

Chapter Review #1

Josiah Stumbo

CD501 - Online, Spring 2023

In Chapter 2 of *Soul, Self, and Society*, Michael Rynkiewicz discusses the anthropological concepts of culture, ethnocentrism, and contextualism and explains their relevance for preaching the gospel. Rynkiewicz's main point is that Christians must avoid the dangers of ethnocentrism and embrace the journey of contextualizing the gospel by arriving at an understanding of culture as both *relative* to its own context and *constructed* by the environment in which groups of people find themselves.

In this very interesting chapter, Rynkiewicz discusses the origin of culture, and how postmodern thinking, breakthroughs in social sciences, and new discoveries in the field of neuroscience have impacted the way we understand the formation of cultures as well as the concept of cultural relativity. Rynkiewicz makes a case for the complexity of culture, discussing how people are shaped by the intellectual, material, and spiritual resources available in their environment, but each individual also has the ability to contribute the shaping of culture by choosing various responses to the resources they are provided with. Rynkiewicz attaches this concept to both ethnocentrism and contextualization. In discussing ethnocentrism, Rynkiewicz explains the dangers of assuming that one's own culture is the superior culture and explains that Christians can overcome this tendency when they understand the relativity and complexity of the concept of culture itself. Rynkiewicz goes on to explain that Jesus Himself was born into a culture, and that every word of scripture was written in the context of a culture. In order to grasp the meaning of the gospel and then communicate it to others, contextualization is absolutely necessary.

Rynkiewich explained many of these concepts in a way that I have not heard previously. The way he explained cultural relativism and the formation of culture based on one's environment helped me grasp the concept of culture at a new level. His explanation of contextualization, although not brand new to me, helped me put words to it that I wouldn't not have been confidently able to explain myself.

The first question I would find interesting to explore would be "how does Rynkiewich's definition of culture on a grand scale like this overlap with the concept of creating a "culture" within a ministry?" As a ministry leader, I am tasked with creating a "culture" of discipleship, hospitality, kindness, etc. This discussion here made me wonder if I'm possibly using the correct word here, and if there are any dangers of ethnocentrism in the approach I've been taking. The second question that I think it would be helpful to explore more would be the interaction between the Gospel and Culture. Rynkiewich seems to oversimplify the complexities of the conversation that is often had between anabaptists and American evangelicals, for example, about to what extent Christians ought to engage with culture.