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The Dubious History of “Contextualization” and the Cautious Case for its Continued Use

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Abstract: This study first traces the history of the term “contextualization” by uncovering two underlying historical undercurrents that go back as far as the seventeenth century and then by examining the theological agendas of those who first advocated the idea. It concludes that dangers and cautions do indeed abound for the theologically conservative Christian. However, the study also makes the historical and theological case for the continued use of a more narrowly defined “contextualization” by underscoring the inherent translatability of the Christian faith and by focusing attention on the incarnation and the doctrine of justification as the foundation for a more conservative Lutheran approach.

Introduction

Recently two prominent evangelical pastors have publically taken to task the idea of “engaging culture.” Their point is that the church should be “absolutely distinct” from culture.¹ This fear of the surrounding culture has led more than a few Christians to ignore or dismiss the cultural context in which they live. It can also give rise to the tendency to withdraw from the surrounding community altogether. “Rounding the wagons” as the pressure from society increases is a natural thing to do.

Some might dismiss this as naïve, but I believe it merits a reasoned response. First of all, I can understand the fear because it also nags at me—the fear that such engagement will inevitably end up distorting the Gospel, tainting the church, and eternally hurting souls. A quick survey of history would show us that their concern is legitimate. But this also deserves a carefully thought out response because it directly effects how we carry out the mission of the church. As a former Lutheran missionary in Africa for almost a decade and half, I have more than a passing interest in this topic.



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The question that we are dealing with here is essentially the question of “contextualization.” This article will certainly not be the final word on that topic, nor is it meant to be. Neither do I intend to address the practical question of how one goes about doing contextualization. An incredible amount has already been written on “contextualization” in the past four and half decades and I would encourage the reader—proponent, opponent, or undecided—to at least dabble in some of it.²

This being said, I intend to address the underlying question of whether or not we should even be engaged in contextualization in the first place. Should we even be using this term? More specifically, I propose to do two things in what follows: (1) briefly trace the history of the term “contextualization,” uncovering its potential dangers and benefits; and (2) make the case within an evangelical confessional Lutheran framework for the continued use of a more narrowly defined “contextualization.” Of course, I surely cannot do justice to each of these topics in such a short article. My goal here is to simply present a few ideas, especially from a conservative evangelical Lutheran perspective, in the hope that they serve as an impetus for further reflection and conversation.

The Dubious History of “Contextualization”

I often start off my Church History class with a dictum that seems to apply here as well: *History may elude us, but we never elude history.* What I mean is that we may discount history, but it has an uncanny tendency in the end to influence and shape us, even unbeknownst to us. It is best, then, I contend, to spend at least some time becoming familiar with how the term and concept of “contextualization” emerged. As we will see, for the biblically and theologically conservative Christian, dangers and cautions abound. We are then left with the question: Does it merit jettisoning the term altogether or might it yet prove useful in our context today?

Historical Undercurrents of “Contextualized Theologies”

The term “contextualization” was first coined in the early seventies. The idea itself, however, was long in the making. In retrospect, it seems to have been the result of at least two historical undercurrents that began to reshape modern thinking as far back as the seventeenth century.

We can trace the first of these to Francis Bacon (1561–1626), whose innovative ideas reoriented the entire discipline of what we know today as natural science. Whereas knowledge had traditionally been linked to timeless principles uncovered by the ancients, Bacon advocated for an approach to knowledge that paid particular attention to events observed in nature. This shift from a deductive to an inductive and empirical method of attaining knowledge was revolutionary to say the least. It contributed greatly to what historians have called the “scientific revolution” and serves to this day as the foundation of modern science. The shift that took place

between then and now is striking. Before and during Luther’s time, for example, university students of medicine commonly studied the popular writings of Hippocrates and Galen, ancient Greek authorities on traditional theoretical medicine.³ Two hundred years later, students were conducting experiments based on a scientific method very similar to that used today. As a sign of the times, in 1859 Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* was founded on the close scrutiny of various species of animals within their natural environments. *It is important to note that what changed in all of this was the starting point of how to attain knowledge—from timeless principles to observation of nature.* And, as a result, advancements in science have grown astronomically, as has the plethora of other “human sciences” based on similar methodologies, e.g., sociology, anthropology, psychology.

It was inevitable that this method would eventually be applied to the discipline of theology. In times past, theology had claimed the proud title of “queen of the sciences” precisely because it was based on not only timeless but also divine principles.⁴ With the advent of the Age of Enlightenment, we begin to see a shift in thinking. Theology’s dogma and creeds cease to be measured and validated by their conformity to divine truths and are instead judged by their usefulness and relevance in the real-world context.⁵ Consequently, the study of theology at the university is relegated to a position beneath that of medicine and law. In the mid-nineteenth century, Charles Darwin’s idea of “natural selection” challenged the traditional idea of divine providence and championed the environment as the cause of different species. If this is true of biology, why not also theology? Are disparities in theological beliefs simply a result of different environments? Indeed, theological disparities, once condemned as “heresies,” instead give rise to a number of different “denominations” that agree to coexist in peace.⁶ *The starting point of theology gradually shifts, giving much more weight to the importance of real-world context in theological formulations.* That is the first historical undercurrent that would eventually in the 1970s give rise to the idea of “contextualized theologies.”

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There was also a second, related historical undercurrent. Christian theology was never really a simple matter of readily accessible eternal truths. Those truths came to us through the written texts of the Bible, thus raising the question: How does the reader acquire meaning from those texts?

