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Globalization and contextualization: Reframing the task of contextualization in the twenty-first century

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Abstract

In the face of globalization, approaches to contextualization developed in the late 20th century must be expanded upon. Two main developments of globalization are examined and implications for contextualization are drawn. First, the increased interconnectivity of the global church and the McDonaldization of ministry imply that the focus of contextualization must be increasingly upon processing, evaluating, and rejecting or assimilating these global Christian influences. Second, globalization had led to the hybridization of cultures from which four implications are drawn. Contextualization must be focused more on understanding and responding appropriately to rapid social change now, and less on preserving or transforming the "traditional culture" of the past. Contextualization must be more radically rooted in biblical truth and identity. Contextualization must reevaluate the place of the catholicity of the church in relation to theological and ecclesial traditions. Finally, contextualization might be reconceived as a process of hybridization as opposed to homogenization or fragmentation.

Keywords

Contextualization, globalization, culture, hybridization, glocalization

Robert Schreiter once pointedly wrote, "Globalization is inevitable; hence eontextual-ization becomes essential" (1993: 67). But the question we faee is *What kind of contex-tualization?* I believe that the goal of contextualization remains the same, namely

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faithful communication of, reflection upon, and living out the Christian faith in ways appropriate to specific contexts. But in what ways do we need to reexamine and reframe the task of contextualization in the face of globalization? The ever-accelerating and intensifying phenomenon of globalization has been radically reshaping lifestyles and redefining our understandings of culture and ethnic identity. Furthermore, Christianity has become a truly global faith with globalization increasing the interconnectivity among Christians worldwide. These developments raise complex questions about the task of contextualization. The thesis of this article is that the impact of globalization in recent decades calls for a reframing of the task of contextualization in many, if not most contemporary contexts.

From ancient times people around the globe have been connected in different ways. However, since the late twentieth century the speed, frequency, and intensity of this connectedness has increased exponentially. Nayan Chanda (2007: xiii) speaks of the increasing *velocity, volume, variety*, and *visibility* of global interconnectedness. Observers such as Roland Robertson describe globalization as "compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (1992: 8). As time and space separating peoples are compressed, interconnectivity is increased.

Early approaches to indigenization and contextualization focused largely on the translation of the gospel and discovering new expressions of the Christian faith among non-Christian peoples in more or less well-defined and often rather isolated contexts. Questions tended to dominate the discussion, such as, How can we effectively communicate the Gospel? and How and to what extent should the gospel preserve or reshape traditional culture? or How can the culture be transformed to more faithfully reflect the kingdom of God?[1] What is suggested here is not that these questions are now irrelevant or that conventional approaches to contextualization be jettisoned. But rather for the majority of the world impacted by globalization new additional models are necessary to address the new challenges brought by globalization.

This article address two major developments related to globalization from which five implications will be drawn for a reframing of the task of contextualization: first, the increased interconnectivity of the global church and the McDonaldization of ministry, and second the hybridization of culture.

Increased interconnectivity of the global church and the McDonaldization of ministry

Globalization has led to increased interactions between churches internationally. Recent decades have witnessed an explosion in short-term mission trips, international partnerships, international Christian mass media, global networks, and a proliferation of programs and ministry models being promoted internationally. One way to analyze these interactions is through the lens of Arjun Appadurai's (1996) global flows or "-scapes":

> Globalization's impact of the church expresses itself through the various global flows: *Mediascapes* (flow of worship style, music, and media), *Ethnoscapes* (flow of cultural and ethnic influences), *Ideoscapes* (flow of theological concepts, leadership styles, and ministry

> models), *Eduscapes* (flow of spiritual formation and discipleship training methods), and *Financescapes* (flow of foreign resourees and money). (Ro, 2013: 277–78)

Historically the missionary enterprise was conducted largely by religious orders or mission agencies. They were the experts and the nearly sole link between sending churches and the churches being planted abroad. However, in recent decades this picture has changed dramatically. One study revealed that nearly half of all American churches with over 2,000 weekend worshippers act as their own sending agency for some or all of their missionaries and agree or strongly agree that God's instrument of mission is the local church and not mission agencies (Priest, 2010). Affluence and the ease of travel and communication have made it possible for local congregations to participate more directly in cross-cultural mission efforts. In what Robert Wuthnow calls the "globalization of American Christianity," roughly 1.6 million Americans participate in church-sponsored international short-term mission trips and American churches spend nearly $4 billion annually on overseas ministries (Wuthnow, 2009: 1, 170–71).

