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## Church Pews and Drunk Shepherds: the Precedents, Functions, and Principles of Contextualization

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As I attended the Christmas play in south India I noticed two things in particular. The first was a certain and unexpected feeling of familiarity. In the midst of a cultural context *very* different from my own, various things such as the hymns, pews, and other features were strangely reminiscent of traditional church services I had attended in the United States. I later learned that North American missionaries had started the church and the members were highly grateful for the gospel message that the early missionaries had brought to their area. In addition, however, the missionaries also imported various North American church practices and the new Indian church accepted them as part of what it meant to conduct Christian worship.



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A second impression came in the midst of the Christmas play. The actors and dialogue were following the basic biblical story, and all looked fairly familiar. That is, until the shepherds showed up. As the actors – all from the youth group – came onstage, the church crowd immediately perked up and began to chuckle. The shepherds were acting *drunk*. The youth played it up, staggering and slurring their way through a few lines, to the laughter and enjoyment of the church. This continued until the angels appeared, at which point the shepherds instantly sobered up and continued with dialogue that was once again familiar to me. As a friend later explained, modern-day shepherds in that part of India have the reputation, among other things, of always being drunk on cheap liquor. Isn't it possible that the Jewish shepherds acted similarly? What seemed culturally strange to me made complete sense to their reading of the story.

Contextualization may be one of the most crucial topics for global mission today. In some cases we see pew-type examples where the gospel was too closely combined with a foreign culture. These and other examples have prompted mission workers to consider ways to help Christianity be “indigenous” to a culture and not a foreign religion. In other cases we see how contextualization occurs naturally as Christians read the Bible through their own cultural lenses. Such situations give us the opportunity to reflect on how every culture tends to shape the gospel uniquely, providing both insights and challenges.

In this chapter I will discuss the ways that contextualization is a biblical concept, revealing how God's people—and God himself—regularly contextualized messages and practices. I will then touch on the recent history of contextualization and three particular functions that it serves. I will finally outline several key principles that can guide missionaries, pastors and other mission workers in the process of contextualization.

### **Biblical Precedents—God the Contextualizer**

Though contextualization is a relatively new term, it refers to an ancient reality. From the very beginning God revealed himself through people's own languages and cultures, “translating” his good news in ways that people of every age and region would understand. In addition, God's people regularly expressed their worship and understanding of God through their own culture. These points have been highlighted by biblical scholarship, which has long noted the various ways the Bible, in addition to being God's revelation, is a cultural book. As evangelical biblical scholar Joel Green notes, “...the biblical texts did not fall out of the sky; they are not facsimiles from

heaven, but arose in particular times and places in response to particular situations.”<sup>1</sup> A biblical understanding of contextualization begins with the realization that the biblical accounts and literature that reveal God to us are themselves reflective of cultural contexts and interactions.

Examples of this abound throughout the Old and New Testaments. For instance, many scholars have noted the similarities between the language and forms of the ancient Near East suzerain treaties and the covenant that God makes with Israel at Sinai in Exodus 20-23 and Deuteronomy.<sup>2</sup> In other words, as Hafemann has noted, “biblical covenants did not arise in a vacuum.”<sup>3</sup> Rather, when God revealed himself and sought to establish a covenant with Israel, he did so using treaty language common at that time. As another example, when God in Genesis 15:7-18 affirms his promise that Abram’s descendants would indeed inherit the land of Canaan, God symbolically moves down an aisle of split animal carcasses. Though strange to those of us unfamiliar with ancient Near Eastern culture, Abraham would have recognized this as a royal land grant covenant, commonly used among kings and leaders in the societies of his day.<sup>4</sup>

The examples of contextualization continue in the New Testament. The Gospels reveal how Jesus contextualized his teachings on the Kingdom of God according to his first century Jewish cultural, religious, and agricultural context. Some narratives, such as some of the parables, are so contextualized that their true meanings only become evident when we study and understand the cultural context they reflect.

