

PHI 923-32: Contextualization for Social Change (Spring 2024)

Sandra Anderson

Omega Graduate School

May12, 2024

Professor: Dr. David Ward / Prof. David Moser

Assignment #3 – Essay

1. Write a 5-page paper using the outline below. Review the Examples of Contextualization provided in the PHI 923 Course Resources located in DIAL. Provide responses to the following based on your selected cultural issue or phenomenon:

- a. Present Situation of Social Concern – describe the situation requiring a contextualized Christian response to a cultural situation or phenomenon.
- b. Social Analysis: (Family, Church, Society) – Using the Five Spheres of Life, develop a cultural analysis to comprehensively describe aspects of the situation or phenomenon.
- c. Theological/Moral Evaluation – Identify Biblical areas or Kingdom principles relevant to the issue.
- d. Issues to Address – Identify underlying/related issues that need to be addressed in the contextualization strategy.
- e. Spectrum of Critical Contextualization (address only relevant ones)
 - i. Condemnation – includes issues condemned by Scripture (i.e., erroneous doctrine, idolatry, or syncretism)
 - ii. Correction of Erroneous Emphases – cultural beliefs/practices containing true insights but are diluted with wrong focus.
 - iii. Conversion of Themes – beliefs/practices with no significant negative influence but can be used to point to Christ.
 - iv. Commendation of Good Belief and/or Practices – beliefs/practices in culture that are completely consistent with Scripture but exist without religious warrants are to be commended.
- f. Strategy for Contextualized Communication - develop a strategy by thinking through all the practical considerations below.
 - i. Stakeholders - Identify the people or groups who have a stake in the phenomenon or issue.
 - ii. Venues of Communication - These could be written or spoken, and could

involve media, or social or organizational networks.

iii. Resources - Identify available and needed resources.

iv. Timelines - Begin to think through the timeline or logistical issues involved in implementing a contextualization strategy.

v. Obstacles to Anticipate - Anticipating obstacles can add practical aspects to a strategy that can help it to succeed.

Christian Service in Public Education

The United States Constitution's First Amendment reads, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" (U.S. Constitution. amend. 1). The Establishment Clause guarantees protection of a state religion and guarantees freedom of speech (amend, 1). For this essay, we will examine this clause from the viewpoint of a Christian working in a public or secular school setting. Since the US Constitution forbids a state religion, in schools today, biblical principles are not taught to students. This has left the schools without a moral covering. Due to biblical principles not being taught in schools, it has left the curriculum and schools open to embrace anything popular. Despite Amendment 1, we are still free to lead.

Social Analysis

Modern-day culture wars in America and secular schools and colleges around the nation are more than just people clashing. Scholars around the globe are adding to the body of literature from multiple and diverse viewpoints, and leaders from every sector of society are fighting for power. There seems to be a lack of literature from a Christian perspective from a biblically conservative perspective on the Establishment Clause. This has left a gap in the literature influencing policymakers and lawmakers. As a result, leaders opposing biblical views have found ways to effectively get around the Establishment Clause opening the door for multiple religions and ideologies to become embedded in the nation's educational system and society through syncretism.

Syncretism seems harmless on the surface. According to the *Routledge International Handbook of Religion In Global Society*, while there are still many historical parallels in religion, it has changed over time. Religions have assumed new forms, gods, and spirits and continue to have significance everywhere in the world. There is no longer a single set of traditions, a distinct social sector, or concepts of linear progress that can adequately capture religiosity. It is becoming more and more difficult for the government to regulate and control it since new players and organizations are vying for control of themselves and their gods (Cornelio, J. S., et al., 2021). Mary Boys' article suggested that people should embrace religious pluralism, recognize the limitations of having only one religious theory, and go beyond the particulars of their religious tradition. Boys asserted that instead of clinging to absolute truths, individuals should embrace religious diversity and that God loves others and communicates with them through many religions. Boys wrote in her article that individuals have a competitive impulse that leads them to believe that this undermines their relationship with God. "Acknowledging the finitude of one's own tradition requires a degree of maturity" (Boys, 2022).

Syncretism is penetrating deep into the fabric and mindset of American society. Until the late twentieth century, many Christians viewed yoga and meditation as Hindu and Buddhist practices that were ungodly. As these practices grew in the United States, Asian and European promoters downplayed the religious background affiliated with Hinduism, Buddhism, and even the New Age movement. Instead, the promoters used science to gain public acceptance by highlighting the mental and physical benefits of reducing stress. The promoters strategically used tactics to move yoga and meditation more systematically into institutions and schools by secularizing them and downplaying them as Hindu and Buddhist practices. (Brown, 2019). This

is a problem if Joel Spring is correct in his analysis of American education. Spring argues that “American students compare well to other nations in civic knowledge, but their concept of good citizenship is primarily passive: respect and obedience” (Spring, J., 2019, pp. 28-29). If students seem to leave school with a concept of citizenship focused on obedience to the law and authority in contrast to community activism, this may also be applied to student thinking overall. This aligns with God’s warning that “All of us, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). The challenge is then, how do you unlearn what has so deeply been embedded into the minds and hearts of both children and adults in this post-modern age? How do you do it without being seen as an adversary, a troublemaker, or contradictive?

