

Reat, Noble Ross

1980 " 'Theravada Buddhism and Morality': Objections and Corrections," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. LXVIII, Num. 3, September

Swanson, Herb

1981a *The Center for Church Planting and Church Growth in N.E. Thailand: A Brief Report* Chiang Mai, Thailand: Manuscript Division, Payap College (Mimeographed)

1981b *The Center for Church Planting and Church Growth in N.E. Thailand: A Response* Chiang Mai, Thailand: Manuscript Division, Payap College (Mimeographed)

Tambiah, S. J.

1970 *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press

## A Note About Manuscripts

As a scholarly forum, *Missiology* is made up of contributed writings, most of them unsolicited. Though we receive more manuscripts than we can use, we welcome this! Keep them coming. Our journal will benefit from selectivity.

### Manuscript format

Please! Double-spaced manuscripts only! And if you really want to help us (and therefore yourself!), use a 62-stroke line on 8½ x 11 paper with reasonable margins top and bottom.

Then note our use of the anthropological system of reference for all documentation. Numbered end-notes are used only for the author's own comments. Manuscripts with foot-noted documentation may be set aside until a corrected format is received.

### Handling of manuscripts

All manuscripts will be acknowledged (but cannot be returned unless you provide postage). Decision to use a manuscript may take some months — even a year. Each article must be viewed not only in terms of its own merits, but in relationship to a whole number of the journal. We shall advise you further when we decide to use your article (or, not to consider it further).

Like other scholarly journals, payment is made in copies (20) of the published article.

Happy writing!

## The Problem of Contextualization

KRIKOR HALEBLIAN

THE TERM "contextualization" broke upon the slumbering world in 1972 with the publication of the Theological Education Fund (henceforth TEF) report entitled *Ministry in Context*. The task of the committee, as stated succinctly in the preface to the report, was "to discern more clearly the new issues and the new challenges in theological education seen in the context of the radical change in the world scene, particularly in the Third World." After two years of deliberations, the study committee discerned four areas to be contextualized, but "the most crucial to this discussion was 'contextualization in theological approach'" (TEF 1972:29).

The notion of contextualizing theology (or more correctly contextualizing the gospel)<sup>1</sup> is of course not new, neither is the way in which the problem of contextualization is discussed in the TEF report. What is new, however, is the term itself and the way in which this seminal concept has come to the forefront of missiological concern. But as with all new words and concepts, there often settles in a period of confusion. After nearly a decade, this nuclear concept has raised a concatenation of problems, many of them still unresolved. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze these problems and potential ways to resolve them.

### Crucial Issues in Contextualization

The number of problems which plague contextualization are many, and it is difficult to decide which questions are most

---

Krikor Haleblian is an associate professor at the Armenian Bible College in Pasadena, California and serves as pastor of the Armenian Church of the Nazarene in Montebello, California. He received his Ph.D. in Missiology from the School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary.

*Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XI, No. 1, January, 1983

hh

crucial. What might be a central concern for one is peripheral for another, especially if the question is directed to those within the discipline of missiology. In consulting the available literature on the subject,<sup>2</sup> we have found the following questions and issues most often recurring: (1) the definition of contextualization; (2) its differences from indigenization; (3) the legitimate agents for contextualization; (4) syncretism; (5) the limits of contextualization; (6) the gospel core; and (7) hermeneutics.

#### Contextualization Defined

The term "contextualization" is derived from the word "context," the meaning of which is quite clear. According to *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, it has two basic meanings: (a) "the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning," and (b) "the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs — ENVIRONMENT."

The meaning of the term may be clear at the dictionary level, but in the literature on contextualization, there is widespread confusion. Kato writes, "We understand the term (contextualization) to mean making concepts and ideas relevant to a given situation" (1975:1217). Others define the term as having to do merely with cross-cultural communication of the gospel (Nicholls 1975:637; Bradshaw and Savage 1975:1226; Nunez 1976:5, 6). Still others limit contextualization to the development of theology done locally (TEF 1972:19; and Luzbetak 1981:39). Some definitions bring out the aspect of separating the gospel from its cultural "clothing" (Bradshaw and Savage 1975:1226; Ro 1976:51, 52).

