

“He skillfully provides the theoretical framework, definitions, charts, and ample resources for students exploring contextualization for the first time. There is such depth here, however, that graduate students will find the chapters equally challenging and useful for extended research. The reference list of articles and books alone is a lasting treasure for missiology students. Moreau spans a spectrum of approaches and issues where the gospel intersects with cultures. This work is a springboard for various teaching styles and methods of presentation. The well-planned layout of outlines, summaries, study questions, and key word lists make travel through the material extremely manageable. One shouldn’t study contextualization without access to Moreau’s work.”

—Paul W. Shea,
Associate Professor of Missions,
Houghton College

“In this new work, Moreau, a seasoned practitioner and an accomplished author and teacher, does the church and the academy a great service. Having poured over and synthesized the vast contextualization literature of the past generation, Moreau offers a way forward—a map—for evangelical intercultural workers to navigate the often uncertain terrain of contextualization. In many ways, Moreau has modeled this task well by addressing profound ideas that are made accessible to the reader through an inviting and engaging style. This timely book ought to be read in the curriculum of Christian colleges, seminaries, and mission training centers.”

—Edward Smither,
Professor of Intercultural Studies,
Columbia International University

“Scott Moreau provides us with a very thoughtful treatment of one of the most important and controversial issues of the day—contextualization. Setting this issue in the context of history, current reality, and future possibilities provides readers with a helpful framework to deal with this topic. As evangelicals who are committed to the gospel transformation of individuals, families, communities, and nations, we must personally and corporately wrestle with the issues raised by

Moreau. I believe *Contextualization in World Missions* will help provide greater clarity, understanding, and hopefully unity as we serve our risen Lord in seeking to make disciples of all nations.”

—Geoff Tunnicliffe,
CEO/Secretary General,
World Evangelical Alliance

“Jesus ate local food and spoke the local dialect. He honored his context. But contextualization is not bulletproof. There are many dangers. What term do we use for God? What rituals do we participate in? Is air conditioning contextual? Is the majority language contextual, or only the minority? If the second generation is influenced by global media, are their values as contextual as the first generation’s? How much does it matter anyway? Aren’t there other priorities that are more important than contextualization? For many years on the field and in the literature, Scott Moreau has explored this. Here is the fruit of his labor—nuanced, comparative, and inspiring.”

—Miriam Adeney,
Associate Professor of World Christian Studies,
Seattle Pacific University

“Scott Moreau has produced an excellent compendium of the contemporary approaches to and philosophies that underlie the important subject of missionary contextualization. This is certainly the most comprehensive compilation available today and is thus an excellent resource for practitioners, students, and teachers alike. Scott’s categorization of these approaches is well-conceived and his diagrams, charts, and appendices are all immensely helpful. Additionally, the author’s evaluative comments regarding each of the approaches are refreshing to read and digest, particularly in this day of excessive neutrality.”

—Larry Poston,
Professor of Religion,
Nyack College

“This is an exceptional overview of thirty years of dialog and debate among evangelicals on contextualization. It is a balanced and compelling review of the theological tensions that characterize this debate,

reflecting on the diversity of theological perspectives, of methodologies, and of praxis with reference to evangelism, discipling, and church planting among the major world religions. There is an excellent bibliography of sources for any student or scholar interested in the literature on evangelical contextualization. I welcome this work! It is an excellent contribution to evangelical scholarship on contextualization.”

—Sherwood Lingenfelter,
Professor of Anthropology,
Fuller Theological Seminary

“Scott Moreau is doing a great service to all of us who got lost in the vast jungle of approaches to contextualization in world missions. His helicopter view provides us with a tremendously useful mapping of the landscape that will help us advance even further into what is eventually the cultures, minds, and hearts of peoples—the locale where the gospel is to be rooted.”

—Birger Nygaard,
Danish Church Mission,
Denmark

“No one has read as widely or has a better grasp of the breadth of evangelical approaches to contextualization than Scott Moreau. His teaching, reading, and personal relationships have given him an unparalleled encyclopedic awareness of evangelical thinking and proposals for the theory and practice of contextualization for the past forty years. His book provides an accurate, comprehensive panorama of the landscape of evangelical contextualization. For missiological novices, it will open the door to two generations of voluminous writings. Among seasoned veterans, it will spark reflective, more evenhanded evaluation of what their brothers and sisters are saying. Moreau has a keen, analytical mind that is able to sort out hundreds of examples and present them in easy-to-comprehend categories. He is particularly strong in clarifying distinctions in evangelical approaches to contextualization that have become muddled over the years. The charts are outstanding; they simplify a vast amount of data, synthesizing and clearly explaining his analysis. Equally strong are the examples he has

selected, which both illustrate his seven models of contextualization and demonstrate the creativity and variety of evangelical approaches. Moreau's 'map' is highly recommended as an accurate and comprehensive guide for anyone taking a serious trip into the land of evangelical approaches to contextualization."

