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**WHAT IS CONTEXTUALISATION?**

by

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**Biographically speaking:**

John Harrower made petrol and wrote economic reports before training in cross-cultural mission over 1977-79 at the CMS Missionary Training College. With Gayelene and their two sons he lived in Argentina for nine years, 1979-88, working with university students, church planting and in Christian literature publication and distribution. Back in Melbourne he helped restructure the Anglican Church in Glen Waverley. He completed an MA in missiology and is currently researching Christian and Muslim prayer. In July 2000 he became the eleventh Bishop of the Anglican Family of Tasmania.

## WHAT IS CONTEXTUALISATION?

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the midst of life's joys and sorrows, how can we share the love of God demonstrated in Christ in one historical context, to our historical context today, which is so different? This question is what contextualisation is about. We are seeking to discover how the one Gospel can live and be meaningful in many cultures. This demands asking, what in the Gospel message is compatible with a given culture and what is not? And how can the Gospel become part of a culture without losing its authenticity?

An historical overview will seek to show how the Church has developed its current understanding of contextualisation. 'Culture' is viewed theologically prior to various approaches to contextualisation being described. Three models of contextualisation: Translation, Anthropological and Praxis models are shown to enable a constructive engagement between Gospel and culture.

Contextualisation challenges the Anglican Church in Australia to a self-critique of its own progress in fostering Gospel living in The "Great Southland of The Holy Spirit". To what extent has the 'anglo' of Anglican been a crippling cultural captivity rather than a cultural seed ready to die to self so that Gospel life might grow in Australian cultural attire? God's work will not be fulfilled through Australian Anglicanism unless it seriously analyses culture and is prepared to relinquish many of its treasured forms in order to be truly incarnated into Australian society.

### **Acknowledgements:**

I gratefully acknowledge the late David Penman as my initial mentor in missiology and contextualisation and for my brothers and sisters in Argentina who challenged and helped me to live contextualisation. I also thank my post-graduate teachers, Graham Cole, Kevin Giles, Ian Hawley and Keith Hinton, for their classes, questions and enthusiasm for the Gospel and peoples. This paper was initially developed as part of the Australian Anglican Missiology Consultations nurtured by the General Synod Office.

## A. INTRODUCTION

Not long after being elected Bishop of Tasmania I received word that I could well need to have a coat of arms approved by a Royal Society in England for my ministry in Tasmania!

Apparently there was a need for the new bishop to have a seal, an embossed one, to duly authorise his Episcopal documentation.

The incongruity of a coat of arms for a bishop of an island on one side of the world requiring approval by an island on the other side of the world, albeit a royal one (!), accelerated my reflection on the theme of "Gospel and Culture" or "Contextualisation".

## B. CONTEXTUALISATION: SOME DEFINITIONS/ CLARIFICATION

**Contextualisation** is "the various processes by which a local church integrates the Gospel message (the "text") with its local culture (the "context")". The text and context must be blended into that one, God-intended reality called "Christian Living".<sup>1</sup>

**Culture** Missiology makes use of cultural anthropology to elucidate culture defined as, "a dynamic system of socially acquired and socially shared ideas, according to which an intersecting group of human beings is to adapt itself to its physical, social and ideational environment".<sup>2</sup>

There are three levels of culture:<sup>3</sup>

1. **Forms** - the "shape" of the particular cultural pattern - the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *what kind* and *how*. Note that the *why* is absent here because it occurs in the following two levels.  
E.g., what should be the design of my bishop's seal?
2. **Functions** - society's answer to the immediate *why*. What are the reasons, presuppositions, prerequisites, needs, associations, repercussions, logical connections, of the particular form? The term *cultural grammar* has been applied to this whole network of meanings, usages, values, presuppositions, associations and purposes, i.e. we must be aware of the *cultural semantics* as well as the cultural grammar and the appropriate usages of the language as well.  
E.g., why have a seal? Is a seal necessary? Answer: A seal is a legal necessity for episcopal authorizations. But, is there no other legal way?

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<sup>1</sup> Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, Orbis, New York, 1988, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p. 75ff.

3. Underlying Psychology - the society's psychology or mentality. The underlying premises, emotionally charged attitudes, basic goals & drives, starting points in reasoning, reacting, and motivating. Australians are anti-authoritarian, but want to know, "Who said so?" But is a seal the only or most appropriate way, of answering this need?

Culture then embraces the totality of a way of life. Christ must be incarnated into all these levels of form, function and underlying psychology. The Gospel is to become an integral part of a life system. The aim is that the Gospel will be a living part of the living and whole way of life of the society.

Culture is dynamic, ever changing, and the Gospel, properly integral to a culture, will be essential to determining the evolving life of the society.

**The Gospel** is the Good News of God to us in the person of Jesus Christ. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and all living creatures. Human beings were created in the 'image of God' to enjoy relationship with their Creator and with one another. They were given stewardship over the created order: the 'Cultural Mandate'. This was never withdrawn but the creation story includes a symbolic account of the rebellion of Adam and Eve, which had dire consequences for their relationship with one another, with creation and most importantly with their Creator. In Romans 5:12ff. Paul concludes that this rebellion is the cause of all human rebellion against God which he calls "sin".