Buswell, concerned about the lack of standardization of the term contextualization, breaks the word into three categories: contextualization of (a) the witness; (b) the church and its leadership; and (c) the Word (1978:90-99). Bruce Fleming, while basically following Buswell's threefold distinction, suggests the terms supracultural, transcultural and cultural to represent the three aspects of contextualization (1980:73).<sup>3</sup> For him, the "supracultural" is the "framework" revealed in the Bible, the "transcultural" is the tradition or the lessons learned through history, and the specific development of theology in a local situation is termed "cultural."

From the preceding discussion on the subject, we may tentatively define contextualization as that discipline which deals with the essential nature of the gospel, its cross-cultural communication, and the development and fostering of local theologies and indigenous church forms. In this definition, we see the *supracultural*, the *transcultural*, and the *cultural*.

#### Contextualization Versus Indigenization

Before the term contextualization became so popular, indigenization was the most widely used expression.<sup>4</sup> Because of the close association of these two terms, a cleavage of a sort has taken place between those who wish to preserve the old term (Buswell 1978; Kraft and Wisley 1979) and those who would rather discard it (Coe 1976; Taber 1979). In the middle are those who use the terms interchangeably (Athyal 1976; Padilla 1979a; Allmen 1979).

It is not necessary to delve into the history of the word indigenization. We need to point out, however, that by and large the concern for indigeneity in modern missions has been identified with the self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating formula. The concern here is primarily for external adjustments and adaptations of the church to its environment. The relation of the church to the socioeconomic, political, and cultural life of the people is left untouched.

The TEF reaction to the term indigenization was partly directed against such understanding of the missionary task. It stated that contextualization

Means all that is implied in the familiar term "indigenization" and yet seeks to press beyond. Contextualization has to do with how we assess the peculiarity of Third World contexts. Indigenization tends to be used in the sense of responding to the gospel in terms of a traditional culture. Contextualization, while not ignoring this, takes into account the process of secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice, which characterize the historical moment of nations in the Third World (1972:20).

How necessary is it to replace the older term indigenization with contextualization? Buswell warns that "we should also think twice before rejecting the terms *indigenous*, *indigeneity*, and *indigenization* . . ." (1978:93, 94).<sup>5</sup> To do away with any notion that indigeneity is a static concept, Kraft and Wisley (1979) modify it with the adjective "dynamic."

45

The spokesmen for contextualization are seeking to go beyond indigenization in a number of ways. Taber itemizes six ways in which this takes place. We summarize:

- (1) Indigenization focuses only on the cultural dimension, while contextualization includes social, political, and economic questions.
- (2) Indigenization tends to define culture in static, traditional terms, while contextualization emphasizes the process of change and transformation in culture.
- (3) Indigenization tends to view sociological systems as closed and self-contained; contextualization takes into account the global politico-economic and cultural context of each people.
- (4) Indigenization is thought to be something that happens on the foreign field; contextualization sees that all cultures, including those in the West, manifest the demonic and the divine, and undergo the same processes.
- (5) Indigenization tends to deal with the surface expressions of the gospel, contextualization with the deep and universal dimensions.
- (6) Indigenization is merely a transfer of authority from mission to the national church; contextualization presses for local autonomy from the beginning (1979:144-146).

Based on the above comparison of contextualization with the traditionally held view of indigenization, it may be best to opt for the newer term while observing with Nicholls that "in the end it is not so much the word used as the meaning that grows up around it that is important" (1979a:21).

#### Agents of Contextualization

Another basic question which remains unresolved is this: Who shall participate in the quest for local or cultural theology? The foreigner, the national, or both? While many nationals (Athyal 1976:71; Padilla 1979a:104; Costas 1979) seem to argue for the development of theology by locals, a large number of Western missiologists have a mixed reaction. They fear that the development of Third World theologies may lead to syncretism. A survey questionnaire prepared by the Association of Evangelical Professors of Mission in North America on the subject shows that

Though the largest block of votes affirmed this (i.e., encouraging nationals to develop their own theologies) as desirable (27), a significant number were not sure (10), and a slightly larger group (17) denied it. The combined total of the "no" and "not sure" equaled that of the affirmative vote (Conn 1979:56).

Among those "not sure" are Loewen (1979a:170), Taber (1978a:10), and Mbiti (1974:10ff) who point out that

contextualization is a difficult task and must not be done in isolation.

