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GUIDELINES IN CONTEXTUALIZATION

Richard J. Gehman

Contextualization! A crown jewel in the hands of the missiologist? Or is contextualization fool's gold which has the appearance of value but brings disappointment to the prospector?

Contextualization is many things to many people.¹ For some, contextualization brings new hope of liberation from the tyranny of theological imperialism. The Theological Education Fund sees contextualization as the answer to renewal. "It may be stated that contextualization should be in the focal concern because *through it alone* (italics mine) will come reform and renewal. Contextualization of the Gospel is a missiological necessity."²

For others the term, "contextualization," is so loaded with nuances that evangelicals should best avoid it. Fleming concludes his study of contextualization with this recommendation: "Properly speaking, evangelicals do not, and should not, contextualize the Gospel."³

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1. A selected bibliography of articles on contextualization, not including those referred to in the footnotes, include:
 - Ada, Samuel. "In Dialogue: Reflection on Von Allmen's Article, 'the Birth of Theology'", *International Review of Missions*, January 1975, pages 52-55
 - Buswell, J. Oliver III. "Contextualization: Is it only a New Word For Indigenization?" *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January 1978, pages 13-20
 - Conn, Harvie. "Contextualization: A New Dimension," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January 1978, pages 39-46
 - Conn, Harvie, "Theological Trends and Issues in Christian World Missions as Seen From a North American Perspective," *Occasional Bulletin*, April 1979, pages 53-57
 - Kinsler, F. Ross. "Mission and Context: The Current Debate About Contextualization," *Evangelical Mission Quarterly*, January 1978, pages 23-29.
 - Kraft, Charles, "Contextualization of Theology," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January, 1978, pages 31-36
 - Taber, Charles R. "Contextualization: Indigenization and or Transformation," Colorado Springs, Colorado: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, The North American Conference on Muslim Evangelization, October 15-21, 1978.
 - Taber, Charles R. "Is There More than One Way to do Theology?" *Gospel in Context*, January 1978, pages 4-10.
 2. ShokiCoe and Aharon Sapsezian, *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund* (London: Theological Education Fund, WCC, 1972), P. 30
 3. Bruce Fleming, *Contextualization of Theology* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1980), p. 78
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As J. Oliver Buswell III points out, contextualization is used with various meanings in different contexts without any attempt to define what is meant.⁴ Some define contextualization with primary reference to the communicating of the Gospel. The late Dr. Byang Kato in his report at Lausanne said, "We understand the term to mean making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation Since the Gospel message is inspired but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of modes of expression is not only right but necessary."⁵

Others focus their attention on the development of Third World theologies. Daniel von Allmen, representative of many, "attributes the 'new terminology' to 'specialists in theological teaching in the Third World' ".⁶ For him, contextualization "is an attempt to express the fact that the situation of theology in a process of self-adaptation to a new or changing context is the same in Europe as in Asia or in Africa."⁷

The author has been interested in the subject for some time. One of the requirements for accreditation set by the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa is a contextualized curriculum. As a staff at Scott Theological College in Kenya, we have discussed contextualization and its application to the college curriculum, syllabi and the whole educational programme. This is yet another dimension of what is meant by contextualization.

The working definition of contextualization as developed by the Theological Education Fund is very brief. "Contextualization is the capacity to respond meaningfully to the Gospel within the framework of one's own situation."⁸ The beauty of this definition is its simplicity. When interpreted by an evangelical, this definition has tremendous validity. The Gospel is applied and related to the situation in which you find yourself. The Gospel becomes meaningful and relevant as it answers the problems, needs and questions a people has. This is particularly helpful when thinking of theologies for developing churches.

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4. James O. Buswell, III, *Contextualization: Theory, Tradition and Method*, in *Theology and Mission* edited by David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978) p. 87
 5. Byang Kato, "The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism," *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* edited by J.D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), p. 1217
 6. D. Von Allmen, "Birth of Theology", *International Review of Missions*, January 1975, p. 37
 7. James O. Buswell, III, "Contextualization: Theory, Tradition and Method,". 88
 8. Shoki Coe and Aharon Sapsezian, *Ministry in Context*, p. 20

But what often passes for a contextualized theology falls short of biblical theology. It is beyond dispute that contextualization as defined by many is not rooted in Scripture. You begin with the context, understand the particular revolutionary situation where you are, and then later connect this with some "theological motif." What we have is a political ideology in the garb of Christianity with no vital relationship with the heart of Scripture.