Though Jesus’ teachings reflect his Jewish context, the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles show how early followers of Christ contextualized their messages for other contexts. For example, Paul’s speeches in Lystra and Athens in Acts 14 and 17 demonstrates the ways he interprets the work of God via the stories and ideas of non-Jewish people. In Lystra Paul does not talk about Jewish prophets and their messages – his common theme and starting point for Jewish audiences. Instead he appeals to the Lystrans’ understanding of a God who created all things and continues to direct nature and sustain life. In Athens Paul uses the words of local poets and philosophers to further characterize the Athenians’ “unknown god” and introduce them to Jesus and his resurrection. Here again Paul foregoes discussion about Jewish patriarchs, prophets, or other concepts he would use with a Jewish audience but that would be confusing to a non-Jewish audience.

From these brief examples it is evident that there has never been and never could be an “un-contextualized” gospel message. God, the ultimate “contextualizer,” has always valued and revealed himself through peoples’ cultures, and people have always used their cultural and material resources to make sense of and worship God.

What, however, are the limits and potential dangers of contextualization? How does one intentionally and responsibly contextualize the gospel in a new context? These are the questions that have occupied the contemporary discussions of contextualization.

### History of a Concept

Though, as we have seen, contextualization has always been an inherent component of God's revelation, the term itself is relatively recent. When first introduced in 1972, the term *contextualization* was presented as an alternative to terms such as *adaptation* and *indigenization*. Many missiologists felt that these latter terms referred to small and relatively simple changes that western missionaries made to aspects of the Christian faith. Contextualization, however, referred to a deeper process and denoted the ways a holistic gospel needed to engage the cultural, economic and political categories of a people. Though debated and defined in various ways, evangelical missiologists now generally agree that contextualization refers to "the process whereby Christians adapt the whole of the Christian faith (forms, content, and praxis) in diverse cultural settings."<sup>5</sup>

Contextualization highlights and celebrates one of the greatest strengths of Christian mission – the reality that the gospel can be translated and communicated to every culture in the world. But why, then, has this become such a crucial, and even controversial, topic? The irony and reality is that, in the history of the Christian church and mission, the Christian faith often became *so* contextualized that Christians could see no distinction between their faith and culture. Thus, when Catholic and Protestant mission work increased dramatically in the nineteenth century, missionaries could rarely, and only with difficulty, separate aspects of their culture from their faith. The superiority of the Christian faith, so they felt, could be seen in the superiority of European culture, education, technology, political rule, etc. Thus, to bring Christianity to a new culture meant bringing the mix of Europe's faith, culture, technology, etc.

Two important developments paved the way for a different way of thinking about culture and context. First, in the nineteenth century, missionaries started employing the "three-self principle." Introduced almost simultaneously by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, the principle stated that local churches should be encouraged to become self-governing (with their own leadership), self-financing (from within their own churches) and self-reproducing (starting new churches without outside help).<sup>6</sup> As missionaries considered how to help and/or allow local churches to become self-sufficient, they also recognized the need for structures, leadership,

architecture, and even teaching and theology to become “indigenized” and adapted to local cultures.

But the three-self principle did not always employ a deeper understanding of culture and context. A second development that helped missionaries better understand this came in the mid and later twentieth century via missiologists who studied cultural anthropology and linguistics. Bible translators such as Kenneth L. Pike and Eugene A. Nida were the pioneers of this movement, arguing that missionaries should study other peoples’ cultures and consider ways the Christian faith could be dynamically expressed through culture.<sup>7</sup> Other missionaries followed, studying cultural anthropology and publishing their insights in books and a new journal, aptly named *Practical Anthropology* (later renamed *Missiology*). Thus, many missionaries trained in the fifties and sixties learned anthropological skills such as participant observation, emphasized the importance of the “insider’s” view of culture (the “emic” view) and began assessing mission work through new lenses.

