MI 715 Contextual Theology

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Contextual Theology

MI 715    Spring 2003                   Dr. Eunice L. Irwin
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Course Description:

A study of the way local communities and culture groups receive the Christian faith, apply its message to their life contexts, and voice its relevance through writings and traditions. The course also will consider roles and methods of the persons who participate in contextualizing theology, including those who contribute from the outside. Areas of special focus will be: Theological approaches and disciplinary rationales for doing contextual theology; models and criteria for contextual theologies; understanding how to respond to multiple expressions of the Christian faith within the one worldwide church, and; case studies in contextual theology.

Course Objectives:

1. To understand differences of assumption and method between classical theology and contextual theology, and the relationship of these to one another.
2. To examine current models for doing contextual theology and understand the specific disciplinary approaches and skills these bring to the task.
3. To develop skills in exegeting the context in order to encourage theological response.
4. To introduce some of the theologies prevalent in the Third World (as well as among minority populations in Europe and North America), recognizing various contextual factors present within the regions and situations.
5. To establish biblical and theological criteria for evaluating contextual theologies.
6. To assist students to value emerging cross-cultural and multicultural theologies; and to help them discern and respond positively to many of the local expressions of Christian theology in the worldwide church.

Course Requirements:

1. Interaction-Reflection Papers (2 pages each) on five articles or chapters. These are noted in the syllabus and due on the dates assigned. (25%)

2. Book Review (10-15 pages) of a contemporary example of a contextualized theology for a local group or specific culture. Describe how the theology came to be formed--its necessity and development. Evaluate its content on the basis of the models and criteria taught in the class. (Select a book from the list "fourth required reading" below.)
   Due March 20th. (25%)

3. Take-Home Exam (Over Bevans and parts of Schreiter)
   Date distributed: April 3rd.
   Date due: April 17th. (20%)
4. **Term Projects** (20-30 pages) also to be submitted as a **Class Summary** with 1-2 pages of outline notes and specific bibliography. Choose one of the following topics:
   a. Research study of a contextual theology developed by a cultural, or local interest group—articulating major issues addressed, methods used, and theological themes.
   b. Research study showing the important practice of contextual theology as part of the work of Christian mission in a specific place and time.
   c. Individual project on using proverbs as key ingredients to produce a local theology (or “little theology” per Sedmak pp. 150-4). [See also Healey & Sybertz.]
   
   **Due May 15th (Selected ones presented 15th and 22nd).**  

**Required Reading:**

Bevans, Stephen B.

Grenz, Stanley J. and Roger E. Olson

Schreiter, Robert J.

Sedmak, Clemens

**Fourth required reading (for Book Review):** Choose one of the following:

Bujo, Benezet

Dyrness, William A.
1997  *The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture.*  
Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Gutierrez, Gustavo J.

Lee, Jung Young  (Excellent, recommended!)

Schreiter, Robert J.
The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local.
Maryknoll., NY: Orbis Books.

Course Schedule:

Readings from the text by Stephen Bevans is abbreviated--
B = Models of Contextual Theology
Readings noted for the two texts of Robert Schreiter are abbreviated--
CLT = Constructing Local Theologies

2/13  Introduction to the Course
Topic: "Contextual Theology as a Field of Mission Studies: Whose Theological Perspectives are Represented?"
Classical vs Contextual Approaches to Theology
Read after class:  B, ix-15; CLT, ix-xiii
Grenz & Olson, Who Needs Theology?
From now on, do assigned readings before class.

2/20  Topic: "Theological Method -- Balancing Scripture, Tradition and Spirituality within the Context"
B, 16-27
CLT, 1-21
Article: Charles R. Taber, "The Limits of Indigenous Theology"

2/27  Topic: "Local and Global Factors of Culture in Contextual Theologies"
CLT, 22-38
Interaction paper #1: William Dyrness, "Introduction" of Learning About Theology from the Third World
Supplemental reading recommended: Dyrness, Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology.

3/6  Topic: "Typologies and Models of Contextual Theology"
"Translation Models: Criteria and Cases"
B, 28-33, 139-143;
B, 37-53
Video and Discussion, as time permits: Circle of the Spirit
(Questions will be distributed on the video. Students will submit their own responses to the questions at the end of the class discussion.)

B, 54-69
CLT, 39-74
Class discussion on Paul Hiebert's Critical Contextualization as possible critical application of Anthropological Model.
Guest Presenter: Stephen Bevans (TBA).
3/20  
**Due: Book Review**  
Topic: "Praxis Model of Contextual Theology: Criteria and Cases"  
"Relating to the Experience of God in History"  
B, 70-87  
*Class discussion on Liberation Theology.*  
*Interaction paper #2: Per Frostin, *"The Hermeneutic of the Poor—the Epistemological 'Break' in Third World Theologies"*

3/27  
Topic: "Synthetic Models of Contextual Theology: Criteria and Cases"  
B, 88-102  
CLT, 75-94  
*Interaction paper #3: Kwok Pui-lan, *"Mothers and Daughters, Writers and Fighters"*

4/3  
**Distributed: Take-Home Exam**  
Topic: "Political and Theological Criteria for Christian Identity"  
"The People, Language, and the Church" -- Identity Factors in Theologizing"  
CLT, 95-121  
*Interaction paper #4: Albert Widjaja, *"Beggarly Theology: A Search for Perspective Toward Indigenous Theology"*
  

4/10  
**SPRING BREAK**

4/17  
**Due: Take-Home Exam**  
Topic: "Incipient Theologies within Popular Religion and Official Religion"  
"Case Study: Popular Beliefs among Subanen Christianity"  
CLT, 122-143 (review)  
*Discussion: Clemens Sedmak’s 50 guidelines in Doing Local Theology*

4/24  
Topic: "Transcendental Models of CT: Criteria and Cases"  
B, 103-116  
CLT, 122-158  
*Interaction paper #5: Philip Hughes, *"The Use of Actual Beliefs in Contextualizing Theology"*

5/1  
Topic: “The Countercultural Model of CT: Criteria and Cases”  
B, 117-137  
*Discussion: Theologizing from Gospel and Counterculture*

5/8  
Topic: “Evaluating Christologies and the Use of Scriptures in Contextual Theologies”
Supplemental reading recommended: Kwok, Pui Lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*.

5/15  **Due: Term Projects!!**
Students will distribute their 2-page **Class Report** summaries on their term projects with term projects. **Selected projects** will be presented.

5/22  Class will meet during time scheduled for Final Exam. Continuation of **selected projects** for class presentation.

**Recommended Reading:**

DeGruchy, John and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds.
Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Douglas, Kelly Brown

Dyrness, William A.
1990  *Learning About Theology From the Third World.*  Academie Books.


Healy, Joseph and Donald Sybertz

Hesselgrave, David J. and Edward Rommen
1989  *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models.*
Grand Rapids: Baker.

Kaufman, Gordon
1995 [1975]*An Essay on Theological Method.*  Atlanta: AAR.

Kwok, Pui-Lan

Levison, John R. and Priscilla Pope-Levison, eds.

Osborne, Grant

Schreiter, Robert J.

Song, C. S.

Van Engen, Charles

Woodley, Randy (from Eagles Wings Ministries)

Focused readings/course on Theological Method:

Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson's book, Who Needs Theology?


NOTE: New Course in Summer 2003, taught by Mark Hatcher, on Theological Method(s) for Contextual Theology.