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A LOOK AT CONTEXTUALIZATION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, DEFINITION, FUNCTION, SCOPE AND MODELS

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Introduction

Many Evangelicals use the word "contextualization," but they may not be aware of the specific circumstances under which the term was coined. In reality, different scholars can mean different things when they discuss contextualization, depending on their theological starting points. This article will examine various definitions of contextualization and review how the term came about. It will discuss the functions of contextualization, and the specific areas that the term covers.

Earlier Terms, "Contextualization" and Definitions

As a precursor to looking at actual models and methods of contextualization, it is important to understand the historical background of the term. When scrutinizing the relationship between the Gospel and culture, one discovers different words are used to explain the process of what happens when the Gospel moves from one culture to another. Here are some of the terms that have been employed:

- Accommodation
- Adaptation
- Indigenization
- Incarnation
- Translation
- Transposition
- Rereading of Scripture
- Communication
- Conceptualization

- Incarnation
- Inculturation[1]

Harvie Conn notes that there is a progression of terms and ideas starting with "indigenous church" proceeding to "indigenization" and finally to "contextualization. He raises the question as to whether these new terms solve any of the old problems.[2]

Hesselgrave and Rommen used the term *contextualization* in its expanded understanding of context and culture. It was their opinion that "A new word was needed to denote the ways in which we adjust messages to cultural contexts and go about the doing of theology itself."[3]

When discussing contextualization, it is assumed that people in the discussion agree as to the meaning of the term. However, there are several different ways of understanding contextualization and each definition is tied to theological presuppositions. Actually, the term "contextualization" was introduced in specific historical circumstances within the World Council of Churches (WCC) and was only later taken up by Evangelicals and used in a different way.

Here are some definitions of contextualization used by Evangelicals:

- Contextualization is an effort to express the never changing Word of God in ever-changing modes for relevance. According to Bruce Fleming, "Since the Gospel message is inspired but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of the modes of expression is not only right but necessary."[4]
- According to Von Allmen, contextualization is new terminology developed 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."

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[1]Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 18; David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1989), ix.

[2]Harvie Conn, *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity,* ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), xvi.

[3]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 28.

[4]Bruce C.E. Fleming, *Contextualization of Theology: An Evangelical Assessment* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1980), 62.

Therefore he adds, "The problem of the birth of theology in a new context remains unchanged."[5]

- Taber uses indigenization, accommodation, and contextualization as synonyms and defines these terms as "a process, sometimes intentional and sometimes unintentional, by which a message which is initially alien takes on a shape more congenial to the total receptor context."[6] On the one hand, his view of good indigenization is that which makes the message intelligible in terms of receptor categories of thought and imagery and relevant to the existential concerns of the receptor people and sharpens the focus of the Gospel. Bad indigenization on the other hand "blunts and emasculates the Gospel by denying or concealing those parts of the Gospel which contradict basic cultural values or by focusing on non-essential or illegitimate issues."[7]
- Bruce J. Nicolls defines contextualization as " . . . the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate culture and within their particular existential situations."[8]

Although all these definitions have different nuances, the main point of each one is the description of how to express the message of the Gospel, supreme over all cultures, in new cultural contexts. It is the process that makes the message intelligible in the thought of the receptor people. Hesselgrave and Rommen argue that contextualization is a necessity. Their thesis rests on the following premise: if the Gospel is to be understood, then contextualization must be true to the full message of the Bible and related to the cultural, linguistic and religious background of the listeners.[9]

The concept of contextualization raises three concerns for missions. The first concern is that missionaries tend to introduce their cultural heritage as an integral part of the Gospel. Thus missionaries

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[5]Daniel Von Allmen, *The Birth of Theology,* in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity,* ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 325-348.

[6]Charles R. Taber, "The Limits of Indigenization in Theology," in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity,* ed. Charles H. Kraft and Tom N. Wisley (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 372-399.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 33.

