Jesus highlighted the fact that the woman's faith provided liberation from the evil spirits. Likewise, the faith of a parent, teacher, or leader can make a dramatic effect in freeing people from all types of bondage. The Lord emphasized that

regardless of a person's background they are not limited from experiencing the best from Him. He taught the disciples an important lesson in overcoming their discriminatory tendencies by showing them that even a Gentile woman (a person to be avoided at all costs, or so they thought) and her daughter were important to the Lord.

2. *Jesus showed that case studies do not always have easy solutions, but involve many complex factors.* Even Jesus hesitated at first to address the woman's need. He realized the difficulties of cross-cultural ministries. He was fully aware that His primary focus was to the Jews and not to the Gentiles. Yet, He trained His disciples in integratively solving problems with wisdom, knowledge, and faith.

3. *Jesus used case studies as opportunities for the disciples to learn how to link theory and practice.* One of the most difficult aspects of teaching in a theological seminary in Africa is nurturing the student's ability to bridge theoretical truths with their real problems and ministries. Case studies have a way of bringing the theoretical in line with the practical. I presented a case study about the dynamics of "king-making" in Africa for a cultural anthropology final exam. The students worked for four hours drawing links between the practical case study (borrowed from Paul Hiebert's *Case Study* book) to principles learned in the class. They unanimously shared: "This was the most meaningful exam we have ever taken in our life!"

4. *Jesus used case studies to broaden the horizons of His disciples.* Most of the disciples rarely had the opportunity to move much beyond their home region. They lacked a greater global perspective that many of us have today thanks to satellite television, newspapers, and radios. A macro perspectives lifts our eyes beyond the problems of one's immediate circumstances.

5. *Jesus used case studies to help alleviate people's fear of the unknown.* When the other disciples watched Peter walk on the water to meet the Lord, they would have been greatly inspired by the power of their Master over all forces in nature. Among non-Western thinkers, many people live in a constant state of paralysis by their fears. These fears usually center around our alarm about death, ancestral spirits, sickness, suffering, oppression, hunger, pain, disasters, or attack from numerous human and supernatural enemies.

Jesus urged people not to fear, for He assured them of His protecting presence.

Paul reinforced this when He said, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he has put everything under his feet." (I Cor. 15:26,27)

6. *Jesus used case studies to help people retain, transfer, use and deepen their faith in God.* No doubt, the case studies exhibited through Christ and His parables have been told millions of times throughout history. Transfer is an ability to take information learned in one situation and convey it to another. Many people have little trouble learning new information, but most struggle with the ability to transfer that information into practice. These powerful stories have a way of helping people illustrate, apply, instruct, persuade, and inspire others unlike propositional truths. This inductive teaching emphasis was a common trait of Christ's. When people hear about Jesus stilling the winds, and the waves with three simple words, "Hush, be still!" They are comforted by the fact that God's power is greater than any problem, person, or circumstance.

7. *Jesus used case studies to enhance the disciples ability to analyze motives*

and solve problems. Analysis is the detailed examination of a person, substance, or structure to ascertain its component parts. When one has the ability to analyze and discern, then one can see beneath the surface to the root causes. Jesus was a Master at analysis. He knew what the thoughts and motives of men's hearts were. He used case studies to help His disciples gain skill in analysis as to ideas, events, and people. When

Case studies give us the benefit of going beyond description to interpretation, analysis, and evaluations—a much needed element in contextualizing theology among non-Western thinkers.

the disciples came back from their first evangelism experience in Luke 10, they said, "Even the demons are subject to us in your name!" Jesus said, "Do not rejoice in that, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven!" He wanted them to look for the deeper reasons behind the events. Case studies give us the benefit of going beyond description to interpretation, analysis, and evaluations—a much needed element in contextualizing theology among non-Western thinkers.

8. *Jesus used case studies to help people correlate truths and events at their own level.* It is easy to see little problems as bigger than they are unless we have the benefit of comparison and contrast. Correlations bring into mutual relationships complimentary events or ideas for the purpose of enhancement. When we are well connected to one another and to the body of Christ we are able to get a bigger picture of greater plans of God than simply getting myopic about our own selfish concerns. Without correlation, we tend to distort truths out of proportion. Jesus knew that case studies provided a continual supply of correlations that help provide

balance of perspectives. Often Jesus would correlate the realities of the disciples lives by correlating God's care for nature. Once Jesus said, "Consider the lilies of the field. They do not sow or toil and yet even Solomon in all his array was never clothed as beautifully as one of these! (Matt. 6:30). Contextual theologians do not need to be afraid of using analogies in their ministries. It is perhaps the single most effective means of teaching and learning styles found in traditional African education. For instance, many Africans see correlations between their cultural views of sin, sickness, and suffer-

ing and the biblical views of sin, spiritual sickness, and spiritual judgment with those of the traditional African view. One Tangale student writes the following descriptions about their tribal views that can be easily linked to the biblical basis for the sin, sickness, and judgment:

—*Tangales believe that SIN is sassa-lap*—This means living contrary to the accepted norms of the culture. Any offense against the will of society, the gods, or the ancestral spirits will result in punishment. The Bible makes it clear that sin is living contrary to the laws and nature of God. Any offense against God and His standards will result in spiritual death. In the light of this tremendous need the majority of Tangales have embraced Christ as their Savior.

—*Tangales believe that SICKNESS is pada.* This means the abnormal condition of the body. It could also mean being afflicted by the gods. Sometimes the Bible links sickness as a consequence of sin, ignorance, or wrong behavior. When the early missionaries showed how the Lord provided healing both through miraculous and through

the use of medicines, the Tangales hearts were touched.

9. *Jesus used case studies to allow the disciples to test out ideals with minimum risk.* Many of us hesitate to try out new ideals unless we have seen others experiment with them first. When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, he was willing to venture out into the deep. No doubt, this innovation gave the other disciples more confidence in the Savior. They wanted others to test the solutions and promises offered by the Master before they would try them out. Case studies offer face saving examples of others who have undertaken a new adventure. When the venturing is accomplished we will have encouraged many more to offer salvation to the lost, edify the believers, and disciple the future leaders of the church. Without the benefits of experimentation by faith we will be stuck in the mire of our own fears of change.

For example, one student shared that in his village of Nyanya in Nigeria, the Lord used a miracle to demonstrate His ideals through one courageous man. It seems that one day a man crossing a road was struck by a car which shattered his right leg. Most of the villagers immediately assumed that the man must have been associating with the occultic secret societies. Despite the persuasion from the few believers in the village, the council of elders declared that the man's accident was a signal of disapproval from the ancestral spirits. Throughout Africa, there are many who assume that nothing occurs without a spiritual cause. However, the Christians decided to use this as an opportunity to witness God's grace through their prayers and actions.

