PHI 923-32 – Contextualization For Social Change

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**Discussion Paper**

**Contextualization and Social Change: Applications in Secular Health Care**

In his seminal book, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Zondervan, 2004), Alvin J. Schmidt lays the foundations of what can be argued as the rise of truly civilized human society. Schmidt addresses eight main points that Christ profoundly influenced: Transformation of people, Value of human life, Charity, compassion, hospitals, and health care, Education, Labor and economic freedom, Science, the Arts, Holidays, words, symbols, and expressions (p. 1). Because of the severe persecution during early Christianity, for three centuries Christians could only care for the sick as they found them. It was not until A.D. 369 that the first hospital was built.

Schmidt reminds the reader that, prior to Christ, our human world was in pagan hands, and that, “The pagans thrust aside anyone who began to be sick, and kept aloof even from their dearest friends, and cast the sufferers out upon the public roads half dead, and left them unburied, and treated them with utter contempt when they died” (p. 6).

Schmidt’s eight points are clear examples of how God raised up change agents from pagan depravity. Of particular fascination for me is the way that Christian thought changed humanity’s entire view of healing illness (p. 6). The fear and contempt towards the sick during the Alexandrian Plague reminds me of the way many in our contemporary society initially regarded sufferers of COVID-19. Mistrust of others led to social isolation; older people––due to their vulnerability––were scorned and blamed for causing the lockdowns of cities and towns. I believe that God’s “change agents” (medical researchers, public health leaders) created a rapid shift in prevention and treatment that protected our society from accelerated aggression against those ill with (or deemed susceptible to) the virus.

**Contextualization Specific to Our Hospital Foundation**

My research resources have helped me to think of healthcare in terms of *ministry*. When viewed in this light, I can see how the motives for ministering to the sick can carry a higher purpose and calling than simply tending to the sick out of guilt or pity.

The stakeholders encompass individuals, the organization, and the broader community. The work I do with our Hospital Foundation is 100% voluntary; we give of our time and money because it feels good to make a difference for our community. It warms the heart to know that we are helping the weaker among us––the sick and injured, many of whom cannot afford to pay for healthcare. Not only do the fellowship and interaction with Foundation volunteers provide a sense of family; we have aligned ourselves with something Higher than ourselves––we are aligned with Spirit.

The challenge of contemporary contextualization lies in maintaining healthcare’s Christian principles within secular bounds. There are inherent obstacles that prevent faith-based principles to be overtly disseminated within the Healthcare district. Local politics influence agencies that provide healthcare, and secular encroachment into public life has gained dominance. A video lecture by Mack (2016) taught that the American political system was founded on the belief that there is a need for the separation of church and state, but that hasn’t kept religion out of politics.

**Conclusion**

The challenge of contemporary contextualization lies in maintaining healthcare’s Christian principles within secular bounds. Specific religious references are prohibited in my professional interactions due to the secular nature of our public healthcare district. Nonetheless, I am comforted to know that the roots of today’s society and laws are rooted in sacred texts from Judeo-Christian history. As a volunteer director of our Hospital Foundation, I embrace a sense of calling; this will also help me maintain focus and handle challenges, reminding me that I am serving a higher power.

**Works Cited**

Mack, H. (2016) [SEMINAL]. *Viewpoint: Religion’s influence on politics* [Video file].

YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1-sc0CZtLI [Time = 26:27]

Schmidt, A. J. (2004). *How Christianity Changed the World*. Zondervan.