In a deep and insightful study of Johann Gerhard’s (1583–1637) understanding of the Word of God, historian and theologian Bengt Hägglund argued convincingly that a major epistemological shift took place in the eighteenth century in terms of

how one answered that question.⁷ Beforehand, during the Reformation in the sixteenth century and throughout the following century, it was commonly believed that the human mind played a much more *receptive* than *active* role in the process of attaining knowledge. It is important to understand here that knowledge is acquired through the “interplay” between my mind and an external object, e.g., a tree. But which of these plays the prominent role in my apprehension of, for example, what a tree is? My mind or the tree? In previous centuries, the external object was deemed the starting point of knowledge and our apprehension of it an effect of that external object. In other words, the external tree played the prominent role because it was essentially thought to have “created” my apprehension of what a tree is. Hägglund described it thus: “Apprehension is not from the subject [my mind] to the object [e.g., tree], but vice versa from the object [e.g., tree] as the underlying and determining factor to the subject [my mind].”⁸ Or, as one historian succinctly put it: “Our mind does not measure the thing, but is measured by the thing.”⁹

Much of this may seem strange to our modern sensibilities since it is diametrically opposed to how we approach understanding something today. It appears counterintuitive to relegate our minds to a quasi-passive role and allow that they “be measured” by things outside of us. This perception is mostly because we live under the dominating influence of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and his innovative epistemology.¹⁰ In the preface to his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant himself described it as the “Copernican Revolution.” And a revolution it was. He essentially overturned the existing cognitive theory and assigned our minds to a position of increasing prominence in the understanding process.¹¹ According to Kant, an external object in and of itself cannot be detected and give rise to true understanding. It cannot be truly known apart from categories preexisting in the human mind. A reversal has taken place. “The measured has become the measurer.”¹²

As one might expect, this “epistemological revolution” has had an enduring influence on the discipline of theology. It essentially set the theologian in a place of prominence over Scripture, i.e., the external object. In his magisterial work on the history of biblical interpretation over the last few centuries, Hans Frei concluded that with the modern age came a reversal of the direction of interpretation and understanding of Scripture.¹³ Rather than fit the real world into the biblical narrative as had been done before, the overarching concern was to fit the scriptural world into the contemporary world. Hence, those parts of the text deemed ill-suited for contemporary society, e.g., angels, demons, and miracles, were set aside as nonessential to the “deeper meaning” of the text. The end result, as one might expect, was a depreciation of the text itself and a chronic separation from its “deeper meaning.”

As many have pointed out, there are three factors to be considered in the process of interpretation: The author (and his world), the text itself, and the receptor (and his

world).¹⁴ With the diminishing importance of the text came efforts from both liberals and conservatives alike to get at the “deeper meaning.” *In the age of modernity, they did so by focusing on the world of the author.* Liberals attempted to reconstruct the historical composition of the original text (i.e., historical criticism) and conservatives the historical events of the original context.¹⁵ There was a foreboding sense, however, that neither would succeed in bridging the ever widening gap between then and now.

A change in focus was inevitable. We detect hints of it already as far back as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who held the view that “all theology was influenced, if not determined, by the context in which it evolved.”¹⁶ In other words, our current context may be more relevant than that of the original author’s when it comes to doing theology. But it was not until the twentieth century that pivotal change was ushered in by the likes of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Michel Foucault (1926–1984), and Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), architects of the postmodern mindset.¹⁷ *With the dawn of postmodernism, attention was directed definitively to the world of the receptor.*

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Accordingly, meaning came to be seen increasingly as a mere “creation” of the viewer as he or she “played” with the text.¹⁸ Note that this is virtually the opposite of the view espoused by the likes of Luther and Gerhard in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Objective knowledge apart from the knower is now deemed impossible. The very notion of universal truth is rejected, since it is commonly believed that truth is dependent on (and only valid in) a particular context.

Moreover, within this twentieth century context, what Nietzsche called a “hermeneutic of suspicion” was widely applied to all areas of scholarship, including theology.¹⁹ Such a “hermeneutic of suspicion” sought to uncover the hidden power agendas of those elitists “from above” who shaped their disciplines in order to retain power, even if done unknowingly. It was applied in an effort to liberate those “from below,” the socially, economically, and politically oppressed. This “liberation” emphasis came into focus especially during the 1960s and 1970s when a great number of third world countries were in the throes of liberating themselves from European colonial powers. Hence, as a sign of the times, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire published in 1970 his groundbreaking *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he introduced his view of “liberation pedagogy,” an approach to education that would break down oppressive power structures and empower the oppressed. Also fundamental to this “hermeneutic of suspicion” was the firm belief that the vantage point of those “from below” was to be preferred over that of those “from above.” This was especially true for theology.

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Historical Context of the Term “Contextualization”

These long-term historical developments were among those that led to significant changes in mission thinking throughout the twentieth century. One of the most important was the ecumenical movement and its accompanying progressive approach to theology. The roots of the movement can be traced to the nineteenth century, but it was solidified, at least to a degree, at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. The International Missionary Council (IMC) was an outgrowth of this conference and had a large influence on mission thinking throughout the twentieth century. Unfortunately, disappointed with the Council’s progressively liberal agenda, e.g., evangelism as “social engagement” or “social gospel,” more conservative fundamentalists and evangelicals increasingly distanced themselves from it.²⁰ This, of course, strengthened the liberal agenda, culminating in the IMC’s merging into the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961 to become its Division on World Missions and Evangelism (DWME).

