Contextualization for Social Change

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Professor

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Assignment #1 – Core Essential Elements

1. Select One (1) Core Essential Element from the Syllabus Outline:

a. Weekend Residency: Create a 350-word original discussion paper (with cited sources) during the week of the residency. Be prepared to discuss and engage with other students during the live sessions. Post this document in DIAL.

b. Professor will check for quality of content and word-count requirements. Grade assigned will be Credit or No Credit (CR/NC).

Culture & Contextualization

Christian contextualization being “the process whereby Christians adapt the forms, content, and praxis of the Christian faith to communicate it to the minds and hearts of people with other cultural backgrounds” (Boubakar, 2015, p.7) needs to have an aspect of reflexivity of culture. A reflexivity for one of the cultures that one is contextualizing into, and two the culture of the one who is doing the contextualization. Without this reflexivity of the two, there is bound to be some form of misapplication of contextualization.

Culture is a sphere of people groups' conciseness, where they come to know who they are and who others are. It provides people with a context of existence. Culture consists of language, beliefs, values, symbols, artifacts, and lifeways or a way of being and existing. Culture is typically invisible to people within their culture because they just exist within it and know no other way of being that they have been socialized unto. We find it much easier to see cultural influences on people from different cultures, such as the influence of tribal religions' permeation within people's lives within that given culture. Therefore, understanding culture is vital for contextualization, in particular, Christian contextualization where in the process of communicating ideas, concepts, and beliefs to people of different cultures or subcultures, the communicating party needs to have some working knowledge of the receiving party's culture to apply the concepts in a meaningful way to the receiving culture’s people. However, what is also very important to Christian contextualizers is to have a reflexivity of their own culture and their socialization into their own way of being and religious beliefs and practices. Without this, the biases of the contextualizer will hinder the independence of the Christian gospel message throughout cultures, nations, and societies, by assuming that the correctness of their Christianity from their cultural socialization is the Christianity to be contextualized.

An Ethnocentric approach to trying to understand a culture not only impacts the view of the other culture but also the view of one’s own culture. We need to see cultures (ours and others) with a cultural relativism where we may not always approve of a given cultural practice, but we see that practice considering the given cultural epistemology. With this reflexivity of uncovering the relative socialized cultural ways of understanding and communicating, we can contextualize the true gospel message of Christ (not our culturally constructed anthropomorphic version of the gospel), which is culturally independent by design so that all people in nations and cultures could and should be saved and redeemed by and for Christ.

WORKS CITED

Sanou, Boubakar, *New Testament Precedents to the Practice of Contextualization in Contemporary Mission* (2015). Faculty Publications. 473.