MI 715 Contextual Theology

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Contextual Theology

MI 715    Spring 2008                   Dr. Eunice L. Irwin
Thursday, 2:30-5:15pm  (M305)         Office: 858-2148
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Course Description:

A study of the way local communities and cultural groups receive the Christian faith, apply its message to their life contexts and express its relevance through writings and traditions. The course will consider roles and methods of those 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 of contextual theologies; responding to multiple expressions of the Christian faith within the global 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 recognize the specific disciplinary and interpretive approaches 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 arising in the global South (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 evaluate crosscultural and multicultural expressions of faith, to help them discern and respond constructively to local expressions of Christian theology in the global church.

Course Requirements:

1. **Participation** through regular attendance, timely submission of assignments and **Reading Log** (due May 15th), and contribution to class discussions. (10%)

2. **Interaction Papers** (1 page) on five readings (articles or chapters). Assignments and due dates noted in the syllabus; instructions will be posted on Moodle. (20%)

3. **Book Review** (10+ pages of text) on a contemporary example of a theology for a specific group, situation or local culture. (Select a book from the “Additional Required Reading” list below, or propose an alternative book to the professor for approval of before doing this assignment.) Instructions for this assignment will be posted on Moodle. Date due: March 13th (20%)
4. **Mid-Term Take-Home Exam** (Open book, open notes)
   **Date distributed:** March 27th
   **Date due:** April 10th (15%)

5. **Term Research Paper** (15+ pages of text) submitted to professor, **with** a 2-page **Research Summary** (consisting of a summation of findings or outline of main points plus essential references from the paper) distributed to each class member.
   Brief student reports scheduled on May 15th and 22nd.
   **Date due:** May 15th (35%)

**Required Reading:**
Bevans, Stephen B.

Flemming, Dean

Grenz, Stanley J. and Roger E. Olson

Schreiter, Robert J.

**One More Additional Required Reading—for Book Review (Due March 13th)**
Choose a book from list below by Feb. 28th or propose an alternative to the professor.

Clifford, Ann M.

Douglas, Kelly Brown

Gutierrez, Gustavo J.

Healey, Joseph and Donald Sybertz

Jenkins, Philip

Lee, Jung Young (Excellent, recommended!)
Course Schedule:
Complete readings before class time on the dates below.

Text of Grenz and Olson abbreviated as—
WNT = *Who Needs Theology*

Text of Dean Flemming abbreviated as—
CNT = *Contextualization in the New Testament* [Normative text]

Text of Stephen Bevans abbreviated as—
MCT = *Models of Contextual Theology*

Text of Robert Schreiter abbreviated—
CLT = *Constructing Local Theologies*

2/14  
Introduction to the Course  
*Topic 1: Contextual Theology as a Field of Mission Studies: Whose Theological Perspectives Are Represented?*  
*This week, read after class:*  
WNT, 9-35  Everyone is a Theologian, Not All Theologies are Equal  
CNT, 13-24  “Introduction”  
MCT, xix-15 Contextual Theology as a Theological Imperative  
CLT, ix-xiii, Foreward  
*In following weeks, required readings due before class on dates assigned.*

2/21  
Topic 2: Contrasts with Classical/ Systematic Theology  
CNT, 25-55  Bridging Cultural Boundaries  
MCT, 16-27  Issues of Contextual Theology  
CLT, 1-21  What is Local Theology?  
*IP#1 Due:* Shaw, “Contextualizing the Power and the Glory”

2/28  
Topic 3: The Gospel Articulated for Local Communities  
CNT, 56-88  Contextualization in Acts: The Preaching of Paul  
9-117  Paul’s Letters: Doing Theology in Context  
MCT, 23-33, 139-143  Notion of Models  
MCT 37-53  TRANSLATION MODEL  
CLT, 22-38  Mapping a Local Theology  
*IP#2 Due:* Taber, “Is There More Than One Way to Do Theology?”

3/6  
Topic 4: The Gospel’s Interaction with Cultures  
WNT, 36-67  Defining Theology, Defending Theology  
CNT, 118-151  Paul and Culture: Engaging the Greco RomanWorld  
MCT, 54-69  ANTHROPOLOGICAL MODEL  
CLT, 39-74  The Study of Culture  
Video and Discussion, as time permits: *Circle of the Spirit*
IP#3 Due: Dyrness, “Introduction” to *Learning About Theology from the Third World*

3/13

Topic 5: **Liberating the Gospel, Bringing Change to Church Tradition**
MCT: 70-87 **PRAXIS MODEL**
CLT: 75-94 Theology and Context: Church Tradition as Local Theologies
Supplemental reading: Widjaja, “Beggarly Theology: A Search for a Perspective Toward Indigenous Theology”

IP#4 Due: Frostin, “The Hermeneutics of the Poor—Epistemological ‘Break’ in Third World Theologies”

3/20

**Due: Book Review**
Topic 6: **Combining Contextual Approaches**
CNT, 152-181 Paul as Interpreter – Contextualizing Scripture & Tradition
MCT, 88-102 **SYNTHETIC MODEL**
Read article: Kwok, Pui-lan, “Mothers & Daughters, Writers & Fighters”

