Contextualization for Social Change

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Assignment

### *Developmental Readings*

Review Assignment #3, the course essential elements, assigned readings, and recommended readings to identify selections of books and scholarly articles to identify and select developmental reading sources and entries.

* Refer to the “[Student Guide to Developmental Readings](https://drive.google.com/file/d/161V_FaYR2BnNGCSFUlWPjUSIQzcH04Hq/view?usp=share_link)” for updated information on sample comments, rubrics, and key definitions related to developmental readings.

Note: The approach I am taking on assignment 3 is using the sociology of religion as a tool for contextualization, whereas it takes on an outsider's view of the practice of religion, which seems to be a good way of seeing religion or Christianity more from the perspective of others who we may be contextualizing Christianity too, in order to address the concerns and the ‘oddness’ of Christianity within the contextualization. Thus, my developmental readings are on the topic of the sociology of religion.

**Source One:** Martin, B. (2020). A Poetic Imagination and a Realist Eye: The Arts in David Martin’s Sociology of Religion. *Society*, *57*(2), 164–172. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-020-00461-y>

**Comment 1:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**The cultural disciplines, theology included alongside sociology, depend on history. History involves narrative, and narrative involves contingency and subjectivity ... History can only be narrated in ordinary language, in principle available to any competent language user. The same applies to the cultural disciplines. They have no concepts like ‘quasars’ in astrophysics or even ‘metabolism’ in medicine, unless metabolism is used metaphorically. The fundamental role played by contingent narrative expressed in ordinary language means that the cultural disciplines are metaphorical and rhetorical to a degree not found in the natural sciences and they proliferate taxonomies. They sprawl because attended by numerous qualifications dependent on cultural time and space. The setting out of the ceteris paribus clause can be very extended indeed.” (Martin, 2020, p. 165)

**Essential Element:** History of Contextualization

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This quote is additive to my understanding of “cultural disciplines” utilization of concepts and terms that may be different than other disciplines, there is a metaphorical and rhetorical dimension that an may not seem clear to ‘outsiders’ receiving the message.

**Contextualization:**  This part of the quote really stands out to me, “The cultural disciplines, theology included alongside sociology, depend on history. History involves narrative, and narrative involves contingency and subjectivity.”, where indeed history is such a large factor in understanding the current context of these cultural disciplines, but we need to keep in mind the history that may not be apparent in our understanding of context given that history has a certain perspective mainly from the powerful that brings a contingency and subjectivity to our understanding. For example, when we look at the history of Christianity, it is from the major theologians' and political environment perspectives, but there is a large history of day-to-day ground level Christian experience that is hard to come by, with only snippets from what pieces one could put together from belief journaling of the main body of Christian history.

**Source Two:** Nye, M. (2019). Decolonizing the Study of Religion. *Open Library of Humanities*, *5*(1), 43. <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.421>

**Comment 2:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**Decolonization of the curriculum is a starting point, and the inevitable result of a much wider programme of change. So, how can the study of religion (and a number of related academic fields of study) move further from its origins as a tool of European colonialism to being a space in which contemporary power structures of inequality (including race, gender, sexualities, class, and ability) are challenged and disrupted? Some of the ways in which the discipline can begin to explore this are as follows: the historical development of the study of religion, such as its formation as a discipline; the historical processes by which assumptions and ideas (and terminology) were formed; the discipline’s canon of theory and methodologies; and the way in which the discipline is written.” (Nye, 2019, p. 9)

**Essential Element:** Culture & Contextualization

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This is additive to my current understanding of the dynamics and consequences of colonization. History has been a story of colonization from the Greeks to the Romans, Asian empires, and then the European colonization of all parts of the world. There may have been some historical benefits from the expansion (global trade, global migration, global information, and technology sharing), but there have been many negative consequences of colonization.

**Contextualization:** The consequences of colonization have been numerous, from wars to exploitation, to racism and slavery. With the negative aspects of colonization came the spread of Christianity, much of that spread was colored by the political and economic interests of the colonizers and used as a means of taming the ‘savages’. This is why it is important to decolonization religion, to separate out the things that were done in the name of religion that caused great harm to humanity, this does not represent the essence of the religion and needs to be addressed truthfully by the contextualizers.

