

Chapter IV The Contextualization Process

The Development, Usage and Meaning of Contextualization

In the milieu of theological terminology it is quite easy to get caught up in the type of thinking which prompted Alice's rabbit in the classic to say, "The word means exactly what I want it to mean." The same seems to be true with the concept of contextualization.

In order to grasp the full meaning of the term, *contextualization*, and the shift that has occurred within this concept, it is necessary to go back nearly one hundred years to the writings of Emile Durkheim, specifically his work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912). Durkheim is known as one of the founders of the study of sociology as a separate academic discipline, that is, separate from the study of psychology. His antiutilitarian views formed the basis of the concept of society as a moral construct which is developed and maintained through a collective consciousness-conscience (Durkheim 1961). His view explained religion as a function within society which provided the key to the relationship of an individual with the society. Thus, Durkheim is also known as the

father of the relative social contextualization of religion. Religion was seen as a significant contributor to the well-being and effectiveness of a society by providing sanctions and limitations from a sacred source. The rituals, beliefs and religious practices of a society are irrevocably linked with the culture of that society. After Durkheim, anthropologists could include a chapter on religion as being one of the factors of culture in a given society without fear of ridicule in the post-Enlightenment era.

Contextualization in the terms of the social scientist has always referred to the relationship of various domains and taxonomic features which make up the culture of that society. Religion or religious beliefs are considered to be one of the contexts involved. Within this structure of contextualization truth or error, right or wrong, or in other words, absolutes are not issues. It is simply noted that certain beliefs and practices played an important role in the development of a particular culture. As anthropologist G. Linwood Barney observed, "Cultures were presented as organic wholes with various interdependent parts which all contributed to the whole" (Barney 1982, 173). Barney continued, "This development in anthropology caught the attention of

missionaries who then pursued studies in anthropology and applied these insights to missionary principles and practice" (Barney 1982, 173).

In spite of the obvious benefits to the missionary to have a working knowledge in the fields of sociology and anthropology, there is a gnawing inadequacy with a strictly social scientific view of culture and contextualization. The question of the supracultural, that is, an absolute which comes from God, remains unanswered. Can God, who is above culture, communicate with man who is a part of culture? Or, can the supracultural find meaningful forms of expression in any culture?

The answer to these questions is yes, and the term coined by Barney to describe the process is *inculturation*, "...that process or state in which a new principle has been culturally 'clothed' in meaningful forms in a culture" (1973, 57).

God is absolute, underived and unchanging. But consider the following implications. The Gospel is given of God. Therefore it is derived. It cannot be absolute. Is it therefore relative? If so is it changeable... We need another conceptual category between absolute and relative. It would seem that the term 'constant' might meet this need. Constant refers to that which by nature does not change, though it may be derived...Then it follows, God is absolute. That which he initiates and affirms to man in his covenant and redeeming

acts is constant; however, the forms in which man responds to God are tied to his culture and therefore are relative. The absolute and the constant are supracultural but man's response is relative and thus can vary from culture to culture as each society expresses the supracultural in forms peculiar to its own cultural configuration. Thus a relevant expression of the God-man relationship can preserve the integrity of a culture but in no way needs to compromise the essence and nature of the supracultural (Barney 1981, 173).

The social scientific version of contextualization has value for the missionary particularly in understanding how change has occurred as the result of his or her presence in a country. However, it does not adequately explain the relationship of the supracultural message of the gospel.

Contextualization, as the term was used at the 1971 Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches in Bossey, Switzerland, and the term's popularization by the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches in 1972, presented the idea that theology should take into account aspects of culture, such as social and economic concerns, which had previously been neglected by the term "*indigenization*". The dialectic envisioned at the time has found many applications in neo-orthodox and liberal theologies as well as among a group which Bruce Fleming calls the "context-indigenizers" which represents

evangelical theology (Fleming 1980, 45). Fleming provided an understanding and background of the diverse interpretations of what it means to contextualize.

For many evangelicals, contextualization is simply a more popular way to inculturate the Christian message in the context of culture. The basic difference between evangelical thought and neo-orthodox and liberal approaches to contextualization is that for the neo-orthodox and liberal, the context becomes part of the content of the message. This view follows more closely the sociological understanding of contextualization. The evangelical would see the message as unchanging yet relevantly communicated into the cultural thought forms and language of a particular people group. This view follows the inculturation aspects of the contextualization process.