God sent his one and only Son, Jesus of Nazareth, to live and die and rise again. The incarnation, 'God with us', brought love and the challenge and hope to enable us to live. Jesus' death is the atoning sacrifice through which we are reconciled to God. His resurrection means hope for the future. The risen Christ is at work in the world in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings lost sinful human beings to repentance and forgiveness, incorporating them as living members of Christ's body, the Church. This Third Person of the Triune God indwells God's people giving light and life, preparing them for the ultimate family reunion and celebration, promised by the Ultimate Parent.

Our 'Good News' is Christ centred because it is this Person that we are called to believe on as Lord and Christ – not just some propositions about him. This understanding is established in certain historical happenings that for the Christian are non-negotiable. "To affirm the unique decisiveness of God's action in Jesus Christ is not arrogance; it is the enduring bulwark against arrogance of every culture to be itself the criterion by which others are judged."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids & WCC Publications, Geneva, 1989, pp. 166 and 155ff.

## **SOME HISTORY**

This history of the developing interest in contextualisation will be very brief.

### **Biblical**

Biblical literature arises out of a context. The authors wrote in history addressing the historical situation in which they found themselves. In the Old Testament God called his people, Israel, to live in particular cultures, and in fact they had to relearn how to be God's people in different cultures at different times. They went from bricklayers to Bedouins to farmers. God sought to work with his people in making their faith appropriate to its particular setting. The prophets were continually calling the people of God back to a right way of living. Jesus mainly worked mono-culturally. The incarnation, of its very nature, shows the way in which the divine word became flesh and dwelt amongst us in a particular culture in a particular locale at a particular time. In the book of Acts chapter fifteen there is a classic example of the people of God trying to understand the relationship between the Gospel and culture: "Was table fellowship possible between Jews and gentiles?"

### **Western Colonial Era**

With the advent of the Western Colonial Era the missionaries from Western nations were able to go to many places they couldn't before and many took it for granted that Western Christianity was Christianity exactly as given by Jesus and the apostles. The missionaries along with their (western) Christian textbooks exported Western patterns quite unwittingly. They were unaware that their way of expressing theology, both in language and the structure of the theological system, were culturally determined. They thought of their theology as an absolute compendium that the whole global church should use and adhere to. But western theologies address western questions that are culture specific. The questions asked by other cultures are often missing in these western theologies. In Protestantism theological formulations have tended to be seen as the ultimate standard of truth. But this theology is in danger of standing above scripture - our pet doctrine supported by proof texts.

### **The Indigeneity Model**

For many years the missionary task was seen as establishing indigenous churches. The word indigenisation comes from the Latin literally meaning to "grow within", i.e., native born or produced. The writings of Henry Venn and Roland Allen popularised the indigenous model. This was made concrete in the "Three Selves Movement": self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. The older indigenous model meant that national Christians were in fact creating a western church. Some Christian missionaries sought to value the past culture of the peoples that they were working with and sought to resurrect dying cultural patterns. The danger with this was that it attempted to wind the clock of cultural change backwards and the indigenous church takes on an image of a past era. But while indigenisation values traditional culture it also recognises that contextualisation is contemporary. There is therefore a proper tension between the traditional indigenous culture and the emerging indigenous culture as it enters into interaction with other world cultures.

## Post World War II

### New Bible Translation

In this period very significant work was undertaken in translating the Bible into contemporary English. The J B Phillips' translation was one example of this. Later the American Bible Society endorsed the work of Eugene Nida, Jacob Loewen, and others by using the "dynamic equivalence model"<sup>5</sup> of Bible translation. The 'Good News Bible' translation, which included simple line illustrations, was another important step.

### A New Interest in Anthropology

In this period we also see Christians for the first time really taking seriously the emerging insights of anthropology. Missionary organizations in the sixties onwards started to insist that missionaries have some knowledge of anthropology.

### End of Colonial Era

This was also the period when the old colonial empires collapsed under the pressure of growing nationalism. As new nations emerged, each with a desire to establish its own cultural identity(ies), the church in these countries was caught up with change. They had to become national churches.

### Biblical Studies

In the post war period there was also seen a great awakening in the scholarly study of the Bible and in Biblical Theology. Karl Barth's *Dogmatics* epitomizes this development. In the sixties Roman Catholics and Evangelicals began using critical methods in studying the Bible. Critical method was particularly interested in contexts - the *Sitz em Leben* - the situation in life of the original audience and of the original authors of the Bible.

### Third World Theologies (e.g. Liberation Theology)

A somewhat later development is seen in the emergence of liberation theology. The Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez linked Marxist analysis to theology and his *Theology of Liberation* was published in 1971. This was followed by other publications such as Miguez Bonino's, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*, and many other books followed.