> Nearly all U.S. congregations are involved in some kind of international ministry, whether it be eollecting money for global hunger programs, sponsoring missionaries, or working direetly with international nongovernmental agencies. Congregations are increasingly flnding ways to partner with ministries in other eountries. (p. 235)

The widespread impact of short-term missions is further illustrated in studies conducted by Robert Priest. For example, "In a sample survey of 551 Protestant pastors in Lima [Peru], a majority (58%) reported that their congregation had hosted a visiting group of short-term missionaries from abroad during their current pastorate" (Priest, 2007: 180). Furthermore, Majority World churches have not only become a missionary sending foree (Moon, 2013; Jaffarian, 2004), but churches in South Korea, Singapore, and other parts of Asia are also sending short-term workers in large numbers. A survey of 672 Protestant pastors in Thailand revealed that an astonishing 51% had hosted short-term teams from South Korea (Priest, 2008: iv).

In addition to short-term missions thousands of international partnerships exist between denominations, congregations, and other religious organizations. Some 85% of megachurches have direct international partnerships, 58% shared material resources, and 95% of the pastors were in favor of more partnerships (Priest, 2010). These relationships have become a source of resource-sharing and social capital for the participants.

Globalization of Christian influence is advanced not only by congregations and denominations that support local efforts, but also by parachurch organizations and megachurches that propagate particular ministry tools, models, and programs as keys to effectiveness. This might be called the *McDonaldization of ministry.* The widespread presence of McDonald's restaurants throughout the world epitomizes values of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control; thus the term *McDonaldization* has been coined to describe one feature of globalization (Ritzer, 1993). Evangelistic tools, discipleship methods, leadership development, and a host of other highly

standardized programs are being promoted worldwide through seminars and literature, usually promising results (if not financial incentives). Sueh programs are often well funded and seek to hire the most gifted church workers with salaries that local churches could never match. Transdenominational ehurch networks have also developed on an international scale. The Willow Creek Association for example claims to represent 100,000 leaders, from 10,000+ churches, speaking 45+ languages, in 300+ cities, and over 100 countries (Willow Creek Association, 2014).

Here too Majority World churches are involved. The Singapore-based organization Intentional Disciple Making Churches (IDCM) has had participants from 23 countries at its training seminars and is creating a global alliance with the vision "to establish 20,000 disciple-making churches in 50 gateway cities by 2020" (IDCM, 2014). Jonathan Ro's (2013) fascinating study of globalization's influence on urban young professional churches in China documents not only adaptation of Western worship and leadership styles, but in one case the embracing of Reformed theology in the Puritan tradition. He also describes one church's adoption of a discipleship-training program and philosophy developed by SaRang Church, one of Korea's largest megachurches.

One West African church leader confided that pastors in his city could attend a different conference nearly every week of the year sponsored by some outside ministry attempting to promote their particular method or program. This has created in many cases a bewildering array of options that appear modern and forward-looking. Local believers are at times overwhelmed and unable to adequately evaluate the appropriateness of such options or contextualize them to their situation. Though most of these programs are well meaning and many are indeed helpful, they rarely have an understanding of local cultures or contextualization. They more typically propagate cookie-cutter solutions with little sensitivity to complex local challenges.