McGavran also followed an inculturation understanding on what contextualization is in his book *The Clash Between Christianity and Culture*. He asked, "Is there one way or many ways to God?" (McGavran 1974, 27). His answer attempted to define the issues involved, and then he proposed three possible answers to the question. The problem is more than just a question of dress, housing and language, but an issue of moral and ethical right and wrong. Like Fleming,

McGavran took a high view of Scripture and exhorted that there is "a right way" based on what is said in God's Word. His approach is similar to Niebuhr's concept of Christ as the transformer of culture (Niebuhr 1960).

There are aspects of every culture which may be called "lifestyle" which clash with the message of the Bible. In such cases the authority of God's Word is held higher than cultural authority. The Christian, then, is called upon to change his lifestyle to conform to the message of the Bible. Conversely, there are also aspects of culture which cannot be categorized as right or wrong. In other words, there are cultural practices which the Christian community in that culture need to evaluate for themselves. On this issue McGavran said, "Let's leave room for differing opinions" (McGavran 1974, 69).

Fleming especially and also McGavran approached contextualization from a theoretical perspective. McGavran peppered his ideas with some practical examples but Marvin Mayers in *Christianity Confronts Culture*, provided the best of both the theoretical and practical (1987). Mayers approached the change process that occurs when two individuals or cultures meet from four perspectives; the trust bond, social structure,

the validity of distinct societies, and effective ministry. These perspectives or models, as Mayers called them, are viewed in theory as principles in cross-cultural communication in the first section and then viewed again in the form of case studies in the second section.

Mayers proposed a lifestyle which hastens the cohesion process in contextualization. This is an anthropological study relying on accepted knowledge from the behavioral sciences to help the communicator of the Christian message. The emphasis is on practice.

For the technical side of the communication of the Christian message across cultural boundaries, Eugene Nida and William Reyerburn wrote *Meaning Across Cultures*. There are two important issues that affect anyone involved in cross-cultural ministry. The first is the issue of misunderstandings that can develop because of differing cultural backgrounds, especially as these relate to differences between the cultural preconceptions and values of biblical times and those of the present. The second issue is adaptation and restructuring cultural preconceptions and values of biblical times so they are accurate and relevant in present day cultures. Whereas Mayers' focus is broad, encompassing the whole of contextualizing when two

cultures meet, Nida and Reyburn concentrate on the unchanging message of the gospel and how it can be contextualized (made relevant) in other cultures.

This author's view of contextualization is a combined version of both the social scientific understanding of contextualization and the inculturation approach to contextualization. It is not possible to ignore the change that occurs within a culture when new information is received into that culture. That process of change is the process of contextualization. However, it is not only the missionary who is bringing change and cross-cultural interaction. A host others, such as CNN and the BBC through powerful satellite connections, are reaching the remotest parts of earth with their transmissions, forever changing and expanding the world view of the common man. The only certain thing is change, and the biggest change is change itself. It is important for anyone involved in cross-cultural relations to be aware of the rapid contextualization which is occurring not only in the Christian community or as a result of the proclamation of the Christian message but in secular society as well. When two cultures or world views meet there is an assimilation that occurs one with the other

and eventually a cohesion develops, forming a new--somewhat the same and yet different--culture.

The Christian message fits into this process of contextualization on the supracultural level. Using Barney's terminology, it is a constant. The Christian message needs to be proclaimed in such a way that it is clearly understood, not simply a Western understanding, but understood within the particular culture. This does not assume that this is an easy task. Bruce Nicholls noted that,

Throughout the history of Western Christian theology the truth of the gospel has suffered an unconscious assimilation of conflicting tenets and practices. Augustine was unable to completely free himself from neo-platonism. Aquinas synthesized biblical faith and Aristotelian philosophy. Modern liberal theology in the West has been deeply influenced by the philosophies of the Enlightenment, evolutionary science and existentialism, and in the East by the philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism (Nicholls 1979, 30).