**Comment 3:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**In summary, therefore, a process of attempting to decolonize the study of religion should require a methodological awareness of the historical and academic legacies of colonialism within the discipline, in terms of the ways in which it is taught and researched, along with key assumptions about the subject matter (such as the concepts of religion and world religions). Much of the extant discourse and structure of the discipline is the product of European colonial history. Decolonizing this is not an optional add-on: the discipline came into being through empire and colonialism, and the contemporary ‘colonial matrix of power’ is very often how the study of religion continues to justify itself.” Nye, 2019, p. 27)

**Essential Element:** Contextualization for Constructive Social Change

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This is additive to my understanding of the process of decolonization and the need for people of religion to address the consequences of colonization on religion.

**Contextualization:** This quote points out the need for Christians to be historically and culturally aware in the understanding of their own faith and when they communicate their faith to others. This is especially true for American Christians, where our history has been colored by so many negative connotations of colonization, from the genocide of First Nation people and the pillage of Africans as what was used to build the economy America and then the trailing brutal racism, much done by “Christians”, and at best most American Christians remained silent as these evil acts were taking place. Granted some Christians were fighting against these harms. Our American Christian history drenched in colonization, and often we do not even realize that we reproduce colonized Christianity. Therefore, the issue of decolonization is an important aspect of contextualization of Christianity.

**Source Three:** Draper, S. (2021). Effervescence Accelerators: Barriers to Outsiders in Christian Interaction Rituals. *Sociology of Religion*, *82*(3), 357–379. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srab001>

**Comment 4:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**Many types of barriers are raised during social rituals. They can be physical, with numerous examples including walls, doorways, fences, emblems, uniforms, guards, and human chains. They also can be uttered or performed as in creeds, orthodox statements, orthopraxy, jargon, inside jokes, moralizing, criticism, mockery, vitriol, and outright violence. The type of barrier can affect its size and/or consequence. “Size” is the percentage of the population whom the barrier excludes. A small barrier might be a sign politely requesting that parishioners silence their phones, whereas Pentecostal snake-handling is a large barrier. The higher the barrier, the more extraordinary is membership. “Consequence” refers to the severity of punishment intended for trespassers. A noisy side involvement during an introspective ritual might prompt askew glances or other mild forms of shaming (Goffman 1963a). By contrast, heresies can lead to execution. The more consequential the barrier, the more imperative it becomes to stay within its protective boundaries. Barriers constructed by organizations are barriers from within. This could mean, for example, requiring novices to master certain practices prior to joining the formal ritual, or developing a congregational lexicon that is incomprehensible to outsiders. Barriers can also come from without, as when certain practices are outlawed. The important factor in barriers from without is that a congregation perceives embattlement; how outsiders actually feel about them is irrelevant to the ritual outcomes (Draper 2019; Smith 1998). Outsiders can be targeted directly, or indirectly with reference to their sacred symbols. They also range from near to far and particular to general (Yukich 2010). Different types of outsiders carry different degrees of risk for social conflict in the immediate IR.” (Draper, 2021, p. 360)

**Essential Element:** Approaches to Contextualization

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** The ideas presented in this quote are additive to my understanding of the dynamics of barriers that are within religious social practices to outsiders. We as Christians typically do not notice the oddness and uniqueness of our religious rituals that we take for granted.

**Contextualization:** The barriers that in-groups have are not unique to religious circles, but are particular important in religion, because of the oddness of religious rituals and the exclusionary understanding of the significance of the rituals. As mentioned in this quote these barriers could be physical, utterances, or actions, to outsiders these unfamiliar things may be barriers to people feeling welcomed and uncomfortable. Christians may not notice that these established barriers exist in their religious practices and wonder why they cannot get more people in their church doors. This is one of the reasons why I wanted to take a look at Christianity, not as an insider but as an outsider in the sociology of religion so I can pick up on these nuances.