At that point, the departure of many of the remaining evangelicals left the DWME without a more conservative voice. As one might expect, it was at this time that a number of mission trends emerged that tended toward the extreme liberal side of the theological spectrum. The “ecumenists,” as one missiologist calls them, reduced evangelism to “presence” (versus proclamation), emphasized interreligious dialogue, and debated whether those from non-Christian religions were “anonymous Christians.”²¹ The term “missions” (plural) was replaced by “mission” (singular), emphasizing what God was doing in the world, whether inside or outside of the church. This idea was popularized through the term *missio Dei*. They challenged the church to “let the world set the agenda” and “discern the signs of the times.”²² Prominent missiologist David Bosch explains the underlying gist of such statements:

Whereas evangelicals seek to apply Scripture deductively—in other words, make Scripture their point of departure from which they draw the line(s) to the present situation—ecumenicals follow the inductive method; the situation in which they find themselves becomes the hermeneutical key. Their thesis is: we determine God’s will *from* a specific situation rather than

in it. . . . In the words of the Uppsala Assembly: “The world provides the agenda.”²³

Hence, they encouraged the church to exegete local communities in order to find out how and where God was already at work in the socioeconomic and sociopolitical contexts of those communities. Mission work was no longer deemed a matter of evangelism and church planting, but instead the struggle for justice and liberation for those who lived under oppression.²⁴

It was within this unsettling context in 1972 that Shoki Coe first used the term “contextualization.” It was quickly picked up by other ecumenists. Coe later explained: “Contextuality . . . is that critical assessment of what makes the context really significant in the light of the *Missio Dei*. It is the missiological discernment of the signs of the times, seeing where God is at work and calling us to participate in it.”²⁵ Hence, rather than give priority to the biblical tradition and confessional statements of the historic church, Coe’s version of “contextualization” sought to emphasize local cultures because, it was thought, God was already at work within those cultures, especially within their “social and economic dimensions.”²⁶ When he coined the term, Coe was the General Director of the Theological Education Fund (TEF), a fund set up by the IMC to raise the level of theological education in the Third World. The term was first used, then, in the context of encouraging Third World scholars “to evolve theologies and programs designed specifically for their respective constituencies and cultures.”²⁷ This led to such “contextualized theologies” as Liberation Theology (in various forms), Black Theology, Third Eye Theology, Water-Buffalo Theology, Yin-Yang Theology, etc. Not surprisingly, many of these, though culturally sensitive, seem to skirt the edges of orthodoxy when evaluated in light of Scripture and historic Christianity.²⁸

Concluding Reflections on the History of “Contextualization”

There is no denying that a great deal of good has resulted from the aforementioned historical shifts. As one of our professors of biology recently pointed out to me, the advances in scientific methodology have directly translated into huge medical advances over the past few centuries and reaped enormous benefits for those of us alive today. Recognition of the important influence of context on one’s beliefs, values, and practices has led to significant advances in understanding both the variety and unity of humankind, as well as communication across these different contexts.

There is also no denying that, theologically speaking from a confessional evangelical Lutheran perspective that values the foundational authoritative importance of Scripture, this history can be quite disconcerting. The term as well as the concept of “contextualization” have carried and may very well still carry theological baggage that is sharply at odds with a more traditional approach to

Christianity shaped by the Reformation. As I mentioned earlier, dangers and cautions abound.

But does it merit jettisoning the term altogether? I think not, as I intend to argue below. Indeed, my purpose in laying out this historical background is not to convince us to simply dismiss the term, but rather to shape our continued use of it and to establish the need for caution as we proceed. Perhaps more than anything else, this “history lesson” would seem to suggest certain helpful boundaries and warning signs as we engage in what I argue below is the inevitable task of contextualizing the message of the Gospel.

The Cautious Case for the Continued Use of “Contextualization”

In what follows I wish to make the historical and theological case for the continued use of the term and concept of “contextualization.” As I mentioned earlier, we will proceed with caution in light of the rather dubious historical origins of the term.

The Historical Case for the Use of “Contextualization”

The history of contextualization did not stop with Shoki Coe and the ecumenists. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a “battle” of sorts ensued over the meaning of the term as liberals and conservatives alike sought to clarify and define it. The plethora of articles and books written at the time by more conservative theologians attests to this struggle.²⁹ A number of different models were proposed to map out the different approaches to contextualization. Two Roman Catholic scholars, Stephen Bevans and Robert Schreiter, each proposed his own “map” of the terrain of contextualization.³⁰ Several conservative evangelical theologians also proposed “maps,” but they went so far as to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable models.³¹

In light of the liberal agenda associated with the origins of the term, it is understandable why these evangelicals viewed it with such deep suspicion. It is noteworthy, however, that they refused to jettison the term altogether. Rather, they sought to rescue it from its liberal context and adapt it to their more theologically conservative thinking. Why? More than anything else, they realized that it captured a truth fundamental to Christianity from its very inception: *The translatability of the Christian faith requires attention to context.*

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But why take up such a non-biblical and non-theological term, especially one surrounded by such controversy? First of all, adopting a non-biblical term to express a fundamental truth of Christianity is nothing

new. Even such cherished expressions as “being of one substance with the Father”³² and “theology as habitus”³³ entered into our church vocabulary only after serious debate and careful clarification. But more to the point, there were, of course, other terms besides “contextualization” that had been used to express this fundamental truth. Terms such as “indigenization,” “adaptation,” and “accommodation” were quite commonplace, but they also carried their own weighty baggage. In retrospect, they seem rather disparaging and paternalistic, giving the impression, as Lesslie Newbigin has pointed out, that the missionary had the “un-adapted” Gospel and that concessions could be made to adapt it for other cultures.³⁴ “Indigenization” had been a useful term in the context of foreign missions; but with today’s increasingly “glocal” mission field triggered by massive diaspora movements, it is hopelessly outdated.³⁵ So, “contextualization” has become a part of accepted mission lingo as a useful way to describe the church’s engagement with contexts precisely because of the translatability of the Christian faith.