The fact that contextualization occurs when the message is proclaimed should not compromise the supracultural status of the message. The real danger occurs, as Nicholls has illustrated, when culture and philosophies resulting from culture assume a supracultural understanding of the Christian message. This form of contextualization is easily seen in American Christianity which identifies biblical principles with

the "American way of life". Many American congregations seem unaware that their lifestyle is more closely related to the consumer principles of capitalism than to the realities of the New Testament.

Henry Lazenby likewise focused on this problem of the supracultural being too closely related to a particular culture when he posed these thought-provoking questions:

...How will Western forms be separated from the 'biblical principles' when it is only by using the Western forms that any 'biblical' principles were discerned? If the Western forms are removed does this not necessarily lead to some degree of change in the principles? ...by introducing already determined 'biblical principles' into the African setting, (for example), nothing can occur except assimilation. The principles are being assimilated into the culture in order to make the culture reflect those 'biblical principles' held authoritative by the Western missionary. But since these principles are inextricably connected to the thought forms and values of the Western culture, the African church will of necessity only reflect a Western form of Christianity (Lazenby 1992, 12).

Lazenby's questions emphasize the fact that there is a fine line between having an ethnocentric form of Christianity and one which questions whether it is possible to know with assurance what the message is that God has revealed.

After nearly twenty centuries of examination of the Christian message one cannot assume that nothing is

known about it. A Western understanding of the Christian message is at least an understanding. On the other hand, what is known should not be held in such high regard as to assume supracultural status. David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen reasoned that;

The missionary's ultimate goal in communication has always been to present the supracultural message of the gospel in culturally relevant terms. There are two potential hazards which must be assiduously avoided in this endeavor: (1) the perception of the communicator's own cultural heritage as an integral element of the gospel, and (2) a syncretistic inclusion of elements of the receptor culture which would alter or eliminate aspects of the message upon which the gospel depends (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989, 1).

Hesselgrave and Rommen have highlighted an important point in the communication of the gospel, but it only emphasizes one aspect of what it means to contextualize. Contextualization occurs not only on the part of the sender of a message, making that message relevant but in the broader and more practical sense it occurs after a message has been received and incorporated into the world view and culture of a people.

A true picture of contextualization includes two components. The first is based on the social scientific model which views contextualization as a process of change by which contexts interrelate and

join together, forming new contexts which likewise interrelate and form still other contexts. The second is the inculturation model which seeks to relay the Christian message within a context in culturally appropriate ways so that the information is understood and applied. In attempting to combine the social scientific concept of contextualization along with the inculturation approach, this definition emerges;

Contextualization is the ongoing process of change by which the constant of the Christian message unites different contexts together in genuinely cohesive and compatible ways.

Issues in Contextualization in Irian Jaya

There are three major issues which face the contextualization of the Christian message in Irian Jaya. The first is a belief system which is based on an animistic mentality. Animism is defined as: Human beings' efforts to understand, control and manipulate ancestors along with the personal and impersonal spiritual forces which influence and affect the society in order to be successful and live in harmony with them. The goal of the animist is to be in harmony with his environment which not only includes living human beings, but also ancestors, spirits, plants and animals. The forces which affect the harmonious inner

workings of the culture must be dealt with in appropriate ways. This includes the introduction of the Christian message which must be harmonized with the rest of the environment. The results can be seen in Irian Jaya and other parts of Melanesia in various cargo mythologies.

The second issue is the experience of past and present colonization in Irian Jaya. Most of Melanesia can relate to the past experience of colonization but in Irian Jaya colonization is a current, though sensitive, issue. The inner aspirations of Irianese people are reflected in passive-aggressive behavior towards the neo-colonialist Indonesian government. The longing for independent rule, though, is tempered by the desire for the material benefits which have come as a result of being a part of the Indonesian government. The ensuing love-hate relationship has resulted in an unstable political environment and has been the cause of social distortion among the Irianese.

The third issue which effect the contextualization of the Christian message is a preliterate, preindustrial cognitive orientation which requires the use of symbols and imagery in communication. "Life and reality are seen pictorially in terms of active emotional relationships present in concrete situations.

The concrete relational thinker tends to express, inform and persuade by referring to symbols, stories and events rather than to general propositions and principles" (Hesselgrave 1989, 223). Irianese operate in this cognitive sphere which requires the de-emphasis on abstract, analytical and linear approaches to communicating.