When everyone in the village disassociated themselves from the man, the Christians visited the fellow. Some even took food to him in his time of need. Several men even humbled themselves to bathe the man and assist in helping him put his clothes on in the morning.

Some of the youth got busy clearing his farm at the height of the rainy season.

All of these actions were viewed mysteriously and with wonderment by the non-Christians. Many of them assumed that the Christians must also belong to the secret societies if they are bothering to assist this man. Eventually, their puzzling manner turned into abuse of the Christians. The majority of the villagers felt that the Christians were impeding the ancestral spirits from exacting their discipline on the man. But the believers persevered with the assurance from Christ's promise, "Love your enemies and do good to those who spitefully use you and your reward in heaven will be great." (Luke 6:38)

When the man recovered completely from his accident, the community marveled at the change in his attitudes. He was a transformed man on the outside and the inside. People who were not related to this man, helped restore him without charge or duplicity of motives. Love lifted the man and the community to new heights. Soon the entire community, especially the council of elders sought out the Christians for advice. They asked, "How can we find security, healing, and deliverance from the evil forces like this man experienced?" The gospel penetrated through the area because of this evidence of the grace of God and the love of a handful of believers. This story and others like it, encourage and disciple believers to trust and obey the Lord and see His salvation come, not only individually, but as in this case, corporately.

10. *Jesus used case studies to successfully encourage problem solving through faith and obedience.* Jesus asked Peter (John 6:66-71), if he also wanted to defect, saying, "Surely, you too do not want to go away?" But Peter responded with the precedent setting statement that would stem the tide of defection, deterioration, and defeat when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we

go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God." Peter paved the way for men to apply determined commitment to Christ above all others when presented with problem of abandonment.

One seminary student shared with me that in his region there are procedures for discovering the cause of people's sicknesses. In this particular part of Nigeria, a sick man, who happened to be his grandfather, was perceived to have offended one of the gods or the ancestral spirits. To discover which spirit has been grievously offended, the grandfather was taken to the Juju house with sacrifices to appease the spirits. The traditional priest then spoke to the ancestral spirits on behalf of the grandfather. Occasionally, the priest would say, "He has offended the great grandfather spirit. When the messenger returned with the findings, the family were required to prepare sacrifices of wine, food, and chickens to appease the spirits.

The student shared the story of John 9:11 with his family which taught that once there was a man born blind. The people asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Jesus replied, "It was neither that this man sinned or his parents, but it was so that the works of God could be displayed in him." Then Jesus healed the blind man who gave a powerful testimony of Jesus before the religious leaders.

The seminary student showed that the way Jesus solved the problems of the blind men and the resistant Pharisees was the way the Tangales should solve their problems. Through faith, the Tangales could be made whole, and without faith they too would remain blind, as the Pharisees. Furthermore, Jesus emphasized that this had occurred in order that God's works, power and glory could be displayed. Man's human comforts are secondary to the greater purposes of God.

11. *Jesus used case studies to explain the patterns, trends, and tendencies of people.* A pattern shows a progressive similarity between experiences, ideas, or people's behavior. Jesus compared His own life to that of Jonah's and to the Temple when He said, "As the temple is destroyed, so will the Son of Man be killed and resurrected from the dead. He also illumined this pattern: "As the Father has sent me so send I you."

Case studies allow contextualizers to learn a great deal through the models of others, both for good and bad. Extrapolations (estimates from known values to unknown results) become possible through analysis of trends in ways that we can predict the response to various kinds of ministry approaches. Without contextualized understandings of cultural patterns, communicators may find themselves going against the heavy flow of cultural traffic.

12. *Jesus used case studies to show cause and effect relationships.*

Some people have a hard time intellectually, socially, or spiritually connecting reasons and results. Throughout the Old Testament people who lived in fear were deprived of many blessings, encountering paralyzing defeats. In Num. 13:31-Num. 14:1-18, the Israelites experienced the problems of cause and effect when they failed to walk by faith and not sight.

Christians, by their spiritual natures, are built to live by faith and not by fear. Contextualizers will learn to use case studies that connect the principles of cause and effect. Failure to make connections between cause and effect or to presumptuously link wrong causes to certain outcomes will end in confusion as in the following study:

A dynamic missionary from the Evangelical Missionary Society of E.C.W.A suddenly fell sick from a serious stroke. Quickly, one of his sisters, who was a renowned traditional doctor came to visit him on his sick bed. She

looked at him and said, "Look, you are suffering because you have forgotten our traditions. You have even refused our medicine, but I have brought some to give you one last chance." She slowly removed a small bottle of a liquid concoction and two small amounts of a powdery substance from her clothes. "The reason why you have fallen sick is

Case studies allow us to simulate an actual occurrence of events without endangering our resources, time, or efforts. We are able to look at a situation from hindsight, evaluating if someone's decisions were the absolute best at the time.

this: When you were recently visiting some missionaries your vehicle broke down on the way and you were forced to sleep in the bush. During that time, the evil spirits of the forest came and inflicted a serious sickness on you to show their displeasure. To our people, sickness can come as a result of an enemy invoking the power of spirits to bring sickness on one seen to be an invader of their territory. Without this medicine that I brought to you, the power of the curses placed against you cannot be dispelled!"

The missionary shared the story of Job with his sister. He explained that God allowed the devil to test his faithfulness. However, when he was tried he came forth as gold and God multiplied his prosperity greater than ever before. Even though his sister was not

convinced, the missionary distinguished between evil causes and heaven sent ones. He showed that a believer has the following hope and ability to call on God to help him with his problems, regardless of the context.

13. *Jesus used case studies to help people think innovatively, adaptively, and practically.* Once the apostle John

observed someone casting out demons in His name and he said, "We forbade him, because he does not follow along with us." (Luke 9:49) But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him; for whoever is not against you is for you." Jesus recognized the fact that unity in the Spirit does not necessarily require unanimity of methods. Case studies allow us to see that God uses a variety of approaches to accomplish His kingdom purposes. Without an innovative, adaptive, and practical mind set toward a contextualization of theology, we will be stuck in the molds of others and never be able to properly contextualize the Gospel to others.

Typically, this has occurred throughout African theological educational institutions. Well meaning missionaries translated their Bible school and seminary notes and gave them to their African students, faithfully transmitting them. Without their contextualization, we may fall into the same trap of the disciples condemning—those who do not teach as we do. Narrowmindedness in communication content, delivery, and organization continues to be some of the greatest stumbling blocks for contextualization throughout the world.

