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Willowbank to Zaire: The Doing of Theology

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Introduction

The Congress on World Evangelism at Lausanne in 1974 introduced many evangelicals to the concept of contextualization. The Willowbank Consultation on the Gospel and Culture (1978) provided a giant step forward in examining its multi-faceted dimensions. It was my privilege to participate in both these gatherings and to continue to reflect on the topic as I taught a course on contextualization in Wheaton Graduate School. A growing awareness of the cultural implications of the gospel brought to me the sense of an unpaid debt to the Zairian Church with which I served in the area of theological education from 1953 to 1964. While no expatriate can ever ultimately contextualize the gospel for a group of believers, it became my growing conviction that I could have facilitated the process far more than I did.

I recognized that I had delivered many prepackaged boxes of biblical "truth" to my Zairian students. Although the content was biblical, it did not speak to many issues, crucial to the Zairian Church, of which I was only dimly aware. Furthermore, the delivery system fostered a mentality of theological dependency that matched the colonial context. Through my deepening understanding of what contextualization was saying to missions and churches alike, it was as if the Word of the Lord was coming to me a "second time," as it did to Jonah (3:1). I had no choice but to return to the church in Zaire with this new "word." This I did in the summer of 1981. I met with a number of church leaders, some of whom were my former Bible school and seminary students.

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Without undue breast beating over past failures, I shared with them in informal meetings my new sensitivity to the whole question of the gospel and African culture and the relationship between the two. This "testimony" aroused a great deal of interest. Never had they known me to have more questions than answers, but their response was most favorable. It was obvious that I was scratching where they were itching, or more correctly, I was touching parts of the body where they were badly hurting.

These informal but in-depth discussions ultimately led to a formal invitation from the Administrative Council of the Communauté Évangélique au Centre d'Afrique (CECA) to return in the summer of 1983 for two seminars on the subject of the Gospel and Culture.¹ As a missions professor, I was keenly interested in seeing contextualization practiced and not just extolled. What could my students expect to see happen when they took up their ministries in an overseas context? And what could they legitimately do to help make it happen? From a pastoral perspective, I wanted to see this section of the Zairian Church begin to develop its own African theology, a theology that would be both biblical and culturally relevant and authentic.

Although I recognized that a genuine African ethnotheology could only be produced by Africans themselves, yet I felt that as an expatriate I could have a significant role in the process — as much or more by what I *didn't* do this time around as by what I did.

To the objection that I was setting the Zairian Church's agenda, I would point out that wherever there is input from the outside there is thereby an influence and an orientation toward certain directions. The whole thrust toward contextualization and all its facets as promulgated by the TEF is a prime example of this, but we do not castigate it for this. Taber states that "a hermeneutic worked out exclusively within one civilization and history will have its . . . inevitable weaknesses, errors and blind spots . . . [Thus] the role of active dialog with brothers and sisters of the entire *oikoumenos* is precisely to make it possible for us to receive and offer each other mutual help and correction" (Taber 1983:240).²

While I was concerned about the ultimate product of the seminars, I was equally or more so concerned about the process. I was convinced that the desired product could never be attained without the proper process. Because I am convinced that the process I employed is needed in other parts of the world and is virtually reproducible anywhere, I wish to share the pattern followed in each seminar, make some observations on what took place, and finally indicate what I feel should be the next steps.

Theology is all too often seen as the exclusive domain of an erudite elite. While not demeaning the contribution of the highly trained professional theologian, I am convinced that theologizing should be done on various levels of church life, in fact, on every level. In a true sense theology should reflect the consensus of the community of believers.³ It was therefore decided that one seminar would be conducted in Swahili for pastors who had only a Bible school level training (2-4 years beyond primary school education). The other

seminar would be conducted in French for those who were serving the church as Bible school and seminary professors, high school teachers, or administrators of departments within the church (evangelism, TEE, education and so on). All of these leaders in this second group had received advanced training; some held university and seminary degrees.