### Ecumenical - WCC

In 1971 the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches introduced the word "contextuality". Contextualisation entered the literature through the writings of the General Director, Shoki Coe. He was concerned that indigenisation suggested a static response to the Gospel "in terms of traditional culture. Therefore, it is in danger of being past-orientated. . . . So in using the word *contextualization*, we try to convey all that is implied in the familiar term indigenization, yet seek to press beyond for a more dynamic concept which is open to change and which is also future-orientated".<sup>6</sup> More

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<sup>5</sup> See Section F of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> Shoki Coe, *Contextualizing Theology*, republished from 1973 in *Mission Trends* No. 3, 'Third World Theologies', Anderson and Stransky (Eds), Paulist Press, Broadway, N.Y., 1976, p.21.

recently the 1996 WCC conference on world mission and evangelism took as its theme "Called to One Hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures".<sup>7</sup>

#### Lausanne - Willowbank

In the Lausanne 1974 Consultation a translation communication linguistic model was used to discuss Gospel and Culture.<sup>8</sup> A follow on report published four years later entitled, "Gospel and Culture", demonstrated the significant development that was occurring in evangelical circles: "sensitive cross-cultural witnesses will not arrive at this sphere of service with a pre-packaged Gospel. We believe that fresh, creative understandings do emerge when the Spirit-led believing community is listening and reacting sensitively to both the truth of Scripture and the needs of the world."<sup>9</sup>

### **D. A THEOLOGY OF CULTURE**

The life of human beings made in the image of God both as individuals and in families, living in specific cultures is developed in Genesis chapters 1 to 11. The equality and dignity of all human beings is stressed but at the same time their division into nations or cultural groups is shown. "Human culture (Genesis 4) and the history of the nations (Genesis 10) are the product of God's blessings upon human beings. God brought judgement upon a sinful human race in the flood (Genesis 6) but immediately there was made a covenant with the survivors (Genesis 9). It is shown to be effective in that the earth becomes filled with a multitude of varied nations (Genesis 10). Thus, as David Penman put it,

*"The world of nations becomes the result of peace made with man after the flood. The nations become simultaneously signs of God's program for peace and of his judgement."*<sup>10</sup>

A theology of culture holds in tension the Image of God in creation and the Cultural Mandate given to humankind, and the rebellion of humankind and the ensuing judgement of God seen in the expulsion from the Garden and the Flood.

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<sup>7</sup> The 'Gospel and Cultures' Pamphlet Series began with the excellent, *Gospel and Culture* by S. Wesley Ariarajah, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> This translation communication linguistic model was not asking questions of the themes and heartbeats of a culture. It is captured in the quote from Byang Kato speaking at this conference, "We understand the term to mean making the concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation... Since the Gospel message is inspired but the mode of its expression not, contextualisation of the modes of expression is not only right but necessary", 'Let the Earth Hear His Voice', *The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism*, World Wide Publications, Minneapolis, p.1217. See also Charles Kraft and the diverse cultural meanings of 'lamb' and 'pig', *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Orbis Books, New York, 1979, p.14.

<sup>9</sup> *Gospel and Culture*, 'Willowbank Report', 1978, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> See *A Garden of Many Colours: The Report of the Archbishop's Commission on Multi-cultural Ministry and Mission*, presented to the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, March 1985, p. 31. Note the excellent "Culture and Customs: What Is Multiculturalism?" and especially the opening section on culture beginning at p. 9 and following.



## E. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTEXTUALISATION

### Nigeria

*What I would like these young men to know before they embark for Nigeria is that it is God who is taking them to Nigeria not that they are taking God, said a Nigerian to a group of prospective missionaries.<sup>11</sup> He continued:*

*When missionaries first came to my country, they spoke of the God who created the world as if he were a different God from the one we already knew about. We listened and compared what we heard and read in the Bible about this God and discovered that he is the very same God we had always known about. We received many new insights from the missionaries and especially we heard that we could come to know God personally through Jesus Christ. But everyone except the missionaries realised that your God is the same as our God.*

*In other words, our God had brought the missionaries to add to our understanding and commitment. The missionaries had not brought a new God with them. And this is what I would like these young missionaries to realise before they go so that they don't waste so much effort trying to change our ways but devote themselves to building something worthwhile on the foundations that are already there.*

### Chile

A dialogue "Rich Woman . . . Poor Woman" written by a peasant woman in Chile will be read at the Consultation. See Attachment A. How can the Gospel minister to these two women? Is it the same Gospel?

### Africa

"The fact that aspects of this message may be either unacceptable or offensive to modern rationalistic people should not make us restructure the message to accommodate them, but to explicate its meaning *relevantly* to touch them not simply in their cultural or social context but in his existential need, perplexity and moral guilt. To proclaim *relevantly* therefore is not, as Helmut Thielicke observes, 'To accommodate ourselves or ape those we would reach.' Far from it. Paul actually contradicted the Greeks and Jews and showed them God was completely different to what they had expected. But it was in terms of *their* suppositions and notions that he searched them out. He met their questions on their level. That makes all the difference. He did not ape what they were saying just to make the Gospel palatable."<sup>12</sup>

### Australia

A video showing the significance of contextualisation to sport may be shown and its script made available at the meeting.