In his brilliant work on mission as translation, Lamin Sanneh established definitively that “translatability” is not peripheral to Christianity, but essential to its very nature.³⁶ In other words, the church does not engage in translating the faith across cultures because of convenience, but because it is in its very nature to do so. At this point, I am not talking about the command of Jesus to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:18). *Rather, I am referring to the fundamental belief at the very core of Christianity that the faith actually can be translated from one cultural context to another and that this core belief naturally and necessarily feeds into the urge to do so.* Moreover, the “translation” Sanneh is referring to here goes beyond mere texts and literary works. Language and culture are so intricately bound together that any translation is as much a matter of culture as it is linguistics.³⁷ As I often remind my students in missionary training, “Learn a language, learn a culture.” For this very reason, the church will always inevitably be engaged with cultural contexts.

If this is true, then we should see the church thus engaged all throughout its history. And we do. As Sanneh points out, we see this most clearly in the earliest days of the church, as Christianity was translated out of the Aramaic and Hebrew context and into the Gentile culture.³⁸ Of course, it was not an easy process, and both Jewish and Gentile cultures were intertwined in the resulting Christian culture. Nonetheless, it is an amazing fact about Christianity, and one that often goes unnoticed, that “its continuous translatability left it as the only major world religion that is peripheral in the land of its origin; and what it lacks in the predominance of its birthplace it has more than made up for in the late fruits of its expansion.”³⁹ It surely says something about the translatable nature of Christianity that only remnants of it remain in the vicinity of Jerusalem, its geographical cradle.

We tend to know this instinctively, but it is worth reminding ourselves how deeply translating the faith has been a part of the expansion of Christianity throughout its history. Even before the Christian era, the Septuagint rendered the

Hebrew Bible into Greek. The birth of the Church on the Feast of Pentecost was also essentially the first “evangelism event” of the Church. What “utterly amazed” the onlookers was not the strange violent wind or even the tongues of flame sitting on the heads of the apostles, but the extraordinary miracle that they spoke in different languages such that “each one heard them speaking in his own language” (Acts 2:6–7). It is not a little significant that the first miracle wrought by the promised Holy Spirit was that of overcoming the barrier of language. It comes as no surprise, then, that Augustine (354–430) considered it quite natural and necessary that the Bible be translated and “disseminated through the whole world [and . . .] become known to the nations for their salvation.”⁴⁰ Around the time that Jerome was translating the Scriptures into what would become the Vulgate, those same Scriptures were being translated by missionaries into the Armenian and Gothic languages.⁴¹

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Jerome’s Vulgate allowed Latin to claim definitively, as it were, its place as the official language of Western Christianity. Notwithstanding, despite considerable resistance on the part of some, translation into the vernacular continued through the Middle Ages as an important missionary activity among the northern “barbarians.”⁴² It is often pointed out that the Luther Bible of 1534 attests to Martin Luther’s conviction that cultural context matters. Reformation scholar, James Nestingen, recently pointed out that the same could be said regarding his Catechisms.⁴³ They were in fact translations of the faith into the heart language of the people. Interestingly, he argues that Luther’s Catechisms go beyond mere first level linguistic translation and engage in second level cultural translation.⁴⁴ On this second level, Luther was “contextualizing” the faith, that is, recognizing and, to the extent possible, making use of the cultural assumptions embodied by the Germanic language at his time in order to speak to the heart.⁴⁵ Sanneh, himself an African (Senegalese), has even pointed out that Europe’s “Age of Colonialism,” despite being tainted by the urge to perpetuate European culture throughout the world, still bears strong witness to Christianity’s persistent interest in and promotion of the vernacular (both language and culture).⁴⁶ The missionary work of Robert De Nobili (1577–1656) in India, William Carey (1761–1834) in China, and David Livingstone (1813–1873) in Africa come to mind.

And so it has continued throughout the history of the church. The point here is not to romanticize or gloss over the church’s struggle—at times, bitter strife—over the question of how far one can go when it comes to translating the faith. The point

is that this struggle itself is evidence of the translatability of Christianity. It is reflective of the inherent tension between Christ and culture that the Church inevitably endures as it translates the faith from one culture to another. There would be much less tension if Christianity were, for example, a religion like Islam, for which the *un*-translatability of its sacred text forms an inviolable principle.⁴⁷ For the Muslim, “there can be no translation of the Quran, for translation is always adaptation.”⁴⁸ But the Church, as a whole, has refused to embrace Islam’s approach to mission by “diffusion” of the home culture and has instead tended toward an approach to mission by translation.⁴⁹

But the Church, as a whole, has refused to embrace Islam’s approach to mission by “diffusion” of the home culture and has instead tended toward an approach to mission by translation.

That brings us to the deeper question: Why is translatability so inherent to Christianity, whereas for other religions like Islam it is such a foreign idea?

The Theological Case for the Use of “Contextualization”

That is a theological question. There are a number of theological points that could be brought up here, many of which have been highlighted by other scholars.⁵⁰ I would like to underscore only two that I believe form the foundation for any Lutheran approach to contextualization and, incidentally, set Christianity apart from such a religion as Islam.

Incarnation and Contextualization

The first is fairly evident and quite often cited in these discussions: the Incarnation. The fact that God entered history and was born a fully human being at a precise time and in a specific cultural context has deep implications for the salvation of the world He entered. It also tells us something about God and the way He tends to work. The Lutheran reformers and those who followed them understood that God works in such a way that the “finite is capable of bearing the infinite” (*finitum capax infiniti*): “The drama of salvation and vocation is not lived out in the angelic realm because the finite cannot bear the infinite; it is worked out in the finite realm because, under the Word, it is capable of bearing the divine.”⁵¹ “There is no good trying to be more spiritual than God,” C. S. Lewis once wrote, “God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it.”⁵² If this is true of

God with regard to bread and wine, water, and human mouths, it also suggests something about how God works in and through human history and culture.