Even though the same basic format was followed in each seminar, the educational backgrounds and ministry contexts represented by each group shaped the specific content. The participants, by the way, were chosen by the Church. Though I led each seminar, there was never any question as to ownership.

What is the Gospel?

After a short introductory orientation relative to the purpose of the seminar and the importance of the process that was to be followed, the first topic was introduced: "What is the Gospel?" Especially in the Swahili seminar this question was met with almost astonishment that it should even be raised. Shades of catechumen class — why everyone knew that answer! A cascade of clichés emerged. These were all faithfully recorded by me on sheets of newsprint, but not without probing questions as to the meaning of the words being used. I assumed the position of one who was not antagonistic to the gospel, but who was totally ignorant of its special, technical vocabulary.

At one point in the French seminar, as I was pressing the participants for the meaning of the theological words they were using, a seminary professor objected that instead of simply fulfilling our original objective of defining the gospel we were "getting into theological matters." He had not realized that almost all the preceding comments had employed a distinctly theological vocabulary. We then raised the question as to whether theology could really be avoided in a discussion of the gospel, even if the technical language used to describe it could be.

It gradually became clear that what was thought to be expressible in a few neat phrases actually embraced much more. A few key verses of Scripture actually required a journey from Genesis to Revelation to explain fully. Through patient but probing questions the gospel gradually began to take on new dimensions. What was almost glibly described in the first two minutes as "good news" was in the course of the next hour discovered to contain a lot of "bad news" (human disobedience, a broken law, alienation from God, divine judgment, etc.). "Salvation" came to be seen not only as a forensic justification (no such term used, however!) but also as a release from the bondage of sin in its various manifestations.

As the excitement produced by the discovery of the richness of this simple term "gospel" became evident, I only wished that I had used this approach twenty-five years earlier, but unlike Jonah, I was inwardly grateful for this second chance.

The whole morning in both seminars was thus taken up with this "simple" question that any catechumen could answer. At the end of the morning one

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participant in the French seminar observed that we had covered many themes, and he asked me to give a summary of the gospel. I graciously refused to come to closure at this point. I wanted to maintain the state of minor disequilibrium that I had created at the outset in order to enhance the continued learning process.

What is Culture?

Using the minimum of formal explanation relative to the concept, the seminars next introduced the topic of culture, and specifically African culture. Seeing culture as "the total lifeway of a people" (Kluckhohn 1949:17), the various elements of culture were arrived at by discussion and illustration. Customs and institutions, differing from tribe to tribe among those present, were more easily comprehended. More difficult were the concepts of worldview and values. During our discussion of worldview in the French seminar a heavy tropical storm came up. The rain almost drowned out our voices as it beat on the metal roof. The accompanying thunder and lightning were propitiously timed however. I immediately asked if everyone in the town heard the thunder and saw the lightning. The answer was a unanimous affirmative. I then asked if these phenomena meant the same thing to everyone in this cosmopolitan town. This time there was a unanimous negative. I asked what different meanings were attached to them. Diverse and intriguing explanation, differing from tribe to tribe, were shared.⁴ This became a natural bridge to a fuller understanding of the significance of worldview in the life of a people. Worldview was thus graphically seen as the perception of the "system" by which the world operates. After this introductory background to a working concept of culture, the more formal definition of the Willowbank report was shared (Willowbank 1978:7).

What is the Relationship of the Gospel to African Culture?

We were now prepared for our third major topic which would get to the heart of our seminar, namely, the relationship of the gospel to African culture. We broke into small buzz groups to discuss how and where the gospel had touched, and in some cases transformed, African culture. An ancillary question asked why the gospel had so widely attracted Africans. Or to put it another way, why for the African people was it indeed "good news"? The response varied somewhat between the two seminars. The French seminar was in general more reluctant to be as positive or absolute in its affirmations. This group was generally more analytical and seemed more perceptive in seeing both sides of an issue. Thus while both groups saw the deep hostility of tribalism as something the gospel has greatly ameliorated, the French seminar participants were far more emphatic in their concern for the strong lingering evidences of it even in the life of the church.