14. *Jesus used case studies to plant seed thoughts that would grow into great enterprises.* Jesus knew the power of faith in great ideals to transform people and countries. One day a man came up to our Lord saying, "I will follow you, Sir, but first allow me to say goodbye to those at my home." Jesus told him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back, is fit for the king-

dom of God.” (Luke 9:61,62) Many people in Africa enjoy basking in the glories of their histories. No man, Jesus said, is able to plow a straight furrow if he is looking back. A contextual theologian will be able to help the people focus on where they are going in planting seeds for eternity. Case studies help men see the benefits of forward thinking rather than wishing for the good old days to return. Christ wants us to march forward to the building of His kingdom in the hearts of men. No one ever harvested a crop without someone planting the seeds by faith. Lots of great churches, disciples, and ministries are not developing today because of the failure of contextual seed sowing in days gone by. Proverbs 24:3 in the Living Bible says:

Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts.

15. *Jesus used case studies to see how the little pieces of the puzzle contribute to the creation of the big picture.* Synthesis is the ability to combine elements to form a whole. Today’s computer architects are able to synthesize new hardware and software by synthesizing ideas of others to make equipment that has transformed communications. It is possible to send an entire theological library to Africa through telephoned linked computer modems in minutes with the proper equipment. Someone had to have the vision of putting together the parts of the puzzle to see a bigger picture than others had never imagined before. Jesus gave us the Lord’s prayer from Luke 11:1-4 through synthesizing the essential elements of praise, confession, thanksgiving, reconciliations, consecration, commitments, dedication, and supplications into an easy prayer to remember. His prayer has become a model for all other prayers. He capsulized the essence of prayer in

ten sentences. His prayer covers all the needs of life. It deals with the past sins, the present concerns of life, and the future trials that prepares us for victory through His power. Contextualizers will learn to master synthesis of African theologies for sickness, suffering, and healing etc. through the wise use of case studies. Caution must be used in allowing one’s contemporary case studies to take precedence over the truths of Scripture.

In Conclusion

One student recently shared the powerful need some of his people have for finding a source of reconciliation. To the Gus people of Plateau State, sacrifices are needed to restore harmony between two estranged parties. The *abisku anu* refers to a sacrifice that is based on one’s sayings or pronouncements by a man of authority. He gave a specific example of a father who recently made a declaration that his daughter will not marry any man from a certain tribe. Within months of his pronouncement, his first daughter suspiciously fell in love with a handsome young man from that particular tribe. Because the father loved his daughter so much he decided to offer a sacrifice to the spirits in order to reconcile himself to them and to allow his tribe to be reconciled to the tribe of the young man. Without the sacrifice, everyone in the village believed that the girl could not have a happy or successful marriage. Secretly, the father feared continual harassment from the family spirits for breaking his oath!

A contextualizer will be able to describe Jesus as the Great Reconciler of all men, tribes, and families. He came to provide a means of ending the enmity between nations, genders, and ethnic groups. He can show how Christ used

examples to break down the wall of hatred between the Jews and Gentiles—beliefs that regarded separation as synonymous with holiness.

Additional Resources

1. Look for appropriate stories in newspapers, magazines, or popular literature.
2. Read the advice columns in newspapers to get an idea of the issues and approaches people are currently concerning everyday problems.
3. Ask students or church members to anonymously record some of the events they are currently struggling with. Ask them to prescribe some suggested line of action.
4. Ask people for similar experiences they have faced related to the issues at hand. Some people will take from their history which should be compared and contrasted with the current situations.
5. Write down things people say especially about their observations and experiences.
6. Read widely current fictional stories to enhance your resource bank of case studies. Recognize that truthful case studies are better, but fictional ones have special significance in certain occasions.
7. Search the New and Old Testaments for case studies that can shed light on your present experiences. Be careful that you are able to place the biblical case studies in their proper context and that you are using proper hermeneutics to interpret their primary meanings.

Dr. Paul J. Fritz is currently the Dean of Continuing Education at the Jos ECWA Seminary in Nigeria, Africa.

Contextualizing the Power and the Glory

Contextualization is more than the initial presentation of the Gospel, it involves the evaluation and reintegration of life impacted by the revelation of God's truth; allowing the opportunity to create new and much needed local theologies for the newly emerging church.

by R. Daniel Shaw

Contextualization is an extension of the old 'indigenous' concept. It came into vogue in the late 1970s and has been the subject of many articles in journals such as *Missiology* and numerous books in recent years (Gilliland 1989, Hesselgrave 1989). It is no accident that contextualization theory and world view theory have developed side by side. This growing literature focuses on the need to take the local culture and its world view seriously and use the concepts vital to a people's daily living to present the Gospel. In this way the Gospel has relevance within the context of presentation. Therefore the nature of the Gospel and the church that develops within a cultural context will vary.

Contextualization however, is far more than an initial presentation of the Gospel. It extends to cultural issues with which the fledgling church must grapple and suggests the development of a local theology. This raises the double sided concern of 1) the necessity of critique within a cultural context and (2) the need to protect against syncretism. Both must be taken seriously.

Development of Contextualization

Charles Taber epitomized the importance of contextualization in mission activity when, in 1978, he inaugurated a new journal called *The Gospel in Context*. Articles dealing both with theory and applications to various contexts all over the world graced its pages. Unfortunately the expense of publication and a limited budget brought about a premature collapse of the venture, but the concept was firmly entrenched in the minds of missiologists. David Hesselgrave (1978) included a chapter on

it in his best selling book, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, and subsequently developed the concept into an entire book bearing the title *Contextualization* (1989). The faculty of the School of World Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary also took the concept seriously and under the leadership of Dean Gilliland created an entire volume (1989) dealing with the concept as it pertained to their respective fields of specialization. Though not always in agreement, these two volumes put the concept on the lips of every missiologist.

Gilliland (1989) defines contextualization as:

The way in which the Word as Scripture, and the Word as revealed in the truths of culture interact in determining Christian truth for a given people. For the purpose of missions there must be a maximizing of the meaning of Christian truth for the particular situation in which and for which the message is developed (11-12).

Thus there is a constant tension between God's truth and cultural truth, i.e. context, on the one hand and relevance of the Word within a context on the other. Without a perception of relevance, a message is often ignored because it is not perceived as meaningful.

Recognizing the interaction between these anthropological and theological issues, Paul G. Hiebert has developed the need to approach contextualization critically from God's point of view rather than from other cultures' or from a human perspective. His contribution made a significant difference in reducing relativistic approaches and recognizing God's place in the human context extending from the very fact that He made human beings and, therefore by extension, created culture (Shaw 1988:11).

The cultural diversity extant around the world today is a wonderful expression of God having created humanity with a propensity for great variety.

Being part of the hermeneutical process, contextualization always interprets God's truth within a specific culture, giving the development of a church within a particular culture meaning. Gilliland continues;

Contextualization is the dynamic reflection carried out by the particular church upon its own life in light of the Word of God and historic Christian truth. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the church continually challenges, incorporates, and transforms elements of the cultural milieu, bringing these under the Lordship of Christ. As members of the Body of Christ interpret the Word, using their own thoughts and employing their own cultural gifts, they are better able to understand the Gospel as incarnation (1989:13).