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<sup>11</sup> op.cit, Kraft, p.21.

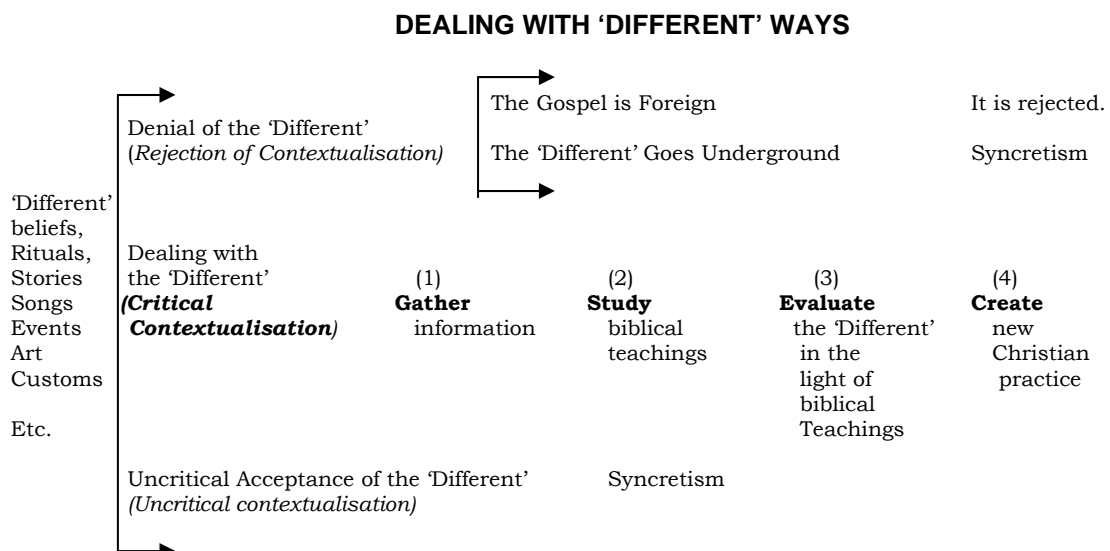
<sup>12</sup> Michael Cassidy, "Third Way", I can't find which Issue Number! Sorry.

Paul Hiebert in his excellent book, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Baker, 1985, p.183ff) distinguishes between three responses to the significance of culture and contextualisation:

1) Rejection of Contextualisation. Christians may decide that a culture “different” to their own is basically evil and therefore they are very negative about it. They insist that on becoming a Christian one must give up such things as drums, the old songs, dances, body decorations, certain types of dress and food, marriage customs, funeral rites etc. The trouble with this is, (i) it usually leaves a cultural vacuum which is then filled by equally doubtful aspects of the Christians’ culture and, (ii) it only drives the old cultural ways underground.

2) Uncritical Contextualisation. A second approach has been to accept every aspect of the culture as it is. In the Christian Liberal tradition it is often thought that all religions lead to God and when this is accepted the corollary follows that all cultures are equally acceptable to God. Mission is not about changing people's religion or culture but helping them to become more in touch with ultimate reality, or as it is sometimes expressed to become more truly human. This view is based on a complete acceptance of radical relativism and pluralism, which disallows any evaluation of other people's culture, religion, or ethics. For many people, Christian and non-Christian, this is problematic because not all religion is of equal value and not all behaviour is equally acceptable. Most people, for example, would not endorse a religion which practiced human sacrifice or took part in cannibalism.

3) Critical Contextualisation. Thus for most Christians today the only option is a critical acceptance of the principle of contextualisation. This encourages respect and the positive affirmation of other cultures, sees our own culture like all other cultures as having good and bad elements and acknowledges that our cultural "spectacles", along with everybody else's, colours our thinking and theology. This does not mean we make no evaluations, endorse everything in another culture, or become thorough relativists. Critical acceptance implies that judgements are made but sympathetically, and not only of other cultures but also of our own. If this position is accepted in principle, unity does not necessarily follow. What to accept and what not to accept, and how far culture should be allowed to impact on theology remains an open question. Hiebert gives the following chart (p.188) to explain the three responses:



## F. APPROACHES TO CONTEXTUALISATION

There are models for doing contextualisation that bring theology and culture together. We will explain three models which seek authentic and workable ways forward in contextual theologising.

### Translation Models

In this model the essential message of Christianity is supracultural: the starting point is always the supracultural essential doctrine of the faith, and culture plays an ancillary or subordinate role in the translation process. The traditional Formal Equivalence Translation Model<sup>13</sup> was based upon a limited understanding of translation where the translators operated literally and saw “languages as merely alternative codes for the same reality. . . . (But) when the forms are retained from culture to culture and language to language, the meanings are inevitably changed.”<sup>14</sup> This model mistakenly equated form and meaning.