—Steve Strauss,
Professor of World Missions and Intercultural Studies,
Dallas Theological Seminary

"The study and praxis of contextualization is often a theological and missiological mine field. This work provides an incredibly helpful map that guides the reader to a better understanding of the complexities of contextualization and provides a summary of evangelical approaches."

—Timothy R. Sisk,
Professor of World Missions,
Moody Bible Institute

"With *Contextualization in World Missions*, A. Scott Moreau has provided readers not only with a detailed map, but also with a reliable compass to navigate this vast and often daunting terrain of contextualization. Even experienced travelers in the world of evangelical contextualization will find Moreau the ultimate go-to guide."

—Craig Ott,
Professor of Mission and Intercultural Studies,
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

"Moreau provides a travel guide through the evangelical landscape of contextualization. *Contextualization in World Missions* is an in-depth comparative survey of the theory and practice of communicating Christ across cultures. It is a timely text for serious students and practitioners in a day when ill-informed, superficial attacks and defenses of contextualization abound. Moreau provides a clean break, a fresh look at the ministry, art, and science of effectively communicating the gospel to, in, and through another culture. Moreau's research and scholarship are extensive and impeccable; yet the work is surprisingly readable and engaging. He defines keywords, provides questions for reflection and dialogue, and includes readings for further study. This

book lays a solid foundation for the journey through the world of contextualization. Follow this guide and you are less likely to get lost and more likely to find your ultimate destination on your missions journey.”

—Mike Barnett,
Dean, College of Intercultural Studies,
Columbia International University

“A contemporary, nuanced account of evangelical contextualization models fills a great need not only for missiologists and missionaries, but also among theologians and biblical scholars. Scott Moreau is a trustworthy guide, and his research will raise awareness of authentically global theology while further informing current hermeneutical discussions.”

—Daniel J. Treier,
Professor of Theology,
Wheaton College

“Scott Moreau has done a masterful job of dealing with the vast amount of literature on contextualization. He has surveyed an incredible number of articles and books and in a masterful way helpfully presented and evaluated content and perspective to produce his study. The next time I teach a course on contextualization, this will be my text.”

—Charles H. Kraft,
Professor Emeritus of Anthropology,
Fuller Seminary School of Intercultural Studies

Contextualization
in
World Missions

*Mapping and Assessing
Evangelical Models*

A. Scott Moreau

 Kregel
Academic

There are presentation slides in PowerPoint format available for this book on the Kregel website: www.kregeldigitaleditions.com.

Contextualization in World Missions: Mapping and Assessing Evangelical Models

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*Dedicated to my
friend and mentor Dr. John Gration.
John hired me to teach at Wheaton,
encouraged me to grow and develop in
my service to Christ and constantly
challenged my thinking.*

*I am deeply grateful for the
life of this servant of Christ
who went to his eternal reward
January 29, 2012.*

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PREFACE

This book came into existence almost accidentally. Invited to participate in a World Evangelical Alliance consultation on contextualization, I was excited to hear what others had to say on the subject and to develop my own presentation. The organizers designed the consultation so that every participant would present a paper for the others to discuss. They distributed a list of topics for participants to consider. One grabbed my attention.

Organizers wanted one of the participants to develop a supplement to Stephen Bevans's excellent map that outlines the models of contextualization (1985; 1992; 2002). No one had volunteered, so I (perhaps not as wisely as I thought) jumped at the opportunity.

Bevans's map reduced almost all of the evangelical approaches to one or two models (the translation and countercultural models). A challenge for evangelicals is to develop a new map focused on evangelical models. My intention was not to compete with Bevans's map but to create a sub-map that would focus on evangelical models of contextualization. Creating this focused map requires a closer look at a smaller part of the terrain—like having a map of Nairobi as an insert to a map of Kenya.

As I prepared over the next few months, it dawned on me that this supplemental map of evangelical models of contextualization would require more than just a chapter in a book; it would take a whole book. I presented my approach at the consultation and received significant and helpful critique. Working through the revisions helped me finalize some thinking (Moreau 2010). It also opened doors to thoughts I had not considered. Eventually I put together a book proposal that Kregel generously accepted, which is what you now have in your hands (or on your screen).

