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# Contextualization and Discipleship: Closing the Gap between Theory and Practice

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CONTEXTUAL theology has gained significant momentum in recent theological studies. Traditionally, theological reflection centred around two sources, scripture and tradition, but now it is virtually impossible to engage in a meaningful theological discussion without taking seriously the third source: context. Stephen Bevans argues that 'doing theology contextually is not an option... [but] is a theological imperative'.<sup>1</sup> Understanding the context of a particular people means to appreciate their culture and history as

well as the issues currently impacting their lives.

Towards the end of the 19th century, many mission agencies accepted Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn's three-self model as a guideline for their church planting projects. In order to promote the rapid growth of autonomous churches, missionaries encouraged the emerging churches to be self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing. But today such a model is considered inadequate because it lacks emphasis on the receptor's context. It is argued that even the theology of the emerging church must be self-generated, hence the term 'fourth self' of self-theologizing became important.<sup>2</sup> If context is

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1 *Models of Contextual Theology*, revised and expanded edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), p. 3.

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2 Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), pp. 195-196.

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ignored, the church runs the risk of being seen as a foreign enterprise with a foreign message.<sup>3</sup> Dean Gilliland defines contextualized theology as

... the dynamic reflection carried out by the particular church upon its own life in light of the Word of God and historic Christian truth. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the church continually challenges, incorporates, and transforms elements of the cultural milieu, bringing these under the lordship of Christ. As members of the body of Christ interpret the Word, using their own thoughts and employing their own cultural gifts, they are better able to understand the gospel as incarnation.<sup>4</sup>

We must consider at least two important points raised by Gilliland in this definition. First, he emphasizes the importance of the church's self-theologizing, 'upon its *own* life... using their *own* thoughts and employing their (the church members') *own* cultural

gifts...' (Italics mine). The task of communicating the gospel message in a culturally meaningful and relevant way ultimately belongs to the national church, to its national leadership and to all the members of the church. Even though this task begins in the hands of missionaries, missionaries must look ahead and empower the national leaders so that eventually they will do their own theologizing.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Gilliland speaks of bringing 'elements of the cultural milieu under the lordship of Christ'. It is the church that must 'challenge, incorporate and transform' the elements of culture so as to bring these under the lordship of Christ. Contextualization must be understood in a comprehensive manner, covering not only the areas of Bible translation, the expressions of worship, leadership structure, and so on, but also the very fabric of believers' commitment to and involvement in society as *disciples* of Jesus Christ. In that regard, contextualization and discipleship are two concepts that cannot be separated.

## Discipleship and Contextualization

Discipleship is often overlooked in the discussion of contextualization. Gener-

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3 Douglas Howard, 'Measuring Contextualization in Church and Missions', *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol 12:3 (July-September), 1995, p. 135.

4 'Contextual Theology as Incarnation Mission' in Dean Gilliland, ed., *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today* (Waco: Word, 1989), pp. 12-13. For a brief historical survey on the term 'contextualization', see Bruce Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1979), pp. 20-36. For an Asian evangelical response to the concerns raised in the contextualization debate, see Bong Rin Ro, 'Contextualization: Asian Theology' in Ken Gnanakan (ed), *Biblical Theology in Asia* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1995), pp. 3-17.

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5 This is particularly the case in countries like Cambodia, which was ravaged by the civil war and the genocide of Khmer Rouge (1975-79) during which most church leaders lost their lives. More concerted efforts are needed on the part of the missionaries working in Cambodia to raise up future theologians and writers who can reflect their own situation and give direction for the Cambodian church.

ally speaking, missiologists and missionaries pay attention to the initial communication of the gospel and try to ensure that their message is receptor-centred. When it comes to follow up and discipling new believers, however, the approaches taken are not as systematic or well-thought through. How does one disciple a Muslim background believer? How does one disciple a Buddhist background believer? How about those coming from the urban slums of Manila or from a Communist regime? If we are careful about how to package the gospel message for the first time hearers, then we should also be careful about how to package the follow-up and discipleship materials for those who desire to grow closer to Jesus. A typical result is that we have many decisions but very few disciples in our mission work.

The next two examples illustrate the problem I raise in this paper, that discipleship is often overlooked in the discussion of contextualization.