Illustrations of the Contextualization Process

In Irian Jaya the government program of transmigration allowed the author to see one example of the context-ualization process in a tangible way. The government built houses for participants in this program and would give full ownership of the house and land to the participants after an agreed period of time. This is very similar to the American Homestead Act. For many Irianese, this was a curious proposition of taking land that had always belonged to them and then saying that if they maintained it well it would again belong to them. The Irianese contextualized this situation by dismantling the houses built by the government and using the materials in ways more useful to them and in locations more suited to their culture. These houses, then, have been contextualized. The basic materials used in their construction have found

uses though not in the form in which they had been conceived. The Indonesian government took building materials, put them together in a certain way on a particular location and told the people that this is how they should live. The Irianese, on the other hand, saw the example and for all practical purposes understood the concept, but thought the materials would have better uses elsewhere. The zinc roofing material remains a corrugated sheet of zinc but has found a more practical use as a fence to keep the pigs out of the garden. The question arises, then, as to what is the correct use of a corrugated sheet of zinc: Is it better suited for a roof or a fence? A more penetrating question would be: Is it right to take a corrugated sheet of zinc off of the roof and make it into a fence?

The basic character of the corrugated zinc did not change in the process of using it for a roof or for a fence. This illustrates, however crudely, what happens when the constant of the Christian message is proclaimed in a culture other than the culture of the sender.

Figure 2 further illustrates the process of contextualization. When two cultures or even when two concepts interact, a change will occur in perspective, attitude and orientation. In the case where a

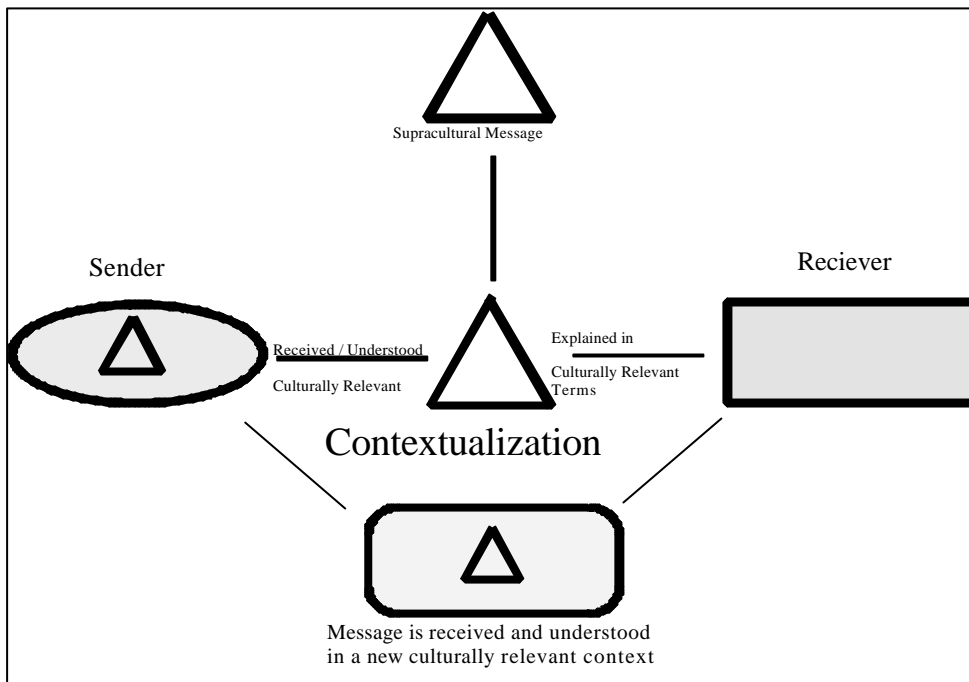


Figure 2

supracultural message, that is, the Christian message, is communicated, contextualization is both the process of making the message culturally relevant and the socio-cultural process which occurs in both the sending and receiving cultures.

While the sending culture's understanding of the incarnational truth of the Christian message may precede the understanding of the receiving culture, it does not invalidate or supersede the receiving culture's understanding. There is a common message, revealed by God, inscripturated, expressed in cultural terms and received in cultural terms, which is universally normative in the Christian experience.