The responses of the Swahili group reflected, it would seem, both the orientation of early gospel preaching in their midst as well as the meeting of

specific felt needs within the African milieu by the gospel message. Prominent in the first responses as to why the gospel was "good news" was an emphasis on eternal life, the ability to approach God without fear, and the hope of heaven instead of the prospect of eternal judgment. The concept of judgment, however, is still a very prominent element in African songs being currently composed in the church.

Further probing of this question in this group elicited a discussion relative to the freedom from fear of evil spirits, such as the fear of the howling of wild dogs believed to be caused by "dirty spirits" inhabiting them. The element of fear surfaced again with reference to a common burial custom. When a relative dies and is buried in a far away place, his clothing in addition to some of the dirt or a stone from his grave must be brought back to his home village in order to avoid misfortune from coming upon his relatives. Deliverance from this kind of fear and from the power of sin to enslave one in evil practices were cited as areas where the gospel has powerfully influenced African life.

The French group underlined the issue of sin and the need for pardon that was deeply rooted in pre-Christian African thinking. Reference was made to the ritual of sacrifice in certain tribal situations, and in one instance to leading a goat out into the bush as an atonement for the sins of the village (movingly reminiscent of the scapegoat of Leviticus 16:10). Again, the provision of a Power over evil spirits was cited as an area where the gospel had profoundly touched African life. This positive affirmation of the power of the gospel took the form of personal testimonies in several cases. It provided a good background for the next section which, on the surface at least, was more negative in appearance.

The Church's Unfinished Agenda

In this fourth section of the seminar I raised the question, "Where has the gospel not touched or adequately transformed African culture?" To sharpen the focus, I referred to three specific areas of life: national (political), ecclesiastical and personal. In order both to illustrate what was specifically meant by these three areas and to indicate my own vulnerability as both an American citizen and churchman, I cited an example in each domain from the American context. This put my African brethren and me on a common ground, something we had not always shared together by design in years gone by. This was a crucial stage of the process, and I felt it imperative to express my own vulnerability as a foreigner who both personally and nationally had on previous occasions consciously and otherwise occupied a "higher ground."

I recognized that the rest of the seminar could be a discussion of generalities and superficialities if the topics of this section did not come out of a matrix of absolute honesty. It is at this point that the credibility of the expatriate seminar leader/facilitator is crucial. My preliminary discussions two years previously had sensitized me to this. During an in-depth discussion of the reality of the spirit world and some of its "strange" manifestations such as

lights and sounds experienced by Africans, one African professor had stated, "We never share these things with the missionaries; they would only laugh." At that moment I could not help but ask myself how many insights into African life and heart needs we missionaries had forfeited because of a condescending smile born of our ultimately secular, western scientific view of reality! Apparently the respect for African culture and the personal vulnerability I had communicated two years earlier now made it "safe" for this professor to share things to which I also had previously remained a stranger.

The crucial nature of this section of the seminar cannot be overemphasized, for it is here that the church is producing its own unfinished agenda. The very presence of a missionary in this situation could result in merely a sanitized version. My own understanding of African life coupled with the evident spirit in which the agenda was produced all bore witness to the fact that we were grappling with an unexpurgated edition.

Though I took no vows of secrecy and none were even implied, I am not going to describe this agenda in detail. In a relationship of trust built up across the years I facilitated its production. I do not want to betray that relationship by its unauthorized reproduction, for I look forward to an ongoing fraternal spiritual pilgrimage with my African brethren in these crucial areas. Hopefully from their pens will come a sharing of their agenda at the appropriate time—to the benefit of the church worldwide.

On the other hand, I do not want to suggest in any way that we discussed heretofore unknown, esoteric subjects. To the contrary. Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of African church life could write at least a part of the agenda. Some of the items have been discussed in this journal. The significant point is that in this context the Africans wrote their own agenda. In the case of the French seminar it comprised 28 items. More exhausting than exhaustive, many of the topics merited a separate seminar and the writing of a book. Felt needs and real needs seemed to meld into one.

The participants had been divided into three groups, and from their separate sections the different items of the agenda emerged. These were then shared with the plenary body and, along with the previous topics which had been discussed, were recorded on newsheets. Each item was briefly explained as it was recorded. Then items with a common denominator were grouped together.

For example, a "marriage" category included items such as polygamy, the dowry system and levirate marriages. Then came the difficult task of choosing the three items that would occupy the rest of our time together. I had a special personal interest in one of the items at the French seminar. I was most anxious to see it chosen, though I did not indicate this. Furthermore I *knew* it was a burning issue in the life of the church. The group decided (for reasons still unknown to me) to go through the formalities of a secret ballot. A tie vote on two items necessitated a repetition of the process. My topic lost by one vote. I learned something about African priorities!

Interaction Between Text and Context

The three topics before us led us into the very heart and purpose of our time together: the dynamic interaction between text and context, the text of Scripture and the context of African culture. Especially for the Swahili group this kind of dialogue between the Bible and life situations was a new experience. Before the seminar the French group had been given a copy of Rene Padilla's article on hermeneutics with its very fine and helpful discussion of the hermeneutical spiral.⁵

Each of the three groups chose one of the topics with which they would grapple in the light of Scripture. They were given some preliminary and basic instructions relative to the process to be followed. Having defined and clarified the problem to be addressed, they were then to go to the Scriptures and seek out as much relevant biblical data on this subject as they could, using the limited tools of concordances and Bible indexes that were at their disposal. From what the Bible says on the subject, derived by sound exegesis and hermeneutics, they were to find biblical illustrations, draw principles and formulate propositions relative to these topics. The groups were going through stages of developing an ethnotheology. Their work was incomplete, to be sure. At this point, however, I was far more interested in process than in product. I had faithfully delivered the "product" across 15 years of teaching, often to realize later that some of the boxes had remained unopened or at best their content only partially used. In this new situation, Africans would pose their own questions, discover their own answers and fill their own boxes. In a word, they would be theologizing. The result would be an aspect of theology that would be pastoral in nature, for they were wrestling with issues right out of the Christian community. My excitement was matched only by theirs.

This section of the seminar began with a period of personal Bible study and reflection by each participant on his particular group's topic. Then the groups, chosen by region, met for an extended in-depth interaction with the Scriptures. A recording secretary in each group brought together the fruit of the group's deliberations. In both the Swahili and French seminars there was evidence of a serious dialogue with Scripture. Because of the time restrictions the dialogue was limited, but the "conversation" had begun. Scripture assumed a new relevancy as it not only provided answers to questions that were being asked but itself raised questions. The first steps up the hermeneutical spiral staircase had been taken.

The diverse academic level of the Swahili and French seminar participants was naturally reflected both in the content, the format and the style of presentation of the two groups as they brought their findings to the plenary session. The Swahili group, composed largely of men with pastoral responsibilities, inclined to be far more sermonical. Rather than bringing seed thoughts that crystallized their thinking, they tended to bring the whole garden. It thus became the task of the facilitator to be more actively involved in distilling the essence of all that was presented and highlighting the key issues by writing key phrases on the newsheets. While this may have gone

beyond the ideal bounds of a facilitator's role, pragmatically it seemed best in achieving our immediate goals.

The French group, however, was far more analytic in its approach to the subject. It could penetrate to the heart of an issue and was more systematic in the arrangement of its material. This is in no way a value judgment relative to the effectiveness of the participants in the respective ministry contexts. It did mean, however, that while the Swahili group ended up with no written statement, each group within the French seminar produced a document that was a clear, concise and cogent "working paper" on its particular topic. These were successively put on newsprint by the recorder of each group. They elicited some very stimulating discussions. Again and again, it was obvious that the Africans were breaking new ground in their thinking. The barriers between African culture and biblical truth were gradually being broken down.