Two important contributors to contextualization, both Mennonite Brethren, were trained and began their work during this time. The first of these, Jacob A. Loewen, was a MB missiologist from British Columbia, Canada. Loewen served as a missionary in Latin America, studied linguistics and anthropology, and wrote extensively in *Practical Anthropology* on missions and cultural contexts in the sixties and beyond. One of Loewen’s principal contributions regarded the need of western missionaries to value and learn from local peoples’ cultures.<sup>8</sup>

The second MB missionary of this era to highlight the importance of cultural contexts and develop thinking on contextualization was Paul G. Hiebert. After serving as a missionary in India and studying cultural anthropology in the sixties, Hiebert went on to write and teach on aspects of culture, missions and theology. His writings became highly influential throughout the global mission community. Of particular significance was his concept of “critical contextualization,” which will be discussed below. As will be seen, one of Hiebert’s crucial points was the need for missionaries to value and seek to understand the local cultural context from the vantage point of the insider using the tools and conceptual frameworks of cultural anthropology.

These two broad developments – an understanding of the three-self principle and the study of local cultural contexts – set the stage for what eventually came to be known as contextualization. Though at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries some missionaries continued (and continue) to uncritically import aspects of western Christianity in their mission work, many others have realized that an understanding of contextualization can facilitate new and exciting movements for Christ, and insights into Christianity itself.

## Functions of Contextualization

Contextualization has occupied a particularly important place in cross-cultural mission and ministry since the eighties, generating lively discussion on its role and purpose. In this section I highlight three particular functions of contextualization as summarized by Darrell Whiteman.<sup>9</sup>

### Communication

The first and perhaps most discussed function of contextualization is to help people hear and understand the gospel. Contextualization seeks to create a good “bridge” for communication. On the surface, this would seem to be a straightforward task. However, as discussed above, the history of missions shows how too often the message of the gospel has included extraneous messages that caused confusion and distracted the audience away from the core message of Christ. This is not only a concern for “traditional” mission settings. Church leaders in the United States have also been distressed by how culturally disconnected churches have become from certain segments of society. As a response churches such as Saddleback and Willow Creek, and even the recent “emergent” churches, have intensely studied and adapted their message, music, architecture, and other things to the cultures of those to whom they seek to reach. Whereas some people wonder if these churches are *too* contextual (a critique I’ll address below) the important point is that these leaders believe that a gap exists between the gospel message and people’s cultural location. They might ask, “Do we require someone to learn our own language in order to hear a gospel message? We do not. Why, then, do we require people to learn a new (church) culture in order to hear the gospel?” Contextualization, then, is the process missionaries and pastors engage to “translate” a gospel message into new cultural “language” so that people have the chance to more clearly hear and respond. Some people in that culture may still find a contextualized message to be offensive and choose to reject it. However, if they do so we can be more assured that it is the message and not a foreign-looking culture that they find offensive.

A recent and somewhat controversial example of contextual communication is what many call “insider movements.” This term refers to people from various religious backgrounds, such as Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist communities, who follow Christ while remaining closely connected to or “inside” their non-Christian communities. They may thus identify themselves as Muslim followers of Christ, for example, but read and prioritize the Bible as God’s Word and follow Jesus as their Savior and Lord. The reason they do so, they claim, is because many churches around them lack contextualization and require them to reject their culture and

family traditions more than the Bible actually requires. In fact, many people in their context like and could accept and follow Christ, but the local church offends them and keeps them from doing so. If the gospel were more carefully contextualized, they claim, the true message of Christ could be heard more clearly, leading more people to embrace and follow Christ. They would prefer Christ to be the stumbling block, not a Western-looking expression of Christianity.

These examples raise the question: at what point does the gospel become too contextualized? How do we make sure that contextualization doesn't alter core aspects of Christianity? This leads to the second function of contextualization.

### **Critique**

Contextualization does more than express the gospel in and through culture. There are also times where the gospel critiques and challenges culture. It is in these times that contextualization can be understood to have a role in subverting improper, unjust, or unrighteous cultural norms. Numerous biblical examples illustrate how a contextualized message both aids communication *and* profoundly transforms the cultural categories in question. For example, Jesus and the church in the book of Acts use meals as a context-appropriate forum to teach and disciple others (Luke 22:7-38; Acts 2:46-47). However, Jesus and the church also challenged the way in which Greco-Roman and Jewish leaders would sometimes use meals to reinforce status hierarchies (Luke 14:1-24; 22:24-27; 1 Corinthians 11:17-22). Jesus thus embraced and contextualized practices such as the meals, but then subverted ways in which those practices did not adhere to the reign of God. As another example, Paul was not content to let the Lystrans' or Athenians' understanding of the gods or God remain unchallenged. While he spoke of God using their cultural categories, he also pointed out areas where their categories were too limited, or even wrong (Acts 14:15; 17:29-31).