Third World theologians and missiologists, of course, are concerned that much of theology in their quarters is imported from the West and irrelevant to their situation. Many nationals feel that theology must be articulated "*from within each particular historical situation . . .*" (Padilla 1979a:104). Obviously this cannot be carried out even by trained missionaries, because they are no less subject to ethnocentrism and pressures of enculturation than anyone else. What is needed, as Taber states, is a "cross-fertilization and mutual correction . . ." (1978a:10). The believing community in each culture must take ultimate responsibility for contextualizing the gospel, but there is a place and a need for professionals who can act as "brokers" in this difficult and ongoing task.

#### The Problem of Syncretism

We used to view syncretism as a phenomenon that takes place only on mission fields. Now missiologists point out the many ways in which Christianity in the West is syncretistic. Equally significant are the interdisciplinary efforts put forth in the study of syncretism from anthropological, linguistic, biblical, and missiological points of view. Although missiologists have a better understanding of syncretism, they still have conflicting views.

In a symposium devoted primarily to the problem of syncretism (Taber and Yamamori 1975), for example, the participants held two radically different conceptions of syncretism. While some emphasized the aspect of unification of opposite forces, beliefs, tenets, and practices, others, McGavran (1975b) in particular, viewed syncretism as belonging to one and the same axis with contextualization, though positioned at the opposite end of the bipolar continuum.

A serious problem is how to determine what causes syncretism and how to avoid it. While few writers on the crucial issues of contextualization fail to warn about the dangers of syncretism, many ignore the factor (or factors) which lead to syncretism. Others who deal with the issue assume a failure in logic as the primary reason which leads to syncretism. Kraft (1978:35ff), for example, gives two reasons, both of which have to do with mode or approach to contextualization. Similarly, Kato (1975:1218,

1219) lists ten reasons for the growing tendencies toward syncretism in Africa, but he fails to mention the possibility that the contextualizer's inadequate grasp of the essential nature of the gospel might be one of the primary reasons for such tendencies.

#### The Limits of Contextualization

A closely related issue is the question of limits for contextualizing the gospel. Will the Church split apart as we experience the rise of local theologies? "What happens to the vaunted 'Church universal' in all this, and will Jesus be so tied to regional and national differences that we are no longer 'one in Christ' but 'many in Christ?'" (Sontag 1979:366). To resolve these and similar problems, missiologists have offered a number of criteria or guidelines.

Writing on the implications from the New Testament on contextualization, Ericson lists four limits or criteria for "acceptable" contextualization:

- (1) The core: revelation and salvation effected in Jesus Christ;
- (2) The substance: the gospel tradition in apostolic transmission;
- (3) The application: exhortation addressed to particular people;
- (4) The expression: quality of life in a cultural setting (1978:83).

The degree of variability, he goes on to point out, is least in number one and greatest in number four.

Somewhat different are the guidelines that Padilla gives. He enumerates (1) the Word of God as the basis of theology, (2) the concrete historical situation as the context of theology, and (3) obedience to Christ as the purpose of theology (1979a:306).

The most comprehensive guidelines or criteria for contextualization of the gospel are Taber's. He mentions seven points, four of which are methodological and the remaining three substantive. The methodological criteria are (1) biblical, (2) prophetic, (3) dialogical, and (4) open-ended, while (1) transcendent, (2) Christological, and (3) subject to the Holy Spirit are substantive criteria (1978b:69-77).

How do we respond to these guidelines, and can they adequately serve to set the parameters to the development of ethnic theologies? At the level of logistics or methods, as Taber prefers to call it, there is much to be gained here. That local theology must proceed in obedience to Christ, or that it must be biblical, prophetic, dialogical, etc., is helpful. But there is little or

no help at the substantive level. The conclusion that a contextual theology must be Christological or that it must affirm revelation and salvation effected in Christ is a nonsequitur. Christian theology, whether ethnic or not, is by definition Christological,<sup>6</sup> and cannot be based on anything but the salvation effected in Jesus Christ.

#### The Gospel Core

Is there a supracultural, unchanging gospel core, and can it be identified and separated from the cultural forms in which it is given? Although this question is integral to the problem of contextualization, missiologists and theologians are obviously divided in their answers. Some (McGavran 1975a; Kato 1975; Athyal 1976; Fleming 1980) believe that there is a gospel core and that it is identifiable, albeit in general terms. Others (Nicholls 1979b; Marshall 1979; Packer 1979; Loewen 1979a) seem to contend that there is no gospel core, and even if there is such a thing, it would be difficult to separate it from the cultural forms in which it is given. Those who believe the core can be separated from the form give several answers as to its precise context.

Fleming writes, "it might be suggested that the *Bible itself* is understood as 'the core' out of which various key doctrines are to be emphasized" (1980:58). McGavran is more specific. He affirms that belief and allegiance to (a) the Triune God, (b) the Bible, and (c) the ordinances and doctrines set in the Bible (1975a:41, 42) are the core of the gospel. Kato (1975:1216) and Athyal (1976:70) limit the core simply to Christ incarnate. *The Willowbank Report*, prepared by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, contains the most specific statement. While recognizing the difficulty involved in reducing the gospel to a formula, the participants at Willowbank affirm,

We recognize as central the themes of God as Creator, the universality of sin, Jesus Christ as Son of God, Lord of all, and Saviour through his atoning death and risen life, the necessity of conversion, the coming of the Holy Spirit and his transforming power, the fellowship and mission of the Christian church, and the hope of Christ's return (1978:440, 441).

Those who basically contend that there is no gospel core present their views with certain qualification. Nicholls, for example, states that the concept of the gospel core "is open to the same subjective dangers as the neo-Orthodox concern that the

Bible 'contains' the word of God or a canon within the canon" (1979b:74). He argues that while the content of the gospel can be separated from its form at the "symbolic" level, it is impossible on the "conceptual" level. The distinction between these two is vague, but Nicholls seems to argue for the possibility of distinguishing content from form at the linguistic or translation level alone.

The question of the core of the gospel and its possible separation from the cultural forms is somewhat misleading. The biblical accounts are rooted in cultural and historical circumstances, and they cannot easily be disengaged from the forms in which they are given. To separate the content of the gospel from its cultural forms is similar to peeling an onion in order to find its core. What is urgently needed is a method that can sidestep kernel-versus-husk type questions. Structuralism with its recent extension to narrative analysis is one of the best methods this writer has come across. We shall not discuss structuralism here, as we have already written on it extensively elsewhere, (cf. Haleblian 1982) but we simply point out that it can successfully help delineate the essentials of the gospel without making a radical disjunction between form and content.

#### Hermeneutics and Contextualization

Missiologists agree that hermeneutics is most central to the task of contextualizing the gospel, but a cursory review of available literature indicates a lack of noticeable progress in this area. Many who are committed to contextualization of the gospel have ignored this subject altogether; others have failed to turn out models specifically fit for the task of contextualization.

One such attempt is Rene Padilla's "contextual approach." He contrasts the "intuitive approach" to hermeneutics with the "scientific approach," and goes on to define contextual hermeneutics as the approach where

Both the context of the ancient text and the context of the modern reader are given due weight. The aim is that the horizon of the contemporary historical situation be merged with the horizon of the text in such a way that the message proclaimed in the contemporary situation may be a dynamic equivalent to the message proclaimed in the original context (1979b:88).

To this end, Padilla suggests a hermeneutical circle involving four elements: (1) the interpreter's historical situation; (2) the interpreter's world-and-life view; (3) Scripture; and (4) theology

(89ff). But after all is said and done, has Padilla offered anything specifically fit for contextual hermeneutics?

The existing deficiency in hermeneutical models is partly due to the feeling of many missiologists that the local Christian themselves must develop their own hermeneutical methods. Taber (1978a) is quite emphatic at this point. Referring to the New Testament writers' use of the Old Testament citation which is considered an outmoded hermeneutical method by today's standards, he writes,

If we can do this — i.e., adopt a style of hermeneutics which differs remarkably from that used by biblical writers in their own time — why can't people in other cultures do the same thing? (1978a:9).

He assumes that hermeneutical methodologies are culturally conditioned and that Third-Worlders should not be required to adopt Western hermeneutical methods.