“Historicity” lies at the foundation of what it means to be Christian. In my core theology class for undergraduate freshmen, I often have the privilege of teaching students who are very unfamiliar with Christianity and the Bible. Very often they are under the mistaken impression that the Bible is a written record of God’s revelation to or through one person. They assume, for example, that the Christian Bible is similar to the angel Gabriel’s revelation to Mohammed (Quran) or to Joseph Smith’s translation of the golden plates revealed to him by the angel Moroni (The Book of Mormon). They are surprised to learn that the origins of the sixty-six books of the Bible span well over a thousand years, thousands of miles, and three different spoken languages. For a religious book often referred to as the revelation of God to human beings, it is rather embarrassingly mired in human history. Large portions of it are not even “revelations” but simply historical accounts written by those alive at the time.⁵³ As such, although the Word of the Eternal God, the Bible is, oddly enough, prone to the poking and prodding of the historical sciences. It is significant that few other religions could or would so willingly embrace the idea, for example, of a Biblical Archeological Society.⁵⁴

In fact, the most important part and center of the entire Bible—the four Gospels—is not an angelic vision or ecstasy, but mere eyewitness accounts of an event that took place in real history—the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It says something about Christianity that at its very center lies such a mundane, earthy, unspiritual event. God became a human being and in terms of His humanness He was like anyone else during that time. Moreover, this raw historicity of the Christian faith was not something peripheral to the essence of Christianity, something dispensable that could be laid aside or even deemphasized. We know this because already during the apostolic era and in the centuries afterwards there was tremendous pressure to “de-historicize” Christianity. This effort came in the form of Gnosticism, a Greek philosophical approach to spirituality that valued the spiritual and shunned the material. Whereas the modern tendency is to question Jesus’s *divinity*, the first major attack against Christianity had no problem with His divinity but instead rejected His *humanity*. For the gnostics, Jesus Christ was entirely too human and too historical. It was scandalous to them that God would sully Himself by being embedded in a historical context. And so they sought to “disentangle the gospel from its involvement with ‘barbaric and outmoded’ Jewish notions about God and history.”⁵⁵

The Early Church, however, recognized that to distance the Gospel from its historical setting was to lose the Gospel altogether. Hence, they resisted the Gnostic temptation and insisted all the more on the historicity of the Christ Event. The Apostle John writes that he testifies about “that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched” (1 Jn 1:1).

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Even the earliest versions of the Apostle’s Creed confess that the Son of God was *born* of a woman and was *crucified* and *buried* under *Pontius Pilate*, a known ruler at the time. Such statements place the Gospel squarely in history.⁵⁶

These facts are germane to our discussion so far because a Gospel centered on a historical event is, by definition, a “contextualized Gospel,” that is, a Gospel “embedded” in a certain historical, political, social, and cultural context. This is certainly not to say that the Gospel had relevance only for that context, but to underscore the fact that as a historical event—as opposed to, e.g., a vision or spiritual encounter—it has a *real-world* context. Consequently, translation is required from that context to another and so on and so forth.

That this translation happens vertically throughout history, i.e., from earlier to more recent historical contexts, can be seen in the biblical record itself. God has embedded His entire revelation within real-world contexts, whether through prophets embedded in ancient Israelite culture, His own Son born into a Palestinian context, or the apostles ministering in a Greco-Roman world. It goes without saying that Jesus ministered in a context that was not of Moses. Consequently, a grammatico-historical approach to interpretation bids us pay careful attention to the socio-historical context of a passage before bringing its message to those in our own context. Translating the faith over the years, centuries, and millennia has been an important part of guarding the faith. But translation also happens horizontally throughout history, that is, from one cultural context to another within the same historical period. The biblical record also attests to this as more than a few scholars have pointed out.⁵⁷

My point here is this: Historicity and translatability go hand in hand when it comes to Christianity. *The historicity of the Christian faith as established definitively by the Incarnation justifies theologically and necessitates practically its translatability. This translation (on both the first and second levels)⁵⁸ is what has come to be termed “contextualization” as it is more narrowly defined by more conservative theologians.*

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Justification and Contextualization

The second theological point that I would like to underscore here is a bit more nuanced and mentioned much less frequently in discussions about contextualization:

justification through faith alone. I believe it too, along with the first, forms the foundation for any Lutheran approach to contextualization. I say this because, upon reflection, the belief that we are saved by “faith alone” (*sola fide*) has deep missiological implications for Christianity—much deeper than we might be aware of at first glance.⁵⁹

Let us begin with a purely hypothetical question: What would the Christian religion look like had it been *un-translatable*? It would have led to one of two extremes. It would have devolved into a localized regional religion with no universal claim on all peoples, or it would have insisted on the perpetuation of the Jewish language and culture as part of its universal religious claims.

