

GOSPEL UNITY IN CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

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Introduction:

The big question many sincere missionaries, ministers, and church workers ask today is,

How can we effectively communicate the gospel in the midst of such a diverse cultural, ethnic, educational, political, and economic landscape? Is it possible?

Two Approaches:

1. The over contextualization of the gospel or dumbing down the gospel.
2. Bring the gospel to the actual context where it is to be preached.

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I. Defining Context and Over-Contextualization

A. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines context as “the situation in which something happens: The group and conditions that exist where and when something happens.”

B. To contextualize an idea, statement, or an event is to place it within the larger setting in which it acquires its true and complete meaning.

C. Contextualization aids comprehension.

1. A math problem may not seem practical until you see it within a story problem.

2. In evangelism, to contextualize is to tailor the presentation of the gospel to a wider sociological context in order to achieve greater understanding.

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D. The question is not whether or not we are to contextualize. In countless ways, we all contextualize the gospel and the church to its own culture. We are not first century Palestinian Jews or Gentiles.

E. The danger of over contextualizing the gospel takes place when one intentionally fits the individual customer (culture), adjusts to it, accommodates to it, or conforms to it in order to make an appealing gospel presentation.

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The Starry Night by Vincent Van Gogh



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The Starry Night by Ron English



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"In the beginning the church was a fellowship of men and women centered on the living Christ. Then the church moved to Greece, where it became a philosophy. Then it moved to Rome, where it became an institution. Next, it moved to Europe, where it became a culture. And, finally, it moved to America, where it became an enterprise."

Richard Halverson

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Some questions to ponder upon,

Is the contemporary church so immersed in the images of the culture that has abandoned the call to be contra-mundum?

Are we over-contextualizing the gospel to the point that our identity is lost?

Are we emulating the methods of corporate America without thinking if such methods are consistent with the ways of Christ?

What are we going to do?

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II. Contextualization of the Gospel in Urban Settings

A. We are preaching the gospel in 21 Century developed America.

B. What is the Gospel?

1. The good news to all people in all contexts.
 - a. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) Romans 5:17.
2. This news must be told everywhere with barely any contextualization.
3. The gospel is still a mind-blowing message in America and around the globe. It brings concepts that may be missing from people's mental frameworks.

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C. Urban contextualization takes place when:

1. The leader intentionally desires to know the people, to know about their lives, jobs, frustrations, joys, etc. This may bring a lot of discomfort, but it will be necessary.
2. The communicator is able to use cultural reference within his speech in order to illustrate a biblical truth.
3. The communicator understands the necessity to be plain with the text in order to maintain the validity, truthfulness, and seriousness of the biblical account.

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4. The communicator will intentionally avoid cultural mechanisms in order for the culture to think better of him or the gospel. We don't adapt to that which contradicts Scripture. While human culture and tradition may be negotiable, the Word of God is non-negotiable.

5. We are brave enough to consider tradition as an important historical element. This filter must be proven, though.

6. The communicator realizes that the gospel is alien to any culture at any time.

7. We confess that Scripture—not our experience—is the standard by which all things are to be evaluated.

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Conclusion

"The humble are dependent upon God, not on themselves. They humble themselves "under the mighty hand of God" (1 Peter 5:6). They abandon outcomes entirely to him. They "cast all their anxieties upon him, because he cares for them" (v. 7). We do the very best we know, we work hard, and even self-sacrificially. But we do not carry the load...In our love of Jesus and His father, we truly have abandoned our life to him." (Dallas Willard)

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