This issue of mediating between the supracultural and the incarnational aspects of the Christian message are at the forefront of the missionary effort. The dangers of this process lie, as Hesselgrave and Rommen pointed out earlier, in falling into the error of ubiquitous ethnocentrism, assuming that our understanding of the supracultural is capable of being transplanted or falling into the error of universalism which accepts any cultural expression of the Christian faith as valid. "Some might feel that the intensive investigation of generations of Western theology must surely have produced by now a once-for-all set of theological understandings that can simply be passed on from culture to culture. Those of us involved in contextualizing Christian theology in non-Western cultures have not, however, found this position to be entirely accurate" (Kraft 1978, 33). Contextualization of the Christian message is not so much a product that is passed from one culture to another but it is a process of learning about God's revelation on the part of both the sender and receiver of that message.

The Church in the Contextualization Process

It would be impossible to present a profile that would be representative of all churches in Irian Jaya

since the character of the church is largely determined by the ethnic background of its members. There is one church in the city of Manokwari which can at least be used as a model for the contextualization process, both positively and negatively. The church presents a uniquely diverse population and that in itself is reason enough to use it for this model.

Location, history and size of present church membership

The Erikson-Tritt Church is located in the coastal town of Manokwari, Irian Jaya, Indonesia. The church is named after the first two TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission) missionaries to come to Irian Jaya in 1951. Walter Erikson and Edward Tritt began survey work in the Bird's Head region of Irian Jaya in 1952. On their last trip to the interior of the Bird's Head region they were chopped to death with machetes by their own carriers. This may sound like a dismal picture to paint for the beginnings of a church, but the Lord used the deaths of Walter Erikson and Edward Tritt as the stepping stone for many more missionaries to come to Irian Jaya. As a result, not just the Erikson-Tritt Church but many churches were established largely because of an increase of missionary activity.

At the present time the Erikson-Tritt Church has approximately 140 members.

Population, economy, ethnic/racial character of community

Manokwari is a port city with a population of 128,207 people, according to the 1990 census. One long time resident has said that the economy of Manokwari is based on chickens. What he meant was everyone raises chickens so that at least if other food sources run out you can always eat your chicken. Other than the chicken-based economy, Manokwari exports approximately 93,000 cubic meters of wood per year, 218 tons of chocolate, 35 tons of fish oil and approximately 40 tons of scrap metal per year. It is interesting to note that the scrap metal industry is not self-propagating but is based on equipment discarded following World War II. These export products provide almost no economic significance for the average person except for a meager wage. For a hard day's work a person can expect to make anywhere from \$.90 - \$3.00 and that is not much to live on. Most profit, if there is any, is also exported out of Irian Jaya.

Ethnically, the city is divided three ways: 1) Coastal tribal, 2) Interior tribal and 3) Ethnic

Malay/Chinese. There is a large amount of animosity between these ethnic groups based on the ethnocentrism of each group. This tension between ethnic groups is prevalent in most daily activities and fosters much prejudice.

Denominational affiliation/type of church government

The Erikson-Tritt Church is part of a fellowship of churches called The Bible Christian Fellowship Churches of Indonesia. This fellowship is a unique combination of Congregational and Presbyterian forms of church government. Each church in the Bible Christian Fellowship Churches of Indonesia is autonomous yet bound together through Area Councils and a General Council.

Ethnic background/racial composition

The racial and ethnic composition of the Erikson-Tritt Church reflects the diversity of the city of Manokwari. The largest single tribe in Manokwari is the coastal Biak people and they also comprise the majority of the church members.

Biak Tribe	: 65%
Ethnic Malay	: 15%
Arfak Tribe	: 10%
Chinese	: 7%
Westerners	: 3%

Educational level of the majority of the membership

The majority of the church members have completed grammar school or grades 1-9. There are a growing number of high school and college students which are now attending church. The low educational level is reflective of society as a whole. The Erikson-Tritt Church is perhaps the best educated gathering of believers in the Bible Christian Fellowship. The pastor is a college graduate, three members are college teachers and one is a high school teacher.

