

CONTEXTUALIZING THEOLOGICAL CURRICULA IN AFRICA

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Dichotomy in Africa



Symptoms?

- i. Syncretism
- ii. Corruption and impunity
- iii. Prosperity Gospel

Cause? Compartmentalization of thought systems (faith, life, academic discipline)

Result? Failure to internalize the content of our Christian faith

Road map



- i. Present data demonstrating the need for contextualizing curricula.
- ii. Propose a rationale and contextualization model from the apostle Paul.
- iii. Recommend a way forward.



ARE THE GOALS IN
OUR THEOLOGICAL
INSTITUTIONS
CONTEXTUALIZED
TO THE AFRICAN
SITUATION OR ARE
THEY GENERIC?



ARE THESE GOALS
CLEARLY
ARTICULATED OR
EVEN
UNDERSTOOD BY
THOSE IN OUR
CLASSROOMS?



IS
CONTEXTUALIZATION
FILTERING DOWN TO
THE COURSE
CONTENT AND
DELIVERY?



WHAT ABOUT THE
WORLDVIEW OF
THE STUDENTS?
IS THIS TAKEN AS
AN IMPORTANT
FACTOR IN THE
CURRICULUM?

The need for contextualizing curricula

Findings of a preliminary survey (done in 2016) of three departments of Theology in selected universities in Nairobi.

- i. Goals: Contextual in nature
Students 13%; Lecturers 40%
- i. Contextualization of course content
Students 67%; Lecturers 80%
- i. Worldview
 - Helpful: Students 44%; Lecturers 20%
 - Hinders: Students 27%; Lecturers 40%
 - Both/and: Students 26%; Lecturers 40%

Conclusion



Although some level of contextualization is taking place in the classroom, what still needs to be addressed is why it is not being effectively incorporated beyond the classroom.

An example of
contextualization
and implications
for curriculum
development

- i. Paul's speech in Athens (Acts 17:16–34) – how to use culture and worldview to present and interpret the biblical message
- ii. Background:
 - Athens
 - The Agora and Areopagus
 - The worldview of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers



Principle 1

Identify your ultimate goal

- i. What is our goal as theological educators?
The ultimate goal of theological study is to ensure that as our students move through the various stages of the educational process, they begin to develop a biblical worldview that is both clearly articulated and lived out in their context because it has been internalized.

- ii. Focus? Head, heart, hands, and the surrounding context.

Implications?

- i. The modes of expression of the biblical message are not static, but dynamic. This implies that an African Christian theology is valid.
- ii. Consequently, although some goals of theological education are generic and apply globally, the specific goals of theological education cannot be uniformly adopted across the globe but must be contextualized to meet the needs represented in that part of the world.
- iii. These goals must guide in aligning the African Christian worldview to the biblical meta-narrative.

Principle 2

Know your target context



- i. Who are you teaching and where? This will guide how you develop your philosophy, learning objectives, content, delivery methods and teaching resources.
- ii. Both geographical and digital spaces must be considered.
- iii. The rapid cultural changes also have implications for the evaluation and subsequent revision of curricula.
- iv. Western secularism vs. the African traditional worldview?

Implications?

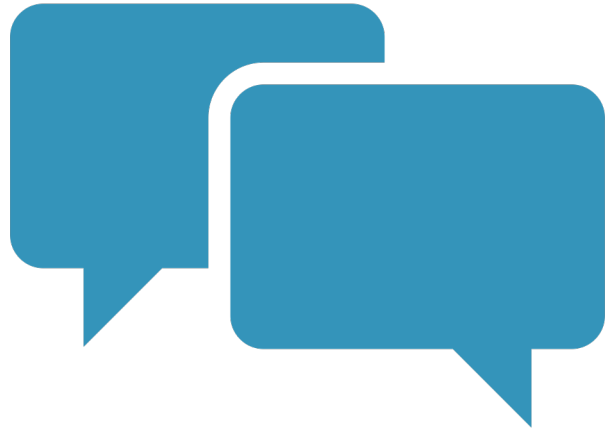
- i. Contextual relevance must go beyond the course content to the modes of delivery.
- ii. As the curriculum and the courses are developed and implemented, the educator must consciously keep in mind the elements of worldview that are essential in guiding valid contextualization questions and the need to use strategies that will encourage holistic learning.

Questions to ask



This must be done intentionally.

- i. How does worldview influence a student's understanding of how this curriculum/course/topic relates to his/her faith, life (within the particular cultural context) and academic discipline?
- ii. What objectives should the educator incorporate in the curriculum (including the course outlines) that challenge students to begin to contextualize?
- iii. Does the course content uncover contextual issues that require reflective analysis?



Principle 3

Create a dialogue between the biblical context and the target context

- i. Every individual is situated within a certain cultural context and lives in general conformity to that context.
- ii. Most people in Africa today have a cultural background that is diverse, with key elements ranging from the traditional to the modern.
- iii. A study of our target culture, as well as the subcultures within the larger culture, is invaluable for helping one begin to recognize points of dialogue.

Implications?

Dialogue through

- i. Mother tongue translations
- ii. Stories from the students' contexts
- iii. Theological systems etc.

Principle 4

Determine what is negotiable
and what is non-negotiable



i. Some value systems of Africans have a positive correlation in the Bible.

ii. Caution!!

Contextualization carries a very real danger of sliding into syncretism. Syncretism occurs when religious and cultural forms are combined with the biblical message without any regard for whether or not they align with biblical truth.

Africans need to formulate theological concepts in the language of Africa. But theology itself in its essence must be left alone. The Bible must remain the basic source of Christian theology. Evangelical Christians know of only one theology – Biblical Theology – though it may be expressed in the context of each cultural milieu.

(Kato, 1985:12)



Training
of faculty



Research,
writing
and
publishing



Sharing of
resources

What next?

The ball is now in our court as theological educators to ensure that the Church of the future is well grounded and that the faith and practice of its members conform to biblical truth.