The modern anthropologically informed Dynamic Equivalence Translation Model prioritises meaning over form and “endeavours to be faithful both to the original author and message (or meaning) and to the intended impact that that message was to have upon the original readers.”<sup>15</sup> Any item of communication has its form, and inside it has its meaning, which in Christian communication is the kerygma.<sup>16</sup> Thus the message or meaning is packaged within a context: the message is often likened to a kernel and the form or context to a husk. It is not possible to communicate meaning without it having a cultural form.

When the Gospel encounters a new culture, it brings something, at least Christology, that is absolutely new. All cultures have similar deep structures that make it possible to find some correspondence between aspects of one culture and another. It is imperative to be alert to the danger that a form from another time, let alone another place, is almost certainly going to miscommunicate because cultures experience ongoing change. Note the words of Helmut Thielicke “The Gospel must be constantly forwarded to a new address, because the recipient is repeatedly changing place of residence.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> op.cit, Kraft, “The formal-correspondence translations aim simply to transfer the word forms of the source language into the corresponding word form of the receptor language.” page 264.

<sup>14</sup> ibid, page 264-275, section: “Formal Correspondence an Inadequate Model”.

<sup>15</sup> ibid, page 271.

<sup>16</sup> Harvie Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing World*, Academic Books, Grand Rapids, 1984, pages 147-159, gives a useful summary and critique of the work of Charles Kraft and the Dynamic Equivalence Translation Model.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Corney “Have you got the right address? Post-modernism and the Gospel”, *Grid*, World Vision Australia, Spring, 1995, page 1.

### **The Anthropological Model**

This model of contextualisation rises from a more catholic view<sup>18</sup> of culture and humanity. Here God's revelation is not only a supracultural message but is also found within culture<sup>19</sup>. This is creation-centred, focusing on the world being God's world, compared with redemption-centred theology that sees the world as fallen and corrupt. The Anthropological Model sees particular cultures as unique. Everyday people are the best contextualisers, and the theologian should enable the process whereby the people do their own theology. This model, therefore, looks for God's revelation and self-manifestation within the values, relational patterns, metaphors and myths of a culture. Acceptance of the Christian faith might challenge and restore a culture, but will not radically alter it.

A key theological theme is the incarnation: God revealed in culture.<sup>20</sup> In nature and history God's providential involvement can be discerned.

A well known illustration of this is Don Richardson's work among the Sawi people of Irian Jaya<sup>21</sup> where the Chief's son, the 'peace child', was exchanged as the means of reconciliation between the warring tribes. This provided a concept that could be used to show how God's peace child brought peace. This 'concept fulfillment' assumes God is at work in every culture and there is thus a key to understanding the Gospel in all its richness.

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<sup>18</sup> Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Orbis, New York, 1992, chapter 5 especially.

<sup>19</sup> Note the "logos" in John's Prologue, and in the Anglican tradition, Archbishop William Temple's commentary on John 1: 9 -13 "So it may be truly said that the conscience of the heathen man is the voice of Christ within him - though muffled by his ignorance. All that is noble in the non-Christian systems of thought, or conduct, or worship is the work of Christ upon them and within them. By the Word of God - that is to say, by Jesus Christ - Isaiah, and Plato, and Zoroaster, and Buddha, and Confucius conceived and uttered such truths as they declared." *Readings in St John's Gospel*, MacMillan and Company, London, 1950, page 10.

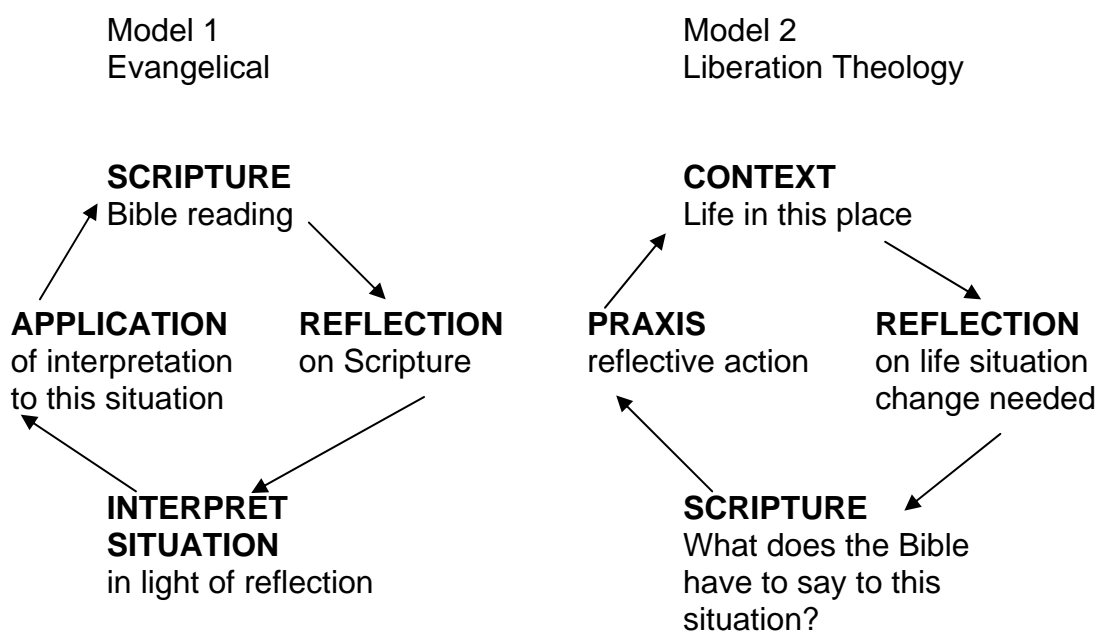
<sup>20</sup> Bruce Kaye, *A Church Without Walls: Being Anglican in Australia*, Dove, Blackburn, 1995, in his study on Australian Anglicanism uses aspects of this Anthropological approach. He sees natural laws as the foundational framework alongside which we can discern the revealed special laws of God. The foundation of the cosmos is order, or law, and this we discern by godly wisdom. Richard Hooker's triad in classical Anglican theological method, (Scripture, reason and tradition) while essential, is not to be overshadowed by the interplay between God and the world: that is, the Incarnation. Also Lux Mundi, 'The Religion of the Incarnation', is claimed by Archbishop Ramsey (1960) to demonstrate that "modern Anglican theology owes many of its characteristics to the central place held within it by the Incarnation." Cited in *op.cit.*, Kaye, page 143.