Ministry in Context reflects the double-premise dialectic by which theology is derived. Paul Loffler, a theologian of development, states his methodology. "The methodology implicit is that of 'theology as process,' which consists in 'interaction between involvement and reflection' and interaction between the response of the people of God today to the Mission of God today and the records of past response and action."⁹

Here we find a relativity of the dialectic opposites, each interacting in order to form theology. Furthermore, we find a subjective, existential emphasis on Scripture. In fact, Scripture is not even mentioned. Involvement, *praxis*, doing — this forms the thesis. Reflection on the records of past action—this forms the antithesis. The result is the synthesis of theology. Here we find no earnest effort to learn, "thus saith the Lord" in Scripture. Propositional Revelation is not taken seriously. Man does not humbly bow before God as he learns the will of God from Scripture. Theology becomes a pretext for making a political ideology more palatable to people living in a Christian context.

Politicized theologians of the left, including those of Liberation Theology, Black Theology and Theology of Hope, all had their influence on the development of contextualization. One thing they have in common is their emphasis on *praxis*. First, you begin with activity and only then do you reflect on it. Gutierrez, a Liberation theologian, relates theology to action in these words. "What Hegel used to say about philosophy can likewise be applied to theology; it rises only at sundown. The pastoral activity of the Church does not flow as a conclusion from theological premises. Theology does not produce pastoral activity; rather it reflects upon it."¹⁰

In this context of theological writings, we evangelicals need to think carefully what we mean and do not mean by the term, "contextualization," if we are to escape the pitfalls of contemporary theology. Guidelines must be established to help us forge new frontiers and avoid unforeseen error.

The purpose of this article is to define carefully what evangelicals mean by contextualization and to expand each element of the definition with further amplification.

9. Ibid, p. 47

10. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1973) p. 11

Definition of "Contextualization"

Contextualizing Theology is that 8)dynamic process whereby 1) the people of God 6)living in community and interacting with believers throughout time and space, 4)under the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit, 9)proclaim 7)in their own language and thought forms, 5)the Word that God has spoken to them 3)in their context 2)through the study of Scripture.

Amplification of Definition

1. Contextualization is done by the people of God

Contrary to the conciliar approach to contextualization, the Evangelical views contextualization primarily in terms of communication and application. As Flond Efele has pointed out, "to Africanize Christianity cannot be an occasion for prefabricating a new theology. Christian values are universal values. The purpose of the Pan-African movement on African theology is to promote an African expression of the interpretation of the Gospel ... It is in hearing the Gospel that the Christian faith is born and the supreme purpose of African theology is to facilitate for Africans the conditions for hearing it." (Hesselgrave 1978:99)

Unregenerate men cannot do theology. Nor can individual believers in isolation from the believing community do theology. The study of Scripture and the understanding of the will of God can only be done properly by those who have entered a covenant relationship with the living God through personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Dr. Nicholls speaks of "starting from within the circle of faith-commitment."¹¹ We live in a day when professing Christians do not see any relevance in prayer, worshipping, evangelizing, or memorizing Scripture. Bishop John Robinson in his book, *Honest To God*, confessed that he and many other seminarians did not see any relevance in the churchly discipline of prayer. The problem with theologians in many cases is that they either do not have a living faith in Jesus Christ or they do not approach life from within "The circle of faith-commitment."

"The contextualizing of biblical theology in a changing world demands a rethinking of the whole process of doing theology. But the Bible itself insists that the starting point must be from within the circle of faith-commitment to God's self-revelation in Christ. With the weakening of assurance of the knowledge of the content of the Christian faith, many theologians and communicators are, in practice, making the cultural context the starting point."¹²

11. Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1979), p. 55

12. Ibid, p. 55

When we speak of the “people of God,” we do not mean the elite who know the original languages of the Bible and who have graduate studies in theology and philosophy. The people of God are doing theology at every imaginable level: Christians reading their Bible and applying God’s truth to their own lives; lay persons who study Scripture in the preparation for teaching, witnessing and preaching; evangelists who study Scripture in order to proclaim the Gospel and bring men and women to faith in Christ; pastors, both ordained and non-ordained, official clergy and lay clergy, who study Scripture in order to preach the Word of God to the people of God on Sundays; men with a prophetic ministry who study Scripture in order to call society back to the ways of the living God, ways of justice, and righteousness; teachers who study Scripture in order to instruct students preparing for some greater Christian ministry; scholars who study Scripture in order to write books and articles both at the popular and professional level.