We were all painfully aware, however, of having more questions than answers at this point, but at least the right questions were being asked. At this juncture maybe right questions were more important than "right" answers, especially if the answers were to questions that weren't really being asked.

Conclusion

How did it all conclude? Again, the Swahili and French seminars ended differently. In the former, it fell to the leader to raise the question as to what was to be done with what had been covered in the past several days. It was agreed that it would be shared with local churches. I am not sure how much dialogue will take place between these men and their people, for I observed that even in our small group sessions interaction was difficult. Sermonettes were usually the order of the day rather than genuine discussion. Further modeling of this new approach is desperately needed. This is not surprising considering the heavy dose of lecture method these men have received in their Bible school experience. I am tempted to feel that for some of the older men the damage may be permanent and to a measure irreparable. During our last session together we actually discussed the lecture vs. dialogue method. We quickly counted up the number of hours in which they had been lectured or preached to during their two years of Bible school. Then counting all the hours spent in taking exams (a most inadequate form of dialogue and not worthy of the term), we found that they were lectured to about 97% of the time. They learned this lesson well! (I am still actively seeking some form of penance for my large part in the creation of this model. Maybe this trip was a down payment.)

In the French seminar several participants anticipated my concluding section by asking what the next steps were. They lamented the fact that most seminars were terminal and didn't want this one to share such a fate.

Several concrete proposals were made.

1. Further seminars of the same nature should be organized to grapple with specific issues. It would seem that this group (many of them trained

theologians) could render a unique service to the Administrative Council of their denomination which had already appointed a special commission to study certain matter relative to marriage customs.

2. It was agreed that theologizing of this kind should also take place at the lay level of the church. Since the groups had been selected by region, a coordinator was chosen from each group to organize similar seminars on the local church level. These are to follow the same process. This is why I was extremely sensitive about modeling a process that could be reproducible.

3. It was further agreed that small groups from the larger group meet regularly to discuss these various issues and write papers on them. These could be circulated to other areas for discussion and interaction. Out of this consensus of the community some final and more definitive position papers would emerge that would be printed for the benefit of the whole church. This would be the beginnings of an emergent ethnotheology.

4. Certain discussions centered around the creation of a loosely knit organization that would commit itself to grappling with these cultural issues in a biblical frame of reference, though no definite action was taken. I believe that the dynamics for such an organization were generated during our time together.

As a part of this conclusion let me share several personal reflections:

1. Travel to various parts of the world has convinced me that a great deal more is being talked about contextualization than is being done. While this may be true of most noble concepts, evangelicals need to start translating Willowbank into practice. In a word, Willowbank itself needs to be contextualized. I made this plea soon after the consultation (Gration 1978:17). I am still convinced that this is an urgent need in theological education (the fountainhead of contextualization) and in the life of the church. *

2. Missionaries can have a significant role in the contextualization process. We have molded the forms, established the patterns and created the sometimes inappropriate models that now exist in the very warp and woof of many third world churches. Now older, veteran missionaries can (and maybe should) assume a pivotal role in helping to initiate a new process of contextualization that can reverse or at least redirect much of what has been established in years gone by. Most new missionaries now going overseas are being sensitized to the concept of contextualization. In many cases, however, they are going to work with a church that is strongly "establishment" and status quo in its mentality. This is often frustrating to the new missionary and his younger national brethren.

A veteran missionary can have the best of both worlds. He can understand the process of doing theology, and he can enjoy credibility. He can also often introduce "revolutionary" ideas that would be rejected out of hand coming from a young person. I was embarrassed during a discussion at the end of the French seminar concerning the attitude that the top church council would take toward what had transpired. One participant, mildly cynical about the church's openness to grappling with some of these issues, categorically

stated, "Let's not forget, only Dr. Gration could have initiated this kind of seminar." I am not sure that he was right. However, the fact remains that I did initiate the process without even having to cut through the usual ecclesiastical red tape. In fact, the church council built the idea of continuance right into my original invitation. In a sense, I cashed in on the credibility I had built up across the years.