<sup>21</sup> Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, Regal, Ventura, 1984(Revised), chapter 3. This book is a significant development of his earlier books building on the idea of the Sovereign God being with peoples who when presented with the Gospel respond to it as the fulfillment of their cultural beliefs and customs.

### Praxis Model

Another contextual model is The Praxis Model.<sup>22</sup> The doctrine of God's providence<sup>23</sup> assures us that God is interacting, and very much a part of life today. This model of contextualisation gives us confidence that in committing ourselves in this moment of history in this life, here and now, God is here too.<sup>24</sup>

Forming a theology from 'praxis', i.e. from the involvement in the struggle for justice and freedom. 'Doing theology' in a 'hermeneutical circle' can be illustrated by comparing two ways of doing theology and noting the distinctive starting points at the top of the (circular) process:



Taking risks, our dependence on each other and the Holy Spirit are essential ingredients of the praxis model. This suits the disciples and communities of faith where an ongoing cycle of review and change in community are possible.

<sup>22</sup> R.J. Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies*, SCM Press, London, 1985, is an excellent development here, as also Dryness op.cit.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Helm, *The Providence of God*, Inter-Varsity Press, London, 1993, for a fuller exploration of the theory and pastoral application of this doctrine.

<sup>24</sup> "In the Scriptures it is the doers who are blessed. There is, in fact, 'no knowledge except in action itself, in the process of transforming the world through participation in history'". in David J. Bosch, , *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1991, p.425. For an excellent commentary see the Section on 'The Epistemological Break', p.423-425.

## **Being Discerning in Using Differing Contextualisation Approaches**

These models are not exclusive of each other's concerns and practices. Rather, each brings particular emphases that enable the Gospel to dynamically engage with a people and their life view and patterns.

The Translation model's strength is its concern for preserving the Gospel within its cultural setting. Its weakness is that it fails to take culture seriously and rapidly degenerates to a cultural imperialism by the dominant culture.<sup>25</sup> The Gospel is too readily identified with a particular culture, rather than a particular Person.

The Anthropological model takes seriously the values and forms of a people and the reality of God's image and work present within a culture. Its weakness is religious syncretism: "If what is drawn from local sources retains its original religious meaning, and is merely amalgamated with other Christian elements"<sup>26</sup>. without being shaped by the Gospel. This relativism is a danger because it can lead to "an uncritical celebration of an infinite number of contextual and mutually exclusive theologies"<sup>27</sup>.

The Praxis model emphasizes the living out of the Gospel and the following of Christ in a context. Its strength lies in the imperative of life together in Christ and the ongoing dialogue between context and text. The dangers are that the "facts" (of the context) always remain ambiguous and yet they may be elevated to supplant the message of the Gospel<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p.302-313.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen. Neill, Gerald H. Anderson & John Goodwin (Eds), *Concise Dictionary of The Christian World Mission*, Abingdon Press, N.Y., 1971, "Syncretism".

<sup>27</sup> *op.cit*, David J. Bosch, p.427.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, pp. 428-432. Where also other concerns are helpfully explored by Bosch.

## G. THE CHALLENGE OF CONTEXTUALISATION FOR AUSTRALIAN ANGLICANS

God's work will not be fulfilled through Australian Anglicanism unless it seriously analyses culture and is prepared to relinquish many of its treasured forms in order to be truly incarnated into Australian society.

People in Australian society in 2000AD have moved a long way from Australia of the 1950's, let alone the cultural forms of Tudor England<sup>29</sup>. We must look at the husk and the kernel, at the form and message and then, identifying the message, look at our society and ask, "What are the basic forms? What forms will be most suitable in this new culture to enable a proper communication of the essential message?"<sup>30</sup> Too often the Anglican Church has asked, "In what way can we adjust Anglican ministerial dress, church architecture and book based wordy liturgies, so that they will be acceptable in Australian culture?" By holding the meaning in the old forms, we jeopardise the communication of the Gospel message.