**Comment 5:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**Because of their influence on occasions, it is unlikely that a church can avoid building barriers indefinitely. Constructed and reinforced over time, certain barriers are likely to demarcate an organization’s symbolic solidarity through IR chains as members repeatedly experience the barriers’ energizing effects. Summers- Effler (2010) shows how inter-situational “emotional rhythms” emerge over the course of IR chains, establishing collective identities in social movements. For example, the anti-death penalty group in her study developed symbolic solidarity in IR chains by transforming negative emotions from dispiriting IRs into an organizational culture shaped by IRs of righteous anger and “heroism.” Many congregations are likely to take a similar path over time, deriving group energy from a critical attitude toward certain outsiders while deemphasizing, ignoring, or even discarding the goal of inclusion. Others may not see a discrepancy, and can even brandish the symbol of inclusivity itself to achieve distinction, testifying for example in favor of the ingroup’s moral virtue or even educational achievement (Bourdieu 1984). For religious organizations who maintain strong allegiance to the sacred symbol

of inclusiveness, the inevitability of building barriers can present a dilemma, as they will necessarily build barriers insofar as they interpret this symbol as a mandate to openly oppose various oppressors. However, by building barriers against outsiders who are relatively far away, generalized or distant abstractions such as fundamentalism, mainstream culture, or the media, churches can maintain confidence in fidelity to their mission, as we saw many times in this research (Draper, 2021, p. 375)

**Essential Element:** Contextualization for Constructive Social Change

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** The concept of Interaction Rituals (IR) is additive to my understanding of religious practices, where these interactions are performed by the in-group with the understanding of the workings of these interactions.

**Contextualization:** By virtue of religious groups there are barriers to their in-group from outsiders, because of the religious group’s uniqueness to the set of beliefs they hold. However, religious groups need to be aware of these barriers and establish an informal ‘training’ program where outsiders coming into their religious service may have some indication of what is taking place and then by having some understanding could feel more comfortable and even welcomed in this new environment. For a church to become aware of the barriers that they have will hopefully enlighten them to make paths to accommodate outsiders to navigate their barriers for inclusion in the fold.

**Comment 6:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**Inclusive congregations who perceive their own acts of exclusion as mission failures can recuperate symbolic solidarity in IRs that acknowledge shame, often through laughter, and redeem those failures as “lessons in humility,” moral narratives that can help members avoid similar moments in the future (Scheff 1990; Summers-Effler 2010:69). Emotionally powerful symbols that shape situational strategies can in this way be carried by churches over time through IR chains, reinvigorating a mission that is, based on most Christian doctrines of sin and forgiveness, neither achievable nor dispensable.” (Draper, 2021, p. 376)

**Essential Element:** Contextualization for Constructive Social Change

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This quote is additive to my understanding of the Interaction Rituals on more of an individual member level, where some members of a congregation may have a gift of hospitality including making outsiders feel welcome by addressing some of the known barriers.

**Contextualization:** I really like how the author wrote this piece of the article, where it points to the humanness of interactions including interaction rituals, as “lessons in humility”, where those who practice religion are fallen human beings just like the outsiders, where things don’t work out as expected, our lives are filled with these circumstances, including our religious activities. I think one of the most important features that religious people could help navigate barriers and be open to outsiders, is to show their humanness in humility, and not to put out this ‘holier than thou’ complexion, even though we as Christians know better, it is something that we have trouble doing. One of my role model Christians is Martin Luther, with all his faults, blunders, and rawness, though he severed Christ well. As we become aware of the barriers that we establish and try to lessen them, let us also enjoy the “lessons in humility”.

**Source Four:** Breskaya, O., Giordan, G., & Richardson, J. T. (2018). Human Rights and Religion: A Sociological Perspective. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *57*(3), 419–431. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12544>

**Comment 7:**

**Quote/Paraphrase: “**At the same time, study of human rights policies and their application at national and global levels enriches sociological understanding of religiosity and religion as such and relationship between religious identities, behavior, and attitudes. A study of the effect of religious mobilization

on international human rights policy (Wuthnow and Lewis 2008) contributes to revision of the role of organized religion and individual religiosity/spirituality in the public sphere and to conceptualization of the multidimensional construct of religion in modern societies.” Breskaya,, etl., 2018, p. 427)

**Essential Element:** Approaches to Contextualization

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This quote is additive to my understanding of the relationship between religion and human rights. For the most part, religions have respect for human dignity, in particular the Christian religion.