While in graduate school, I spent hours in libraries browsing card catalogs and bookshelves and reading journal indices to find resources. A trip to the reference section, another trip to browse the right subject areas, and trips to the journal collections to browse by hand through all of the journals were all necessary parts of the research hunt.

Today, the immediate access to resources has changed the game

Preface

completely. Google Scholar makes snippets of multiple millions of books available for almost instant searching. If the dreams of Google's owners come true, you and I will be able to search every book ever printed and buy those we want. Also, by virtue of the access granted to faculty at institutions like Wheaton College, I can search electronically every issue of major journals that are storehouses of evangelical contextualization ideas, proposals, and attempts. The complete issues of journals such as *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, *Mission Frontiers*, *Swedish Missiological Themes*, *Missiology*, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, *Mission Studies*, *Journal of Asian Mission*, and *International Review of Mission* are all available. In less than an hour I can secure more electronic versions of articles from these journals (and many more) than I can read in a year.

That said, to explore the contours of what others are writing, I examined more than five thousand reference items, including articles, chapters, and monographs. I limited my reading to those most directly related to the purposes of this project, and you will see them in the reference list at the end of the book.

Although the resulting literature review is not exhaustive, it is comprehensive enough to give an accurate ethnography of contextualization as written by the spectrum of English-speaking evangelicals around the world. In the days of our global church, however, this is still only a small slice of what evangelical Christians from every nation of the world are doing to reach others for Christ. I hope, however, that it will give a clear picture of the incredible energy, creativity, and passion of that slice. This is an exciting vision!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although I am the author of this book, such works are never the results of the efforts of one individual. As a part of Wheaton College, I have received continual support and help for research and reflection. The institution provides a fantastic evangelism and mission collection as well as access to incredible databases that I have enjoyed exploring. Wheaton College administrators encourage faculty to think carefully and clearly about our disciplines in light of the faith we share, and for 150 years have pushed us to do it all for Christ and his kingdom.

My colleagues in the intercultural studies department have been a constant encouragement and joy for me; their friendships and collegial partnership means more to me than I can adequately express. Additionally, I need to acknowledge my debt for thinking to four special students—Shane Dixon, Shane Gauthier, Mary Hawthorne, and Caleb Smith—who put up with me bringing thoughts and ideas to class and brainstormed with me on the mapping process. Special thanks for critical proofing work at various stages of the manuscript go to two additional students: Rachele Bargerstock and Todd Saur.

However, one person deserves special mention. John Gration was the department chair when I joined Wheaton, and he taught the contextualization course until he retired. I inherited his slot, and he provided abundant resources and thinking. It is on his shoulders that I stand. Even before I came to Wheaton, I used his fascinating article “From Willowbank to Wheaton” (1983) as a guide in my thinking and teaching of contextualization while on faculty at the Nairobi International School of Theology. Thanks to his clear thinking and ability to empower others for contextual thinking, I found solid grounding for my own development. Of course, wherever I have strayed from his foundations is my own responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps one of the best ways to introduce contextualization is to tell a story. At the core of Simon's question are vital issues of the relationship between gospel and culture, and especially the gospel and this particular element of Simon's culture. As you read the story, consider how you might react to what he asks.

SIMON'S QUESTION

Ben churned inside over the implication of what Simon had asked. Given the circumstances, what could he say that would encourage Simon to walk faithfully in Christ despite the issues he would face once his conversion become known to his family?

Simon Mazikenda, a Swazi from Hlatikulu (a small town in southwest Swaziland) prayed to receive Christ one day at a bus stop when Ben, a teacher in Simon's school, presented the gospel to him. In Swazi culture, it is impolite to say no to anyone in a position of authority. Knowing this, Ben decided to involve Simon in a Bible study as a follow-up to discern if the decision had been genuine. Simon readily agreed and attended faithfully for the next several weeks. With exams coming, Simon faced the prospect of completing his studies and then returning home. An average student, Simon had little chance of qualifying for university studies (only one in thirty are accepted).

As Ben met Simon for the last time, he asked the question that had been troubling him since that day at the bus stop. "When I go home, I know that my father will ask me to sacrifice to the ancestors. What should I do?"

Having lived in Swaziland for two years, Ben knew some of the issues involved—at least in his head. The authority of elders in Swazi society, and especially parental authority, was not to be taken lightly. Should Simon openly rebel, he would face serious consequences, the least of which would be the beating he was sure to receive if he would not carry on the family traditions. The fear of family rejection in this strongly collec-

Introduction

tive society ran deep—Simon’s identity was tied to being a good family member.