This presents the centrality of a community of believers within a culture interacting with their particular world view and allowing the Word to reflect upon that view in such a way that cultural practices based on it are critiqued. Thus the biblical world is in constant interaction both with the world of those who receive the Word and the world of the one who communicates it. This cultural mix often resembles a child's game of "telephone" with the message passing through several links and changing along the way. What those at the far end of the communication chain understand about the intended message is not necessarily what it started out to be. To the extent possible this must be avoided and the various means for doing so form the basis of true communication. It is the interrelationships between elements of all these worlds that is crucial to effective understanding;

not a linear progression but an interactive and relational model.

It is the need for critique in the contextualization process that draws our attention. Although crucial, contextualization should never simply be a matter of adapting Christianity to a particular cultural context in order to make sense. It must also be the interaction of people with biblical values which in turn judge the human context and impact relationships among those who subscribe to the cultural rules of that society. Where the beliefs and values of the Word interact with those of human society, critique takes place. Critique, then, is a meeting of God's truth and cultural truth (theological and social reality) at a deep structure—the deep world view level.

Critical Contextualization

One of the problems facing new Christians and the missionaries among them is how they should handle their old beliefs and rituals. Several approaches have been tried, resulting in variations of meaningful understanding of the Gospel in a cultural context. These variations range from syncretism to a viable church.

Rejection of all Traditional Beliefs and Rites

Attempting to avoid compromising the Gospel, some believe that all tradi-

tional culture is pagan and must be rejected. However, this approach leads to the Gospel appearing foreign for it is expressed only in imported symbols, rituals and thought patterns. It is, therefore, incomprehensible to ordinary Christians as well as to non-Christians.

Another product of this approach is that traditional beliefs and practices are driven underground. Often if the old ways are not dealt with openly or people do not understand the meaning of that which is introduced, people will continue to practice their traditions in the context of their homes, out of sight of missionaries. This lack of understanding leads to what Schreiter (1985) calls dual religion—an underground traditional structure with its manifestations of deep beliefs and values, appearing to accept Christianity but without true understanding.

Uncritical Acceptance of Traditional Beliefs and Rites

In order to avoid being foreign, and in an attempt to become indigenous, some have suggested that the new Christian community retain all of the old cultural forms, and find in them the means to fully express the Gospel. This approach, however, also leads to syncretism. Uncritical use of old beliefs and forms leads, in the end, to a mix in which the essence of the Gospel may be lost in the meaning of traditional

religious structures. Christianity then becomes a veneer covering the old religious ways. This is what has happened in much of Latin American Catholic Christianity of the past.

The rejection of these two approaches leads to a third approach, which Hiebert has called "critical contextualization" (1982b). This third approach seeks both to avoid the pitfalls of syncretism and to enable local believers to understand the meaning of the Gospel within their own cultural context.

Critical Contextualization

When questions regarding old beliefs and practices confront new Christians, people have opportunity to deal with the particular topics at hand in a unique and exciting way. The topics should come directly from their cultural context, and will often pertain to the relevance of Christianity to deal with issues people in the society regularly face—rituals and ceremonies, moral issues, immorality and other matters of license. Handling issues in a responsible way (maintaining fidelity to biblical and cultural contexts alike) encourages appropriate responses to all this.

Thus at the birth of a child the question will arise as to how Christians should handle births. The same is true of rituals and ceremonies relating to death, marriage, and any number of other circumstances in which human inter-

action with spiritual elements is appropriate or considered necessary. These issues provide new Christians opportunity to interact both with Scripture and with their culture in order to determine appropriate practice in the church. It is also important for the emerging church to demonstrate the relevance of Christianity and behave in a manner befitting individual Christians in the particular culture. By so doing they let their lives shine before other members of their society (Mt. 5:16), and develop an answer for their behavior that will point others to the reality of their faith (I Pet. 3:15).

The Process of Contextualization

To critically contextualize initiates a process by which Christians can come to determine what God will allow and where adjustments need to be made. This process has several steps: (1) discuss old beliefs and practices, (2) determine God's view regarding these same issues, (3) evaluate the old in light of biblical teaching and, finally (4) create a new contextualized Christian practice.

Discuss Cultural Practices

People should be encouraged to openly discuss their old practices and the meaning these have in the traditional culture and/or religion. By denying them opportunity for open discussion, without censure, we drive those practices underground. So, for example, they may collect old songs, or old myths, or discuss the meanings of any cultural practice thereby giving insight to the deep structures behind particular behavior patterns. Such discussion may be used to convey scriptural teaching about the subject at hand and show how this teaching differs from the beliefs of their old religion.

Understand God's View

What does God's Word say about these same issues? On some issues, such as those pertaining to the Decalogue, God is very clear—every culture has

its "thou shalt not" list. How these relate to God's list is the issue.

On many issues the Bible is silent. Scripture is not a cultural manual of acceptable and unacceptable practices. Often God is neutral on cultural issues, apparently opting to work with people in their circumstances even

Contextualization enables people to use their creative understanding of their culture in conjunction with their new found faith and understanding of Scripture...enable (ing) them to create Christian practices that are meaningful to people in that society.

when practices are viewed as marginal (Kraft 1991). Slavery is an example throughout Scripture, and it is only near the end of the revelational period that God, through Paul's experience with the runaway slave Onesimus, deals directly with the Christian response to the issue. In such cases decisions must be made based on the interaction of biblical and cultural principles.

Evaluating Cultural Practices

This third step provides the critique for cultural practices from a biblical perspective. To the extent possible people need to see the way God looks at their cultural practices. Where the practices are directly contrary to God's

law, these should be stopped. However, it is important for missionaries and others interacting with people to understand the rationale behind such practices. The world view of a people needs to be understood and appreciated resulting in new ways of fulfilling their needs. So-called "functional substitutes" should come about as a result of thorough research by outsiders as well as insiders—interaction is essential.

Converts and members of newly developing churches should be encouraged to decide how to express their new beliefs. In so doing they should review their old practices and decide: (1) which are not usable because the forms and symbols are too closely tied to the specific beliefs of the old religion, (2) which can be used without modification because they are general forms, rites, and symbols that can serve as the media for expressing the Gospel, or for expressing their cultural identity (in terms other than religion), and finally (3) which can be used with new meanings given to them. This redemption of old forms has been used widely in the West to result in modern Christmas celebrations with a Christmas tree, the place of bridesmaids, candles and rice at weddings, Easter celebrations, preaching styles, and many other cultural adaptations resulting in communicating Christian meanings.

