

"CONTEXTUALIZATION"

Acts 17:22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. 23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, **TO THE UNKNOWN GOD**. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, **him declare I unto you.** KJV

Contextualization (Gospel) cross cultural adaptation/indigenization of the Gospel

Definition of context (*Merriam Webster*)

1: the parts of a discourse that surround a word or passage and can throw light on its meaning

Indiginization; Sharing the Gospel with indigenous people who have little understanding of our culture and world. Looking for commonalities.

What is a Bridge-Builder?

In college I received a minor in civil engineering. In class we learned how to design one of our world's most important structures--bridges. Bridges are fascinating, I think, because they are designed to bring things together--land masses, roads, and people. I've found my life as a Christian to be exciting for the very same reason--because now I get to be a bridge-builder for Christ. Of course, Jesus is the only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5); but, acting under His authority, Christians have the privilege of building bridges also. What kind of bridges are still left to be built? Non-Christians often have barriers that keep them from considering Christ: intellectual, cultural, and moral barriers. We can be their bridges to the gospel. Just as Jesus left heaven to come and mingle with the sinful world, He's left us with the

glorious task of creatively penetrating our world with the good news.

How does one become a bridge-builder for Christ? While it's true we need to understand theology and the gospel message, we must also understand what non-Christians believe,

So we begin now by examining one of the most "widely accepted"¹ models for contextualizing the Christian faith. It was developed by the acclaimed scholar and missiologist Paul Hiebert. His approach is called "critical contextualization"

Step 1: Exegete the host culture. Cross-cultural workers study the culture phenomenologically. They suspend judgment; they uncritically gather information about beliefs and customs of the host culture.

Step 2: Exegete Scripture. Local leaders and cross-cultural workers together find bridges from Scripture back to the host culture; this is known as the "hermeneutical bridge." Local leaders guide the community in a study of Scripture to address issues at hand.

Step 3: Community evaluates beliefs and customs. The community critically examines its traditional beliefs and customs in light of its new biblical understanding. The community may choose to:

1. retain the old practice, custom, or belief if it is not unbiblical,
2. reject the practice, custom, or belief because it is unbiblical, or
3. retain but modify the practice or belief to give it Christian meaning through appropriate rituals, actions, or symbols. Step

4: Community develops new contextualized practices. Leaders help the faith community arrange the practices and beliefs they have chosen into a ritual that expresses the Christian meaning of the event. This process may be diagramed as shown below: