

Appendix A: Gospel Pathways and Contextualization

Missional Community Leaders Training

April 27, 2008

SELF-EVALUATION

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. There are non-Christians who would consider me their friend. | Y N |
| 2. I know the personal stories of those people. | Y N |
| 3. Through listening, I know what their personal idols/functional saviors are. | Y N |
| 4. I have shown them how to celebrate well. | Y N |
| 5. I know how to bless them in a way that demonstrates the gospel. | Y N |
| 6. I have been and am actively blessing them as gospel demonstration. | Y N |
| 7. We eat together regularly. | Y N |
| 8. Part of my recreation rhythm regularly includes them. | Y N |
| 9. They know the full gospel of Jesus Christ. | Y N |
| 10. I have shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with them at least once. | Y N |

(NOTE: If you have more than one non-Christian friend, try walking through this with each of them in your mind)

HOW WILL THEY SEE IT?

Part of the work of sharing the gospel is DEMONSTRATING it

Consider 1 Peter 2:12 and 3:13-15

- Live a life full of good works (show the gospel through works)
- Live it among those who do not believe (incarnate the gospel in proximity)
- Live in a way that makes no sense apart from the gospel
- Be prepared to give an answer for the hope of the gospel in you

HOW WILL THEY HEAR IT?

The other crucial part of sharing the gospel is DECLARING it

Consider Romans 10:13-15 and 1 Peter 2:9-10...

- It does them no gospel good to only see us live a life of good works – they may be impressed and consider us a very good moral person and miss Jesus
- People do not just believe the gospel of Jesus Christ because they see our good deeds, they must hear us preach the good news
- This is the purpose for our sending – we are sent to be HERALDS of the Gospel
- Our gospel living should create open doors, questions and a platform to which the gospel of Jesus Christ is the answer

What are the reasons for why we don't share the gospel?

What is the gospel?

Consider 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 2:8-10

What does one need to know in order to understand their need for the gospel?

GOSPEL PATHWAYS

Everyone starts in a different place with a different story, particular worldviews, a unique set of questions, a variety of objections, a particular state of being or emotion and a deep longing for the divine. Identifying the pathways to gospel proclamation can come through any or all of these combined.

The key to a gospel conversation and gospel declaration is listening for the deep longing for the divine underneath the surface of the “thing” (story, worldview, emotion, etc)

- Affirm what is good or strong about the “thing” in their life or story
- Connect the “thing” to THE STORY (or your story) and show how others had the same experience and similar results (you’re not alone)
- Show how our/their story doesn’t work and why – let the gospel destabilize or show the weaknesses to what they trust in
- Identify that at the root of their longing they are looking for a story that works
- Show how Jesus had the same experience, but had different results (there’s hope!)
- Explain why and how Jesus accomplished what he did (Glory of God and Gospel Power)
- Show them that they cannot complete their story without God in Christ

(NOTE: There is no absolute order to this – you have to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit)

Their Story...

- Affirm what is good and true in it (All along listening for what is broken)
- Ask questions to more fully understand the “heart” in their story – to discern the longing for salvation from God
- Explain the parts of The Story that deal with the broken parts in their story and show why their story will remain unstable
- Show how and why Jesus experienced the same brokenness but overcame and can redeem their story
- Explain how their story could change because of God’s work in Christ Jesus

Their Worldview (s)

- Pay attention to how their decisions are shaped by their worldview and discover their worldview (individualism, socialism, humanism, pluralism, post-modernism, etc)
- Affirm the creational intent/good in their worldview
- Investigate with them where the world would be if everyone believed that worldview
- Show in The Story what happened with that worldview
- Show how Jesus came and redeemed what was the creational intent in that worldview
- Explain how God can redeem all of the creational intentions in their broken world views through His work in Christ

Their Emotions/State of Being

- Pay attention to people’s emotions or state of being
- Compare their behavioral and emotional state to the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19–25)
- Recognize that what comes out of a person tells you what is going on inside (Luke 6:44–45)
- If they are open, process their emotions or behavior with them and ask them if they are content with the state of life they are experiencing
- Show them the idol of their heart and how their emotions or behavior is showing them this god doesn’t work – it doesn’t produce life abundant and life eternal – freedom
- Demonstrate in The Story the same problem and then show how Jesus experienced an entirely different thing altogether
- Explain what Jesus has done to overcome this idolatry for them and how the same Spirit that was in Jesus is available to those who put their faith in the work of God in Christ Jesus

Their Questions...

Their Objections...

CONTEXTUALIZATION DEFINED

Contextualization is adapting the declaration and demonstration of the gospel in culturally adaptable forms, holding to the essence of the gospel at the same time.

"I see contextualization is adapting my communication of the gospel without changing its essential character."¹
Tim Keller

CONTEXTUALIZATION DEMONSTRATED

Consider Jesus...The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

- The true God and the essence of the gospel took on bodily form
- He came into a particular culture in a particular time in a particular form
- He was a male, a Jew, a part of the working class
- He spent 30 years living in and learning the culture before he started his public ministry

Then before he turned the mission over to his disciples he said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."²

Consider Paul in Acts...

- Acts 13:13-52 - In a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch to those who believed in the God of the Bible
- Acts 14:8-20 - In Lystra with a pagan, blue-collar crowd
- Acts 17:16-34 - In Athens at the meeting of the Areopagus (the "court" for judging new religions and foreign gods); Athens was known for its school of Philosophy

Authority

- Synagogue - The Law, the Prophets and John the Baptist
- Pagans - General Revelation - Creation
- Areopagus - Intuitive Revelation, Creation and Imago Dei

Content

- Synagogue - He tells them The (their) Story, ignores the doctrine of God, and connects the story to Christ
- Pagans - He tells them a brief part of The Story and works with the concept of God
- Areopagus - He intersected The Story and their story (including their idols, their philosophers and poets) and he both fulfilled the quest of the searching ("*the unknown god*", "*he is not far*", and "*he has given proof*"); AND he confronted their false beliefs: The God who made the world - A personal god (as opposed to pantheistic Stoicism); God had a purpose and a plan (as opposed to Chance as the Epicureans thought); Raising Him from the dead (Immortality of the soul was accepted by the Greeks, but not the resurrection of a dead body)

Appeal

- Synagogue - You need Christ to justify you
- Pagans - Turn from worthless idols that don't really provide for you or give you joy
- Areopagus - Repent from your ignorance, God will judge the world with justice by the man he appointed

In Common

- God is gracious, good and powerful (13:16-22; 14:17; 17:25, 27, 30-31)
- They are looking to themselves or gods that can't save them and it won't work (13:39; 14:15; 17:25, 27-29)
- God has broken into history to accomplish our salvation - they don't need to earn it

Also Consider Paul's circumcision of Timothy in Acts 16:1-5...so as not to offend those he was trying to reach (This is good example in light of the fact that Paul so vehemently opposed mandatory circumcision previously)

¹ http://www.redeemer2.com/themovement/issues/2004/feb/advancingthegospel_3.html

² John 20:21

Mission Implies Contextualization

There is no such thing as a non-contextualized Christianity. The minute you decide to minister the gospel you begin to 'incarnate', like Jesus did. And we, like he did, come bringing the gospel cloaked in our specific make-up, experiences, backgrounds, values and view points...basically we bring our SPECIFIC gospel informed culture into a culture. Therefore, the very forms that we ministry with and the practices that we engage in will have a Biblical form or shape AND a cultural form or shape.

"Mission is the mother of theology"³

Martin Kahler

Each time we give form or shape to the gospel, we are demonstrating our theology in a particular way in a particular context. This means we are always doing contextualization - intentionally or unintentionally - because we are always demonstrating what we believe about God (theology).