Jesus, the church and Paul were aware of and addressed unjust practices. In a similar way the church often has a prophetic role, called to stand up for the poor and oppressed and to challenge unrighteous and oppressive people and structures.<sup>10</sup> In such cases a contextualized message does not seek to reduce the offense of the gospel, but to make it clearer. As Whiteman states, "Good contextualization enables the church to offend people for the right reasons. Bad contextualization, or the lack of it altogether, offends them for the wrong reasons."<sup>11</sup>

### **Creating Community**

Finally, contextualization leads Christians to have a richer understanding of their faith and a deeper relationship with the global church. If we continue to use the

analogy of a communication bridge, contextualization allows for two-way traffic. That is, when we begin to interpret the gospel in light of another culture, we allow for the other culture to speak to us and to perhaps show us new things about our faith that were latent. Contextualization helps us see that the gospel is universal across all cultures *and* particular to specific cultures and contexts.<sup>12</sup> It helps Christians to not only celebrate the commonality they share with others in faith and belief, but to learn from the various perspectives that each offers.

I am regularly reminded of this when I travel or interact with Christians from contexts other than my own. Christian friends from India teach me how Christ offers hope to poor and oppressed people. Christians from Africa remind me of how the spiritual realm can and does impact the material world and how prayer can bring healing and deliverance. Some Native American Christians speak passionately about the ways God loves culture, including their indigenous cultures, and does not reject it as colonial American Christians have. These perspectives do not add to biblical revelation. Rather, these believers “see” and highlight truths that I, from my cultural perspective, may not always see or experience. When I hear them my Christian faith is enriched and our relationship is deepened.

## **Principles of Contextualization**

The above has shown that, at its heart, contextualization is a practice that seeks to keep Christianity faithful to its biblical essence while at the same time being “at home” in each and every culture in which it takes root. To do this missionary scholars over the last forty years have developed, with the help of biblical studies and anthropological insights, several important principles to guide the practice of contextualization. The following are some principles that missionaries have found particularly important and that can guide mission workers, particularly MBs and other evangelical Anabaptists.

### **Biblical Revelation**

Evangelicals, including evangelical Anabaptists and MBs, believe that contextualization should make biblical revelation central to its understanding. This has two components. The first is to affirm that the Bible itself is revealed in and through cultures. While some may see this as relativizing the biblical message, evangelical Anabaptists see this as evidence of the value God places on culture. As Hiebert asserts, God’s revelation “is communicated by human cultures without losing its divine character.”<sup>13</sup> This gives us courage that it is possible for the gospel to be expressed in every culture. The second component is that contextualization must be



congruent with the Bible. That is, any practice or doctrine needs to be measured “by the degree to which it faithfully reflects the meaning of the biblical text.”<sup>14</sup>

### **General Revelation**

While the Bible is the central and normative authority in contextualization, God also reveals himself to people through creation and cultures. As I discussed above, for example, the apostle Paul himself modeled this in his interactions with the Lystrans and Athenians (Acts 14:17; 17:22-31). In recent decades evangelical missionaries such as Don Richardson have popularized the concept, discussing the ways God has placed “redemptive analogies” within cultures. These redemptive analogies, when discovered and interpreted by Christians, can help people understand the biblical revelation of Jesus and his salvation via one of their own cultural concepts or practices.<sup>15</sup>

### **Insider Perspective**

Evangelical training has often emphasized biblical studies, but has sometimes created a “gulf” between that and cultural knowledge.<sup>16</sup> As we saw above, however, many missionaries have recognized this and turned to cultural anthropology to help bridge this gap. One of the principal concepts that has emerged from this interaction is the need to understand the local cultural context from the vantage point of the insider. Too often outsiders make quick judgments of a cultural context or practice based on incomplete or inaccurate knowledge. Hiebert and others, however, recommend that missionaries temporarily suspend judgment as they seek to learn the logic and purpose of the practice in question. They should enter cultures as “learners” and remain as such, even when they eventually share the gospel in culturally appropriate ways.