We must add to this the pervasive influence of international Christian mass media via publications, radio, television, and the Internet. Jimmy Swaggart, for example, is translated into 11 languages and broadcast in over 104 countries (Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, 2014). Popular Christian books from and authors, mostly from the West, are translated and made available inexpensively in the Majority World. For example, according to evangelist Reinhard Bonnke's website, "185 million copies of CfaN follow-up literature have been published in 103 languages and printed in 55 countries. Millions of books have been printed and freely 'seeded' in nations around the world" (CfaN, 2014). In a survey of 2,826 Christians in Kenya and Central Africa Republic informants indicated their favorite author. The international diversity of authors named evidenced the impact of globalization. Some 33% of CAR respondents and 55% of Kenyan respondents named a non-African author as their favorite. Ben Carson and Joel Osteen topped the list in Kenya (Priest, 2012). Global Christian media often promotes a wide variety of teachings that can be far beyond historic Christian doctrine and tradition. The so-called prosperity gospel of health and wealth, represented by preachers such as Osteen and Bonnke, has been widely promoted through television, radio, publishing, and mass campaigns. Global Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity especially—now comprising about one in four of the world's Christians—feed from these streams of influence.[2]

What this means is that churches of the majority world are experiencing, in addition to the already disorienting influences of globalization, a tsunami of relationships, workers, programs, and agendas from Christians abroad. They bring new ideas, new choiees, new technologies, and sometimes new eeonomic opportunities. Imported programs and ministry philosophies are often enthusiastieally and uncritically adopted. Western ways can appear cosmopolitan and forward-looking in comparison to seemingly backward and narrow traditional ways. Fenggang Yang illustrates this in describing the Christianity of young professionals in China:

> we can see that MeDonald's and Christianity share similar symbolic meanings to the educated young Chinese: modernity and cosmopolitanism. For the Chinese, eating at McDonald's is a sign of being in tune with modern culture and offers a sense of connecting with the outside, Western world. Similarly, believing in Christianity is accepting a universal religion that has been predominant in the modern West. Both McDonald's and Christianity offer a sense of individual freedom, civility, responsibility, and status for the yuppies in urban China. Moreover, both have become accessible during the process of China's market transition and global integration.
>
> . . . in a symbolic sense, adopting Christianity and eating at McDonald's make the Chinese feel they have gained an equal footing with the Americans and other Westerners as modern world citizens.
>
> . . . By frequenting McDonald's and converting to Christianity, young urban Chinese get psychological peace, security, and certainty. (Yang, 2005: 438)[3]

Such attitudes are not limited to China. They evidence questionable associations with Christianity as a modern cosmopolitan religion and the temptation for young churches to uncritically adopt imported programs and ministry models. These developments raise important new questions about the role of contextualization.

The implication of this development is that the focus of contextualization must be increasingly upon processing, evaluating, and rejecting or assimilating these global Christian influences.

Though the influence of globalization is a widely discussed and researched topic, little has been written to address discernment in processing global *Christian* forces upon local churches. Many of the same theological and social scientific tools that have been developed in common models of contextualization can be utilized in this process. The focus here, however, is less on transforming aspects of the contemporary culture (necessary as that may still be) and rather more on managing the barrage of outside influences and discerning their real value for their local situation. Many times churches with meager resources welcome any assistance or program according to the motto, "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth." But the gift horse may in fact end up to be a Trojan horse bringing unintended negative consequences.

Seldom do short-term teams, partner churches, network leaders, media celebrities, and the international promoters of ministry programs contextualize their approaches. Although we might hope that these agents become better informed of the theological, historical, and cultural dynamics at play and become more discerning about their role,

it is not likely to happen any time soon. Indeed it is questionable if they are willing or even able to do so. Churches, especially in the majority World, are often tempted to become enamored, overwhelmed, or overpowered by these influences. They must be instructed in the process of contextualization so as to most appropriately discern how to manage these influences so as to effectively advance the cause of the kingdom in their given context.

Hybridization of culture

The second major development resulting from globalization is its enormous impact upon culture. There is little question that globalization is creating great changes in local cultures and identities, but what is the nature of those changes?