Whenever the people of God are interacting with the Word of God and their culture in order to apply Scripture to the lives of the people, there we have theology. This is nothing less than the priesthood of the believers.

2. Contextualization is through the study of Scripture

If the starting point of the people of God is in “the circle of faith-commitment,” the Scriptures have priority for the people of God doing theology. Karl Barth waged a vigorous war against the old modernists whose “natural theology” ate up “grace” as revealed in Scripture. “The mystery of faith begins with the knowledge of Christ and not with philosophy and human tradition. (Col. 2:1-8)”¹³

The study of Scripture should be done by taking the whole of Scripture seriously. “Errors arise mainly from failing to take all the biblical data seriously. The Bible, we believe, contains all that is necessary for our guidance, but the *whole* Bible must be our guide. The apostolic faith is built on the total witness of the whole Bible, considered as a unity, each part contributing to the one revelation given by God which is the Christian faith.”¹⁴

The problem throughout history is that men with good intention seek to accommodate the Christian faith so as to make it more relevant and acceptable. Today theologians such as Bultmann, Tillich, John T. Robinson and others seek to make Christianity acceptable to secular men. But in their adjustments to Western culture, they have surrendered the heart of the Christian faith. As Dr. McGavran has written, these adjustments must be

13. Ibid, p. 56

14. Donald A. McGavran, “The Biblical Base from which Adjustments Are Made” in *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* edited by Tetsunao Yamamori and Charles R. Taber (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975), p. 55

rejected “on the grounds that instead of revelation judging culture, in such adjustments the culture has weighed revelation, found it wanting and folded it into a syncretistic form agreeable to modern man.”¹⁵

When interpreting Scripture we need to follow what Dr. Nicholls calls, “The objective-subjective principle of distancing from and identification with the text.”¹⁶ By this he refers to a “two-way process of encounter.” Dr. Nicholls seeks to maintain a “balance between the objective authority of the Word of God and the subjective experience of the interpretation.” On the one hand we need to distance ourselves from the text by critical study of the Scripture. “The task of exegesis is the recovery of the *sensus literalis*, the literal or natural meaning of the text, involving the right use of the linguistic tools and historical method, traditionally known as the ‘grammatico-historical’ method.”¹⁷ This he distinguishes from the more speculative historical critical method which operates on the documentary hypothesis of Scripture. Instead of us refashioning Scripture, we need to allow the Scripture to refashion our own pre-understanding, “recognizing its objective authority and its internal harmony.”¹⁸

On the other hand we need to identify with the text. This is the “fusion of the horizons” as the Holy Spirit illumines our hearts. Whereas the Neo-orthodox would accuse the Fundamentalists of stressing the cold, factual, propositional doctrines of Scripture, we need to recognize their accusations for what they are, the erecting of a straw man. As Dr. Nicholls writes, “This principle has always been well understood by evangelicals, especially those within the pietistic tradition. The interpreter receives the Word as God’s Word to his own heart. This principle reinforces the principles of perspicuity and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹

3. The Context of the people of God

By context we refer to the whole environment in which the people of God live, including the social, economic, educational, religious, philosophical and political; in brief, man’s culture. Culture is not static and therefore God must address each generation in each culture through His Word.