It should be noted that it had been many years since I had been back to Zaire for ministry. During the evaluation session on the last evening of the French seminar, one participant commented that it was rare to see an old missionary come back who was still keenly interested in the life of the church. It was obvious that the old wineskin has some definite advantages, especially where age is revered more than it is in the West. The secret is to have some new wine in it, even if this means using an inner plastic liner.

3. Contextualization can and must take place on various levels. I shall leave it to others to define specifically C-1, C-2 and C-3, though I think a case could be made for at least three levels of contextualization, or maybe more to the point, three kinds of contextualizers. Suffice it to say that one does not need to be either a graduate anthropologist nor a polished theologian to work fruitfully at a certain level of contextualization. One's particular background will naturally determine his entry level and the depth of his involvement in the process. Certainly one who is culturally sensitive and concerned with seeing the process described in this paper initiated can have a significant role as a facilitator and/or catalyst. Maybe this is one ministry where not having all the answers is a prime qualification, though a difficult one for many of us who come from the West.

4. Contextualization of the kind we did in Zaire can be dangerous.⁶ During the evaluation session of the French seminar, a high school chaplain stated, "We are touching a dangerous thing every time we touch the gospel and culture." He went on to observe that "the young people will applaud and clap their hands when they see us even mentioning some of the things we have discussed here (fetishism, etc.)," adding "but they will be looking at them through a different window; that is, from a different perspective. Thus we see how these ideas can easily be distorted and perverted." I heartily agreed that contextualization without a solid biblical mooring can easily lead to syncretism. But failing to grapple with these issues would expose the church to the danger of becoming irrelevant and losing the ear of the new generation. It is also true that this failure itself leads to another kind of syncretism which is also deadly. For example, Richardson's initial non-contextualized presentation of the gospel to the Sawi issued in a grossly distorted understanding of the gospel as they related it to their cultural values. Likewise a failure to contextualize the gospel message in a church context can perpetuate the syncretistic wedding of certain cultural values to the Christian faith when they really ought to be judged.

The danger involved in this whole process was graphically summarized when one participant observed: "It is necessary to burn the black wattle [a

fast growing tree] seed before planting it if it is to grow. Our fathers, first-generation Christians, do not want us to burn the seeds for fear of destroying them. They want the seeds to grow but not by burning them first. We must burn the seeds with great wisdom." For many churches the alternatives are safety without reproduction or risk with fruitfulness. May the seeds be burned in the fires of contextualization so that the life within may be released. Dangers? To be sure, but dangers of a different kind characterize both alternatives. The church must always swing between risk and opportunity.

5. While contextualization is primarily for the group involved in it, there is a sense in which theologizing within a specific context will also be a benefit to the church universal. In my farewell word to the French group with its trained theologians, I affirmed that the African theology or African theologies that I anticipated coming from them would contain unique insights that would bless and instruct all the people of God. What Augustines are yet unborn on the African continent who will speak God's ancient word with new accents?

6. Finally, in the original sense of the term "contextualization" as it came to us out of the matrix of the Theological Education Fund, one may properly ask if any of what has been described in the foregoing can properly be called contextualization. Has it really gone beyond indigenization? To this I would reply with a measure of ambivalence. Mindful that one of the distinguishing characteristics of contextualization is its grappling with the religious, social, political and economic issues and dynamics of a society in a specific context (Taber 1979:144, 146), it would be difficult to affirm that all of these came into the direct purview of the seminars. By the same token, the perspective of the seminars did not involve a backward look, one of the stated characteristics of indigenization (Coe 1973:240). There was indeed a grappling with certain issues that have grown out of the past. Nevertheless, they are very contemporary and have been further exacerbated by some of the dynamics of modern society noted above. Though on the one hand they may be characterized as the church's unfinished agenda from yesterday, they nevertheless reflect the influence of today's societal factors that have added to their complexity and increased the urgency of finding solutions.