[9]Ibid., xi.

should *decontextualize* the message of the Gospel from their own cultural background. The second concern is the necessity of putting the Gospel into the new context so that the Gospel and the resulting church will not seem foreign in its new setting. The third concern is that converts may include elements of their culture, which alters or eliminates aspects of the Gospel, upon which the integrity of the Gospel depends.[10]

Development of the Term Contextualization

Just before 1900, the "Three-Self" approach to church maturity was developed to help national churches become independent from their foreign sponsoring churches. This was primarily attributed to the work of Henry Venn, John Nevius, Rufus Anderson and Roland Allen. However, theology was still largely imported from the spiritual parents, the foreign missionaries, and it was foreign in application as well as in structure.[11] There were few local theological works, primarily because writing was not the primary means of communication for nationals. Fleming notes that there was a sense of need for something deeper, but that most people only knew the imported Christianity of the missionaries. The pursuit of something deeper in the 1970s was in two areas: evangelism, that is, how to reach the unsaved in their own countries; and, the ethical dilemma of Christian honesty in corrupt societies. Thus, "Various practical areas that need to become nationalized or ethnicized, have been discerned within these two major emphases."[12] The suggestions for these areas included: modes of worship, hymnody, prayer, the Bible, evangelistic terms, preaching style and theology.[13]

The term "contextualization" was first mentioned in the publication *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970-1977)*.[14] The Theological Education Fund (TEF) was launched by the International Missionary Council (IMC) at its Ghana meeting in 1957-58.[15] The TEF was a funding agency that related to the WCC. The purpose of this agency was to evaluate requests for funding according to how contextualized they

[10]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 1.
[11]Flemming, 2-3.
[12]Ibid., 3.
[13]Ibid.
[14]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 28.
[15]Ibid.

were in four areas: missiology, theological application, educational methods, and educational structure.[16] In 1961, in New Delhi, the IMC joined the WCC and became the Division of World Mission and Evangelism (DWME).[17] The commission worked on reforming the training of national Christians for the Christian ministry. They worked within the context that the Gospel should be expressed and ministry undertaken in response to widespread crisis of faith, and issues of social and human development. There should be a dialectic between local cultural and religion situations with a universal technological civilization.[18]

The situation involved more than just dissatisfaction with traditional theological models.[19] In fact, the context of the work of TEF within WCC was with issues related to the unity, authority and relevance of Scripture.[20] There were two key WCC meetings in 1971 where questions were raised as to whether or not Scripture could be the starting point for theology. The new idea was that the experiential realm of thought and action should serve as the basis for theological work. With this in mind, "The distance between the biblical text and the modern interpreter is to be overcome dynamically by allowing the Bible to pose questions which the interpreter must answer in accordance with his understanding of the biblical witness and of the ways in which God is working today."[21]

Hesselgrave and Rommen see the originators of the term as finding "a new point of departure and a new approach to theologizing and to theological education: namely, praxis or involvement in the struggle for justice within the existential situation in which men and women find themselves today."[22] This went beyond the notions of indigenization proposed by Venn and Anderson that defined an autonomous church, or the Roman Catholic view of accommodation by Louis Luzbetak that had to do with the church adjusting its theology in mission to fit the local culture.[23] The TEF saw indigenization as communicating the gospel and fitting it to culture. They saw contextualization as utilizing patterns of indigenization but wrestling with the new influences on

[16]Fleming, xi.
[17]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 28.
[18]Ibid., 29.
[19]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 29; Fleming, 4.
[20]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 29.
[21]Ibid., 31.
[22]Ibid., 32.
[23]Ibid.

culture.[24] Indigenization was seen as a narrower historical concept that dealt with static traditional patterns and religions.[25] Contextualization was to press beyond these and to deal with contemporary life and deep-seated cultural patterns as well as cultural overlays such as post-modernity, humanism and any other new trends.[26] Thus, in the TEF view, both technical and popular contex-tualization become part of the content. An analysis of the situation is used to support radical theologies and ideologies.[27] It was a type of situational theology and ethics. The process of contextualization, in the WCC view, was to take the Bible and dogmatic theology viewed through the higher-critical lens of modern confessional grids. Then, to subject it to a dialectical process of interaction weighted with socio-political analysis. Thus the thesis was dogmatic theology, the antithesis was the context informed by these other sources such as radical and neo-orthodox hermeneutic influenced theology.[28] In a nutshell, it was a liberal approach that put the Bible in second place to the conditions surrounding the propagation of the Gospel.

