

Thoughts on Evangelism from Pastor Bill

I think discipleship is greatly influenced by two issues – worldview and how someone interprets the purpose of God’s Word. Both issues should be guided by how we *incarnate* God’s transcendent and immanent presence. One contextualization would be our own representation of the gospel – can we be distant enough from culture to rightly interpret the voice of the Holy Spirit as he convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, as he guides us in truth and as he glorifies Jesus (John 16:8-15) *WHILE* being a reflector and thematizer who is able to provide the biblical and traditional background that will enable someone to develop their own theology – personalizing the Word of God into a distinctly Christian, Spirit-filled worldview. To do so we must remain far enough from culture to function as the bride of Christ, the Church. In this sense as individual members we remain deeply devoted to God (Luke 10:27) above all else. We must also be lovingly devoted to all people (Luke 10:27) joining them where “faith actually lives, and that is in the midst of people’s lives”.

There appears to be a particular tension in the topic of contextualization and its role in understanding, communicating and living the principles contained in Biblical narrative. Clearly we are called to be the “hermeneutic of the gospel” (Newbigin, 1989), therefore determining the difference between Biblical content and Biblical context is a critical step in knowing how to best express the good news about Jesus in multiple settings and among new groups of people. The tension surrounds our understanding or interpretation of certain elements of scripture. The Bible is by its very nature a contextualized piece of communication. All of the authors were part of various cultures and historical settings and they were attempting to communicate divinely inspired words in a particular place and time, to “historically/culturally situated people”. As scripture was being written and communicated it would hold cultural or historical meaning for the people it was immediately intended to spiritually shape. The creation account in Genesis and laws and rituals found in Deuteronomy are two examples of inspired scripture that was set in a cultural or historical framework.

The Book of Acts can also be understood as a contextualized account of the work of the Holy Spirit. Though we may read it today and be instructed or inspired by various accounts of the spread of the gospel, it too held specific cultural and historical meanings for its initial readers. There was a definite reluctance of Jewish Christians to preach the gospel to Gentiles. Luke was writing Acts (in part) as an encouragement to all believers to bridge the social and religious boundaries with the gospel of Jesus Christ, to “let go of their ethnocentric attitudes and practices”

The critical component, the reason contextualization is so critical to our understanding of becoming the “hermeneutic of the gospel” in our communities, ***is that we too must examine our own attitudes and practices in light of God’s word to discern how we might bring the whole gospel to the whole world.***

These theories relate to church multiplication and present a similar tension for district supervisors and other church leaders. One of the most challenging hurdles to CM is how established church pastors and denominational leaders view the wide variety of church types. Church campuses, ethnic congregations, simple churches and other types of incarnational communities are viewed through the lens of traditional church settings. They look for organizational components that may be typical (their assumptions) for traditional churches and use them as a method to measure faith-community authenticity. We must press what I consider to be a more Biblical principle to advance this discussion. In my mind making disciples is the reason to multiply churches. Determining what church might look like - its organizational structures, traditions, worship style, norms and rituals is dependent on who they are committed to disciple (contextualized). In this case the conversion of the messenger (denominational leaders, church pastors, church planters) must come before the conversion of those who need the message. We need to 'convert' traditional church pastors and help them move beyond their own assumptions about faith communities and cultures.

I'm adding some interesting excerpts from Bevans book: *Models of Contextual Theology (Faith and Culture)*

The Anthropological Model of Contextualization

The insight of the anthropological model is that the theologian must start where the faith actually lives, and that is in the midst of people's lives.

"It is within every person, and every society and social location and every culture, that God manifests the divine presence, and so theology is not just a matter of relating an external message however supracultural or supracontextual—to a particular situation; rather, theology chiefly involves attending and listening to that situation so that God's hidden presence can be manifested in the ordinary structures of the situation, often in surprising ways. This approach to contextual theology is on culture. For this model, it is particularly in a study of, and sympathetic identity with, a people's culture that one finds the symbols and concepts with which to construct an adequate articulation of that people's faith".

MY ADDITION

This model, more than any other, focuses on the validity of the human as the place of divine revelation and as a source (locus) for theology that is equal to the other two sources of scripture and tradition.

This model stands in contrast to the **Translation model** of contextualization that approaches scripture as a particular message or set of doctrines. The person living this model sees himself or herself as bringing a saving message into the context and making sure that it is presented in a relevant and attractive way. By contrast the **Anthropological model** looks for God's revelation and self-manifestation as it is hidden within the values, relational patterns, and concerns of individuals or set of individuals. Practitioners of the anthropological model would insist that while the acceptance of Christianity might challenge a particular culture, it would not radically change it. In this case - the role of the trained theologian or missionary, therefore, is not that of an expert who tells people the best way to express their faith. Rather her or his role is that of reflector and thematizer, the one who is able to provide the biblical and traditional background that will enable the people to develop their own theology.

NOTE: I really like this statement

By applying the techniques of anthropology and sociology, therefore, the practitioner of the anthropological model attempts to listen to a particular context in order to hear within its structure (especially within the complex structure of culture) the very Word of God, hidden there like a dormant seed since the beginning of time and ready for sprouting and full growth.

This model presupposes that God is already present in people's life ... It has, as its source
"a deep humility, by which we remember that God has not left himself without a witness in any nation at any time. When we approach the man of another faith than our own it will be in a spirit of expectancy to find how God has been speaking to him and what new understandings of the grace and love of God we may ourselves discover in this encounter"
Max Warren, African missionary

ALSO FROM ME, I believe we must address our belief in the miraculous work of God

David Moore suggested a similar theological pursuit, "A supernatural biblicism that affirms the worldview of the Scriptures. In other words, life cannot be reduced only to the material but also includes an embrace of the supernatural intervention of God with all its mystery and wonder. Jamie Smith points out that Pentecostalism more than other Christian traditions has a "radical openness to God."

Referencing Charles Kraft he writes. "doing theology—with an eye to translating the Christian message into ever-changing and always particular contexts—is no more than a recovery of the original spirit of Christian theologizing". Certainly Acts 15 provides an excellent picture of the early church stretching to comprehend the true scope of God's salvation plan. They did not simply accommodate Gentile culture, they hammered out a contextually relative theology, "He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:9,10). They gave birth to a fresh gospel narrative by interpreting an old narrative in a new context.

The early church provides us with an amazing picture of the interplay between worldview, culture and theology. Our true understanding of God finds its origin in theology but it is practiced and shaped in context and culture.