3/27

**Distributed: Take-Home Exam**
Topic 7: **The Gospel Addresses Practices and Beliefs**
CNT, 182-213 Cases from Corinth: The Gospel, Food and the Future
**Criteria for Christian Identity**
CLT, 95-121 Tradition and Christian Identity
Supplemental article: Hayward, “Contextualizing the Gospel among the Saxons”
**The Gospel and Spiritual Experience**
MCT, 103-116, **TRANSCENDENTAL MODEL**
IP#5 Due: Hughes, “Use of Actual Beliefs in Contextualizing Theology”

4/3

**SPRING READING WEEK** (Class will not meet)

4/10

**Due: Take-Home Exam**
Topic 8: **Political and Theological Criteria**
WNT, 68-102 Theology’s Tasks & Traditions, The Theologians Tools
CLT, 95-121 Tradition and Christian Identity (chapter is repeated)
**People, Language, and the Church: Identity Factors in Theologizing**
Supplemental articles:
- Gosnell Yorke, “Biblical Hermeneutics: An Afrocentric Perspective”
- Ingleby, “Globalisation, glocalisation & mission”
**Supplemental book:**
- Miguel De La Torre, *Reading the Bible from the Margins*

**Christology as a Criteria**
CLT, 122-143 Popular Religion and Official Religion
Supplemental reading: Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*

4/17

Topic 9: **Syncretism and Contextualization**
"A Case Study: Popular Beliefs among Subanen Christians" -- Irwin
CNT, 214-233 Colossians: The Gospel and Syncretism
CLT, 144-158  Syncretism and Dual Religious Systems

IP#6 Due: Taylor, “Gaps in Beliefs of Thai Christians”

4/24  Topic 10: Guest Lecturer – Dr. Roger Hedlund, “Theologies of India”
Read article on Moodle: Hedlund, “Hindus and Christians for 2000 Years”

5/1  Topic 11: The Gospel and the Powers
CNT, 266-295  Revelation: The Gospel and the Empire
MCT, 117-137  COUNTERCULTURAL MODEL
IP#7: Hayward, “Measuring Contextualization in Church and Mission”

5/8  Topic 12: Constructing a Message for the Context
WNT, 103-118  Constructing Theology in Context
  119-133  Bringing Theology into Life
  134-148  An Invitation to Engage in Theology
CNT, 296-322  Contextualizing the Gospel for Today
Concluding Remarks on the Course

5/15  Due: Term Research Project and Reading Log!!
Students will distribute to each class members a 2-page Research Summary of their papers. These will be shared orally.

5/22  Class will meet during the week of Final Exams.
Continuation of students presenting their Research Summary findings.

Recommended Resources:
Online:
John Roxborogh’s “Contextual Theology: A Reading Guide” at:
http://www.roxborogh.com/missionandinterpretation/contextual_theology.htm
Osias Segura-Guzman’s website at:
http://www.localtheologies.org
Scott Moreau’s bibliography for “INTR 532: Contextualization” at:
http://www.wheaton.edu/intr/Moreau/courses/532/biblio/theowest.htm
The Center for Global Christianity and Mission at Boston University at:
http://www.bu.edu/sth/cgcm/
The Network for Strategic Missions
http://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.php?loc=kb

Library:
Bediako, Kwame

Bujo, Benezet

Chung, Paul S., Veli-Matti Karkkainen, Kim Kyoung-Jae

DeGruchy, John and Charles Villa-Vicencio, eds.

De La Torre, Miguel

Dyrness, William A.


Gilliland, Dean, ed.

Hesselgrave, David J. and Edward Rommen

Hiebert, Paul

Kaufman, Gordon

King, Ursula, editor
Koyama, Kosuke

Kwok, Pui-lan

Lee, Jung Young

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

Nicholls, Bruce J.

Osborne, Grant

Park, Andrew Sung

Parratt, John, ed.
2004 An Introduction to Third World Theologies. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Robert, Dana, ed.

Sanneh, Lamin

Schreiter, Robert J.
Articles and books related to issues of Contextualizing Theology:

Dyrness, William

Frostin, Per

Hughes, Philip J.

Ingleby, Jonathan

www.redcliffe.org/uploads/documents/people_groups3_01.pdf

Shaw, Daniel  

Taber, Charles  


Yorke, Gosnell L.  
http://www.unisa.ac.za/Default.asp?Cmd=ViewContent&ContentID=7348

**Focused readings/ texts on Theological Method**

Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder  
2004  *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*  


Hesselgrave, David  
2005  *Paradigms in Conflict: 20 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today.*  
Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

"Frameworks for Analysis", pp. 127-196 of Hesselgrave and Rommen's book,  
*Contextualization.*


"Homiletics I: Contextualization," pp. 318-338 of Grant Osborne's book,  
*The Hermeneutical Spiral.*
Charles Van Engen’s article, “Toward a Contextual Theology for the Third World” in