Western Christians need to remember their continued use of old songs such as "Home, Home on the Range," national anthems, art, and other secular cultural forms even after becoming Christians. Missionaries also need to remember that many cultural forms including music, drums, art, drama, dance, speech, and many more are media that can be used to express a great many different messages, including Christianity. In other cultural contexts missionaries need to be cautious in rejecting a medium just because non-Christian religions use it. While preaching is used in many religions,

Christians have clearly not abandoned this form of communication. People often reinterpret forms and new meanings are frequently given to old forms. While risk is always inherent in such adjustment, it provides Gospel incarnation as well as continuity with the past (hence a sense of peoplehood and cultural identity) and can be very meaningful both to people establishing their Christianity in a new context and to non-Christians observing these new expressions of culture.

For instance in the West, Greek art forms have been freely used in homes though they were originally religious in character.

As people evaluate their behavior patterns by the truth of the Gospel, it can set them free. Change that results from critical evaluation, however, should be conscious and the ongoing implications clear as they impact the culture. This leads to the final step in the process of critical contextualization.

Create New Contextualized Practices

This is a crucial missiological step. Contextualization enables people to use their creative understanding of their culture in conjunction with their new found faith and understanding of Scripture. It enables them to create Christian practices that are meaningful to people in that society. Missionaries need to recognize that new indigenous rituals can be created by the use of existing symbols along with the creation of new symbols, which can be integrated and arranged into new practices.

The occasion and means of celebrating the “Lord’s supper” provides a case in point. Should this be regularly incorporated into the worship service or be a separate celebration in believers homes? How should the ‘elements’ be represented—by local materials such as coconut meat and milk or possible imported items like grape juice (or even wine) and bread? To answer these questions, Christians need to appreciate the concepts and symbolic meanings

of the elements, local and imported, and how their use may impact people’s understanding of Christian celebration.

Often the use of imported items is only possible so long as there is outside influence and people may be forced to cease this crucial celebration when missionaries leave because they have not been taught how to think through the critical contextualization process. It is crucial then, as part of the development of a church, to introduce them to this process. This will enable them to think through the Christian implications of many cultural forms as well as the incorporation of new forms that must be critiqued in light of cultural and biblical meanings.

Contextualization Leads to Theological Development

The entire process of analysis, based on cultural/biblical forms and meanings, leads to the development of theology within new cultural contexts. Gilliland (1989b:64) makes this clear when he presents four key questions that track with the critical contextualization framework presented here:

- What is the general background?
- What are the presenting problems?
- What theological questions arise?
- What directions should the theology take?

As people develop their theology it must be understandable, not simply incorporated from an outside perspective. Theological understanding then comes as a result of the contextualization process.

True theology is the attempt on the part of the church to explain and interpret the meaning of the Gospel for its own life and to answer questions raised by the Christian faith, using the thought, values, and categories of truth which are authentic to that place and time (Gilliland 1989 11-12).

Such a recognition of the relationship between a particular context, Scripture and the church enables the theology that develops to serve the

church. It is not, then, a foreign entity interjected onto the consciousness of people as a “system” for understanding God, but rather a means of recognizing the dynamic impact God has upon a working culture caught up in rapid change in the world. Thus without local logic and reason generated from a people’s world view, theology will make no sense and people will correctly question their need to pay any attention to it. Such irrelevance, in turn, could seriously damage the reputation of Christians whose ideas and practices make little or no sense from the cultural perspective.

With all this in mind we can say that contextualization is both a product—what people should understand about the meaning of the Gospel as represented by the forms in their context—and a process—an application of the truths of a culture and truths of Scripture to the development of new expressions of Christianity. These new expressions are what Schrieter (1985) calls “local theologies” and present within a context the meaning of the Gospel in new and exciting ways.

The model of critical contextualization recognizes the need for cross cultural communicators to understand the contexts in which they minister. It also encourages mono-cultural messengers to relate their culture to biblical perspectives that deal with the same or similar practices on the one hand or deeper level beliefs and values on the other. God, in infinite wisdom, has provided a plan for people in all times and places. This plan has been used by the Church to both justify cultural practices in the context of a developing church and as a means of forcing change upon those who do not subscribe to those particular interpretations of the Word. It is to this matter of theological tradition which further impacts a developing hermeneutical community that we now turn our attention.

Reducing Syncretism

Syncretism can be defined as an incompatible mixture of biblical truth and local beliefs and practices. Incompatibility should be judged by God's view not another cultural perspective. There are many cultural concerns that can influence the development of relevant forms within a growing church. Those forms must reflect an understanding of the meaning of Christianity within the community in question. That community is formed by believers interacting with each other on the basis of their worldview and cultural practices. It is a hermeneutical community within which the gospel is understood.

The text of the Gospel—all that is biblically communicated—only has meaning within a particular context—a local culture. That culture, as the church emerges, in turn, is represented by a group of believers who accept the message and attempt to understand and apply it to their lives. This group of believers forms the local church and serves as an extension of God's kingdom in a new context. Syncretism is avoided to the extent that local beliefs and practices are adjusted to come in line with the intentions of God's injunctions. Such deep level meaning necessitates the adjustment of surface forms within each Christian context. Hermeneutics comes as a result of understanding worldview issues which, to some degree, reflect pan-human concerns but are manifested in culturally specific ways. Believers, with their understanding of culture specifics, also serve to interface between the Church at large and their particular culture, thus providing a buffer for change and interaction with the broader world around them.

Familiarity with particular practices

may affect how willing people are to apply them to new beliefs. Those for whom the practices were part of daily life may so closely associate the form and meaning that to use them in reference to another set of beliefs is inconceivable. This is often the case with first generation Christians who may reject their old rites and symbols in an effort to separate themselves from their old relig-

**Syncretism can be defined
as an incompatible
mixture of biblical truth
and local beliefs and
practices.**

ious lifestyle. Such a response may be affected by missionaries who may or may not understand the meaning of these beliefs and practices.

Second generation Christians begin to evaluate their new beliefs in an effort to understand where they have come from and where they as a community of believers are going. As the process continues each generation tends to look back to their past to find cultural roots and may try to revive old symbols and rituals. They often do so with no idea of reviving old religions, but of finding continuity with their cultural past.

Sadly, some missionaries unaware of cultural dynamics totally reject old cultural forms because they appear so different from those that are familiar to them. The problem today is how to remove the old bias of mission, while helping the church deal with its cultural past in order to express the Gospel meaningfully but faithfully in indigenous forms. Here is where the interaction of tradition and Scripture can greatly assist people in the process of evaluating their cultural practices in

light of the Gospel message. The result should be a reduction of syncretism and an increase in the relevance of Christianity.

Ground Rules for Effective Contextualization

Based on critical contextualization as the methodological structure that enables a church to determine relevant beliefs and practices while avoiding syncretism, we can suggest several ground rules for effective contextualization.

1. Cultural relevance is crucial to the Gospel making sense.

Relevance implies the need to make sense, for that which makes sense

will not be viewed as nonsense. People will be motivated to understand the message and relate it to what they already know. Their knowledge provides the grid through which they will filter all new information and its meaning to them.