While the new Prayer Book does seek to come to grips with some of the major pastoral issues in our society,<sup>31</sup> it is still a formal equivalence model, where a prayer book in England is a prayer book in Australia. But this fails to come to grips with the deeper issue, "Is this how contemporary Australians communicate?"<sup>32</sup>

The contextualisation undertaken by the Australian Anglican Church is largely of the formal equivalence translation model.<sup>33</sup> A most serious problem with this model of contextualisation is the failure to adequately analyse the Australian culture in order to decide what themes, analogies and metaphors to use in communicating Christian truth.

A brief comment on the nature of theology.<sup>34</sup> A danger is that Anglicans can perceive Tudor Theology as the kernel. It must be stressed that theology is

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<sup>29</sup> op.cit., Peter Corney, page 1.

<sup>30</sup> John Hannaford, *Under the Southern Cross*, House of Tabor, Adelaide, 1985, and John Smith, *Advance Australia Where?*, ANZEA Books, Homebush West, 1988, have both published their experience of contextualised ministry. Also very helpful is the ongoing research of the Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, Robert Menzies College, Sydney. See Mark Hutchinson, *Studying Australian Christianity*, "Church Scene", August 4, 1995, page 9.

<sup>31</sup> Such as: the death of a stillborn baby, suicide, and new forms of marriage partnership.

<sup>32</sup> Today we have a generation of people who are into short, sharp communications. Whether this is right or not, is another matter - but that is the sort of communication that people are used to. The style and length of worship service needs consideration.

<sup>33</sup> This is an inadequate, indeed flawed approach and we should be applying the dynamic equivalence translation model. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis, New York, 1991, pages 447-449.

<sup>34</sup> Harvie Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing World*, Academic Books, Grand Rapids, 1984, pages 129ff on the nature of theology, including the challenging quote from S. Gundry, "I wonder if we really recognise that all theology represents a contextualisation, even our own theology?"

relative. Theology is written for a time and a place.<sup>35</sup> Theology is not absolute. Theology is a human construct seeking to express for a particular group of people at a particular time and in a particular place, the truths of God in forms appropriate to that time, culture and place.<sup>36</sup> The Thirty-Nine Articles express theology in terms of their historical context.<sup>37</sup> The challenge for Anglicans is to contextualise the meaning of the Gospel in Australia. This will be done as the Gospel addresses issues that are important for Australians. People today want to know about near death experiences, evidences concerning the after life and reincarnation, issues of cosmic harmonising between humans, astral and natural forces, the occult, etc. They want meaning in a crazy world.

The formal tradition of the Creeds, Prayer Book, Liturgy, Thirty-Nine Articles, the Ordinal, the Episcopate, and the interaction between laity and clergy in the life of the Church receive such emphasis from Anglicans that these forms become the focus instead of the transcendental Gospel message. This is seen in the great importance given by Anglicans to maintaining the forms but having major disagreements about the meanings and message of the Church. Is it because Anglicanism is so divided about meanings that, in fact, its only real unity is in the forms? Do these forms then become the shibboleth, which give unity? If this is so, the problem of contextualisation for the Anglican Church in Australia goes beyond an analysis of society. Could it be that our inability to address the issue of the meaning of the Gospel is undermining our enterprise? Meaning does determine where we are going. So perhaps the new Prayer Book is simply seen as another adaptation of the forms of the Church, whilst we fail to come to grips with the deep differences in our understanding of the meaning of the Christ event.

If Australia has become an oral<sup>38</sup> society, then how do we propose to deal with this? In what ways are Australians seeking God? Are they atheists?

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<sup>35</sup> Avery Dulles *The Craft of Theology*, Crossroad, New York, 1995, "It might be thought that theology, by utilising abstract concepts, would be able to leave these images and metaphors behind, but in fact it relies upon such devices, even while seeking to overcome their limitations.", page 48.

<sup>36</sup> "Christian theologies of different times and different places, while covering essentially the same general subject matter one way or another, should let their particular context decide what particular area of faith should receive special emphasis and perhaps serve as the point which leads to the exposition of the full scope of the field. For Calvin this central factor of theology was the sovereignty of God; for Luther, justification by faith; and for Barth, the Word of God and incarnation. It was the context in which they lived and work, and the challenges of their times which dictated their particular emphases... The task of theology of any people is to articulate their understanding of the eternal truth in terms of their given locale and context." Saphir P. Athyal, "Toward an Asian Christian Theology"

<sup>37</sup> Similarly are the traditional three Creeds: The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. See *An Australian Prayer Book*, Australian Information Office, Sydney, 1977.

<sup>38</sup> Oral people choose not to learn by reading, though they are able to read. They choose to absorb by other means. See for example Hugh Mackay, *Reinventing Australia: the Mind and Mood of Australia in the 90's*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1993, and his book on communicating, *Why Don't People Listen?*.