Theories of globalization

The most common interpretations of globalization's impact on culture include *homogenization, heterogenization* (or *fragmentation*), and *hybridization* theories. Homogenization theories argue that globalization is causing cultures to become increasingly similar. In the words of Gwynne Dyer, "Globalization puts everybody's culture into an industrial strength blender" (cited in Stahl, 2007: 335). One example of this is George Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society* (1993). *Fragmentation* or *heterogenization* theories argue that globalization increases cultural differences, tensions, and conflict as some feel threatened and resist the forces of globalization attempting to reinforce their local identity. Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1997) is perhaps the best-known example of this.

There is of course some element of truth to each of these theories, but most observers believe that both homogenization and heterogenization theories are too simplistic and have many problems. Robertson comments,

> It is not a question of *either* homogenization *or* heterogenization, but rather of ways in which both of these two tendencies have become features of life across much of the late-twentieth-century world. In this perspective the problem becomes that of spelling out the ways in which homogenizing and heterogenizing tendencies are mutually implicative. . . . there are ongoing, calculated attempts to combine homogeneity with heterogeneity and universalism with particularism. (1995: 27)

Robertson suggests the term *glocalization* to describe what others call hybridization.

Hybridization refers to the process whereby the local is fused with the global. We are not all becoming the same, and the local retains a certain priority. People do not entirely surrender their cultural identities in the face of global influences, but they do adapt and adopt some of them, assimilating elements from other cultures and rejecting others. Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1995, 2009) has made one of the strongest cases for this view claiming, "Hybridity has become a regular, almost ordinary fixture in popular and mainstream culture—widely recognized as the 'trend to blend'" (2009: viii).

Not only media, marketing, commerce, and education, but especially migration has led to the hybridization of cultures. Today 232 million people or 3.2% of the world's population live in a country other than where they were born (United Nations, 2013). What is the cultural identity of a Filipina who has lived 20 years in the USA and travels yearly back to the Philippines? What is the culture of her son who was four years old when he came to the States? Depending on where they are, with whom they are speaking, and what the issue at hand is, they may reflect various cultures. Thus many people experience multiple identities further complicating the concept of culture altogether. Robert Schreiter describes how local contexts have not only become hybridized, but also *deterritorialized* and *hyperdifferentiated*, thus "people are now participating in different realities at the same time—there is multiple belonging" (1997: 26).

Urbanization is another factor eontributing to hybridization. As of 2012 over 53% of the world's population live in cities (World Bank, 2014). Most great urban centers today are very diverse with various ethnic and linguistic minorities. Contact between these diverse populations in the workplace, neighborhoods, schools, and restaurants also contributes to hybridization. What was once labeled "foreign" now is local. Yet, many such groups vigorously seek to retain some measure of their ethnic identity and heritage.

Luke Martell (2010: 89–104) suggests that even the concept of hybridity may be too simplistic to describe the effects of globalization upon cultures. Hybridity is experienced in many active and passive ways by different peoples, and is subject to many diverse and unequal forces, some not so benign. This means that no single model will be adequate, but rather each cultural context will need to be studied and understood on its own terms.

The concept of culture

We must examine for a moment more carefully the very concept of culture before moving on to the question of contextualization. From earliest human history people have been aware of differences between the language, tradition, values, and beliefs of various peoples, which have often been the cause of both curiosity and conflict. But the ways in which people have described and categorized these differences has varied. Under the influence of nineteenth-century European Romanticism and nationalism the concept of culture developed as a distinct and essential feature of human identity. This essentialist understanding of culture claims that cultures are well-defined entities, more or less self-contained, bounded social systems, clearly differentiated from one another. The culture defined a person's identity, values, and behavior. Along with this came the idea of the "noble savage," nativism, primordialism, and that traditional cultures should not be corrupted by outside influences; all thoroughly Western notions.[4] Similarly essentialist concepts of ethnicity (Barth, 1998), religion (Masuzawa, 2005), and even the notion of "tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1984) developed. In the mid-twentieth century as many Majority World peoples gained independence from colonial powers as they sought to recover their past cultural identity or create a new ethnic identity to redefine themselves in the postcolonial era.