In making the case for his proposed missionary trip to Spain (Rom 15:24), Paul refutes the first of these by insisting on the monotheistic claims of Christianity (Rom 1:18–25; 3:30). The Old Testament, as well as the New, is rife with passages that reveal Yahweh’s claim to the whole world, e.g., Ex 9:14–16; Josh 4:24; Ps 86:8–13; Is 60:3; Mt 28:18–20. But Paul also talks a great deal about “faith alone” versus “works of the law” (Rom 3:21–4:25) and seems to use this doctrine, both theologically and logically, to support the universal claim of Christianity. In fact, he appears to use it as a way of “leveling the playing ground,” if you will, between two ethnic groups, the Jews and the Gentiles (Rom 3:29–30), presumably also including those as far away as Spain (Rom 1:5).⁶⁰ Although using different terms, he seems to imply that the universal, supracultural nature of faith means that Christianity can be and truly is for all people.⁶¹ All attempts to observe the Law, whether it be circumcision, incense burning, or animal sacrifices, tend to be tied to specific places and cultures. In other words, “works” are almost always culturally relative. Faith, i.e., trust, in and of itself, is not. As Luther so astutely pointed out, “to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart.”⁶² All people, regardless of place or culture, can and do have faith, even if it might be faith in a false god. Hence, being saved by faith “levels the playing ground.” Christianity as a religion of *sola fide* can readily find a home in all nations and cultures (Mt 28:19).

Much more dangerous than Christianity’s devolving into a localized religion was the very real threat of its devolving into an attempt merely to reproduce the Jewish language and culture throughout the world. Paul spends considerable time and energy refuting this idea, insisting that to do so inevitably means losing the Gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone (Gal 2:15–4:7). This idea was picked up by Martin Luther and the other reformers and served as the seed of the Reformation movement. Since that time, Protestant Christianity has been concerned especially with internal matters of the heart, i.e., trust, and not merely with external actions carried out *ex opere operato* (mere performance of the act without faith).⁶³ Conversion entails a change of heart and not simply imitation of external rituals and ceremonies, even if those rituals and ceremonies may have value. Such a change,

that is, saving faith, requires the Gospel promise or message of forgiveness in Christ Jesus to which it clings (Rom 3:22; 10:14–15). That promise differs greatly from the simple “diffusion” of an external code to be adopted and observed by the newly converted. Rather, the Gospel message must be spoken in such a way that it can be understood, not only by the head (historical faith), but also in the heart (trust), hence the need for translation and, therefore, attention to context.⁶⁴ In other words, although the question of what is being communicated is undeniably important, the doctrine of justification *sola fide* requires us to also pay attention to what is being heard.

In other words, although the question of what is being communicated is undeniably important, the doctrine of justification *sola fide* requires us to also pay attention to what is being heard.

My point throughout this section is simply this: *The difference between religions of works and Christianity as a religion of sola fide extends beyond how we are saved. It also shapes the way we do mission work.*⁶⁵ Most ritual-centered religions, e.g., Islam, tend toward “mission by diffusion” (of rituals and ceremonies of the home culture). Christianity as a religion of *sola fide* naturally tends toward “mission by translation.”⁶⁶ Of course, Lutheran Christians place high value on certain rituals, such as Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and Absolution. This is one significant point of difference between conservative Lutheran and Evangelical approaches to contextualization and one that begs to be more fully explored by Lutheran missiologists. This being said, since Luther’s German Mass of 1526, Lutherans have been keenly aware of the need for teaching and translation, even and especially with regard to these liturgical and sacramental rituals (primarily because of their previous abuse by the “Papists”). This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Luther’s Small Catechism.

Concluding Reflections on the Case for Contextualization

Nearly everyone vaguely familiar with Christianity would admit the translatable nature of Christianity with regard to foreign missions. When I served and lived for many years as a missionary in Togo, West Africa, it was unquestionably understood that translation (both linguistic and cultural) was a natural part of the job. But is it also true closer to home? Does the translatable nature of Christianity justify, or even require, contextualization on the home front, within our own communities here in the United States?⁶⁷

Church historian, Richard Muller, has pointed out that Christians have always done contextualization but have only recently begun to do it more consciously.⁶⁸ One

of the reasons he gives for this is that we have contextualized the Christian faith for so long and so successfully in the West that it has become “culturally invisible.”⁶⁹ In other words, we in the United States have lived in such a thoroughly Christianized culture that there has been little perceived need for contextualization. But this is changing rapidly and dramatically. Studies show that massive immigration movements are rapidly making previously monocultural communities into multicultural havens within the United States.⁷⁰ The city of Irvine, CA, where I currently sit writing this is forty percent Asian, forty percent Caucasian, and the remaining twenty percent a mixture of various other ethnicities. In addition, the rapid rise of the “nones” (those claiming no religious affiliation) to over one-quarter of the U. S. population is indicative of an America that is quickly becoming “de-churched.”⁷¹

Missiologist Ralph Winter popularized the evangelism-mission strategy spectrum E1, E2, E3, M1, M2, M3. The spectrum attempted to illustrate the cultural barriers one would have to cross in order to reach a community with the gospel. Possible scenarios ranged from few if any barriers requiring only basic evangelism (E1) to numerous significant barriers requiring careful attention to culture and the use of intentional culture-crossing strategies (M3). Whereas previously E1, E2, and E3 described the vast majority of the U. S. and M1, M2, and M3 the mission fields overseas, that is no longer the case today. Significant parts of the U. S. are sliding further down the scale and requiring the use of M1, M2, and even M3 strategies. In short, those two factors—massive immigration and the tendency toward a “de-churched” society—mean what we intuitively already know: The United States is a mission field and is becoming increasingly similar to foreign mission fields. Consequently, contextualization strategies once reserved for foreign mission fields, must now be employed intentionally on the home front.

Finally, if I have indeed made my case about the reality of “contextualization” because of the inevitable translatable nature of the Christian faith, then I would make two further proposals. First, let the conversation begin about *how* to contextualize the faith in ways that remain faithful to our theological heritage and to the mission of

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which God has privileged us to be a part. And, secondly, let us encourage one another in this endeavor, while also gently holding one another accountable.