**Contextualization:** This issue of human rights and religion is important to the contextualization process, where the practice of treating people by a religious group is a direct correlation to how their God views humans. An example that comes to mind is the reformed or the Calvinistic branch of Christianity, their theology is the up most important part of understanding the relationship with God, where in a simplified version God loves some people, He created and chose them to be saved and then the ones God hates He passes them over for damnation. By all means my Calvinist brothers and sister would not put it this way. But by logical conclusion, this is what it boils down to. Given this view of God and this attitude toward humans, some He loves and some He hates. What will our attitude be toward humankind? If we love all people, we are doing something more than what God does, is this right? Nevertheless, this all goes to point out how seemingly simple a thing to care for our fellow human beings could be tainted by our religious social views. Such as the white Christian church of our American history was on the wrong side of human rights with the treatment of black people. Right alongside our Christian practices, our standing up for human rights will go a long way with our connection to other people in the process of contextualization.

**Source Five:** Ammerman, N. T. (2020). Rethinking Religion: Toward a Practice Approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, *126*(1), 6–51. <https://doi.org/10.1086/709779>

**Comment 8:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “Rethinking religion in the sociological study of contemporary society begins with an approach based in theories of social practice. Those theories point us to shared practical religious knowledge that is embodied in action. They point us to the observable patterns of action made possible by that shared understanding, patterns that are both structured and creative, habitual and

intentionally pragmatic. In recognizing that all practices cross institutional

boundaries and are inherently hybrid, we can leave aside blinders that saw religious practices only in designated institutions and only in coherent supernaturalist worldviews. (Ammerman, 2020, p. 39)

**Essential Element:** Culture & Contextualization

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** The concepts in this quote are additive to my understanding, but also a variant where I do not fully agree with the social practices of religion and secular can be a bridge for contextualization, I do agree that there may be some, but it would seem that these are just more generally human social practices, such as sharing meals together. Nevertheless, the indent is to find commonality for the contextualizing practice.

**Contextualization:** I think the author makes some good points in the article, in the way we study social spaces of religions and contemporary secular society, where there are commonalities found throughout the spectrum. These commonalities could be seen as bridges in communication and connection. Such as the social experience of eating together, a common practice in religious social spaces as well as secular social spaces, there is a bond and ‘fellowship’ that goes along with this cross-cultural experience. Finding these common shared social experiences is a way to integrate commonalities to interact and engage one another in a shared contextualization experience where each side participates in the sharing knowledge and receiving of knowledge. As Christian contextualizers, it is important to have a sincere interest in learning from the recipient of our contextualization.

**Source Six:** Smith, C. (2014). *The sacred project of American sociology*. Oxford University Press.

**Comment 9:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “American sociology as a collective enterprise is at the committed to the visionary project of realizing the emancipation, equality, and moral affirmation of all human beings as autonomous, self-directed, individual agents (who should be) out to live their lives as they personally so desire, by constructing their own favored identities, entering and exiting relationships as they chose, and equality enjoying the gratification of experiential, material, and bodily pleasures. That is the deeper vision that undergirds and justifies the first description about ending oppression, etcetera. It provides the more positive, constructive account for why all of those bad things need to be exposed, protested, and ended.” (Smith, 2014, p. 7)

**Essential Element:** Contextualization for Constructive Social Change

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This is additive to my understanding of early American sociology and its interests and hopes.

**Contextualization:** American sociology can be seen as a dual track of what was happening in the larger society. Sociology has its birth in Europe in the 1830s, soon the discipline traveled worldwide including in America. American sociology has a unique development, where sociology is a secular subject of studying the social world through scientific means, although it has a peculiarity of social action, in America Christian scholars saw it as a promising enterprise to study social phenomena and to promote social action. Many of the early American sociologists were Christians interested in the social gospel (making the gospel known in word and deed). This quote nicely points out the drive and interest in utilizing sociology as a tool to promote the gospel and social good.

**Comment 10:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “Worth noting, at this point, as an aside, is how closely sociology’s sacred, spiritual project parallels that of (especially Protestant) Christianity in its structure of beliefs, interests, and expectations. It would not be wrong to say that sociology’s project represents essentially a secularized version of the Christian gospel and worldview.” (Smith, 2014, p. 18)

**Essential Element:** Approaches to Contextualization

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This quote is additive to my understanding of the benefits of sociology to Christians and their contextualization process.