Theological/Moral Evaluation and Related Issues

In landmark cases from previous Supreme Court cases, such as Citizens United and Hobby Lobby, the Court has empowered corporations with greater speech rights and religious liberty, which support the Establishment Clause of separation between church and state (U.S. Constitution. amend. 1; Pollman, 2021). The current Supreme Court seems to be protecting religious liberty to some extent. Believers today will need to rely on God’s Word and the Holy Spirit of God to guide them more than ever before as the Supreme Court and all branches of government turnover into the hands of post-modern thinkers. The Word of God is clear about God, who He is, and what He has commanded. The strategy today is to just outright defy all things Christian in this try to cancel Christian culture and to simply replace and retrain people’s thinking through syncretism and all forms of communication. The two areas of focus in this essay are disrespect of people’s belief in the origin of humankind, and God’s family plan.

While the Supreme Court may have upheld some cases of multi-million dollar businesses with Christian interests, this has not been the case with schools. Educators face a dilemma in teaching about the Bible. The knowledge of the Bible is important for cultural literacy, but the different views and legal considerations have made it controversial. Since the mid-twentieth century, the Supreme Court interpreted The First Amendment to forbid public schools and other government agencies from promoting religious viewpoints to establish a state religion and from forbidding the free exercise of religion (Chancey, 2020). Therefore, as long as the curriculum can be justified as non-religious and designed in such a way that it is scientific or for the public good, it can be taught, and that is what we are seeing today. The Bible is very clear about how the earth was created, and the Bible is clear about how the earth will end. The Bible teaches us that Jesus made the Earth and that we were made for Him (Genesis 1-2; Psalm 8:3-8; Psalm 89:11-12; Psalm 139; 13-14; Jeremiah 32:17; John 1:1-3; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:16; John 1:1-3; Revelations 4:11). The Bible also tells us that we will be united with Jesus for all of eternity and that this earth will end and that God will make a new Heaven and a new Earth for those who believe (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; Revelations 21:1-8). This teaching is in direct contradiction to the theory of evolution.

God created a family plan with Adam and Eve. He gave Adam and Eve dominion over everything that He created and instructed them to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:18-25). God family plan for families was affirmed again in the New Testament, and the Bible gives instructions again and declares marriage between a man and a woman as honorable (Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:22-33; Hebrews 13:4; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-7).

Every aspect of secular American culture has redefined family and marriage. Scholars across the world are defending same-sex marriages.

Marilyn Robb discusses in her article how court cases pit religious liberty interests against anti-discrimination rights. The article complained that cases tend to represent one view of religious liberty: a narrow view of Christian religious liberty and that the Alliance Defending Freedom's Christian community is opposed to transgender rights, gay marriage, and contraception. This author believes that they do not represent the entire Christian community, and they certainly do not represent American religious liberty (Robb, 2019). Another author defended how "A large and growing literature demonstrates the positive impacts of LGBTQ student groups in schools. Studies show that LGBTQ student groups play a positive role in the lives of students, as LGBTQ participants are more likely to develop positive personal relationships and report better mental health than nonparticipants (Fetner and Elafros, 2015; Kulick et al., 2017; Woodford, Kulick, et al., 2018). Some evidence suggests LGBTQ student groups also make schools safer, including by decreasing incidences of bullying and harassment against LGBTQ students in schools (Marx and Kettrey 2016)" (Coley & Das, 2020, p. 10). For believers today, it can be overwhelming. Colleges and universities across the world are producing scholars who flood the body of literature with articles supporting their agenda. Regardless, the Bible is very clear that God had clearly defined absolutes. Homosexuality of any kind is forbidden and is not in alignment with God's family plan (Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10; Romans 1:26-27). Christians throughout the country are being forced to either comply or leave.

Strategic Plan of Action

As believers, Jesus commissioned us to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20).

God has not forgotten the children and youth in America’s public schools. There are thousands of Christian educators working diligently to serve the students in these schools. In this plan of action, the goal will be to equip, support, and encourage them as ambassadors for the Lord Jesus. The stakeholders that I am targeting through my ministry are educators, i.e., teachers, professors, principals, administrators, and some retired teachers. Currently, I communicate with this group under my charge through weekly Bible studies, email communications, group chat, telephone texts and calls, and in-person events. The members of this group have access to each other daily for prayers and encouragement through our group chat and our prayer groups. As I continue to build this ministry and develop leaders within this group, I plan to expand my ministry and influence, which is why I am at OGS.