Realizing that his answer could shape the rest of Simon’s life, Ben initially asked for time and arranged for one extra meeting to answer the question. He spent that week talking to the Swazi Christians he knew, asking their advice. Unfortunately, he received mixed messages. Some insisted that all ancestral practices must be stopped no matter what the cost. Idolatry was one of the worst kinds of sin, and Swazi Christians had to put the traditions of fearing the ancestors behind them if people were to progress in Christ. Others, citing 2 Kings 5, maintained that a semblance of traditionalism was not wrong, as long as Simon maintained loyalty to God in his heart. They were quick to note that the ancestral traditions were not worship, as some missionaries called it, but simply a cultural way of showing respect for one’s roots. Why risk the possible conversion of Simon’s whole family over a non-essential issue? Ben weighed the arguments of both sides and gave himself over to prayer.

These and countless similar examples happen every day in cross-cultural work around the world. The question Simon asked is deeply connected to the central concerns all Christians face: how do we practice our faith in ways that honor God (and his Word) while at the same time respect our cultural values and traditions?

How Important Is Contextualization?

Revelation 7:9–10 bears eloquent testimony to the reality that our worship in heaven will not be monocultural:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

Without contextualization, people will not connect to Christ in

a way that moves their hearts. Faith will feel foreign, and people will lose what they have grown up cherishing. Churches will never feel rooted in their own culture, and people will not see the true winsomeness of the gospel. They will never understand the fullest intent of the incarnation. As Byang Kato noted at the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, “Since the Gospel message is inspired but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of the modes of expression is not only right but necessary” (1975, 1217).

Contextualization is at the “mixing point” of gospel and culture. It is not surprising then that the literature on contextualization has exploded over the past two decades. The sheer volume of writing, thinking, and experimenting with and about contextualization demonstrates its importance in mission. With thousands of ethnolinguistic groups, many with dialects and subcultural segments, the need to enable the Christian faith to be at home in each is a testimony to the need for contextualization.

What Do I Mean by “Evangelical”?

Because I focus on evangelical approaches, I need to define what I mean by evangelical. The term *evangelical* has a rich and varied history around the globe, and no single definition will satisfy everyone. For my approach I draw from two respected British sources. The first is British church historian David Bebbington, whose fourfold characterization of evangelicals (1989) is widely accepted. Bebbington characterizes evangelicals as those who emphasize *conversion* (the belief that lives need to be changed; Zoba adds that they have a personal relationship with Christ; 2005, 4–5), *activism* (the expression of the gospel in effort, especially evangelism and missionary work), *biblicism* (giving special importance to the Bible), and *crucicentrism* (Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross is central).

To add depth to these characteristics, it is important to recognize the common theological frame that characterizes evangelicals. The best articulation I have found also comes from former British rector and theologian John Stott. He identifies three key theological constraints that are of importance to all evangelicals (2003, 25–30): 1) the gospel comes from God and not human ingenuity; 2) the gospel is Christological, biblical, historical, theological, apostolic, and personal;

and 3) the gospel is effective because God himself revealed it. Together these (overlapping) criteria offer a broad-based and yet appropriately constrained set of markers for determining contextual models and practices that can be identified as distinctively evangelical. They do so without imposing an artificial uniformity on the practitioners or ensuring agreement among them, as we shall see later in the book.

It will help readers to know that I am an evangelical. I typically use “I” or “we” rather than “they” throughout the book. I am not so naïve to think that I speak on behalf of all evangelicals or that all evangelicals agree with what I say. Rather, I indicate that I am one of the evangelicals whose ideas, values, orientations, and models of contextualization I discuss.

Purpose

“Contextualization” entered the missional lexicon in 1972, which means that we can confine our map to examples from 1972 and forward. Even in that brief time, evangelicals have used hundreds of fascinating approaches.

Metaphorically speaking, the contextual “world” is much larger than the evangelical “continent.” Most of the maps produced so far attend to the world rather than our particular continent. In fact, very few have tried to chart or map our continent, and even fewer to categorize the types of terrain on it. It is as much a mistake to think of Africa as nothing but savannah as it is to think of all evangelical contextual approaches as the same “terrain.”

Continuing this metaphor, I offer a “travel guide” of the evangelical continent rather than a global map. We know some of the parts of our continent very well and are quite comfortable with them. We know other parts less well, and they may seem strange but not threatening. However, we also need to explore some of the more challenging, even dangerous, corners of our continent, and the ways evangelicals warn fellow evangelicals to stay away from them.