Endnotes

¹ Pastors John MacArthur and Thabiti Anyabwile as cited in a blog by Ed Stetzer, August 11, 2010, “Calling for Contextualization: Part 4,” *Christianity Today: The Exchange*, February 17, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2010/august/calling-for-contextualization-part-4-untangling-cultural.html>

² The two classic works on contextualization are Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002) [originally published as an article in 1985] and Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 1985). For more of an evangelical approach, see, e.g., David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 75–103; Charles Kraft, “The Development of Contextualization Theory in Euroamerican Missiology,” in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles Kraft (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), 15–34; A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012). For an intriguing collection of essays and response essays on contemporary issues related to the topic, see David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer, eds., *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 82–163.

³ See, e.g., Roger French, *Medicine before Science: The Business of Medicine from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9–58, 157–184.

⁴ See the influential argument of Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologica* I, qu. 1, art. 4.

⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 421–422.

⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 422.

⁷ Bengt Hägglund, *Die Heilige Schrift und ihre Deutung in der Theologie Johann Gerhards: Eine Untersuchung über das altlutherische Schriftverständnis* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1951), 16–80, 212–218, 242–255. For a short summary available in English, see Bengt Hägglund, “Pre-Kantian hermeneutics in Lutheran Orthodoxy,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 20 (2006), 322–325. I also explore this in some depth in Glenn K. Fluegge, “The Making of the Theologian: The Nature and Study of *Theologia* according to Johann Gerhard” (PhD dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015), 84–121.

⁸ Hägglund, *Heilige Schrift*, 214.

⁹ Max Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1939), 23.

¹⁰ Some would trace this epistemological break already to René Descartes in the seventeenth century, see Gary Hatfield, “The Senses and the Fleshless Mind: The Meditations as Cognitive Exercises,” in *Essays on Descartes’s Meditations*, ed. A. O. Rorty (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 45–48.

¹¹ “Up to now it has been assumed that all *our cognition must conform to the objects*. . . . Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that *the objects must conform to our cognition* . . . which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus, who, when he did not make good progress in the explanation of the celestial motions if he assumed that the entire celestial host *revolves around the observer*, tried to see if he might not have greater success if he made *the observer revolve and left the stars at rest*” (italics mine) (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer & Allen W. Wood [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 110).

¹² Fluegge, "Making of the Theologian," 95.

¹³ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (London: Yale University Press, 1974), 5–6.

¹⁴ See the summary and comments by James Voelz, "Literary Interpretation of the Scriptures (Mark 8:22–26)," in *Listening to the Word of God: Exegetical Approaches*, ed. Achim Behrens and Jorg Christian Salzmann (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2016), 75–76.

¹⁵ Voelz, "Literary Interpretations," 74–75.

¹⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 422.

¹⁷ For an introduction to history and thought of postmodernism, see Lawrence E. Cahoon, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996); David J. Hoeveler, Jr., *The Postmodern Turn: American Thought and Culture in the 1970's* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

¹⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Lamp in the Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics of 'Aesthetic' Theology," *Trinity Journal* 8 (1987): 37–39.

¹⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 424. For an insightful response to such a "hermeneutic of suspicion," see Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 149–154.

²⁰ Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions*, 33. For a helpful history of the different missionary organizations (ecumenical, fundamentalist, and evangelical) that arose in the wake of the conference at Edinburgh, see David J. Hesselgrave, "Will We Correct the Edinburgh Error? Future Mission in Historical Perspective," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 49.2 (Spring 2007): 121–131.

²¹ Moreau, *Contextualization in World Missions*, 33–35.

²² Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rhee, & Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 322.

²³ David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 38.

²⁴ Pocock, Van Rhee, McConnell, *Changing Face of World Missions*, 322. It is then not surprising, as Hesselgrave ("Edinburgh Error", 126) has pointed out that, whereas mainline protestant denominations accounted for eighty percent of the North American missionary force at the beginning of the twentieth century, they accounted for only six percent at the end of the century.

²⁵ Shoki Coe, "Contextualized Theology," in *Mission Trends No. 3: Asian, African, and Latin American Contributions to a Radical, Theological Realignment in the Church*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 19–24.

²⁶ F. Ross Kinsler, "Mission and Context: The Current Debate About Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 14.1 (1978): 87.

²⁷ Hesselgrave, "Edinburgh Error," 126.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ See, e.g., Byang H. Kato, "The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975); Charles Kraft, "The Contextualization of Theology," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 14.1 (1978): 31–38; Kinsler, "Mission and Context" (1978): 23–29; Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1979); Krikor Halebian, "The Problem of Contextualization," *Missiology: An International Review* 11.1 (1983): 95–111; Richard W. Engle, "Contextualization in Missions: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal," *Grace Theological Journal* 4.1 (1983): 85–107; David J. Hesselgrave & Rommen, *Contextualization* (1989).

³⁰ See endnote 2.

³¹ See, e.g., David J. Hesselgrave, “Contextualization Continuum,” *Gospel in Context* 2.3 (1979): 4–11; Bruce J. Nicholls, “Towards a Theology of Gospel and Culture,” in *Gospel and Culture: The Papers of a Consultation on the Gospel and Culture, Convened by the Lausanne Committee’s Theology and Education Group*, ed. John R. W. Stott and Robert T. Coote (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), 69–82.

³² A cherished part of the Nicene Creed, the Greek term *homoousion* was sharply debated by the semi-Arians and fiercely defended by Athanasius despite its non-biblical origin (see his *Defense of the Nicene Definition*).

³³ Luther rather vehemently opposed the use of *habitus* in the theological realm. It only entered into Lutheran theological language, borrowed from Reformed theologians, around the turn of the seventeenth century and was hotly debated at that time in the often overlooked “*habitus* controversy.” See Markus Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 179–222, 300–308. For a summary in English, see Fluegge, “Making of the Theologian,” 56–68.

³⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 142.

³⁵ For example, a term such as “indigenization” would never pass muster with more recent conceptualizations of missions, such as “Diaspora Missiology.” See Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2011).

³⁶ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2009).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3. Translation studies have increasingly shown the significance of the cultural factor in translation; see, e.g., Michael P. DeJonge and Christiane Tietz, “Introduction: Translating Religion,” in *Translating Religion: What is Lost and Gained?*, ed. Michael P. DeJonge and Christiane Tietz (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3–4.

³⁸ Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 1–55.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁰ Augustine, “Christian Doctrine,” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. F. Shaw (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889), II.6, 536.

⁴¹ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin, 1964), 47–48.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 67. For the mission efforts to the Slavic people of the Northern Danube and the struggle for the vernacular, see Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 81–92.

⁴³ James A. Nestingen, “Luther’s Cultural Translation of the Catechism,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 15.4 (2001): 440–452.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 443–448.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 448–449.

⁴⁶ Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 122–190.

⁴⁷ Sanneh (*Translating the Message*, 252–276) provides a very helpful analysis of the contrast between Christianity and Islam in this regard.

⁴⁸ Newbigin, *Gospel*, 145.

⁴⁹ Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 33–34. Of course, historically the two approaches are not so easily untangled, e.g., missionaries serving as agents of “civilization”; nevertheless, as Sanneh has pointed out, for Christianity the “preponderant balance of emphasis” has fallen on the side of “mission by translation” (p. 34).

⁵⁰ For a delightful taste, I would recommend starting with the first five essays in Angus J. L. Menuge, ed., *Christ and Culture in Dialogue* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1999), 31–144.

⁵¹ Martin E. Marty, “Articles of War, Articles of Peace: Christianity and Culture,” in *Christ and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. Angus J. L. Menuge (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press,

1999), 64. This matter became a point of contention in the debate between Reformed and Lutheran theologians regarding the Lord's Supper. The Reformed held that the "finite was incapable of bearing the infinite" (*finitum non capax infiniti*) and, thus, the bread and wine could not be the Lord's true body and blood.

⁵² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 64.

⁵³ For the significant difference between "revelation" and "inspiration" and inspiration's necessary connection to personal, cultural, and historical factors, see the brief overview by Wilbert Kreiss, *Thus Speaks the Lord. The Doctrine of Holy Scripture: Authority, Inspiration, and Interpretation*, trans. Lyne Schmidt and David Somers (St. Louis: LCMS World Mission, 2000), 34–43.

⁵⁴ This society, <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org>, publishes the *Biblical Archeology Review*, a journal that seeks to act as a bridge between the Bible and the academic science of archeology.

⁵⁵ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 52. Shelley offers an intriguing overview of this "first major test to the faith in the Event" and the Church's response; see pp. 46–56.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005); Engle, "Contextualization," 91–99.

⁵⁸ See endnote 37.

⁵⁹ Missiologists have been making this case for quite some time. Biblical scholars over the past few decades, especially proponents of the "New Perspective on Paul," some with more dubious motives than others, have also picked up this theme. While I believe emphasizing the socio-cultural dimension of Paul's Gospel is a helpful addition to Pauline studies, I do not embrace some of the directions and implications of the New Perspective on Paul which would make his teaching of justification peripheral and incidental to his theology. See Mark Seifrid, "The 'New Perspective on Paul' and Its Problems," *Themelios* 25.2 (2000): 4–18.

⁶⁰ I see this as an implication or application of Paul's foundational doctrine of justification, not vice versa that his doctrine stems incidentally from his concern for racial inclusivism. See Mark Seifrid, "The New Perspective from Paul," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14.3 (2010): 23–26.

⁶¹ Many proponents of the New Perspective on Paul have been quick to point out the implications of "faith alone" for racial inclusivism, e.g., the idea of "gracism" in Michael F. Bird, Tremper Longman III, and Scot McKnight, eds., *The Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 130–136. I believe it also helpful to connect his insistence on "faith alone" (Rom 3–4) to his proposed missionary trip to Spain (Rom 15:24) and, therefore, to highlight the universal, "culture-crossing" missionary thrust of "faith alone." See Thomas Schirmacher, "Romans as a Charter for World Missions: A Lesson in the Relation of Systematic Theology and Missiology," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10.4 (1993): 159–161.

⁶² Large Catechism, part 1, First Commandment; Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 386.

⁶³ See, e.g., *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, art. 4, §§ 130–139; Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 141–142.

⁶⁴ I am not here dismissing the primary work of the Holy Spirit in conversion, but simply pointing to the reality that the Spirit has called us mediately "by the Gospel" (Small Catechism, The Creed, Art. 3; Kolb & Wengert, *Book of Concord*, 355).

⁶⁵ For an insightful, albeit in German, article on justification as the “shaping power” of missions, see Georg F Vicedom, *Die Rechtfertigung als gestaltende Kraft der Mission* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund, 1952).

⁶⁶ See endnote 49. Sanneh underscores what he calls the “persuasive rule” as one of the reasons Christianity has opted for “mission by translation” (p. 34). In other words, the obligation felt by missionaries to persuade potential converts toward a change of heart has made them open to translating the faith.

⁶⁷ Admittedly, the question itself is rather paternalistic. It ignores the significant reality that for the rapidly growing church in the South and East, the United States is the foreign mission field and that missionaries to the States will inevitably engage in the process of contextualization. See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford, 2011).

⁶⁸ Richard Muller, *The Study of Theology: From Biblical Interpretation to Contemporary Formulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 201–204.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁷⁰ Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, 125–131.

⁷¹ James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 11–19.