Culture is related to theology in several ways. First, culture forms the grid through which man perceives the revelation of God. Communication is not simply one way, from God to man. People immersed in culture have certain

15. Ibid, p. 45

16. Bruce Nicholls, *Contextualization*, p. 49

17. Ibid, p. 49

18. Ibid, p. 49

19. Ibid, p. 50

perspectives. They see things in a particular manner. "Whenever an interpreter approaches a particular biblical text he can only approach it from his own perspective ... Thus the interpretative process involves a hermeneutical circle in which the interpreter and the text are mutually engaged and that the interpretation inevitably bears the marks of its historical context."²⁰ This means that culture both hinders and helps man in his understanding of Revelation. It hinders him because his pre-understanding may deflect from his perception of what God has really said. It may help him in that "every situation makes possible a certain approach to Scripture which brings to light aspects of the message which in other situations remains less visible or even hidden."²¹

Culture provides the language by which Scripture is understood and by which the Gospel is communicated. Vocabulary, syntax, figures of speech, analogies, patterns of logic and arrangement, religious and philosophical concepts and functions, all form together the medium by which a theology is conceptualized and communicated.

Context (man's culture) provides redemptive analogies by which men are enabled to understand the revelation of God. Don Richardson in *Peace Child* has demonstrated this. These analogies may be found in legends and records of the past. Or they may be found in contemporary beliefs and practices. But they are cultural road ways which lead people to an understanding of the Gospel.

Context also poses questions for which culture demands an answer. The particular problems and emphasis in a given culture may be significantly different from another culture. Since theology is meant to be the application of God's Word to man and his needs, theology is practical. It is not imposed on the laymen by the theologians, nor is it transplanted from one culture to another. This is one reason a Western theology is inadequate for the Third World.

We can say that beyond dispute God has spoken to man in his culture and in a certain measure accommodated Himself to the limitations we experience. This can be seen in Scripture as God disclosed Himself progressively over the years to the children of Israel, then to the Christian church in Hellenistic culture.

However, we cannot accept the recommendation that we must bifurcate the culture forms in Scripture and the supra-cultural meaning communicated thereby. There is something deficient in the manner by which

20. Rene Padilla, *Hermeneutics and Culture: A Theological Perspective*, in *Gospel and Culture* edited by John Stott and Robert Coote, (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), p. 89

21. *Ibid*, P. 90

Daniel von Allmen sees the birth of Theology. He proceeds on the assumptions of textual criticism and form criticism. He confuses theology with Scripture. If theology is relative, being culturally conditioned, then he concludes Pauline Theology is relative. With that kind of un-evangelical presupposition, his conclusions are to be questioned.

Dr. Nicholls is correct when he says that "Evangelicals recognize the inseparable connection between biblical event and interpretation. In conceptual terms there is an inseparable relationship between the content and form of the Word of God. Both are overshadowed by the Holy Spirit so that the inscripturated Word is the authoritative Word that God intended. This biblical content form carries its own objectivity. It is not dependent on the relativity of the interpreter's own culture or the culture into which he contextualizes it. God in his sovereignty chose a Semitic Hebrew culture through which to reveal His Word ... In divine wisdom God chose Abram out of a Mesopotamian culture and through his descendants formed a carrier culture that reflected the interaction of the supra-cultural content and the cultural form. Thus there is a uniqueness about the Hebrew culture of the Bible. It is not just a culture alongside any other culture, but it becomes a unique culture that carried the marks of the divine-human interaction. In the providence of God this culture was able to faithfully carry the uniqueness of the divine message of creation, sin, redemption and supremely the incarnation and resurrection of the divine Son. Jesus Christ was born a Jew, and it is an affront to divine sovereignty to speak of a black Christ or an Indian or Italian Christ."²²

While culture (context) forms the grid by which we perceive Scripture, that grid is not opaque so that we cannot perceive the basic teaching of Scripture. Some would suggest that all theologies are the result of cultural conditioning. The differing theological traditions in the Christian Church are explained by the different cultural contexts in which the peoples lived. As you scan church history, you find cultural dissimilation determining what people believed

No doubt culture did play a part. But such an explanation is simplistic in the extreme. This explanation does not consider the commonality of man, that these differing theologies are embraced by people of many different cultures, that God's Word is perspicuous for all who read it. Such an explanation leads to agnosticism for it assumes we are so conditioned by culture that we cannot see beyond it.

We believe instead that culture provides the seasoning of the food but does not change the nature of that food. We are not determined by our environment though we are obviously influenced by our environment. Culture will create different emphases but will not change the basic thrust of Scripture.