### **Holistic and Comprehensive**

Once we begin to study and analyze cultures we realize just how complex they can be. Good contextualization should thus attempt to be comprehensive, taking into account the various aspects of culture that may be applicable in a situation. Scott Moreau, utilizing a scheme developed by comparative religious scholar Ninian Smart, argues that mission workers should be mindful of seven particular dimensions.<sup>17</sup>

1. ***The Doctrinal/Philosophical Dimension.*** Most societies have formalized philosophies, or ways of framing and thinking through problems. Contextualization needs to engage the philosophies and doctrines of a context.
2. ***The Mythic or Narrative Dimension.*** Myths, or cultural stories, whether true or legendary, carry important cultural messages and values. Thus Christians can

- and should evaluate the proverbs, songs, stories, plays, etc. of a culture in light of biblical revelation, and seek to communicate the biblical narratives via the local culture's forms.
3. ***The Ethical/Legal Dimension.*** Every society has stated and unstated norms by which its members should live. Likewise, the Bible outlines ethics and commands. Thus believers in every context need to consider the various ways the Bible affirms, challenges and/or modifies the ethics of their culture.
  4. ***The Social or Organizational Dimension.*** People often operate within various social groupings, including families, businesses, social organizations, religious organizations, and others. Each has their own forms of leadership and organization, and Christians can find ways to contextualize their own forms of community in light of these.
  5. ***The Ritual Dimension.*** We can see rituals, broadly defined, at work in many different ways. We have initiations for particular stages of life or organizations and we mark these transitions through rituals, some of which are highly defined, such as marriage. We also mark the beginning and end of life with rituals. Christians need to consider their culture's rituals, whether religious, non-religious, or mixed, to see if and how biblical revelation might affirm or critique these, and to see how rituals may be modified to reflect biblical truths.
  6. ***The Experiential Dimension.*** People in many cultures have and value experiences with the supernatural or divine. This could include healings, possession, prophecies, dreams, visions, etc. Such experiences need to be discussed and evaluated to find biblically-based and indigenously understandable ways to address them.
  7. ***The Material Dimension.*** This area, which includes art, architecture, objects, and clothing, is probably what most mission workers think of in regards to contextualization. In what ways can the art forms, music genres, poetry, architecture, etc. reflect biblical truths? What categories do these occupy for people in their lives? These are exciting and sometimes challenging areas for mission workers to consider in contextualization.

### **Critical Correlation**

Once we learn about the dimensions of a context and its practices, how do we relate the gospel to it? Hiebert notes that missionaries have often gravitated towards one of two extremes. Some may reject the dimensions and practices of a culture wholesale and try to replace them with new "Christian" (often Western-Christian) practices. This often leads to a foreign-looking form of Christianity. Others may

completely accept the dimensions and practices and refuse to critique or change them. This can lead to a highly syncretized or inappropriately mixed hybrid of Christian and non-Christian religious beliefs. Hiebert, however, proposes a third way of “critical contextualization.”<sup>18</sup> Recognizing that biblical revelation will both affirm and challenge aspects of the culture, the missionaries and local leaders 1) study the custom and context, 2) study the scriptural teaching on this aspect, 3) evaluate the custom in light of Scripture, 4) and create a new contextualized practice. The critical correlation of Scripture to culture privileges the role of Scripture, but also recognizes that a missionary, pastor, and/or church may see new lessons in Scripture as they study it in light of their culture.