In this book, I offer criteria by which evangelicals label sections of our continent (whether appropriate, good, and healthy or dangerous, syncretistic, and heretical). I offer short excursions to some carefully chosen landmarks in each type of terrain so that when you travel to them you will be better equipped to evaluate them.

To do this, I am more *descriptive* than *prescriptive* in my approach. This descriptive (or *phenomenological*) approach temporarily suspends judgment. We cannot ultimately avoid wise judgment. However, the astuteness we need to judge wisely comes only from an accurate understanding of what we judge (e.g., Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénou 1999, 31–44). This is particularly important when we want to appraise terrain in a new continent that we previously have not seen and thus are likely to misunderstand. In the nineteenth century, Europeans derided travelers who came home telling of a mountain in Africa that remained snow-capped in the summer heat. Those who judged the stories as patently false could not comprehend the possibility of a Kilimanjaro—there was no space for it in their assumptions. Unless we want history to judge us as similarly quick-tongued fools, we need to take the time and energy needed to *understand* before we *pronounce*.

Finally, a discerning reader will see that only occasionally do I draw on theologians and biblical scholars. They have much to say about our landscape, but I have chosen to develop this map from the ever-growing range of perspectives offered by missiologists. While this constraint limits the sophistication in some areas, it also frames the discussion in light of the perspectives of those who most deeply engage in and explore the landmass of evangelical contextualization.

Structure of the Book

In addition to developing my own map, I use *mapping* as a primary metaphor throughout the book. There is great flexibility and utility in this metaphor. Mapping is an *activity* involving exploring territories, drawing boundaries, identifying terrain, comparing size, climate, topography, environment, and so on. Mapping is also a *means* to gain a clear picture by using such tools as labels, markers, inserts, compass points, and scale. Further, in the process of mapping we apply *a chosen set of rules*. All of this results in the map, which is a *product*. We may choose, for example, scale that attends to a specific locale such as a neighborhood or a scale that includes the entire world. Along with our scale, we may determine to use an absolute direction (a “theological north”) and to emphasize certain factors in the terrain while not indicating others. Each metaphorical element of maps and

mapping—means, product, activity, rules—helps us better visualize and understand the things that concern us.

Maps are always mental constructs. No matter how complex, maps are always less complex than our real world. In creating maps, we filter out some things and emphasize others—depending on the choices we make. Every map reduces clutter but simultaneously reduces richness; it simplifies at the risk of reductionism. We do well to keep this in mind.

In the first section, using the map metaphor, I summarize how scholars map the entire world of Christian contextualization. These maps include the evangelical continent as one of the several such continents Christians of all types use.

To map the “evangelical contextualization continent,” we must understand the values and rules that constrain what evangelicals consider necessary for inclusion on that continent. Thus, in the first section I zoom in on these values and rules. Evangelicals use them to guide, constrain, and ultimately evaluate contextual methods, processes, and products. I describe the assumptions evangelical cross-cultural practitioners and missiologists consider fundamental for contextualization as a whole (chapters 2 and 3) and the criteria we use to discern good from bad contextualization (chapter 4). Building on these, I explain significant concepts that shape and constrain evangelical contextual methods (chapter 5), and describe several of the tools we use to analyze, develop, and apply contextualization (chapter 6).

In the second section, I turn to the actual mapping project and give briefly explain the important territories of that continent (chapter 7). Then I present guided tours through each major territory of the continent (chapters 8 through 13). In each tour, I introduce the territory, describe characteristics of that territory, and offer examples from the Bible and our contemporary world. I then note examples in the territory and conclude with a brief list of potential benefits and areas of concern. I conclude this section and the book with a brief speculation on the immediate future for evangelical contextualization, depicting contextual issues I anticipate evangelicals will face as we work toward incarnating Christian faith in every community in the world.

Whenever we map an intellectual landscape, we choose from multiple viable methods. In determining my method, I explored several

Introduction

ways evangelicals have mapped our contextual continent. The map I use does not depend on them, but for those who want to follow my examinations and understand why I did not use them, I include them in four appendices. Appendices A to C present three maps, and Appendix D has a composite derived from them. As I experimented with options for my map, I also developed a “visual map” of evangelical semantic domain for contextualization, explained in Appendix E. Finally, to supplement discussion in the text, I list in their respective categories the entire dataset of 249 examples used to construct the map I use in Appendix F.