22. Bruce Nicholls, *Contextualization*, p. 46

Culture then becomes the tool by which we communicate God's Word to others. Context (culture) is the medium through which God communicates and by which we respond. But culture does not shape the meaning or message of theology. Context is a servant and not the master.

Whatever part our context may play in the process of theologizing, our culture cannot be determinative. Scripture must be in practice our final authority. Harvey Hoekstra pointedly observes, "There was a time when Christians listened chiefly to the Bible and frequently failed to understand what was happening in the world and to relate the two. Today the opposite is true. We are so obsessed with the demands and developments of the secular world as determinative for mission that we have forgotten how often the Bible contradicts the world and diagnoses the world's needs in terms such as repentance and faith which the world continues to reject."²³

4. Contextualization is by the Illuminating Guidance of the Holy Spirit

Doing theology in context is not possible without the Holy Spirit nor is it possible by the Holy Spirit alone. The Holy Spirit illuminates the Word, quickens the mind and empowers for living. A true response to Scripture is therefore not possible apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit only works in the minds of believers and primarily through the Scriptures. Scripture is the yardstick to judge whether or not an alleged insight by the Holy Spirit has divine origins or not.

5. Contextualization is by the Word that God has Spoken

The "Word that God has spoken" is here distinguished from the written Word of God, for it refers to that which God speaks to us through Scripture derived by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. This presupposes only a partial understanding of the total revelation. Theology contains insights that are gained through the study of Scripture. But these insights are fragmentary. This necessitates a continual return to Scripture for correction, clarification and confirmation. The written Word of God must always judge the "Word that God has spoken." For we are ever led to conclusions which we erroneously credit to the Holy Spirit.

It would seem that we must distinguish between several different "Words" that God speaks to us in our context. The two polar points are the Written Word of God and the context in which one interprets that Word. There are certain levels of theologizing which are heavily informed by the context. When evangelizing, for instance, we must begin with the person and his felt needs. In this case the context is very prominent in the way we present the Gospel.

23. Harvey Hoekstra, *The World Council of Churches and the Demise of Evangelism* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishing, 1979), p. 83

There is another level of theologizing, however, when we search the whole of Scripture to know all that God teaches His people. We are concerned not merely with fragments of truth, but "the whole counsel of God." At this level of contextualizing the Scriptures are central with the context playing a less important role.

In all cases theology reflects our understanding of what God has spoken in Scripture. Whenever God speaks to us we cannot escape our context. But there are levels of theology which are moulded more by our context than others. Biblical theology, though not uninfluenced by culture, will certainly be universal in its content. The Christians in particular cultures are united with the universal church in professing one faith. But the Word of God as we understand it must be continually reformed through the collective study of Scripture which is our final authority.

6. Contextualization is by living in Community and Interacting with Believers throughout time and space

Properly speaking, contextualizing theology cannot be done in a classroom situation. It is a communal exercise as the people of God, hungry for the Word of God, study the Scriptures together in their own environment. Contextualizing theology is not done in the ivory tower. It is not primarily an academic exercise by individuals. As the community sits together with the Word of God, there is a growing understanding of what God is saying to them in their time and space.

Koyama in his book, *Water Buffalo Theology*,²⁴ is a good example of how *not* to do theology in context. While it provides interesting reading and certainly reflects a desire to relate to the culture where he serves it has three serious defects. First, he does not grapple with Scripture, nor does he seriously study the Word of God in its totality. Secondly, it is not "Buffalo" Theology, but rather a westernized version, with all sorts of ideologies learned from the West creeping into it. Ralph Covell asks this question, "Is this a product of his Asian mind, or of his ten years of American training? ... I question whether this is really 'water buffalo theology.' Its very sophistication seems more appropriate for the University classroom."²⁵ Thirdly, he fails to distinguish between natural theology and biblical theology.

Truly contextualized theology cannot be done by theologians in Geneva or Rome. Nor can it be done by men whose minds are immersed with western categories of thought, and western philosophies. This means that Contextualized Theology cannot fully evolve within a generation, though steps can obviously be taken.