Thus concepts of culture and ethnicity have been constructed, defined, redefined, debated, and manipulated for a variety of good and bad reasons. The process of globalization has made all the more evident the shifting and evolving nature of human cultures and identities.[5] Cultures are not museum pieces to be preserved at any price, "nor do most people in developing countries want to lead an 'authentic' unspoiled life of isolated poverty" (Legrain, 2006: 39).[6] All cultures not only change, but globalization, and with it hybridization, has dramatically increased the rate and depth of change. Indeed, if we consider culture-change something normal and natural, then "traditional culture" need not be pitted against global influences; local *versus* universal (Robertson, 1995: 33).

This culture change does create tension and at times conflict. Roland Robertson speaks of *relativization* as the "challenge of coexisting with other—often very different and perhaps antagonistic—cultures. Globalization brings cultures into closer contact and thus often leads to the sense that 'one's own' culture is under threat" (2000: 60). This is evidenced, for example, in fundamentalist religious movements that Robertson calls a *globaphobic* response (ibid.).[7] He believes that relativization is "a central—perhaps *the* central—sociological and anthropological phenomenon of the globalization process and of what is increasingly being described as the global age" (ibid.: 61).

Suffice it to say, "culture" is not a hard and fast, static given of human identity as often popularly understood. Nevertheless, essentialist understandings of culture have framed much of the modern missions movement's conception of culture.

Christian missions and culture

Generally speaking, Christian missionaries historically sought to replace "heathen" ways of life with what they believed to be a universal Christian way of life, namely their own. This has been called the *tabula rasa* or cultural replacement approach. As essentialist concepts of culture developed, missionaries came to be criticized for being destroyers of traditional cultures. The association of missionaries with colonialism along with postcolonial reaffirmations of traditional culture further fueled criticism of missionary attempts to change culture. The cultural replacement approach of missions came to be increasingly rejected (at least in theory), so that by the second half of the twentieth century missionary methods emphasizing enculturation and contextualization were being advocated that sought to respect, preserve, or refine local cultures.

Paul Hiebert's "critical contextualization" (1987) became a widely adopted model of transforming culture. The goal was to develop biblically faithful expressions of Christianity while preserving as much of the traditional culture as possible. Local theologies and ethnotheologies developed in the wake of postcolonial efforts to redefine local identities. Much in the same spirit that Western hegemonic political powers were rejected, the hegemony of Western theology was also often rejected. Meanwhile evangelicals advanced pragmatic mission strategies such as Donald McGavran's "homogeneous unit principle" and Ralph Winter's "unreached people group" and Frontier Missions movement. All these developments—though quite different in their ambitions—were clearly rooted in essentialist understandings of eulture (Rynkiewich, 2011a).[8]

Although there still remain some peoples who are relatively isolated from influences of globalization and for whom common approaches to contextualization are still relevant, they are clearly more and more the exceptions. Christian anthropologists such as Michael Rynkiewich (2002, 2011a) and Brian Howell (2006) have argued for a break with essentialist understandings of culture in the missionary enterprise and more particularly in the task of contextualization. Rynkiewich claims that "missiology as it is taught in colleges and seminaries now, tends to be based on an outdated anthropology that is recommended to missionaries for a world that no longer exists" (2011b: xii). He posits not a competing model to what he calls the *standard missiological model*, but rather a complementary one that views culture as contingent, constructed, and contested (2002: 315–16). According to Howell globalization has hybridized local Christian identity:

> as Christians throughout the world become more integrated into a transnational community made up of believers and they begin to identify themselves with aspects of this community, they will draw upon both local and translocal systems of knowledge to construct an identity that serves to connect them with whatever community they find most relevant to their economic, social, political and cultural context. (2006: 312)

What are the implications of this for contextualization? There are at least four.

First, contextualization must be focused more on understanding and responding appropriately to rapid social change now, and less on preserving or transforming the "traditional culture" of the past. Hiebert's model of critical contextualization allowed for social transformation, but in light of rapid culture change and hybridization a more robust model of contextualization is called for that guides the church in the context of cultural change. Globalization has so accelerated the process of social change, and so bombarded us with an array of often bewildering new ideas, values, technologies, and lifestyles, that we often feel like helpless, confused victims of irresistible forces. Contextualization must help the church understand, process, and navigate these influences.