While we cannot presuppose the universality of Western hermeneutical methods, neither can we assume a kind of *tabula rasa* for interpreting the Scriptures (Conn 1978:44, 45). An interpreter of the Scriptures, whether African or Asian, must interact critically with the original manuscripts of the Bible. Traditional hermeneutical methods (textual criticism, literary criticism, history of traditions, form criticism, and redaction criticism), however, are essentially diachronic approaches that make it difficult for the analyst to escape his context and to transcend cultural particularities of the biblical record (Patte 1976:9-14). In contrast, synchronic methods, such as structuralism and semiotics, are a promising field for future research, since they exhibit much potential to move to a rather "context-free" analysis.

From the evidence presented thus far, we conclude that the problem of contextualization is to find an appropriate methodology that will deal with the questions we have raised. Preliminary questions such as, What is contextualization? How is it different from indigenization? Who are legitimate agents for contextualization? are fairly easy to answer. What is crucial and problematic, however, is how to deal with syncretism, the limits of contextualization, the core of the gospel, and hermeneutics. Our aim in the rest of this study is to investigate the available methods and assess their strengths and weaknesses in dealing with these questions.

### Evaluation of Existing Models of Contextualization

Currently, there are two important methodologies of contextualization: (1) the translational model developed by Charles H. Kraft and (2) the semiotic model formulated recently by Robert Schreier.<sup>7</sup> We shall briefly describe each model and evaluate it in terms of its capacity to deal with the problems of contextualization.

#### Translational Model

This model, while rooted in the writings of Eugene Nida, William Smalley, Charles Taber, and others, has been developed single-handedly by Kraft at the Fuller Seminary School of World Mission. The full fruition of his ideas is found in his recent book, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1979).

As the subtitle of the book indicates, Kraft's aim is to offer a model for cross-cultural theologizing which, if utilized to its full potential, can be a great assistance to those involved in the cross-cultural communication of the gospel. At the heart of the model is the concept of "dynamic equivalence." The clue to this concept is found in the Bible translation principle that

Maintains that the aim of translation is to bring about an equivalence between the response of the contemporary hearers/readers of the translation and that of the original hearers/readers of the communication recorded in the document being translated (Kraft 1979:402).

As applied to the task of contextualization, this principle involves the reinterpretation of a given phenomenon, whether the Bible, church structure, ritual, or symbol in a new context where the meaning and impact of the elicited response are equivalent to those felt by the first Christian community.

Since it seeks equivalence in meaning and impact, this approach is contrasted by Kraft to "formal correspondence," a concept which ends up in slavish imitation, whether in translating a word into another language or exporting a church model to another culture. The dynamic equivalence model, however, seeks to express the developing church in forms equivalent to those in the Bible, but appropriate to the local culture. Using appropriate cultural forms, a dynamic equivalent church will therefore look in its culture as a good Bible translation does in its language.

How does this model deal with some of the questions raised in the process of this paper? First of all, the translational model may be too weak to deal with the problem of syncretism. Since its primary goal is to seek equivalence in meaning and function between the "New Testament-predicated church" and the church in the receptor culture, it faces difficulties at two different fronts. First, it must ascertain the central or essential message of the gospel without being selective and biased. Second, it must evaluate whether the developing church in its doctrine, tenets, etc., is syncretistic or unorthodox without having objective criteria.

Nor can the translational model deal successfully with the problem of the limits of contextualization. As we suggested earlier, syncretism and the limits of contextualization are one and the same problem though viewed from two different angles. Both stand in need of criteria to gauge what is orthodox and what is not orthodox, and to protect important meanings invested in the biblical records.

Second, the translational model operates within the matrix of kernel-and-husk metaphor as is evident from the recurrent distinction between "form" and "meaning," or between "formal correspondence" and "dynamic equivalence." This distinction is helpful at the level of Bible translation, but it cannot, to any degree of success, deal with the question of the essential nature of the gospel or the Christian faith. While it may be granted that it is the "*meaning conveyed by a particular doctrine (e.g., consumption of alcoholic beverages, baptism) that is of primary concern to God*" (Kraft 1979:118), in no way can we assume that form is less significant or that the two can easily be separated like oil and water.

By employing anthropological and linguistic insights, Kraft offers some helpful ideas on hermeneutics, but he presents no satisfactory "ethnolinguistic" or "ethnohermeneutical" model, as he prefers to call it. The complex relationship between message, context, and meaning (134-139), can indeed go beyond the plain-meaning approach and perhaps beyond the grammatico-historical method, but nothing is said here that can be viewed as uniquely ethnohermeneutical. Kraft's introductory comment seems to indicate that he is well aware of this problem.