2. Contextualization is both a product and a process.

In the development of a Christian hermeneutical community, contextualization must be viewed as both an end product and a process. The end product can be seen as a group of believers impacted by Christian guidelines established throughout Scripture. The process by which that community makes the Gospel theirs is also crucial. It is that process which enables an on going dialogue between God's truth and cultural truth and addresses the need for relevance as well as a recognition of culture change.

3. Critique based on biblical truth is crucial.

A focus on Scripture provides critique of cultural beliefs and practices. Such critique may, in fact, come from the traditions of the Church as people

have struggled with the realities of conflict between faith and culture over to millennia. However tradition informs the developing church in each context, it must relate back to biblical truth as it has influenced other contexts. Those contexts can serve as a guide for young churches struggling with similar issues.

4. Contextualization impacts culture change.

As the hermeneutical community interacts with the world around it, change is inevitable. The contextualized church may well form a buffer for the society as it undergoes change. Many churches have served to preserve cultural traditions while maintaining the integrity of the Gospel. The orthodox Church in the former Soviet Union is a case in point. As that society undergoes radical change, people are turning to the Church for a sense of stability and a demonstration of meaning in life.

5. The missionary vision of the Church is part of contextualization.

A contextualized church should be ready to communicate its understanding of the message not only within its own context, but by taking the message into new contexts. With an understanding of the Gospel within a particular context as a foundation, the process should be replicated in ever widening circles of influence in other cultural contexts.

Conclusion:

As people acknowledge their relationship with God, and desire to enjoy Him forever, they fulfill their

created desire for relationship with Him. That relationship, however, is only relevant when lived within the boundaries of a particular cultural experience. God brings meaning to and fulfills human longing, while culture enables understanding and implementation of the relationship in any context where it takes root. To this end I pray that those who implement these principles will both experience and communicate the joy of the Lord and the power of the Spirit as they live a contextualized life in accordance with God's will.

[Editors Note: This article is adapted from a chapter in a forthcoming book from Baker Book House, co-authored with Paul G. Hiebert on missiological issues affecting the study of religion.]

References Cited

- 1978 *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*. Hesselgrave, David. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.
- 1982a "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle." *Missiology* 10:35-47. Hiebert Paul G.
- 1982b "Critical Contextualization", *Missiology* 10:287-294 Hiebert Paul G.
- 1985 *Constructing Local Theologies*, Schrieter, Robert J. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- 1988 *Transculturation: The Cultural Factor in Translation and Other Communication Tasks*, Shaw, R. Daniel. Pasadena: William Carey Library.
- 1989 "Contextual Theology as Incarnational Mission." in *The Word Among Us*, Gilliland D.S (Ed.). Dallas: Word Publishing.
- 1989b "New Testament Contextualization: Continuity and Particularity in Paul's Theology." in *The Word Among Us*, D.S. Gilliland (Ed.) Dallas: Word Publishing.
- 1989 *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models*. Hesselgrave, D. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- 1991 *Communication Theory for Christian Witness*. Kraft Charles. Maryknoll: Orbis Books. Revised Edition.

R. Daniel Shaw is the professor of Anthropology and Translation at Fuller Theological Seminary, School of World Mission. He served with Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) among the Samo in Papua New Guinea for twelve years. He is the author of Transculturation: The Cultural Factor in Translation and Other Communication Tasks, two books about the Samo, and numerous chapters in books and articles on a wide range of anthropological, translation and missiological concerns.

Should Christians Pray the Muslim Salat?

How to avoid syncretism when applying contextualization to real situations is critical for successful church planting. A key factor is worship and prayer. Here are 15 reasons for rejecting praying the Muslim prayer salat.

by Warren C. Chastain

Some Muslims are puzzled by Christians who are trying to adopt Muslim practices and rituals. How do Muslims interpret this behavior which they themselves might consider to be compromising: i.e., to practice alien religious forms which they consider false or obsolete? Some, perhaps, are secretly gratified that the superiority of Islam is admitted when non-Muslims take on Muslim practices. Others may see this as a step toward conversion and rejoice.

Also what does it mean to those Christian workers who are facing Mecca and praying the *salat*? Often this is done in meetings where Muslims are present. It is seen as a tool for improving communications and making the Gospel more acceptable? Others actually do it at home or in private because they consider it to be an improvement on traditional Christian forms, though we have not heard of any workers praying at mosques when they return to their home country. Many may do it because of they believe that *salat* type praying is required in order to properly contextualize the Christian message. Probably in most cases, if not in all, the motives are good and commendable.

What is the essence of *salat*? Christians usually interpret the word *salat* as meaning “prayer” which then invites comparisons between Christian and Muslim ideas of prayer. In the Muslim worldview, it is actually the fundamental act of worship which includes a few recognizable “prayers”. In particular, it is a prayer for blessings on Muhammad, prayers for forgiveness, etc. Other statements are made in the *salat* which are praises, or the creeds of

Islam, and are not strictly prayers. A.J. Wensinck in E. J. Brill’s *First Encyclopedia of Islam* says of *salat*, that the translation ‘prayer’ simply is not accurate; the Arabic *du’a* corresponds closer to our idea of prayer. Cyril Glasse in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* agrees, defines *salat* as “a ritual, liturgy, or an act of worship” rather than the supplication usually associated with the word “prayer” in the West. E. E. Calverly W. Montgomery Watt, and S. M. Zwemer also concur that *salat* is worship, not “prayer.” *Salat* is the Muslim substitute, not merely for Christian prayer, but also for the basic idea and act of Christian worship. Here follows 15 reasons why praying the *salat* is highly questionable if not entirely wrong.

Displacement of Revealed Worship

It can be dangerous to think we are engaged in one act when actually we are doing something distinctly different though similar, or even overlapping. Bad theory leads to bad practice. Worship is the highest of all human acts, and the God of heaven actually is seeking worshipers. However, not just any kind of worship man creates is acceptable to Him. The Muslim *salat* is not done in the spirit, nor in truth, nor in the name of Jesus. Rather it is a ritualized worship form created by Muhammad, in rejection of true Jewish and Christian worship, which in some form or other had already been available for centuries. *Du’a*, however, superficially looks like free Christian prayer, but it is anti-Trinitarian in that *du’a* is not addressed to the Father as Jesus taught, (indeed the concept of God as Father is rejected by Muslims). It is not prayer in

the Name of the Son, and it is not evoked by the Holy Spirit (who is merely an angel in Islam theology). Rather, the *du’a* requires certain sacred phrases invoking blessing on Muhammad as, Cyril Glasse, a Muslim scholar confirms: “The *du’a*, which follows the *salah* [*salat*], is always introduced with a prayer on the prophet” (ibid. p. 317). Our conclusion therefore is that neither *salat* nor *du’a* is a proper substitute for, nor parallel to, nor an addition to authentic Christian worship or prayer. It seems to me that to restructure worship so as to appeal to human nature, even when done for good reasons, will produce nothing but a worship in the flesh. To revise true prayer and devotion so as to appeal and perhaps appease Muslims is to water down our faith and represent an affront to our God.