Christians believe that God remains in control and that even in the midst of rapid social change he desires his people to be agents of his love, righteousness, and hope. Contextual theologies and practices must focus less on evaluating and transforming cultural practices and identities of the past. Rather they must focus more on how the forces of globalization and culture change can be channeled and processed to produce a more just and verdant society of the present and future. But this raises the question of how to accomplish this.

Second, contextualization must be more radically rooted in biblical truth and identity. Contextualization has often been conceptualized as a dialogue between biblical text and cultural context (e.g. Nichols, 1987). However, because the culture is continually and rapidly changing, and because societies are increasingly multicultural and hybridizing, there is no clearly fixed "culture" with which to dialogue. Simon Kwan describes this dilemma regarding the hybrid cultural context of Hong Kong: "Who then is the Hongkongese? In

short, s/he is Chinese but not Chinese, is a westerner but not a westerner, is Asian but not Asian. The local identity is strongly ambiguous and highly hybridized" (2004: 62). Therefore, he continues, "the local meaning of *contextual theology* is equally ambiguous, depending on which discursive group during which period is making the definition" (ibid.). Though Hong Kong's history makes it perhaps an extreme example of hybridity, it illustrates how the ambivalence of ethnic identity makes the idea of contextual theology ambivalent.

Hybridization means that the "context" of contextualization is ever shifting under the contextualizer's feet. Or to switch metaphors, one no longer has two fixed points with which to triangulate. There remains only the fixed point of Scripture by which contextualization can seek to guide the process of culture change. This reality pushes the contextualizer to a more radical and more courageous return to Scripture and a more thoroughgoing surrender of his or her own (presumed) cultural moorings and assumptions. Security and identity cannot be found by clinging to some primal cultural identity irrevocably rooted in the human soul. Globalization's impact on culture unmasks all such inadequate identities, which are the root of so much human division and conflict. For the Christian that identity can only be found in the restoration of the *imago Dei* through the redemptive work of Christ and the new creation of the Spirit. While local identities should not and cannot be entirely abandoned, Eloise Hiebert Meneses nevertheless rightly reminds us that "We are not truly followers of Jesus unless we relinquish the total hold that family and ethnicity would have upon us, and belong in the first instance to Christ" (2012: 72).

Essentialist understandings of culture have tended to tip the scales of contextualization more in the direction of the "indigenization principle" than the "pilgrim principle" to use Andrew Walls's terms. But in our current age of globalization the church must reassert its pilgrim nature. It must on the one hand prophetically challenge uncritical submission to the forces of globalization, and on the other hand challenge the naïve defense of "traditional culture." While no Christian or church can exist apart from the contingencies of a specific culture, Christianity cannot be *identified* with that culture. We must ask: what does a *kingdom culture* look like as it takes shape in any specific local context? Seasoned with the grace, truth, and righteousness of the gospel of Jesus Christ the church will be a faithful sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom in its location. Given the complexity of culture in a globalizing world, faithfully fulfilling this mandate requires not only the tools of theology, but the tools of social analysis become more important than ever.

Third, contextualization must reevaluate the place of the catholicity of the church in relation to theological and ecclesial traditions. For sure, ecclesial and theological traditions reflect the historical and cultural developments of their originators. They are no less constructed than the concept of culture. They have also been the source of conflict and division in the Body of Christ. Nevertheless, broadly and judiciously understood ecclesial traditions may offer an additional orientation point, if not stability in navigating Christian identity in the midst of rapid social disequilibration and facing the flood of imported programs and agendas. The value and role of ecclesial tradition including

creeds, liturgies, and polity must be further explored and rediscovered in the task of contextualization to regain a sense of the catholicity of the church (Van Engen, 2006).