"True theology is the attempt on the part of the church to explain and interpret the meaning of the gospel for its own life and to answer questions raised by the Christian faith, using the thought, values, and categories of truth which are authentic to that place and time."⁴

Dean S. Gilliland

CONTEXTUALIZATION DIAGNOSED

To effectively contextualized the gospel in a particular culture then requires:

AWARENESS

1. Personal
 - You are bringing your own culture
 - You must become aware of who you are and how your unique make- up shapes the declaration and demonstration of the gospel
 - Pay close attention to your personal preferences as you make decisions about how to engage the culture
 - You also come with a gospel distortion (Truth or Grace emphasis) - this means you will need to continue to be transform by the gospel (see Newbigin Gauntlet)
 - Let others speak into your life regarding how you are perceived by those you are seeking to engage - this requires Listening!
2. Church Culture
 - The people who have formed the local expression of the Church or Missional Community you lead or participate in also have a culture
 - Are you aware of its uniqueness and how it differs or is similar to your culture?
 - What practices or forms have you adopted that were once timely and culturally appropriate, but are now ineffective?
 - Do you know the difference between the essentials and the nonessentials?
 - What is the perception in the community of your Church culture?
 - Again listen well in regards to how you are being perceived
3. Community Culture
 - The larger community/city you live in has a culture that permeates
 - There are also a large diversity of cultures within it
 - Part of the job of the missionary is to discern what unique cultures you are being sent to first - this may be determined by similar values (i.e. the women praying by the river in Acts 16) or by who God has granted you favor with ("man of peace")
 - NOTE: This does not mean we are to limit our reach to only one particular culture - the kingdom of God is not displayed through homogeneity, but through the diversity of cultures being redeemed
 - Get to know the people within your city - neighbors, city officials, leaders in business, education, arts...find out who the influencers are and why
 - Get to know the story/stories of your city - What has shaped it over the years? What are its wounds? What are it's strengths?

³ Martin Kahler as quoted in McKaughan, O'Brien, and O'Brien, Choosing a Future for U.S. Missions, 21.

⁴ Dean S. Gilliland, "Contextual Theology as Incarnation Mission," in the The World Among Us, 10-11

EXEGESIS

We need to exegete...culture in the same way that missionaries have been so good at doing with diverse tribal culture of previously unreached people. We need to exegete...the themes of Rolling Stones..., Dennis Rodman, Madonna, (and) David Letterman...We need to comprehend that the Spirit of the Living God is at work in these cultural expressions, preparing the hearts of men and women to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have to find, in good missionary fashion, those motifs and themes that connect with the truths of the gospel. We need to learn how to proclaim, "That which you worship as unknown, I now proclaim to you." This is the missionary vision at its best.⁵

Craig Van Gelder

Your goal is to understand the meanings of cultural patterns, rhythms and systems. You want to learn the story and how the gospel completes the narrative of the culture.

Questions to ask in this process:

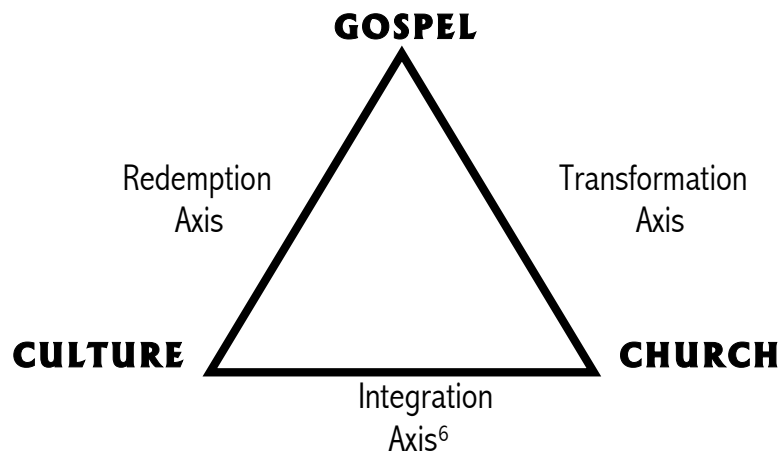
- What are the emotional needs of the elderly, families, teens, singles, men, women, children?
- What are the social, economic or educational needs of the same?
- What are the flaws and difficulties with the systems of the community?
- What is their worldview?
- What redemptive analogies best fit this culture?
- What does this culture understand about the basic components of the gospel story?
- What questions are being asked in the culture that point to their need for the gospel?

