

Editorial: Taking the Bull by the Horns

The focus of this entire issue is on the enormous, exciting and crucial challenge of mission contextualization, done in terms of the underlying vision of the final frontiers. Perhaps there is no greater challenge in missions today than proper Gospel contextualization, a task filled with countless complexities.

Dr. Hesselgrave calls attention to the “decontextualization” factor—the process that will help us get an understanding of the authentic Gospel, which is really what we need since that, and nothing short of that, is what we want to take to the unreached nations. Hesselgrave also reminds us of “relevancy,”—the complex factor that will help contextualizers make sense to the target people and recipients.

All of this is absolutely apropos for missions today. The kind of challenges we face in frontier missions, require more than ransack reading, especially about this crucial subject. Our task requires the best contextualization efforts, doing authentic and relevant Gospel communication, and carrying out the best Church planting efforts of its kind, perhaps in all of history.

Furthermore, we must attempt to do it right (without much error) from the start. The lateness of the hour prohibits the luxury of mistakes, (at least not repeating the old ones), unless of course we’re not really serious about the task nor finishing it anytime soon.

Robertson McQuilkin in his powerful booklet *The Great Omission* (Baker 1984), like a modern day prophet, asks the haunting question of why so much still remains to be done. In view of the more than sufficient resources and all time that has elapsed, why have so many Chris-

tian seemingly refused to do much of anything about fulfilling the Great Commission? Why the Great Omission of the Great Commission?

We may not remember the five or so reasons given, plus the clear exposures of each, but one thing is sure, we need to add an additional reason: *Failure of Proper Contextualization*. Literally millions of people, clustered in thousands of people groups (ethnolinguistic peoples as they are now called) still haven’t heard because they have little or no access to the Gospel and so remain without hope, not only because of our lack of concern and love, but because we have failed to properly contextualize the Good News.

Contextualization Failure

History is replete with examples of our failures in this crucial mission necessity. In this issue take a good look at Ralph Winter’s article in on the history of cross-cultural mission communication. It seems that from the birth of the Christian movement, and throughout its expansion, *including* much of mission efforts today, we have failed in proper Gospel contextualization. Except for a few isolated cases here or there, it seems that we have regularly presented the Gospel *a nuestro modo* (according to our own ways), virtually as second nature, without properly contextualizing it for the people *a su modo* (according to their ways). Past failures in contextualizing the Gospel, even dismissing its immense importance, has been one reason the unreached nations and peoples remain unevangelized to this day.

Knowing our Enemy

“But even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age

has blinded, who do not believe lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.” (2 Cor. 4:3-4)

Unless we who are in missions *learn and apply* the all important lessons of contextualization, we only aid and abet this blinding phenomena.

Could it be that good contextualizing takes the bull (the enemy) by the horns and disarms him of his main weapon?

Regardless of our theological slants, or our missiological differences, it is high time to to take action, remove the blinders and become successful at our mission task.

Of course all of this implies an essential prerequisite understanding of the people who would receive the Gospel. “Know your audience” is absolutely crucial for frontier missions. Ignorance of proper contextualization in a frontier mission situation may not only result in wasted effort, but may be outright dangerous to life and limb. Think of the thousands of Muslim and tribal groups and a host of other peoples that still remain to be disciplined. Failure to effectively contextualize the Gospel, or to simply dismiss it as inconsequential, among the majority of the unreached peoples (perhaps in all cases) is to take your life into your hands.

Someone has said: “Today there are no “easy” fields left.” Prior generations, including myself (having been a missionary from 1964 to 1981 in Southern Mexico), were able to go to the easy fields (in terms of worldview distance and the deep rootedness of dominant religions). But for today’s generation the remaining mission fields are more challenging, complex and fraught with danger.

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