As Robert Schreiter rightly observes, "People may aspire to live in and experience culture as an integrated whole, but globalization only increases the less-than-integrated experience, the experience of conflict, ambiguity, and partial belonging" (1997: 129). Discovering anew the importance of beliefs and practices that are shared among Christians historically and internationally can provide some sense of transcendence and stability in the midst of change and uncertainty. In the words of Kam Ming Wong,

> when we speak of catholicity that is grounded in God's attributes, we neither refer to a literal geographic "spatialization" nor to some form of cultural homogeneity. Rather, it inherently carries a sense of exceeding limits, of penetrating all dimensions of existence, and of transcending natural or social divisions between people as well as the boundaries of time and spaee to the always beyond. (Wong, 2010: 464)

Globalization's shrinkage of boundaries and compression of the world can create a greater appreciation of the church universal and our common relationship to Jesus Christ. This transcendent dimension gives life to local expressions of the church and can unify believers in the midst of their diversity.

Finally, contextualization might be reconceived as o process of hybridization as opposed to homogenization or fragmentation. To be clear, this is not a call for a syncretistic hybridization of Christianity with non-Christian religions or practices, but rather a hybridization of local, historic, and intercultural expressions of the Christian faith. Hybrid theologies address local needs and employ local thought forms, while also learning from the theological insights of other Christians across time and space, thus leading to greater faithfulness to the gospel, greater relevance to the context, and greater unity.

What Hiebert called the "era of non-contextualization" might be understood as a homogenization approach to (non-)contextualization. Western culture, ecclesial forms, and theology were assumed to be superior, universal, and culture-free. With minor adaptations it was simply translated and imposed upon mission churches with a more or less homogenizing intention for the church global—at least along denominational lines.

In reaction to this homogenizing, by the 1970s there was an explosion of local theologies that felt they had little to learn from hegemonic Western theology, creeds, or traditions. Churches sought local identities that had some continuity with lost "traditional culture."[9] This development is comparable to fragmentation theories of globalization: the global church and its theology became fragmented into local expressions, resisting almost *anything* that appeared to be foreign, Western, or making universal claims.

But this trajectory leaves little that unites Christians everywhere and gives little place to the culturally transcendent nature of the gospel. True Christian contextualization cannot be primarily about preserving or rediscovering lost identities, which might only isolate the church from true Christian ecumenism and unity. Rather, as noted above, it must be about discovering authentic local expressions of Christian faith that stand in some continuity with the past and across cultural boundaries, rooted in the biblical message and a common relationship to Christ.

Schreiter describes globalization in our current era as "a quest for the bridges between the global and the local" (1993: 83). This is precisely what contextualization must do for the church. Just as some globalization theorists speak of *glocalization* (e.g. Robertson, 1995), so too contextualization must involve a *glocalization* of the church (Van Engen, 2006). Much like cultural hybridity in which cultures and identities are a mixture of the local and the global, a hybrid approach to contextualization will do the same. It will affirm the importance of locality, in that churches are free to express themselves in ways appropriate to their context and reflect theologically in local thought forms and address local issues. At the same time it will appreciate and assimilate the broader theology and traditions of the church, throughout history and across cultures. Contextualization as a process of hybridization will bring together the church local and the church global.

In this way any church local can be enriched by the church global, while retaining local relevance and identity. In a sense this already has been occurring. Any given local church is already to some extent both local and global, a hybrid of traditional local culture and features of broader Christian traditions shared by churches historically and internationally (Engelsviken, 2011). But this process must now advance with greater intentionality and deeper reflection. Local expressions of Christianity must still be explored utilizing familiar methods of contextualization. But such approaches alone will no longer be adequate.