NOTE: You will have to do more than just demographic studies. You have to dig deeper into your community and become a part of it yourself – this means stepping into the rhythms of your culture on a regular basis

CONTEXTUALIZATION APPLIED

As you are transformed by the gospel and sent into your culture, your job is to bring the embodiment of the gospel to you culture in forms that are adapted to address the gospel "holes" in their stories so as to show them that their story can only be completed through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Adapting a theology of mission from missiologist Leslie Newbigin, George Hunsberber, develops 3 relationships that must occur between the church, gospel and culture:



⁵ Craig Van Gelder, ed., *Confident Witness – Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1999), 14-15

⁶ George R. Hunsberger, "The Newbigin Gauntlet," in *The Church between Gospel and Culture*, 5. Adapted by Jeff Vanderstelt

CONTEXTUALIZATION INCLUDES DECLARATION AND DEMONSTRATION

1. DECLARATION

Content: God's Story – connect the text or topic within the overarching story

Ed Clowney points out that if we ever tell a particular Bible story without putting it into the overall main Bible story (about Christ), we actually change the meaning of the particular event for us. It becomes a moralistic exhortation to 'try harder' rather than a call to live by faith in the work of Christ. There is, in the end, only two ways to read the Bible: is it basically about me or basically about Jesus? In other words, is it basically about what I must do, or basically about what he has done?

Method: Link God's Story to the People's Story – How do the gospel themes address your culture's hopes, fears, tensions? (1) Begin with familiar and show how the gospel confirms what is strong and good in the culture. Know the people's story extremely well. Show your sympathy with it. (2) But use the gospel to challenge and de-stabilize common cultural assumptions at points that they are weak or inadequate. (3) Finally, comfort and galvanize with the promises of the gospel. Show them that they can't finish their own story without God in Christ. (Taken from Tim Keller's article on being context sensitive')

2. DEMONSTRATION

It's interesting to note that in the Acts 16 passage only one of the three representative conversions took place through preaching. The other two are through a power encounter and the quality of godly character observed in community.

Maybe this is why Peter encourages the believers to “*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*”⁸ Before and after this Peter is encouraging the believers to live lives that are full of good deeds and effectively display Christ through actions.

Good Deeds: The Active Medium of the Gospel – The good news that Jesus came to preach had physically observable results (healings, miracles, loving the outcasts, etc...)

What would good news look like to your community? What are the 'signs of the kingdom' in your culture?

A New Humanity: The Visible Presence – The outcome of the gospel is a people who live together in new ways (eating together, praying together, bearing each other's burdens, sharing all they have with one another etc...)

What forms of visible expression does the church need to embody together to display the new humanity God is creating in this community?

Contextualization must continue to be informed by the Gospel and Mission of God so that we don't over adapt to our culture around us, buying into it's idols, and we don't under adapt to the culture, buying into the idols of our own Christian culture.

Contextualization [is] a delicate enterprise if ever there was one...the evangelist and mission strategist stand on a razor's edge, aware that to fall off on either side has terrible consequences...Fall to the right and you end in obscurantism, so attached to your conventional ways of practicing and teaching the faith that you veil its truth and power from those who are trying to see it through very different eyes. Slip to the left and you tumble into syncretism, so vulnerable to the impact of paganism in its multiplicity of forms that you compromise the uniqueness of Christ and concoct “another gospel which is not a gospel.”⁹

Dean S. Gilliland

⁷ http://www.redeemer2.com/themovement/issues/2004/feb/advancingthegospel_3.html

⁸ 1 Peter 3:15

⁹ Dean S. Gilliland, “Contextual Theology as Incarnation Mission,” in the *The World Among Us* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), vii.