Agnostics? Genuine seekers of religious experience? The answer, according to Kaldor<sup>39</sup>, is that there is openness to spiritual reality.

A characteristic of post-modernists is that they are cynical and skeptical; they believe that no matter what is done, everything is going to end up in a shambles anyhow.<sup>40</sup> They are people without hope. They are extremely cynical of institutions - government, church, etc. Ironically, these institutions have traditionally offered hope! How then, can hope be offered? In what ways can Anglicanism de-institutionalise itself so as to become a 'hope-bearer'?

It is imperative that the Anglican Church of Australia interact with the life issues Australians are facing. We must present the Gospel in such a way that it bridges into their world, uses their language, builds on their longings and resonates with something deep within them. If we do not do this, the message of the Gospel will not be received.<sup>41</sup> We may not, in fact, be sharing God's love.

## H. CONCLUSION

Contextualisation is a key issue to both understand and implement for relevant and effective missiological practice. The Gospel comes dressed in culture and it must be lived out in cultures. The God of Life gives life in its setting. The significance of context to the life issues, which the Good News must address and indwell, cannot be underestimated. There are constructive approaches to contextualisation which facilitate an analysis of both Gospel and culture, and their dynamic ongoing relationship. The models available are varied and each brings out particular aspects of a context, and each runs particular risks of misappropriation. The application of these approaches by the Anglican Church in Australia is urgent, lest its 'anglo' culture fail to die to self and enable a truly Australian expression of the Gospel to flourish.

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Kaldor, *Who Goes Where? Who Doesn't Care?*, Lancer Books, Homebush West, 1987. See section, "The Religious Orientation of Australians", page 30.

<sup>40</sup> Steve Clarke, *Evangelism in the Nineties: Facing the Challenge of Post-Modernism* Class Discussion notes. Bible College of Victoria, 1995, and op.cit, Peter Corney. Both are excellent summary articles with fuller bibliographies for further reading.

<sup>41</sup> Communication theory insists that we must be receptor-oriented. The Church tends to be source-oriented and transmission oriented.

## ATTACHMENT A Two (Chilean) Women

### “RICH WOMAN . . . POOR WOMAN”

I am a woman.

*I am a woman.*

I am a woman born of a woman whose man owned a factory.

*I am a woman born of a woman whose man laboured in a factory.*

I am a woman whose man wore silk suits, who constantly watched his weight.

*I am a woman whose man wore tattered clothing, whose heart was constantly strangled by hunger.*

I am a woman who watched two babies grow into beautiful children.

*I am a woman who watched two babies die because there was no milk.*

I am a woman who watched twins grow into popular college students with summers abroad.

*I am a woman who watched three children grow, but with bellies stretched from no food.*

But then there was a man;

*But then there was a man;*

And he talked about the peasants getting richer by my family getting poorer.

*And he told me of days that would be better, and he made the days better.*

We had to eat rice.

*We had rice.*

We had to eat beans!

*We had beans.*

My children were no longer given summer visas to Europe.

*My children no longer cried themselves to sleep.*

And I felt like a peasant.

*And I felt like a woman.*

A peasant with a dull, hard, unexciting life.

*Like a woman with a life that sometimes allowed a song.*

And I saw a man

*And I saw a man*

And together we began to plot with the hope of the return to freedom.

*I saw his heart begin to beat with hope of freedom, at last.*

Someday, the return to freedom

*Someday freedom.*

And then,

*But then,*

One day,

*One day,*

There were planes overhead and guns firing close by.

*There were planes overhead and guns firing in the distance.*

I gathered my children and went home.

*I gathered my children and ran.*

And the guns moved farther and farther away.

*But the guns moved closer and closer.*

And then, they announced that freedom had been restored!  
*And then they came, young boys really.*  
They came into my home along with my man.  
*They came and found my man.*  
Those men whose money was almost gone -  
*They found all of the men whose lives were almost their own.*  
And we all had drinks to celebrate.  
*And they shot them all.*  
The most wonderful martinis  
*They shot my man.*  
And then they asked us to dance.  
*And then they came for me*  
Me.  
*For, me, the woman.*  
And my sister.  
*For my sisters,*  
And then they took us,  
*Then they took us,*  
They took us to dinner at a small, private club.  
*They stripped from us the dignity we had gained.*  
And they treated us to beef.  
*And then they raped us.*  
It was one course after another.  
*One after another they came after us.*  
We nearly burst we were so full.  
*Lunging, plunging - sisters bleeding, sisters dying*  
It was magnificent to be free gain!  
*It was hardly a relief to have survived.*  
The beans have almost disappeared now.  
*The beans have disappeared.*  
The rice - I've replaced it with chicken or steak.  
*The rice. I cannot find it.*  
And the parties continue night after night to make up for all the time wasted.  
*And my silent tears are joined once more by the midnight cries of my children.*  
And I feel like a woman again.  
*They say, I am a woman.*

*(This reflection was written by a working class Chilean woman in 1973, shortly after Chile's socialist president, Salvador Allende, was overthrown. A US missionary translated the work and brought it with her when she was forced to leave Chile.)*  
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