24. Kasuke Koyama, *Water Buffalo Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books: 1976)

25. Ralph Covell, Book Review of *Water Buffalo Theology* by Kosuke Koyama, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January 1977, p. 56

And contrary to the opinion of many, theology is spontaneously being contextualized throughout the Third World in Christian hymns being written to traditional melodies, in sermons preached in churches and schools by nationals, and by the Christians as they interact with Scripture in their context. Wherever you have Scripture in the vernacular language, you have the basis for a contextualized theology.

The whole issue of theology being a community affair, as they interact with believers throughout time and space, is an extremely important matter. This point has been placed nearer the end of the guidelines for a purpose. If Scripture is normative, then it must not be obscured by our theological framework being forced on Scripture. But contextualized theology can never be provincial or narrow. Otherwise, it becomes sectarian. Contextualized theology must be related to the heart of the basic doctrines of the historic Christian church. The context adds the pepper and salt but it does not alter the content in such a way as to create a conflicting theology. The beauty of the Christian faith is that in spite of the hundreds of denominations and differing theological emphases, those who are truly evangelical in their faith can all ascribe to the Lausanne Covenant. There is something more that unites us than an administrative structure. Jesus Christ as He is revealed in Scripture, and the essential elements of the Gospel revealed in the Word of God, are the bond that brings us together. For a contextualized theology to sever that bond would be a travesty and proof of its unsound presuppositions.

7. Contextualization is in their own Language and Thought Forms

Contextualization is pre-eminently rooted in the vernacular translation of the Word of God. That translation must be both faithful to the original texts in Hebrew and Greek and it must convey the message with the impact and meaning that God intended. Without the translation of Scripture, you can have no contextualized theology. Therefore, translation is crucial.

Once Scripture is translated into the vernacular, theological reflection by the people is then possible, free to draw upon figures of speech, analogies, patterns of logic and arrangement, religious and philosophical concepts. Theology is proven to be contextualized by the response it evokes from the people. If the truth of Scripture is communicated by a medium which seems foreign, then it is not contextualized. If the message pierces the heart and seems like their own, then it is contextualized.

Once again, Koyama's theology cannot be a "Water Buffalo Theology" since it is written in English. If contextualized theology is anything other than an academic discipline, it is just this: God's Word communicated through the people's language and thought forms.

8. Contextualization is a Dynamic Process

“The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12 NIV)

The Word of God is living because of the active work of the Holy Spirit in bringing it alive to the people of God as they read it. As men respond to that Word, there is growth in understanding. The picture Paul points in Ephesians 4 is that of being built up “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

“Dynamic process,” therefore, does not mean shifting and changing. Nor does it imply theologies that differ in their essential content. By this we mean a living relationship with Jesus Christ and His Word, so that our behaviour becomes more and more like Christ, so that our understanding of God and His will becomes more and more clear to us. “Unity of the faith” is the accent of the Apostle Paul which is in contrast to the contemporary emphasis on diversity. This is not a unity forced on people. But a recognition that God is one, that He has spoken in Scripture which is marked by harmony and unity, and that as the Holy Spirit leads His people into the study of Scripture there is growth, both in life and understanding.

9. Contextualization is for Proclamation

Proclamation implies Mission. Theology ought not be an academic discipline unrelated to life and mission. Theology is the reflection on the Word of God so that behaviour results. Proclamation is inextricably connected with the knowledge of God’s Word.

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Rom. 10:14)

The best theologians are “task theologians” who are reflecting upon the Word as they seek to proclaim the Gospel in Mission. To isolate theology from life and mission is to misunderstand the intent of God’s revelation of Himself and His will for the peoples of the world.

CONCLUSION

The exciting feature about contextualization is not that it affords hope of reform and renewal, but that the process of making the Word of God incarnate has been going on for several millennia, centuries before anyone conceived the word, “contextualization.” God is at work, through us and in spite of us. Though churches rise and fall, though nations are christianized and de-christianized, Jesus Christ’s Word shall never fail. The Lord affirmed, “I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

We have a task to perform by the help of the Holy Spirit, to let the Word speak to people in their context. Now that the Church is universal, planted among most peoples of the world, we have the responsibility to encourage an immediate application, a direct relating of biblical truth to context, so that God's solution meets man in his need.

But we proceed "within the circle of faith-commitment" to Jesus Christ and the written Word of God. We stand with His people throughout the ages who have confessed, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."