So I really want to evaluate the seminars by a "Yes, but not fully" in terms of all that contextualization implies. My qualification stems from the fact that I see in contextualization an active, dynamic, at times even aggressive posture on the part of the church vis-à-vis its societal context. I see contextualization meaning that the church not only applies Scripture to its total life and context, not only engages in dialogue and interaction with its world, but at the propitious moment actively, and dare I say even on occasion militantly, confronts its world. In the contextualization process the church challenges the "principalities and powers," not only on the personal level but in terms of the systemic evil that permeates the present world order (Costas 1982:93, 170-71). It does so with the belief that as a signpost of the Kingdom it is the firstfruits of God's new order that marks the new Messianic age

inaugurated at the first coming of the King (Luke 4:16-18). Such an understanding of its role on the part of the church gives to it a boldness as it stands over against the world of which it is a part and yet from which it also stands apart. This is the world it seeks to repossess for its rightful Sovereign and which it seeks to transform, always recognizing that only the return of the King Himself will bring this task to consummation.

Something of this exciting mandate I sensed lacking in our seminars. We had to go through the process of this first phase, but the church must not stop here. I must confess that as I reflected each evening on the discussions of the day, my mind rushed ahead to what I felt must be the next step. In my dreams for the future I see another seminar that would put contextualization in its full dimensions in the larger context of the Kingdom of God. Out of this frame of reference the church would begin to define its role and total mission vis-à-vis the multi-dimensional world in which it remains as salt, light and leaven. When the church begins to understand its relationship to the Kingdom of God and the exciting but costly demands of such a relationship, then and only then can it fulfill its responsibilities of contextualization.⁷

For a church in Zaire that has assumed a rather passive role vis-à-vis government and the social and ethical issues it faces on a national level such a new understanding could be nothing less than revolutionary. It might make the church less popular in the eyes of some of the power structures involved in exploitation, but it would give to the church a power to confront that would give it an authenticity that in its relative passivity it now lacks. As a powerful force for justice, as a community whose caring reaches out beyond its own people, as the people of the new Kingdom, its impact on the total life of the country — socially, economically, politically, morally and spiritually — would be incalculable. Maybe herein lies the ultimate unfinished agenda of the church in Zaire.

Notes

1. The author wishes to acknowledge his deep indebtedness to Rev. David Langford, a missionary colleague working in Zaire, who was responsible for setting up the seminars and who contributed much to their success.

2. This concept is in accord with Kraft's insistence on an etic dimension to theologizing since an exclusively emic approach results in a theology that is too parochial (Kraft 1979:36, 293-294, 298).

3. "... *The whole Church* has to be recognized as 'the hermeneutical community', the place where the interpretation of Scripture is an ongoing process" (Padilla 1979:104). (See also *The Willowbank Report* 1979:11, 12).

4. For example, one tribe explains it as a heavenly bird, like a rooster, which lives in the clouds. It descends, explodes and then returns. Another interprets it as a well-padded billy-goat which descends by a cord and then returns.

5. "Hermeneutics may thus be conceived as having a spiral structure in which a richer and deeper understanding of the Bible leads to greater understanding of the historical context, and a deeper and richer understanding of the historical context leads to a greater comprehension of the biblical message from within the concrete situation, through the work of the Holy Spirit" (Padilla 1979:102).

6. For how evangelicals view both some of the dangers as well as the benefits of contextualization see the "Findings Committee Report" of the 1979 Consultation on Theology and Mission held at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Hesselgrave 1979:239-240).

7. Conn sees contextualized theologizing as "the process of the covenant conscientization of the whole people of God to the hermeneutical obligations of the Gospel" (Conn 1983:243).

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