The Authority of Muhammad

A *hadith* has the prophet Muhammad teaching, “*Salah* is the pillar of Islam and whosoever abandons it, demolishes the very pillar of religion.” Muhammad had notions that worship was all important, however, he turned his back on Jerusalem and the Torah, with its focus on the sacrificial system, the priesthood, the Law and the coming Messiah, and substituted his own pattern of intricate, detailed daily prayers. Likewise he rejected the freedom of Christian worship to the Father and the Son, as children, not slaves. The three basic elements of apostolic worship: a) the remembrance of Jesus in the “sacrament of the Lord’s Supper”) hearing and obedience to the Word of God (which Islam rejects as corrupted or superseded by the Koran); ministry of spiritual

gifts through the presence of the Holy Spirit, all were set aside for a pattern of ritual words and movements with a new ethnocentric focus on Arabic. The spirit underlying this innovation is non-biblical worship, despite the adoption of some innocent gestures and recitation of some partial truths (e.g. “God is great,” and “God is One”), does not justify Christians to participate in Muslim practices and its underlying system—a theological error that has kept millions away from salvation in Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Samaritanism

To perform *salat* one must pray toward the Kaabah in Mecca. Jesus rejected the whole idea of a special direction in prayer. We would have expected Him to teach the apostles to face Jerusalem but there is no evidence for this even for Jewish converts. Jesus corrected the Samaritan woman who prayed at or toward Mt. Gerizim saying: “... neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the Father” (Jn. 4:21). The whole idea of converts being required to face any certain direction clearly contradicts apostolic faith. To worship toward Mecca is to disregard both the clear word and the spirit of Jesus’ teaching. In this age, Jesus himself is our “direction” of prayer. He is “the Way” and we are to pray “in His Name.” The conclusion we can draw here: How can you pray in the Jesus’ name if we obey Muhammad?

Chrislam

After Muhammad took power in Mecca, he made a major decision concerning the Kaabah which was the source of the idolatry that Muhammad hated. Unfortunately he did not have the courage of the 20 year old king Josiah who totally destroyed all the images groves, centers of false religion and all relics of idolatry (2 Chron. 34:3-7). “And Josiah removed all the abominations from all the lands belonging to the sons of Israel” (34:33). Perhaps

in a half-way measure Muhammad removed the images out of the Kaabah, but he retained the pagan structure itself with its Black Stone, which he kissed, believing that it became black because sins were transferred to it. Kissing the Black Stone when Muhammad had the political, military, and religious power to set up a system of true submission to the One God, reveals a fatal compromise. Muslims are not merely facing a wrong direction, but they are honoring a pagan shrine and a piece of rock. The only building and stone that the Christian should honor is that mentioned in 1 Pet 2:4-10: “Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.” If we teach converts to look to the Kaabah, how can we also teach them to be “looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2)? If we think they can look both ways, we are modeling syncretism and developing a “double-minded” believer, one “unstable in all his ways” (Jas. 1:7). The conclusion is that “Chrislam” leads to syncretism.

Cleanliness is Far from Godliness

According to Muslims, prayer is totally invalid unless it is preceded by total or partial washing. Muslims have developed an extensive theology of washing. Their stress on cleanliness is very admirable. But when it is made a requirement for approaching God then we enter into dangerous theology. In the Old Testament when water was used for purification it had to be accompanied with blood: “And according to the law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (Heb. 9:22).

But even blood had only temporary validity since it was the blood of animals. As the author of Hebrews clarifies: “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” (10:14) And... “we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Christ.” Christian water baptism

is no exception to cleansing by blood, as Rom 6:3 says: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”

Muslims reject the Christian idea that man has a sinful nature, and therefore reject the need for atonement. Muslim worship accepts mere washing with water as an adequate cleansing for approaching God. Even when Muslims sacrifice an animal it is not an essential part of any theology of salvation from sin.. Muslims emphasize water while Christians stress blood; specifically the blood of Christ. When Muslims do use water, it is merely for cleansing like the outside of a cup. Hence, missionaries who approve of the *salat* will by implication teach a theology that they would reject orally. So doing the *salat* will in fact be justifying Muslim theology and stand against the whole biblical theology of sacrifice for sin as essential to worshipping God. Perhaps a theology of water can be very appealing, but nevertheless deceptive, because it will not cleanse even the outside of the cup!

Christian Alchemy

Are some modern missionaries trying to perform a bit of magic by turning the lead of Muslim *salat* into the gold of Christian worship? How are they attempting to accomplish this? By a very well-meaning attempt to cleanse objectionable elements from the *salat*. The confession that Muhammad is the apostle of Allah is exchanged in this case for a statement about Jesus, and prayers for Muhammad and his family are deleted. Unfortunately this effort fails since the *salat* permits no innovations, particularly any that uplift Jesus over Muhammad. The end result is like the man who was offered Grape Nut Flakes for breakfast. When asked if he could taste more nuts or more grapes, with a puzzled look, he said he could taste neither. Conclusion: A Christian *salat* is alien both to authentic Islam as well as to real Christianity.

Allegiance to the Wrong Community

The Muslim who prays toward the Kaabah is not engaged in an individualistic act even when he does it alone. It is a statement of allegiance and of community. He joins with Muslims all over the world in facing the same center; all his words and actions, except for some trivial differences among different schools of thought, are the same. Thus he expresses his spiritual unity with the community of Muhammad.

There is no escaping the reality that in the past this community has been the enemy of the Body of Christ. It is definitely a distinct community that has displaced or destroyed the Church in many parts of the world. However, no one can really hold dual membership. The act of *salat* is the primary and most pervasive daily declaration of unity in this "anti-Church" community. Conclusion is: "Choose you this day whom you will serve,"-the *Ummah* of Muhammad or the Body of Christ.

Provocation to Violence

The Koran has strong words of condemnation for hypocrites who give the appearance of being Muslims 'but in whose heart is a disease' (8:49; 33:12). David W. Shenk, in an article entitled "Hypocrites are Dangerous" (*Seedbed*, IX 1, p.15), points out the severity of Muhammad's response to perceived duplicity, which was to execute 300 Jews in Medina. Obviously, if Muhammad himself gave a model of slaughter, then no Muslim today—no matter how liberal—can seriously challenge the leader who screams for the *ummah* to use violence against the *munafiqoun* (hypocrites) who try to infiltrate Islam by giving an external appearance of favor. Shenk adds. "Ever since Medina, the Muslim commu-

nity is inclined to develop a fixation on the need to secure their internal integrity. Hypocrites are not to be tolerated neither are revisionists. A serious problem arises, however, when Christians begin to function within the *ummah* with camouflage.

