

A COMMENT ON THE DISCUSSIONS

by R. B.

All modern missionaries, from the time of Peter and Paul, do or should engage in some degree of contextualization. The incarnate Word Himself exemplified a kind of contextualization. The issue, therefore, is how far to go and in what ways. For this, we need to be discussing some general principles but also some specifics. This discussion should honor Christ by being conducted without over-generalization, misrepresentation, or combative polemics.

Ultimately, it is for each group of followers of Christ to prayerfully decide for themselves what the will of Christ is for them in this regard. The outcome, however, is going to differ according to a number of factors, and what is appropriate for a particular believer at one stage may not be appropriate later. For example, in initial evangelism, the use of majority terminology is appropriate in many settings; the evangelist has to start where people are, using what they already know in order to lead them into new knowledge, a new worldview, and a new relationship with the Lord. For the same reason, new believers find majority terminology to be appropriate in their own witnessing to friends and family, and in their initial growth. For this, Scriptures in the majority language are needed.

People in our region, however, are generally quite gregarious. They want to belong to a family, a community, and an *umma* (in this case, the universal church). To that end, many need to become "bilingual" and bicultural, so that they can relate to believers from traditional Christian communities, listen to Christian radio broadcasts, read Christian books, etc. Eventually, many of them merge into the traditional Christian community, while others remain secret believers in small fellowships within their own community.

In considering appropriate approaches, therefore, no one single model is going to serve the needs of all. That does not mean there is nothing to discuss. On the contrary, it means we need to observe ways in which the Lord is leading his various followers, and take note of several possible models. This will help new believers and experienced workers to know what the possibilities are. This will also enable others to design programs and materials suitable for each of these models.

Of one thing I am certain: there is not a single, simple answer to the question of how far to contextualize. Nor is it an issue we can responsibly ignore. May the Lord guide us.

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