The statement of model 5b (i.e., ethno-linguistic interpretation) does not differ

in essence from the ordinary hermeneutical principle of biblical theology that states the biblical passages are to be interpreted in their original contexts (1979:134).

These limitations, however, should not be read as a death-spell to the translational model. We can gain much here, especially at the level of transculturation. As we indicated earlier, transculturation is the aspect of contextualization which deals with the cross-cultural communication of the gospel. The translational model with its central emphasis on "dynamic equivalence" provides the best insight available at this level of contextualization.

#### Semiotic Model

Robert Schreier, Dean of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, is the chief architect of this model.<sup>8</sup> It is difficult, if not impossible, to describe Schreier's model within the space of a few pages, especially since his ideas originate from the cutting edge of theology, sociology, anthropology, and linguistics. The term he uses to represent his model is "contextual" in opposition to "translational" and "liberation" approaches, but it may be best to call it semiotic. Most missiologists use "contextual" or "contextualization" as a broad term to represent the whole discipline under discussion, and it is best to adhere to this designation. The word "semiotic" would best describe Schreier's model, not only because he employs the term quite frequently, but also because the methodological underpinning of his approach is largely semiological.

What is semiotics, and how can it help in the construction of local theologies? A satisfactory definition of semiotics has yet to be formulated, but for Schreier

Semiotics studies the sign-system of the culture. It views the culture as a vast communication system which sends messages (values) throughout an elaborate circuitry (culture patterns, modes of behavior, rules). This circuitry has a number of nodes where the circuits cluster. These points of semiotic density are crucial points where meaning is constructed, where old meanings are judged, where new meanings are formed (1977:31).

The analysis of an infinite number of messages sent by a culture cannot help to construct its inner meaning. One must follow the circuitry of those messages and probe the points of "semiotic density" where meaning is constructed.

For Schreier, such an analysis of culture is only a step away

from construction of a local theology. The locating of the point of "semiotic density" or "nodes" "leads to the emergence of what will be the central themes of the theology of the community" (1977:32). These nodes also act as prisms through which theological themes are organized. Such an approach is quite different from translating the Christian message or finding functional substitutes, in that it seeks to work out a "new" theology from within the cultural situation.

Much can be said or written about Schreier's semiotic mode both negatively and positively, but we will limit our criticism and ask, How does this model fare in the light of the so-called "crucial" questions raised in the process of this paper?

First, Schreier devotes a whole chapter to the matter of syncretism. The more we read, the more apparent it is that this model is deficient in dealing with the problem of syncretism. According to Schreier, syncretism goes on all the time. Its emergence, he claims, is not due to the "unfortunate mis-preaching of the gospel; it is a necessary result of it" (1977:98). At one point, he even goes on to charge that "the Old Testament is very much a syncretist document, as is the New" (1977:99).

As to criteria, Schreier contends that "it is difficult to set up criteria for judging syncretistic processes" (1977:97) because this would involve determining who will set up the criteria? Since neither the local culture can be allowed to determine the criteria nor a Christian culture from outside, he writes, "the syncretistic process may have to run its course before any judgment about genuine Christian identity can be made" (1977:97).

Much more problematic is Schreier's semiotic model in relation to the essential nature of the gospel. Writing on the universality and contextuality of the gospel, he states, "the very nature of the gospel message urges it always into new situations and contexts" (1977:14). Or again, "The gospel is only a living reality when it is incarnated in a concrete context and partakes of the ambiguities and limitations of history" (1977:14). From these and similar statements, one infers that Schreier "is not particularly concerned about defining any concrete core..." (Luzbetak 1981:48). Indeed his semiotic perspective "emphasizes finding Christ in a culture instead of bringing him there" (1977:29, emphasis is added).

Finally, Schreier's semiotics, an attempt in a general sense to

develop a contextual hermeneutic, neglects the biblical material and deals solely with the study of culture and tradition.

Schreiter's semiotic approach, of course, has many strengths. While Luzbetak lists only five "plusses" of this model (1981:51-52), the list can easily be extended to ten or even more. One point is certainly clear. Schreiter's method is the best available model for constructing local or ethnic theologies. We recall that there are three levels of contextualization: *supracultural*, *transcultural*, and *cultural*. It is at the third level that the semiotic model can be of greatest assistance. Schreiter's and Kraft's models can therefore be viewed as complementary. As Luzbetak observes,

Some form of *translation* seems necessary particularly in beginning a local Church — and here Kraft provides many useful insights. On the other hand, once the seed is sown, the new plant must be watered and cultivated so that it might grow and thrive — and here Schreiter provides us with an invaluable tool, a *triple dialectic* between the gospel, the Church, and the local culture (1981:53).

### Conclusion

In these few pages, we have attempted to analyze the literature on contextualization, locate those recurring questions and evaluate the available methods. Our study had led us to the realization that questions such as, What is contextualization? How is it different from indigenization? Who are legitimate agents for contextualization? are fairly easy to answer. What is urgently needed, however, is a method (or methods) that can successfully deal with the question of syncretism, the essential nature of the gospel, and hermeneutics. Structuralism and semiotics can help a great deal in these areas, but we need not limit ourselves to them.

### Notes

1. In a sense, theology is always contextually conditioned. Hence, it is more proper to speak of contextualization of the gospel than of theology.

2. We are limiting our bibliography on contextualization to works written since 1972, except in a few cases where we felt it absolutely necessary to do otherwise. The reason for this decision is twofold: (1) the term was not used before 1972; and (2) while the concept was extant under the rubric of indigenization, most missiologists believe the term acquired a new meaning after 1972.

3. Taber (1978b:55) suggests that the term "accommodation" be used for the outsiders' attempt and "indigenization" or "contextualization" for the efforts of the local believers. We find Fleming's terminology more helpful, since it brings out all three aspects of contextualization.

4. One also finds terms like "accommodation," "possesio," and "transformation" used by missiologists, but the term "indigenization" has by far been the most popular and most widely used.

5. What is puzzling to us is that Buswell uses the term "contextualization" throughout his article, but he goes on to defend the term "indigenization."

6. Taber seems to recognize this problem. He writes, "this is in a sense so obvious that it is embarrassing to mention it" (1978b:72).

7. Luzbetak (1981:41) lists liberation theology as a third important model, but we disagree. Liberation theology, while it has much to contribute to the discussion of contextualization, is itself a contextual theology.

8. A photocopy of his work *Constructing Local Theologies* (1977) was kindly provided to us by him. The revised form of this work will be published by Orbis Books.

### References Cited

- Allmen, Daniel Von  
1979 "The Birth of Theology" in *Readings in Dynamic Indigenity* Kraft and Wise (eds). First appeared in IRM (1975) 64:37-55
- Athyal, Saphir P.  
1976 "Toward an Asian Christian Theology" in *What Asian Christians Are Thinking* J. Elwood (ed) Manila: New Day Publishers
- Bradshaw, M. & P. Savage  
1975 "The Gospel, Contextualization and Syncretism Report" in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* J. D. Douglas (ed) Minneapolis, Minnesota: World Wide Publication
- Buswell, James O. III  
1978 "Contextualization: Theory, Tradition, and Method" in *Theology and Missions* D. J. Hesselgrave (ed) Grand Rapids: Baker Book House
- Coe, Shoki  
1976 "Contextualizing Theology" in *Mission Trends No. 3* G. Anderson and J. Stransky (eds) New York: Paulist, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans
- Conn, Harvie M.  
1978 "Contextualization: A New Dimension for Cross-cultural Hermeneutic" EMQ 14:39-46
- 1979 "Theological Trends and Issues in Christian World Missions as Seen From North American Perspective" OBM 3:53-57
- Costas, Orlando  
1979 "Contextualization and Incarnation" J Th So Africa 29:23-30
- Ericson, Norman R.  
1978 "Implications From the New Testament for Contextualization" in *Theology and Missions* D. J. Hesselgrave (ed) Grand Rapids: Baker Book House
- Fleming, Bruce C. E.  
1980 *Contextualization of Theology*. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library
- Haleblian, Krikor  
1982 *Contextualization and French Structuralism: A Method to Delineate the Deep Structures of the Gospel*. PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary
- Kato, Byang H.  
1975 "The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism" in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* J. D. Douglas (ed) Minneapolis: World Wide Publications
- Kraft, Charles H.  
1978 "The Contextualization of Theology" EMQ 14:31-36
- 1979 *Christianity in Culture: Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in a Cross-cultural Perspective*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books