As such, Evangelicals reacted to the theological agenda within the WCC that shaped the views and practices of contextualization. In the late 1970s James O. Buswell III and Bruce Fleming both opposed the WCC meanings of contextualization, proposing and using different terms. However, their suggestions for other terms as more appropriate for Evangelicals were not picked up.[29] Harvie Conn criticized Evangelicals for confining contextualization to matters related to the effective communication of the gospel to peoples of other cultures while ignoring their own culture-boundedness. He argued that they needed to wrestle with their relationship between the biblical text and their own cultural context. He suggested the term "conscientization," meaning that Scripture is allowed to judge the enculturated interpretations and lifestyles. Another term for this process is decontextualization.[30]

Following the debate, the Evangelical world began to stake out its own ground on issues regarding the Gospel and Culture. Fleming notes that the TEF view of indigenization was the Gospel responding to

[24]Fleming, 52.
[25]Ibid., 53.
[26]Ibid.
[27]Ibid.
[28]Ibid., 58-59.
[29]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 33.
[30]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 34.

traditional culture.[31] However, Evangelicals saw Indigenization as "putting the Gospel into" and not "responding to" culture.[32] In Fleming's view the TEF failed to distinguish content from form, and thus allowed culture and context to manipulate the text.[33] So at the 1975 meeting of the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA) contextualization and indigenization were given the same meaning. According to those at this meeting, there were two categories to contextualize or indigenize: correct theology and application to current situations.[34] There was a big difference from the TEF view, because in their understanding, true contextualized theology did not need applying.[35] This reversed the emphasis back to the Bible being above anything else.

Thus Fleming suggested context-indigenization as the term for Evangelicals to use.[36] He describes the process in six steps:

1. Begin with the inerrant authoritative Word of God,
2. Use historic-grammatical exegesis,
3. Develop biblical theology from the Old and New Testaments,
4. Derive systematic theology from Step 3,
5. Cultivate specialized theologies such as theology of mission,
6. Formulate material on mission principles and practices.[37]

Functionality and Scope of Contextualization to Models of Contextualization

This section expounds on the functionality and scope of contextualization leading to different models of it. Darrell Whiteman has suggested three major functions of contextualization. He captures the method and perspective of the challenge of relating the Gospel to culture. First, it is to communicate the Gospel in word and deed, establishing the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, as well as presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture. Second, the Gospel offends. When the Gospel is presented in

[31]Fleming, 61.
[32]Ibid., 66.
[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid., 53.
[35]Ibid.
[36]Ibid.
[37]Ibid., 59.

word and deed, and the fellowship of believers called the church is organized in appropriate cultural patterns, people will more likely be confronted with the offense of the Gospel, exposing sinfulness, the tendency toward evil, oppressive structures and behavior patterns within their culture. Thirdly, it is to develop contextualized expressions of the Gospel that expand the understanding of the kingdom of God for the universal church.[38]

Fleming says, "The gospel must be recognizable to people within their cultural matrices."[39] In Bible translations, translators use dynamic equivalence in the languages they work in. The late Eugene Nida, a translation consultant for the United Bible Societies, believed that "dynamic equivalence translation meant the closest natural equivalence to the source language message."[40] So, the scope of contextualization is to search for dynamic equivalence in all the areas of church life such as creative ministries.[41] Harvey Talman argues for a minimum of seven critical areas to work on in contextualization: Bible translation, language, evangelism, church planting, worship, music, theology and leadership training.[42] With the function and scope of contextualization mapped out, the following are some models of contextualization.