**Contextualization:** Early American sociology went hand and hand with Christianity and as American society became more secularized so did sociology, sociology even came to be seen as anti-religious. This has scared many Christians away from interest in sociology, which has been a misfortune because what sociology creates is a concerned body of people for humans and their wellbeing, which has been lacking in the Christian community. However, it is not too late for Christians to take advantage of the benefits of sociology. As the quote states, Christianity and sociology really complement each other, because of the sincere concern and love for people. This has been my desire to bring the benefits of sociology back to the church, so we can have a deeper understanding of the physical and spiritual needs of people and the great love God has for His human creation. We Christians get lost inside the walls of our churches in seeing ‘us’ and ‘them’ (outside the church) and are so busy trying to put on a picture-perfect vision of our ‘good Christian’ mentality that we forget that we are snow covered dung, and that we belong with ‘them’ and ‘they’ belong with ‘us’. Let us learn from Jesus’ school of sociology to love all people.

**Source Seven:** Berger, P. L. (2011). The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion. Open Road Media.

**Comment 11:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “Religion thus serves to maintain the reality of that socially constructed world within which men exist in their everyday lives. Its legitimating power, however, has another important dimension -the integration into a comprehensive nomos of precisely those marginal situations in which the reality of everyday life is put into question. It would be erroneous to think of these situations being rare. On the contrary, every individual passes through a situation every twenty hours or so- in the experience of sleep and, very importantly, in the transition stages between sleep and wakefulness.” (Berger, 2011, p. 42)

**Essential Element:** Approaches to Contextualization

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This quote is additive to my understanding of the reality of human thoughts, interests, and concerns about religion and a higher power. Given this, contextualizing the Christian religion is not so alien to all people, given that all people are a creation of God.

**Contextualization:** This is one of the things that have been so fascinating about studying history, cultures, and societies, religion is universal, it is interesting to see the different varieties, but there are also similarities, thus contextualizing Christianity may not be so foreign no matter what culture or time or place. This makes sense since we are God’s creation, and the image of God is written on our hearts. Even atheists are not unaware of the calling upon their soul and thus have rejected the calling, hence claiming not to believe in a God. So really no matter where a Christian turns the harvest is right there in front of them. The thing about it is that Christians need to have a sincere interest in the people so they can engage on a personal level to understand the approach they need to take in contextualizing Christianity. However, in our current day and age, with 24 -7 entertainment technology, people do not take the time to think and question the larger things in life. This is where I see the challenge of contextualization of Christianity.

**Comment 12:**

**Quote/Paraphrase:** “The illiterate peasant who comments upon the death of a child by referring to the will of God is engaging in theodicy as much as the learned theologian who writes a treatise to demonstrate that the suffering of the innocent does not negate the conception of a God both all-good and all-powerful. All the same, it is possible to differentiate theodicies in terms of their degree of rationality, that is, the degree to which they entail a theory that coherently and consistently explains the phenomena in question in terms of an overall view of the universe.” (Berger, 2011, p. 53)

**Essential Element:** Contextualization for Constructive Social Change

**Additive/Variant Analysis:** This is additive to my understanding of the dynamic of theodicy, the issue of bad things happening in the world that was created by a good God, this is a universal puzzlement.

**Contextualization:** This issue of how bad things can happen with a good God, is something that all people should be concerned with, especially with the concept of the Christian God. As Christians, we can intellectually understand that by God’s design, He allowed His creation freedom to do harm or to do good and that we exist within a fallen world where bad things happen. However, when this comes to us a blunt reality on a personal level, it takes on a different level of struggling through. These bad things that happen are a shared human experience that connects us on a personal level no matter who we are, rich or poor, religious or atheist. This shared personal experience can be used as a way to connect with people on a deep level. The deep level is where the contextualization of Christianity takes place, it is not an academic argument of religion, but an interpersonal in-depth soul soul-anguishing change we are asking these people to go through when we contextualize Christianity, we should travel that road with them as Christ has done with us.

**Works Cited**

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