Contextualization for Social Change

Carrie Hayashida

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. David Ward

Professor David Moser

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 warrant 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, 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.

2. Paper Guidelines:

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the

remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

There is a need for vocational and spiritual gifts training for Christian students prior to their high school graduation because a significant number of them do not know what career to choose. Additionally, the Barna Group (2023) reported a staggering 79% of college students lose their faith by the time they graduate from college. This paper suggests a correlation between vocational gifting and loss of faith during college; and suggests a new contextualized Christian response to address this dire situation.

In 2015, I became a Christian Career Coach and began wo rking with Vision Resourcing Group (VRG), a Christian ministry. We developed “STRIVE”, a career ministry and began asking churches for the opportunity to assist their youth with vocational discovery. Our results were 100% in helping students with biblical based vocational guidance. Yet, despite the testimonials most churches made excuses as to why they could not work with us (e.g., they were short staffed or believed it would be a financial burden on families).

Thanks to this course, I have come to the conclusion that what is needed is a new context about vocational calling in the church. Too few churches teach the biblical principles of work, yet they preach about tithing. I find it interesting that churches do not make the connection to work. Perhaps if churches taught vocational and spiritual calling, then made the connection to our work and discipling others it would give a new context to work and result in increased tithing. The vision I have is to teach high school students to disciple and to see their career as their mission field. Since we spend the most time working during our lifetime it makes sense that churches should provide a biblical foundation for vocational and spiritual gifts discovery. If Christians learn about their vocational and spiritual giftings and how to use these gifts to disciple others this training would be a good first step towards a new context where people see college and career years as their mission field.

As parents, we want to believe we prepared our kids for that transition to college, yet we are not preparing them to know their vocational calling and that is the biggest mistake. “Luther’s understanding of calling was not restricted to church parameters but included all kinds of works that could act as a way to serve others. His understanding of work contrasts with the current popular understanding of work that sees it as a mere economic activity without connection to religion or spiritual life” (Kristanto, 2024, p.1).

But what about the church today? It seems that most still only see vocation for the infrastructure of the church (i.e., pastor, elder, deacon). If the church modified its view (context) of vocation as a ministry opportunity to equip the congregation with vocational and spiritual gifts who then use those gifts to disciple others, the church could bear more fruit in discipleship and Kingdom impact.

Teaching the congregation about the five spheres of life that are rooted in Christ we can better prepare Christian students before they go off to secular colleges and hopefully reduce their risk of losing their faith. Time spent discovering how God wired us for vocation can help build a strong personal relationship with him as we see our individual uniqueness and further explore that through prayer. Seeing our purpose builds character and helps define that career path He designed us for. This journey develops into osteopathy and empowers us to become a changemaker for the Kingdom.

Despite the lack of vocational training in churches, my prayer is that when churches see the Barna report, as well as their own youth surveys they will be receptive to the current state and see the need for a new context of work. My hope is that presenting this persuasive argument along with a solution (i.e., STRIVE Career Development Program), they will be inspired to chart a new course for their students.

Issues that need to be addressed include: 1) equipping the congregation with biblical principles of work. Historically, the church does not guide the congregation with regards to work unless it is for pastoral vocations. However, “Christianity is something to be practised daily, for it is a way of life. Because work is the largest portion of human life, it is only possible to have Christianity as a way of life by seeing its connection to work” (Kristanto, et al, 2024. p2). It is through this new proposed ministry and context that will help churches and the congregation make the necessary connection. 2) “Jesus commissioned His followers to be the embodiment of a healthy body, a healthy church, aimed to fulfill the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples” (Matt 28:18-20). Despite this clear mandate from Christ, it appears that church leadership has diverged from His original blueprint, especially in fully activating members of Christ’s church to engage in their divine mission.” (p. 22). Students are being sent to college without a solid footing of who they are vocationally for Christ. Without this understanding, they get to college and sway like the wind. If we send our students to college with a mission and a vocational footing they will be firmly rooted to do great things for the Kingdom.

Within the spectrum of critical contextualization this paper attempts to correct two areas. First, Conversion of Themes. The bible talks about trusting God to provide our financial needs. “Christian education should help to transform the lives of people spiritually and materially. Economic liberation, among others, should be an important aspect of Christian education and education in general” (Gobbo, 2023, p4). That education should happen in one’s home church where the pastor presents biblical teachings on finances, tithes, and work instead of from secular society. If more emphasis is placed in this manner perhaps people would place greater value on tithing and working for the kingdom, instead of monetary keeping up with the joneses.

Second, Commendation of Good Belief and/or Practices. **“**Research shows that for students to function optimally in college, the choice of major must be based on personal interest or identification” (p. 3). With the issue of Christian students NOT knowing what their vocational calling is, the church MUST address this. The students I have worked with have found a tremendous value in our vocational discovery sessions. Framing this ministry in a new context can be very persuasive and will show increased value to churches, which is what they should want to provide to their congregation. Creating a ministry and offering to work with the church so they can adopt it and make it their own gives elders the opportunity to invest in the ministry and the next generation.

The Implementation (i.e., planting) of STRIVE career ministry in a church will require the following strategy for contextualized communication: Stakeholders - parents, church elders and pastors, especially youth pastors. VRG will be working with the church and Christian non-profits to share this program with high school seniors, college students, and adults in transition (jobless, or retirees). VRG will provide the Program and the training for the core leadership that will be in charge of the ministry on site. There are some additional resources needed to complete the program: discipleship training and spiritual gift assessment and materials. The STRIVE Program is ready to be implemented with the exception of the discipleship training and spiritual gifts assessment and materials.

**“**An opportunity exists to provide a method (i.e., coaching) to train and prepare disciple-makers in the local church to aid believers in becoming followers of Jesus and mature disciples with a thriving spirituality” (Smith, 2024, p. 17). VRG has had good limited results, which leads us to believe this new contextualization, youth survey results, and our program will result in positive outcomes within the first year. The overall goal is to reverse the loss of faith and increase the number of students coming to Christ.

Obstacles include money for students to pay for the program, as well as finding the right adult to lead the ministry. Prayer is powerful and I believe this is the call God gave to me. That said, I trust Him and will persevere and hope for results similar to the Discipleship Love Ministry Project that was “designed to to bridge the gap between Jesus’ vision of united, empowered disciples and the current state of discipleship within the church community, where many members of the Body of Christ and their God-given gifts are underappreciated; and foster a church community that recognizes and utilizes the diverse gifts within the Body of Christ (Graves-Ransome, 2024, p31).

The 2023 Barna Group reported loss of faith in college students resonated with me. The timing of my becoming an OGS doctoral student is so God. He has used each course to narrow my focus for the Kingdom work he has called me to. For this paper that is planting a Christian Career Development Ministry in churches. Similar to Paul, who “had a missional vision for the local church. The success of his vision depended on the equipping, or missional identity development, of believers in their areas of giftedness” (Hallam, M., 2021, p94).

The plan is to present the new context for vocational calling to the church, along with preliminary data from two 2024 youth conferences; and STRIVE as a solution. This course helped me understand that my call is to reach the church to show them the issue (lost faith) with a new contextualized Christian response (i.e., to equip our youth with the armor of God) to disciple and know their vocational calling.

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