Model # 1 Authentic/Relevant Contextualization by Hesselgrave and Rommen

Hesselgrave and Rommen defined Christian contextualization 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 . . . and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts. It 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 etc. The notion of authenticity deals with God's revelation. It means to be

[38]Darrell L. Whiteman, "Contextualization: The theory, the gap, the challenge," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 21, no. 1 (1997): 2-7.

[39]Fleming, 64.

[40]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 62.

[41]Fleming, 64.

[42]Harvey Talman, "Comprehensive Contextualization," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21, no. 1 (2004): 6.

> faithful to the authority and content of the will of God as revealed in creation, conscience and Scripture. Authenticity itself does not assure us that the message will be meaningful and persuasive to our respondents.[43]

This refers to authenticity. Relevance also speaks of effectiveness. It is communication that grows out of understanding the respondents in their particular context and the work of the Holy Spirit in both messengers and recipients.

The Hesselgrave-Rommen model of contextualization involves two major tasks:

Task 1: Interpretation and Decontextualization (Revelation, Interpretation, Application)

1. The first element is the process of interpretation and decontextualization which begins with God's revelation of His truth in language. The Spirit has used human authors who in turn have to use linguistic symbols to convey the meaning of that revelation and produce a text.
   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 (latitude of correctness), 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.[44]
2. The second element is the recipient's interpretation of the intended meaning. The perceived meaning is affected by the recipient's own culture and the culture of biblical times.[45]
3. The third element involves two possible options. In the first choice, the recipient forms the possible implications of his or her understanding of the biblical text for the culture in which it is to be lived out. In the second choice, the recipient may

[43]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 199.
[44]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 201.
[45]Ibid., 202.

> decide whether or not to accept the validity of the text's implication, or to superimpose another 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."[46] If the recipient accepts the claims of the text, he or she will apply its meaning to his or her own sociocultural environment. This does not mean the biblical content becomes true, but rather because it is true and, if properly understood, it can be applied to specific contexts in an ever changing, multicultural world. The recipient may now distinguish between culture-bound aspects of the Christian message that are open to modification from revelatory content that has non-negotiable supracultural validity.[47]

Task 2: Contextualize Message to Communicate Effectively to the Target Audience

The Hesselgrave-Rommen model of contextualization shows seven dimensions used to effectively communicate with the target audience. This model involves taking the results of Task one, which are the supracultural elements of the message, and applying them to:

1. Worldviews-ways of viewing the world
2. Cognitive processes-ways of thinking
3. Linguistic forms-way 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.[48]

Model #2 Critical Contextualization by Hiebert

This model proposed by the late Paul Hiebert, professor at Fuller Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, strikes a balance between a view of culture that is either too ethnocentric and one that is overtly pluralistic leading to a cultural relativity with no absolute truth. Hiebert recommends that people in one culture should seek to

[46]Ibid.
[47]Ibid.
[48]Ibid., 203.

understand messages and ritual practices from another culture with little distortion.

Hiebert presents contextualization as an ongoing process that engages local Christians in these five steps:

1. Exegete the culture – uncritically gather information.
2. Exegete Scripture and build the hermeneutical bridge – this means to first find out what the biblical text meant to its original author and audience, then to translate the Biblical message into the cognitive, affective, and evaluative dimensions of another culture. Without the bridge, people of one culture can have a distorted view of the Gospel because they are seeing it through local categories rather than grasping the message as originally intended.
3. Critical Response – evaluate local customs in light of the new biblical understanding and make a decision.
4. Develop new contextualized practices.
5. Guard against syncretism – this means that the church acts together, as a hermeneutical community, in order to come to understanding of what is faithful to the gospel.[49]

Model #3 Synthesis of Pluralism-Biblical Contradiction-Transformation by Lingenfelter

Sherwood Lingenfelter's book *Transforming Culture* written in 1992, is not offering a formal model of contextualization, but it acknowledges the value of contextualized indigenous churches, and defines contextualization as the framing of "the gospel message in language and communication forms appropriate and meaningful to the local culture, and to focus the message upon crucial issues in the lives of the people."[50] He also gives warnings about some of the dangers and weaknesses of contextualized indigenous churches if they are so bound to their own culture and values, that they lose their spiritual vitality as a Christian witness.[51] Lingenfelter says that there are forces that pressure the church to compromise which are rooted in cultural systems that

[49]Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 88-92.