When Christians begin to worship or conduct themselves like Muslims, then the boundaries between the two communities which the *dhimmi* system has established become erased. In a region under the political control of Islam,

We must see that the *salat* is an integral part of a unified coherent whole. It is impossible to take out bits and pieces for our own purposes in order to appear like Muslims or to gain their friendship and approval.

that is intolerable. It feels like sabotage from within." Our conclusion here is that the message of truth must not use methods of hypocrisy.

Second Class Citizens

Historically women have not been expected to go to the mosque to unite with the men as equals in worship. In Saudi Arabia, the heartland of Islam, where the *shari'a* is the law of the land, women are not permitted in the mosques except during the fasting month. The spiritual well being of the men seems to be the primary consideration with the implication that women may worship at home. However, women in menstruation are not permitted to do the *salat* even privately. This is a fundamental rejection of the Christian concept of *koinonia* fellowship. If some missionary and others say, "We will teach the women that they may join in the Christian *salat*" that good intention will hardly overcome the Muslim worldview, and centuries of tradition, that

stresses the ritual purification that is inseparably linked to *salat*. Women converts will inevitably feel unclean and uncomfortable as well as unworthy to worship even if they stand in the back or the place of meeting. Conclusion: A seemingly one small step forward for a man is a giant step backward for womankind. We need to stop spiritual abuse of women.

Worship Without the Holy Spirit

Islam has no doctrine of the Holy

Spirit. Therefore it produces a worship which provides no place for the power or gifts of the Holy Spirit. At best, Muslims might conceive of a Holy Spirit as the Angel Gabriel. However, this has no practical benefit in or for their worship. The Imam leads the worship and as such there is no role for the Holy Spirit to lead. Also

it is inconceivable that the Spirit of God would associate with a religion which has been so antagonistic to Jesus as the Son of God. Nor could the apostles conceive of a worship without a doctrine or a presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that when He left He would send the Comforter who would lead us into all the truth (Jn. 16:7, 13) Conclusion: It does not surprise us that a religion which offers the people Muhammad in place of Jesus would also have a substitute for the Spirit of God. In the *salat*, Muhammad offers his example and the guidance of an *Imam* for worship in place of the gift of the Holy Spirit as promised and given by Jesus.

Form of Flattery

A "Christian *salat*" sends the wrong message to our Muslim friends. They will have reason to believe that if the Christians were finding spiritual satisfaction and access to Allah in Christian worship then they would not need to adopt the Muslim forms of

Should Christians Pray the Muslim Salat?

worship. Love may motivate Christians to adopt or adapt Muslim ways, but it is not love to put the Koran or Muhammad above the Scriptures. If we love Christ, we will want to obey Him, and not follow Muhammad's *salat* to find full spiritual satisfaction and access to God. Counterfeiters do not make \$3 dollar bills. To copy something is to affirm the authenticity of the original. Conclusion: By what biblical authority can we say that *salat* is authentic and acceptable in the Kingdom of God?

Violation of Communication Ethics

If Christians do not admit to the Muslim that *salat* is a superior approach to God, but do it anyway, then the Muslim has reason to question their motives. In communication with other humans, a person has the obligation to use words and actions that do not purposely mislead. Islam has proprietary rights over its own religious terminology and practices. For those who are not in sympathy with the goals of Islam to take upon themselves the right to use those terms and practices for their own private purposes, and in a non-Islamic context, is to violate both the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you", but also violates a basic ethical demand in communications. Conclusion: Christian use of the *salat* gives the Muslim the right to suspect us of deception. The Spirit has said: "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thess. 5:22).

The Curse of Legalism

Muslims have a variety of ideas on salvation, and the Koran barely mentions it. However even when Muslims stress different terminology for attaining paradise there is clearly an underlying legalism associated with attaining blessing or being "rightly guided." If the Jew tried to use the Law to establish his own righteousness (Rom 10:3), the major tool of Muslims to try to establish their own standing before God is their daily perfor-

mance of the *salat*. There is an inextricable linking of works for salvation with a worship focusing on details, externals, ritual movements, holy words and proper washings. Grace and legalism never mix no matter how hard anyone may stir the brew. There is poison in the pot!—and you cannot eat any part of the soup without getting poisoned. Paul says: "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died needlessly. (Gal 2:21) Conclusion: If the law of Moses, attested by God, and given as a Schoolmaster to lead us to Christ, has never been nor today is binding unto salvation, then why should we or anyone lay a new burden on convert—the *salat*—an essential part of a law (the *Shar'iah*) which God never gave in the first place?

Creating New Problems

Not only is legalism theologically and biblically unsound, it makes planting churches more difficult. To hold a "Christian *salat*" believers will have to provide a water source in order to carry on worship. Certain times are more "holy" than others, and certainly more frequent—you cannot call it a *salat* if you do it once a week. The times of Muslim prayer regularly interfere with work and sleep. This can cause economic burdens. In a context of persecution the *salat* could expose believers who wish to control when they will witness. *Salat* makes special physical demands for worship, but this would make it difficult or impossible for the elderly, the weak, the sick and physically impaired to worship equally.

As already noted, *salat* effects the women also. Shall we let the Muslim culture determine how the women shall worship? Despite Muslim apologetics, it is clear that Islam devalues women in addition to segregating them. Can we with good conscience apply the separate but equal doctrine to women in a Christian fellowship? If rightfully we object to imposing Western pews and architecture on an emerging church, why

make worship dependent upon a compass, water troughs, prayer mats, Koran stands and an *imam* to lead prayers? We must see that the *salat* is an integral part of a unified coherent whole. It is impossible to take out bits and pieces for our own purposes in order to appear like Muslims or to gain their friendship and approval. This really does violence to context, since these items only have meaning in their own context. Conclusion. Bad theology leads to bad practice. As a practical matter, we must not lay burdens on others that we ourselves are unwilling to bear.

The Day the Music Died

Muslims believe music is a distraction to worship, so at best, the regular Friday worship may permit a brief chant, but songs and hymns and instrumental music are forbidden. Islam permits music on special occasions, but *salat*, the fundamental act of worship, a basic place to the language of music is prohibited. Conclusion: If Christian worship is to be united with the heavenly worship of the angels we had better learn to sing—and we won't learn it with the *salat*.

Summary

A "Christian *salat*" is really a contradiction in terms—faithful to neither Islam nor Christianity. It is a dangerous mutation that makes Muhammad an authority in the most basic of all religious acts—worship. It is a new legalism, a bandwagon inviting us to get on board, leading eventually to contention, confusion in the Church, and compromise of the faith. Surely we are not going to give up our heritage of true Christian worship, and certainly not exchange it for a mess of pottage—or a pseudo-*salat*.

Warren C. Chastain has worked among Muslims since 1955 in the USA and in Southeast Asia. He has worked with the Zwemer Institute since 1980 where he serves as Director of Research & Strategy.