To cite Wong again,

> No church in a given culture may isolate itself from other churches in other cultures, declaring itself sufficient to itself and to its own culture. Every church must be open to all other churches. The local does not disappear, for it is never absorbed by the catholic; at the same time, the catholic is not a domain unto itself or a space in its own right, completely divorced from the local. (2010: 468)

This observation applies no less to the church of the West, which is tempted to excuse itself from this process. In appreciation of new expressions of the faith from the Majority World, it too must be open to a contextualization of hybridization, uncovering blind spots, enriching its appreciation of the gospel, and expanding its understanding of the kingdom.[10] What new theological insights can be appreciated? What fresh spiritual dynamics need to be assimilated? What can be learned regarding engagement with non-Christian religions or about suffering? Already the growth of many migrant churches has stimulated renewal in Western contexts. Western churches may acknowledge in theory that they have much to learn from Majority World brothers and sisters, but in practice a spirit of superiority generally prevails.[11] Hybridity in contextualization will mean that also the Western church processes and adapts influences from the church global in ways meaningful to its context and advancing biblical faithfulness.

Conclusion

Contextualization will always attend to local needs and creative new expressions of the church. Hybridization has made cultural boundaries porous, but has not entirely

removed them. Cultural differences are not as fixed and impermeable as one thought, but do they still impact identity, communication, and expression. Cross-cultural workers will still do well to learn the local languages, customs, beliefs, and traditions of the people with whom they work. Many aspects of contextualization as advocated in the late twentieth century are still important.

But those tools and concepts must be adapted to address the new challenges as outlined in this essay. The growth of Christianity as a truly global faith, the enormous interconnectivity between Christians globally, and the way that globalization has changed the way we understand culture all mean that the challenge of contextualization is also changing. These processes underscore more than ever that the task of contextualization is never completed, as it must continually readdress ever more rapidly changing contexts.

Contextualization must all the more emphasize the transcendent dimension of Christian experience, whereby the Spirit creates the church in its particularity *and* gives it an identity as part of the universal family of God with Christ as its Head. It is from this spiritual center outward that the process of contextualization moves. In the turbulence and disorientation of globalization, that center must never be lost.[12]

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Notes

1. The process was often led by missionaries, but over time local believers took the initiative to contextualize their faith, often spawning independent movements. Churches in the West recognized that they too must continually recontextualize the communication of, reflection upon, and expression of their faith in the context of an increasingly secular and post-Christian society.
2. According to a Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2006) random sample study conducted in ten countries on four continents, "Majorities of Pentecostals in all 10 countries surveyed agree that God will grant good health and relief from sickness to believers who have enough faith, and in nine of the countries most Pentecostals say that God will grant material prosperity to all believers who have enough faith." Of *all* Christians in Nigeria, 96% believe that God will grant prosperity and 95% that he will grant healing.
3. For a descriptive study of globalization and Korean and American Christian influences on young professional churches in China see Ro (2013).
4. In the words of Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Nativist nostalgia, in short, is largely fueled by that Western sentimentalism so familiar after Rousseau; few things, then, are less native than nativism in its current forms" (1992: 69).
5. "ft is no longer possible to treat societies as if they were uniform, bounded, and isolated from world history, trends, and technologies" (Rynkiewich, 2011a: 164).
6. "It is odd, to put it mildly, that many on the left support multiculturalism in the West but advocate cultural purity in the developing world—an attitude they would tar as fascist if proposed for the United States" (Legrain, 2006: 39).
7. Mark Juergensmeyer (2008) argues that so-called religious violence is often a form of rebellion against globalizing forces led by movements using religion for legitimation.

8. Liberation theologies that developed in the 1970s might be eonsidered an exception because they rejected static views of culture. However, their focus was less on culture per se and more on transformation of social structures in the struggle for justice.
9. For example, it has been argued that globalization contributed to the emergence of African Initiated Churches (Venter, 1998).
10. Darrell Whiteman's third purpose of contextualization is particularly apropos here: "to develop contextualized expressions of the Gospel so that the Gospel itself will be understood in ways the universal church has neither experienced nor understood before, thus expanding our understanding of the kingdom of God" (1997: 4).
11. For the most part Western theologians have continued to either ignore theology originating in the Majority World or view it as exotic (Tienou, 2006).
12. The author is indebted to Harold Netland and Michael Rynkiewich for reading a draft of this article and giving helpful input.

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