The resources that we as practitioners on the ground need are simple. We need the churches that we attend to partner with us and support us as missionaries. Working in secular schools at any level is a challenge for Christians because of the blatant anti-Christian, anti-biblical policies and curriculum being adopted. Additionally, most classroom teachers struggle financially despite being highly qualified with multiple college and graduate degrees and certifications. What would make it more tolerable for Christian educators to stay in this profession is if the church would support teachers as missionaries. The US Constitution allows for equal access to all schools and colleges. “There is “no doubt that the First Amendment rights

of speech and association extend to the campuses of state universities.” (Widmar, 454 U.S. at 269). A public university may not favor those groups that support the institution’s views, and it may not penalize those groups with which it disagrees (Healey, 408 U.S. at 187–88). Similarly, the Court has ruled that student religious groups are entitled to both access (Widmar, 454 U.S. at 267–70) and funding (Rosenberger, 515 U.S. at 831). Indeed, the practice of requiring students to pay mandatory fees that are then distributed to student groups is permissible only if the institution does not favor particular viewpoints (Southworth, 529 U.S. at 233-34)” (Thro, 2021, p. 1-2) On all campus, especially public schools, teachers sponsor and are involved with extracurriculars clubs. Every school can have a bible club for students due to equal access as long as there is a staff sponsor (2021), In public schools, all clubs need a school employee as a sponsor to oversee the club. If churches were to partner with teachers by giving them a financial stipend to sponsor a Bible club, it would support and encourage teachers to longer outside of school hours for this purpose.

As I plan a timeline, the life group is in its fourth year. The weekly meetings are centered around the school calendar with breaks for holidays and summer. The idea of teachers being missionaries is new to many because the church, in general, has taken a hands-off approach. The educators themselves in my group are growing as the Lord uses me to disciple them as believers. Some of the members in the group are new believers, and some are seasoned believers. All are benefitting and growing because I teach the Word of God, and everyone in the group knows that we stand for the Word of God. Now, I want to work with my church connections to raise the consciousness of teachers as missionaries and develop a timeline and goal for bringing more school-based educators into the group and establishing more faith-based partnerships with

teachers and principals. For the most part, teachers are how you reach students and principals are how you reach the entire school. By churches partnering with principals, they can bless the entire school and love on the staff and families during whatever is agreed upon. Some ways that the church can show love is by sponsoring staff lunches and treats or giving away turkeys at Thanksgiving.

As the Holy Spirit continues to move through His people in ministering to students and their families through our schools, the main obstacle is going to be a lack of knowledge and overzealous Christians trying to evangelize as they gain access. This will be in direct violation of the US Constitution (amend. 1), and give the enemy cause to shut any efforts down. Everyone connected with trying to minister and bless the students and families in schools will need to be trained. Just like the church educates people visiting missionaries in other countries, adhering to government laws, the same will be true with schools and colleges. It will be important for all Christian parties to know their rights and their limits. COVID-19 brought the First Amendment to the forefront. “Historically, constitutional law has developed at a glacial pace. Change could be measured in years and decades. But during the COVID-19 pandemic, courts were rapidly confronted with novel and difficult questions. Did the state have the power to restrict religious assembly, but permit other types of commercial gatherings?” (Blackman, 2021). Hosea 4:6 teaches us that God’s people are “destroyed from a lack of knowledge” (NASB, 2020). As we rise to meet the challenges of our post-modern world as ambassadors for the Kingdom, the Bible lets us know that Jesus will not leave us (Hebrews 13:5-6; Deuteronomy 31:6–8). Jesus said in the Gospel of John, (12) “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* at present. (13) But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He

will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. (14) He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose *it* to you” (NASB, 2020). May the Lord continue to lead and guide us as we do His will.

Works Cited

- Blackman, J. (2021). The "Essential" Free Exercise Clause. *Harv. JL & Pub. Pol'y*, 44, 637. <https://journals.law.harvard.edu/jlpp/wp-content/uploads/sites/90/2021/06/Blackman-The-Essential-Free-Exercise-Clause.pdf>
- Boys, M. C. (2022). Educating Christians in order that strangers become neighbours. *Journal of Religious Education*, 70(2), 181-189.
- Brown, C. G. (2019). *Debating yoga and mindfulness in public schools: Reforming secular education or reestablishing religion?*. UNC Press Books.
- Chancey, M. A. (2020). The Bible and the Curriculum of American Public Schools (K–12) in the Twenty-First Century. *The Bible in the American Experience*, 2, 189.
- Coley, J. S., & Das, D. (2020). Creating safe spaces: Opportunities, resources, and LGBTQ student groups at US Colleges and Universities. *Socius*, 6, 2378023120971472. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2378023120971472>
- Cornelio, JS., Gauthier, F., Martikainen, T., & Woodhead, L. (Eds). (2021). *Routledge international handbook of religion in global society*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Doughty, H. A., 2015, A war for the soul of America: a history of the culture wars by A. Hartman], *College Quarterly*, 18(2). Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1-7. <https://collegequarterly.ca/2015-vol18-num02-spring/doughty1.html>
- New American Standard Bible (NASB), 2020. *Lockman Foundation*. (Original work published in 1960).
- Pollman, E. (2021). The Supreme Court and the Pro-Business Paradox. *Harv. L. Rev.*, 135, 220. https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/faculty_scholarship/2794/

Robb, M. G. (2019). Pluralism at work: Rethinking the relationship between religious liberty and

LGBTQ rights in the workplace. *Harv. CR-CLL Rev.*, 54, 917.

Spring, J. (2019). *American education*. Routledge.

Thro, W. E. (2021). Special Solitude: Religious Freedom at America's Public Universities.

Laws, 10(2), 30.

U.S. Const. amend. 1. <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/>