### **The Role of Locals**

Trained leaders, whether pastors or missionaries, are sometimes tempted to function as the contextualization experts and tell new believers what practices are culturally appropriate and inappropriate. However, leaders need to empower and trust the ability of the local church community to interpret Scripture and discern appropriate responses. Though missionaries may feel more trained and qualified in biblical exegesis and cultural analysis, it is ultimately the local church that needs to be empowered to discern together the Holy Spirit’s guidance in their practices and teachings. It is perhaps no coincidence that two of the early missionary anthropologists to articulate this point were MBs, for whom the priesthood of all believers was an important value.<sup>19</sup>

### **Role of Outsiders**

Though missionaries, particularly those who represent power structures, need to empower local believers to interpret Scripture and culture, missionaries still have an important role to play in contextualization. Sometimes local people have a difficult time seeing and analyzing their own culture. Also, church history shows that institutional and theological structures, once established, do not always adjust quickly to changing contexts and new insights. Christians may view changes within their culture as a threat, and are not always willing to adjust or contextualize to those changes. In these instances a humble and culturally knowledgeable outsider might be used to ask questions of local believers, helping them to think on and analyze their own context in new and critical ways.

### **Conclusion**

Contextualization has been and will continue to be a crucial issue for twenty-first century mission work. However, it is fitting to remember that contextualization

is more than a temporary strategy in missions. Revelation 7:9 shows us that, even in heaven, people will continue to be identified as coming from their own unique cultural contexts. When we contextualize the gospel and learn from the contextualized teaching of our brothers and sisters, we are preparing for the ultimate multicultural community experience ever, when the universal God will be worshipped by people from every tribe, tongue and language.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007).
- <sup>2</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels in Near Eastern Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 95-107.
- <sup>3</sup> Scott J. Hafemann, "The Covenant Relationship," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 31.
- <sup>4</sup> Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 44; Brian K. Petersen, "A Brief Investigation of Old Testament Precursors to the Pauline Missiological Model of Cultural Adaptation," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24, no. 3 (2007).
- <sup>5</sup> A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 46.
- <sup>6</sup> R. Pierce Beaver, ed. *To Advance the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Rufus Anderson* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967); Max Warren, ed. *To Apply the Gospel: Selections from the Writings of Henry Venn* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).
- <sup>7</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 9; Eugene Nida, *Message and Mission: The Communication of the Christian Faith* (New York: Harper, 1960).
- <sup>8</sup> Jacob A. Loewen, *The Christian Encounter with Culture* (Monrovia: World Vision International, 1967).
- <sup>9</sup> Darrell Whiteman, "The Function of Appropriate Contextualization," in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005).
- <sup>10</sup> Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 291-92.
- <sup>11</sup> Whiteman, "The Function of Appropriate Contextualization," 55.
- <sup>12</sup> A. Scott Moreau, "Contextualization: From an Adapted Message to an Adapted Life," in *The Changing Face of World Missions*, ed. Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van

- Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 321.
- <sup>13</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 33.
- <sup>14</sup> David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 201.
- <sup>15</sup> Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models*, 67.
- <sup>16</sup> Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 14; R. Daniel Shaw and Charles Edward van Engen, *Communicating God's Word in a Complex World: God's Truth or Hocus Pocus?*, ed. R. Daniel Shaw and Charles E. van Engen (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 19.
- <sup>17</sup> Scott Moreau, "Contextualization That Is Comprehensive," *Missiology* 34, no. 3 (2006).
- <sup>18</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," (1987).
- <sup>19</sup> Loewen, *The Christian Encounter with Culture*; Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, 191.

### Recommended Reading

- Flemming, Dean. *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Hesselgrave, David J., and Edward Rommen, eds. *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models*. Foreword by George W. Peters. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989.
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**Study Questions**

1. Reflect on the implications of the history of contextualization. If you are a member of the global North, how have you experienced or employed thinking that assumes your culture is synonymous with Christian values? If you are a member of the global South, how have you experienced that assumption impacting you; or where have you made your own assumptions that your culture is synonymous with Christian values?
2. Consider people you believe are good “bridges” between gospel and culture. What can you learn from their approach? How do you achieve balance between “dressing up the gospel with cultural character” and “using the gospel to critique culture” (communication versus critique)?
3. Review the seven dimensions of reading culture by Ninian Smart. Which one(s) might be the most challenging for you? To what degree do all seven come into play as you address your contextualizing challenges?