[50]Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 15.

[51]Ibid., 16.

contaminate.[52] The Gospel liberates people from these cultural systems and transforms communities so people can live their lives as God's people within their social system.[53] The Gospel plays a contradictory role, challenging the values, and power structures of the social system, and thus, can "become a significant powerful force in the continuous restructuring of any social environment and worldview."[54]

Although not a formal system of contextualization, the synthesis that Lingenfelter offers contains values and practices that follow a logical progression that can help national Christians make the Gospel meaningful in their own setting. A summary of Lingenfelter's main ideas can be categorized as values and actual practices that stem from value commitments:

1. In value – a person with a pluralist perspective on the world with its distinctive social environments and worldviews should maintain a respectful stance, seeking to understand how others see and interpret their world. However, this person should also acknowledge that all sociocultural systems are tainted by sin. In practice – this person should seek to understand the local worldview as it relates to the social environment as well as how issues of economy and society create these faith communities.
2. In value – Biblical absolutism is a total commitment to the truth and authority of Scripture. In practice – it is discerning what the Scripture says about issues in the local culture.
3. In value – it deals with Biblical contradiction by asking the question: "How does the Gospel contradict what I think, what I believe and how I live?" It entails thinking theologically about the local worldview. In practice – it is bringing local issues to the light of Scripture to see how the Gospel challenges them.
4. In value – it is seeking transformation within cultural environments. In practice – it is finding ways the Bible speaks into the local context building new lifestyle patterns that are informed by a biblical worldview.[55]

[52]Ibid., 17-18.
[53]Ibid., 19.
[54]Lingenfelter, 20.
[55]Ibid., 20-23.

Model #4 Transculturation by Kraft

Charles Kraft, a retired professor from Fuller Theological Seminary, is one of leading thinkers and innovators in the area of contextualization. His books *Christianity in Culture* and *Appropriate Christianity* were groundbreaking in the field of missionary anthropology and stimulated controversy among Evangelicals who tried to work through the implications of his assumptions. Kraft's work is a transculturation model that aims to communicate God's word into receptor cultures.[56] Eugene Nida, the Bible translator consultant who came up with the concept of dynamic equivalence, was one of his mentors. For Kraft, transculturation is similar to Bible translation but in the context of culture. The goal of transculturation is the same as Bible translation, that is, to find the dynamic equivalence.[57]

Hesselgrave and Rommen show that Kraft's work flows from his assumptions that are quite complex. Kraft's key assumptions are:

1. Culture is neutral, a tool through which all reality is filtered. He believes that God made culture as a starting point for people.
2. Meaning is constructed in the minds of the receptors. It is dependent on the extent of shared symbols between sender and receiver.
3. Revelation is where divine truth is understood by general or specific revelation. When God is revealed, people respond .
4. Kraft does believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, but inspiration is attached to meanings and not words. The Bible contains a supracultural message.[58]

Hesselgrave and Rommen as well as other Evangelicals find Kraft's core ideas problematic because he does not seem to hold to an errorless Scripture.[59] They think he is saying that words have no meanings outside of what the receptors give those words. However, his work is innovative and thought provoking, raising many issues of importance.[60] Kraft's model should result in dynamic equivalence in areas such as "translations, transculturations, ethnotheologies,

[56]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 64.
[57]Ibid.
[58]Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 60.
[59]Ibid., 194-95.
[60]Ibid., 65.

conversions, churches and the transformation of culture."[61] The following is a summary of his material from Chapter 4 in *Christianity in Culture*.

