

What Do We Mean by Contextualisation?

Every one of our churches are situated in a cultural context. This is partly local (the geographical context), partly national (the history of our country), and European (our post-modern culture). How do we work towards a better contextualization of our churches?

David Brown planted three churches before revitalising a church in central Paris. For many years he was involved with GBU (Groupes Bibliques Universitaires), the French student movement affiliated with IFES. More recently he has been promoting church revitalisation through his chairmanship of the Evangelism Commission of the French “National Council of Evangelicals” and through his teaching and mentoring at the Bible Institutes in Geneva and Paris and by leading a range of seminars and workshops in France and across Europe.

I. The challenge

A. Working towards implementing the vision of a healthy church in our context

II. What is culture?

A. Culture is all-encompassing

1. “Culture is the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses not only art and literature but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” *Definition of UNESCO*

B. The cultural mandate: Genesis 1.28

1. Taking care of the created world Gen 2.15.
2. The beginning of « civilisation » as we see it in the Bible
Genesis 4.16-26 How a group functions
 - a) Agriculture v20
 - b) Art (“culture”) v21
 - c) Religion (“cultic” in a neutral sense) v26

C. But this “society” also starts to be dysfunctional.

D. In summary

1. Culture is a gift from God to give us identity
2. Culture simplifies our daily life (how we dress, greet people etc)
3. Culture contributes to our mental representation of the world
4. But the danger is when there is **confusion between culture and nature**, as a result of “plausibility structures” (Peter Berger).

III. What is contextualisation ?

A. The Lausanne Covenant (1974)

Article 10. EVANGELISM AND CULTURE

The development of strategies for world evangelization calls for imaginative pioneering methods. Under God, the result will be the rise of churches deeply rooted in Christ and closely related to their culture. Culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture. Because men and women are God's creatures, some of their culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because they are fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. The gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness, and insists on moral absolutes in every culture. Missions have, all too frequently, exported with the gospel an alien culture, and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to Scripture. Christ's evangelists must humbly seek to empty themselves of all but their personal authenticity in order to become the servants of others, and churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God. (*Mark 7:8,9,13; Genesis 4:21,22; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Philippians 2:5-7; 2 Cor 4:5*)

B. Dean Flemming *Contextualization in the New Testament*, defines contextualization as

“the dynamic and comprehensive process by which the gospel is incarnated within a concrete historical or cultural situation.”

“This happens in such a way that the gospel both comes to authentic expression in the local context and at the same time prophetically transforms the context. Contextualization seeks to enable the people of God to live out the gospel in obedience to Christ within their own cultures and circumstances.”

IV. The three levels of cultural context (local, national, European)

A. Local = city/town/village/region

B. National = all our history

C. European = secular ideologies/postmodernity/“the air we breathe”

V. What does this imply practically

A. Knowing your culture

B. By taking on board how people make decisions today

C. Making our faith plausible

Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect. Next make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is. (Blaise Pascal 1623 - 1662 - Les Pensées)

1. The way people process information today
2. Plausible > desirable > credible
3. I must check this out > I like it > Is it true?

Suggested Readings:

Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, Apollos (IVP), 2005

The Lausanne Covenant 1974

Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, Abingdon, 1989

Glynn Harrison, *A Better Story* IVP(UK), 2017

Paul Hiebert, *Transforming World Views* Baker Academic 2008