- Kraft, C. H. & T. N. Wisely (eds)  
1979 *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity*. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library
- Loewen, Jacob A.  
1979a "The Gospel — Its Content and Communication: An Anthropological Perspective" in *Gospel and Culture* Stott and Coote (eds)
- Luzbetak, Louis J.  
1981 "Sings of Progress in Contextual Methodology" *Verbum* svd 22:39-57
- Marshall, I. Howard  
1979 "Culture and the New Testament" in *Gospel and Culture* Stott and Coote (eds)
- Mbiti, John S.  
1974 "Theological Importance and the Universality of the Church" in *Mission Trends* No. 3 G. Anderson and T. Stransky (eds) (1976). Reprint from *Lutheran World* No. 21 (1974)
- McGavran, Donald A.  
1975a "The Biblical Base from which Adjustments are Made" in *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* Taber and Yamamori (eds)  
1975b "The Adaptation-Syncretism Axis" in *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* Taber and Yamamori (eds)
- Nicholls, Bruce J.  
1975 "Theological Education and Evangelization" in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* J. D. Douglas (ed)  
1979a *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*. Inter-Varsity Press  
1979b "Towards a Theology of Gospel and Culture" in *Gospel and Culture* Stott and Coote (eds)
- Núñez, Emilio Antonio  
1976 "Contextualization — Latin American Theology" *Latin American Pulse* XL Feb. 2
- Padilla, Rene  
1979a "The Contextualization of the Gospel" in *Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity* Kraft and Wisley (eds)  
1979b "Hermeneutics and Culture — A Theological Perspective" in *Gospel and Culture* Scott and Coote (eds)
- Packer, James  
1979 "The Gospel — Its Content and Communication: a theological perspective" in *Gospel and Culture* Scott and Coote (eds)
- Patte, Daniel  
1976 *What is Structuralism?* Philadelphia: Fortress Press
- Ro, Bong Rin  
1976 "Contextualization: Asian Theology" in *What Asian Christians Are Thinking* D. J. Elwood (ed)
- Schreier, Robert  
1977 *Constructing Local Theologies*. Chicago: Catholic Theological Union, unpublished manuscript
- Sontag, Frederick  
1979 "A Plea for Common Sense: Are There Human Universals Which Transcend Cultural Particularities?" *Missio* 7:365-368
- Taber, C. R. & Tetsunao Yamamori (eds)  
1975 *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* Pasadena, California: William Carey Library

- Taber, C. R.  
1978a "Is There More Than One Way to Do Theology?" in *Gospel and Context* 1:4-22-40  
1978b "The Limits of Indigenization in Theology" *Missio* 6:51-79  
1979 "Contextualization: Indigenization and/or Transformation" in *The Gospel and Islam* Don McCurry (ed)
- Theological Education Fund  
1972 *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970-77)*. Bromley, Kent, United Kingdom: New Life Press
- Tippett, Alan R.  
1975 "Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?" in *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* Taber and Yamamori (eds)
- Webster's  
1975 *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*. A. Merriam Webster R., Springfield, Mass. G. & C. Merriam Co.
- Willowbank Report  
1978 *The Willowbank Report*. Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization *Gospel and Culture* Stott and Coote (eds)

## Justice and Faith Workshop

SEPTEMBER 5 - DECEMBER 9, 1983

The workshop will provide opportunity for missionaries, laity, clergy and religious to reflect on their commitment and action on behalf of Justice whether in the Third or First World.

Working in situations of poverty, oppression or repression makes new and special demands. The workshop will explore both these demands and the links between Faith and work for Justice. Emphasis will also be given to recognising and developing the supports needed for involvement in the promotion of Peace and Justice.

While outside resource people will be available, the workshop process will draw heavily on the sharing of experience, expertise and insight by the community of participants.

The workshop is open to men and women. Admission by applications.

Application forms and further enquiries from:

The Director  
Justice and Faith Workshop  
St. Columban's College  
Dalgan Park  
Navan  
Co. Meath  
Ireland