Economic status/occupation of majority of the membership

The Erikson-Tritt Church is mainly comprised of unemployed people. These people are unemployed in the sense they do not earn a regular wage. Most have gardens and/or catch fish for daily sustenance. Although this is the majority, there is a growing number of store owners and government employees who are now starting to attend the church. What we have then is a few very wealthy people and many poor people worshipping together. This is also reflective of society as a whole.

Political views of the majority of the membership

All the church members are part of GOLKAR or the Labor Party with very few exceptions. This is the government political party and is the mainline conservative party. Two other political parties exist mainly to prove to the Western world that Indonesia is a democracy.

Sunday morning worship service format

The liturgy for Sunday morning worship has not changed for years. Every Sunday is, with few exceptions, the same. The order of worship is as follows:

Sing choruses
 Opening Prayer
 Hymn
 Scripture Reading
 Hymn
 Vocal Groups
 Pastoral Prayer
 Hymn/Offering
 Prayer
 Hymn
 Message
 Closing Prayer
 Announcements

Services provided during the week

Youth Service : Tuesday Night
 Family Bible Study : Wednesday Night
 Women's Bible Study : Thursday Night
 Men's Bible Study : Thursday Night

Community involvement by church

The Erikson-Tritt Church is involved in the community by helping sponsor an Elementary School, grades 1-6 and supporting a local college student in ministry to the nearby Transmigrant Camps. Another strong ministry to the community is through hospital and jail visitation. In most cases the church is the recipient of community development projects rather than the implementor.

Upon examination of this church by means of this profile there is very little difference noted between this and a congregation of believers in any North American city, except perhaps with the exception of education and income levels. This does not mean that contextualization has not occurred. The contextualization in this model has simply been dominated by the Western context. This really should not be too much of a surprise considering that most of the business world and governments have primarily adopted a Western model for their operations as well.

What this profile does not do, however, is let one see beyond the superficiality of how a church conducts its worship and functions within a community. For example, elders' meetings are called and yet business is carried out in a combination of Western, Asian and Melanesian contexts. In this sense the church is

thoroughly familiar with the contextualization process since each time the church meets there is a need to be open to and assimilate other contexts. This is true for all the people involved including the Western missionaries in attendance.

Some would argue that there needs to be less of an emphasis on the Western context especially as it relates to worship and religious activities. Most missionaries in Irian Jaya would agree with that and yet the tradition of the Western-dominated context has nearly a one-hundred and forty year footing on which to stand. It is now the accepted norm for many congregations in Irian Jaya.

This very Western-appearing model can be deceiving. The pastor of the Erikson-Tritt church was suffering from some kind of stomach ailment. He could find no relief from the problem through the means of modern medicine so he turned to a "dukun" or traditional healer in the community. The "dukun" is perceived to have a special gift from God to perform various acts of healing as well as retributive activity when necessary. In this case the diagnosis was that foreign objects were obstructing the stomach and needed to be removed through a mystical type of surgery, extracting the objects without the

complication of making any incisions. Nails and various other metal obstructions were removed and the pastor fully recovered from his physical problem.

This inside view of the perspective of the pastor and some of the church members does not fit the Western context yet it has been contextualized into the practice of some of the church members.

Another example of non-Western contextual models can be observed in a case involving the forced burning of sacred fetishes. Each year the evangelical Christian churches in Irian Jaya celebrates the arrival of the first missionaries to Irian, which was in 1855. In 1990, the celebration included a dramatic presentation of the arrival of the missionaries coupled with a burning of the instruments of black magic still adhered to by some of the interior tribes. The fetish burning was done partially symbolically, to represent the difference a commitment to Christ made for the tribe, and partially as a means to rid the people of the fetishes that were still being used.

All the area churches were invited and the fetishes were burned. One week later the pastor of one of the churches who attended the fetish burning ceremony approached me with a problem in his church. It seems that one of the elders of the church had

killed this pastor's daughter using black magic. This was the accepted cause of death by all who accompanied this pastor to my house. The elder had even confessed to doing this. In repentance however, the offending elder had offered one of his daughters to the pastor to make up for the one he had killed. The question which I was asked was; should the pastor accept the offer of the elder to replace his daughter?