1. The *forms* of a culture are the observable parts of which it is made up. These are the customs, arranged in patterns, or the products of those customs. Many cultural forms are conceptualizations of material items; most are conceptualizations of non-material items.
2. Each of the forms of a culture is used by the people of that culture to serve particular *functions*. Certain of these functions are general, universal functions, relating to basic human needs that every culture must meet. Others are more specifically related to non-universal, individual, and group concerns.
3. One of the most important functions served by every cultural form is to convey *meaning* to the participants of a culture. Not everyone understands the meaning of a cultural form in the same way, so its meaning within the social setting is the sum of all the subjective associations people make about it. One of Kraft's foundational assumptions is that forms are basically neutral in the sense that the forms and functions of culture act "as a kind of road map made up of various forms designed to get people where they need to go." Thus they are not inherently good or evil in themselves. Where sin comes in with Kraft's model is at the level of meaning; where meanings intended and received are always tainted by sin. Thus no aspect of human culture can be used with completely pure intent.
4. Closely interrelated to function and meaning is the matter of how a cultural form is used. This consideration, more than others, makes explicit the active part human beings take in the operation of culture. The forms of culture are relatively passive in and of themselves.[62]

In terms of Kraft's point regarding dynamic equivalence transculturation, the goal is to find forms and functions that can express the same meanings and usages as in Scripture and the first-century church. Kraft has been misunderstood by Evangelicals who find him

[61]Ibid., 68.
[62]Ibid., 64-66.

liberal in his stance about the Bible. His model of contextualization has validity in Christian mission application.

Model #5 Context-Indigenization by Bushwell and Fleming

This model has three layers that build upon one another, and which reflect the situation of the gospel coming into a new cultural setting via missionaries. In the initial stages the missionaries make decisions, but later in the process local believers can modify these decisions.

1. The first layer is called inculturation. On this level there is a disengaging of the supracultural elements of the Gospel from one culture to another, and the "contextualizing" of these elements within the cultural forms and social institutions of another. This includes translation, evangelism, apologetics and preaching. Judgments are made on what is good, bad and neutral in each culture.
2. The next layer is indigenization. This follows the lines established by Venn, Nevius, Anderson and Allen that emphasized the church and leadership. The inculturation becomes natural enculturation done by national Christians. The patterns, forms and institutions of Christianity include church buildings, order of service, ministers' dress, songs, art and how to celebrate festivals. These aspects can be contextualized. Dynamic equivalence should be sought where the same meaning and function within the culture is the same as in the early church.
3. The third and final layer is ethno-theology. This is doing theology inside the new system. The absolute supracultural elements are applied to specific forms in the culture. In Kraft's terms ethno-theology is a combination of systematic theology and anthropology. However for Bushwell and Fleming, ethno-theology is systematic theology developed within the culture.[63]

[63]Fleming, 67.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many differences in these models, but there is also an overall pattern that emerges. There are three main points that form the basis for contextualization. The first is the Scriptures. There is a need to establish what the Bible says in its own context. This is a process of decontextualization ensuring that the Bible is not read using contemporary settings to understand the text. The second point is to understand, as well as to accept local culture, rather than reject it. Finally, the third point is to relate the Bible to issues in the local culture with the purpose of creating a dynamic equivalence impact. This means not taking the forms from existing Christian settings, and superimposing them on the new culture.

In the contextualization process there is a change in activity. In the pioneering stage, missionaries bring the Gospel and are forced to make some early judgments about what to include or exclude in terms of local forms and functions. Also early in the process local Christians should identify the issues that are relevant to them and start to work on the process of relating Scripture to them. There is a big difference between telling new Christians what they are to do and engaging them in the process of using local forms with Scriptural functions, meanings and usages. When national Christians are engaged in decision-making, there is ownership. When they are told what to do, this is a form of imperialism on the part of the missionaries.

The challenge is to deal with non-neutral cultural forms. There are some neutral local forms that are biblically permissible because they are similar to the cultures of the Bible and are not immoral. Including these forms into the life of the church is not difficult. But, missionaries have forbidden forms that are not neutral, which carry functions and meanings that are against the Bible. This created a perception that Christianity was just a foreign religion. However, the danger in trying to create new meanings with such existing forms is that the old meanings are still attached, and it could result in the people having syncretized understanding and practice rather than one rooted in Scriptures. So the models are helpful in providing guidance for working through those kinds of issues.

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