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Mi 435 Contextualization of the Gospel

Reflection Paper #2

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Contextualization

Contextualization may be one of the most important issues in mission today. Unlike the “Death of Jesus” movement in theology, contextualization is no mere missiological fad that will fade when another “hot topic” catches our attention. Concerns over issues of contextualization has been a part of the Christian church from its inception, even though the vocabulary of contextualization dates back only to the early 1970s. It is a perennial challenge – one that Christians have faced every time we have communicated the Gospel across language and cultural boundaries. The church has struggled with this problem through the ages as it has evolved from one era to another. Essentially, contextualization is concerned with how the Gospel and culture relate to one another across geographic space and down through time.

Contextualization captures in method and perspective the challenge of relating the Gospel to culture. In this sense the concern of contextualization is ancient – going back to the early church as it struggled to break loose from its Jewish cultural trappings and enter the Greco-Roman

world of the Gentiles. At the same time, it is something new. Ever since the word emerged in the 1970s, there has been almost an explosion of writing, thinking, and talking about contextualization. Without question, contextualization is part of an evolving stream of thought that relates the Gospel and church to a local context. So I believe we are making some progress in our understanding of the relationship between Gospel, church, and cultural, but we have a long way to go in everyday practice.

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Throughout the lives of missionaries who's purpose is to reach the unreached with the message of the Gospel, contextualization plays a huge role. Throughout this paper I will analyze the meaning, as well as compare and contrast the idea of contextualization. Throughout the world there are many different cultures that have extremely different ways of life and cognitive processes. Understanding that this barrier that can be reached is essential in reaching those groups of people. Contextualization is the process of making the Gospel easy to understand in the culture we are trying to reach. Sharing the Gospel in away that they can relate (but not change) is essential. (On pg. 73), M. M. Thomas: "Christ-Centered Syncretism," Arnold Toynbee, believed that if Christianity is to be the religion of the future it must become less exclusivistic, more open to change and to accepting various ways of expressing the results of the religious quest." In another way, it must become inclusivistic with the ability of expressing a wide variety without losing its own identity.

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Understanding the culture and the importance of certain rituals or offenses are important when trying to reach the people in another culture. If there is something that I know is offensive to the culture I'm trying to reach, there is no need to emphasize it. For instance, if a Hindu holds to the belief that one must not eat meat, there is no need to tell that person that they should eat meat. The reason being, they can be vegetarians forever and still be saved. However, if one is not

mindful of the culture they can easily fall into situations that can destroy the seed that was planted.

Contextualization is beneficial when it is used properly. Unlike uncritical contextualization that “opens doors to syncretism of all kinds, if Christians continue in beliefs and practices that stand in opposition to the gospel, in time, this behavior will mix with their newfound faith and produce various forms of problems.” When old views and rituals are not examined many issues arise. Kosuke Koyamas’ Waterbuffalo Theology, points out that in contextualizing the Christian Faith we do begin with adjustments to a transplantation – like the transplanting of a grown tree from Amsterdam to Djakarta, or from New York to Manila – but with locating the living seed of faith in what was received, and guarding, watering, and nurturing it as it roots itself in the native soil (79-80). When the seed is located involve the people in evaluating their own culture and to draw upon the strength of the gospel. They know their old culture better than a missionary. Contextualization has to do with how we assess the peculiarity of the third world context.

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