There is a vast difference between how a Westerner would handle a situation like this and how a tribal person would. This offer seemed completely legitimate and in fact very much appealed to this pastor. The only problem which the church board could see was that in accepting the offer of this elder he would also gain acceptance back into the church. The issue was clear: Could a person practice black magic and still be an elder in the church?

These kinds of questions are not the norm in North American churches. They do illustrate quite clearly, though, that the apparent Western form in the church profile is not necessarily the true character of the church. The Western context is clearly seen in the form but the Melanesian context is the norm in practice.

Irianese theology has developed the same type of Western facade as can be illustrated in the operations of the church. John D'Arcy May has made this observation:

The prime event for Melanesia was not (as we theologians imagine) the preaching of the Word or the content of the gospel, but the arrival of white people. For the Melanesian community, myth and ritual provide renewal, assure life's fulfillment and even establish identity. Thus, 'Melanesian theology' though not always explicitly in the Christian sense, is already a hundred years old. It is narrated in the evenings around the fire, in peoples' homes, on the street, during canoe trips or while hunting. The themes come from Melanesian culture and are interwoven with Christian ideas: community, including ancestral spirits; festivals, which represent and call people to life's all-encompassing fullness; anxiety, which comes from the dark world of witchcraft; desire, which includes the longing for peace with traditional tribal enemies (D'Arcy May 1988, 27).

The themes which D'Arcy May has suggested are the real issues in Irianese theology as well. Practiced in secret, not spoken about in the presence of a missionary, these beliefs form the backbone of practical theology.

A typical illustration of the practice of theology is the ritual of sacred water found among certain church members of the Biak tribe. If a member of the congregation is ill or even has suffered some type of calamity in the family, a common practice is to hold a

Bible study or prayer meeting at the member's house. This is a means of strengthening the brother or sister who is suffering and is a fine expression of Christian love and concern within the body of Christ. Further strength or healing may be obtained by placing a glass of water on a Bible and consulting an ancestor through a church member with the gift of communicating with the dead. After a prayer and the quotation and sermonizing of various passages of Scripture, the suffering person is asked to drink the water for healing and strength.

The Risk of Syncretism

These examples represent the contextualizing of traditional animistic beliefs with the practice of Christianity. The negative term used to describe this kind of contextualization is syncretism. Any attempts at contextualizing theology run the risk of syncretism and yet any theological system which does not attempt to be contextualized runs the greater risk of irrelevance.

There are two major concerns in contextualizing theology. The first is the attempt to use Christian terms to express animistic or cargo cultic ideas. This was illustrated in the example of the blessing earlier. It is also seen in the attempt to call the meetings

where spirits or ancestors are consulted, prayer meetings or Bible studies. New terms don't change the character of the symbols involved in such meetings and the charge of syncretism can rightly be leveled against such activity.

The second concern is primarily directed towards the agent of contextualization, which is the bringer of the Christian message. As in New Testament times the risk of being a Judaizer is always present. A Judaizer held on to the Hebrew forms of religion and tried to make them fit into the new emerging forms based on the revelation of Jesus Christ. The kind of contextualization made by the Judaizers is found in Acts chapter fifteen: "And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." The Judaizers concept of salvation included a contextualization of the Christian message with the Hebrew religion. This was unacceptable to the Apostle Paul in the First Century, and this kind of contextualization remains unacceptable. "The greatest risk of syncretism today, as in Jesus' day, comes not from those who are attempting to discover ways of expressing Christianity in non-Western cultures (though there is a great risk there). It comes, rather, from

those who try, like the Pharisees and Judaizers, to preserve the foreign expressions of God's message" (Kraft 1978, 36).

Positive Contextualization

The examples so far of the contextualization process have been negative. It is perhaps easier to pick out those things which don't fit into our cognitive frame of reference. Amidst the negatives, though, will emerge a positive form of contextualization, ordained by God and relevant to the Irianese people who have put their faith in God. These types of positive examples are already occurring and more are sure to follow as the Holy Spirit leads Irianese believers into His truth.

One example that is evident among the interior tribes of the Bird's Head region of Irian Jaya is the contextualized form of expressing the Word of God in their language. The Hatam, Sougb and Meyah tribes all make it a practice in their worship services to chant/sing the Word of God. This is a traditional way of storytelling which has been successfully contextualized into worship.