The first example was when I was at a discipleship seminar at a well-known church in Seoul several years ago. I met a worker who was evangelizing and discipling North Koreans who had escaped to China from North Korea. When asked how he designed his discipleship program, he simply replied that he uses the materials developed by some churches in Seoul. In his mind, the choice of such a material posed no problem since 'the language is the same for North and South Koreans'.

The second example took place not too long ago when I had a conversation with an American missionary working in the Philippines. He was excited to share that he had just secured the copyright of the discipleship lessons

used by a mega-church in Southern California. His plan was to translate these lessons into Tagalog and offer them at an affordable price to churches in the Philippines. I smiled at him out of courtesy, but I knew something was not right.

The above two examples amply illustrate the carelessness on our part in not taking seriously the role of context in cross-cultural discipleship. Even though most missionaries are aware of the term 'contextualization', in reality there exists a big gap between theory and practice. Sometimes, the gap between the theory and the practice rises due to the wishes and policies of sending churches or denominational mission boards. Missionaries or national leaders may not have the 'luxury' to listen to the people among whom they are working. Instead, they must listen to the wishes of the supporters who desire to extend themselves 'across the face of the globe, sincerely believing that this is the best way to win the world for Christ'.<sup>6</sup>

Discipleship in context or contextualized discipleship is an application of contextual theology in following up and discipling new believers in a cross-cultural setting. It takes the receptor's context seriously. It acknowledges, first of all, the simple and obvious fact that no one comes to Jesus in a spiritual vacuum. It rejects the assumption that the mind of the receptor is a *tabula rasa*, ready to receive everything the

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6 Darrell Whiteman, 'Contextualization: the Theory, the Gap, the Challenge', *International Bulletin for Missionary Research*, 21:1, (1997), p. 5.

missionary has to teach about spirituality without any clash with or accommodation to the existing set of beliefs. Discipleship in context is based on the recognition that everyone has been captive to one's own spiritual or religious orientation before coming to know Christ (Eph. 2:1-3; Mark 8:20-23). The receptor's mind is far from empty or free. Rather, the mind must go through a fierce battle for biblical truths to be written on it.

Going back to the example cited earlier, we can see how the discipleship lessons developed by a church in Southern California are not suitable in a Filipino context. In the Philippines, evangelical churches are quick to adopt a discipleship program or a Bible study series popularized in the West. But because the material was not written with the Filipino audience in mind, it does not take into account the spiritual and social dimensions of the Filipino mind. The material does not touch the deeper structures of the Filipino worldview and psyche. Discipling a new believer who comes from a nominal Catholic background, requires a concerted effort to speak to the Filipino mind and heart.

The task of discipling Filipinos in their context requires us to examine the values and assumptions that the new believers bring with them.

Lessons on discipleship must penetrate the bottom level where people's animistic beliefs and assumptions can be challenged and transformed in obedience to scripture. Such an effort minimizes syncretism and encourages faithfulness to biblical truth.

In the same way, discipling North Korean believers requires a deep level understanding of their life under communism. For more than half a century, they have been indoctrinated with atheism. One wonders just how meaningful the statement, 'God loves you', is to a North Korean refugee hearing for the first time about a supreme being who is loving and personal.

Ultimately, a call to discipleship is a call to biblical worldview. Our task of discipling is to call people to the biblical worldview of truth. For this to happen, there must be a violent clash of two worldviews, the receptor's and that of the Bible. Sometimes, the task is compounded by the presence of another worldview brought in by the missionary. Melba Maggay writes,

Christianity in the Philippines is a 'sandwich religion,' a layer of Christian beliefs piled on top of a largely pagan slice of bread. We have yet to communicate in a way that truly wrestles with the people's worldview. We need to locate the Gospel at those precise points

The Spiritual Background of a New Believer

Fig. 1

Top Level	Evangelical teaching on discipleship
Middle Level	Catholic tradition and practices (nominal)
Bottom Level	Animistic beliefs and assumptions

where Filipino mythology and worldview differ from those of the West.<sup>7</sup>

Discipleship in context rises out of a dynamic interplay between text (passed down by tradition) and context. By paying attention to both the Bible and the context in which people live, we are then able to bring the task of disciple-making in a *culturally relevant* and *biblically faithful* manner.

For disciple-making to be effective, it must be grounded in the appropriate context in which people live. It is the context that allows us to understand the needs and issues of the new believers. Only after these needs and issues are properly identified and understood, can we then begin to design a curriculum that will help people to follow Jesus faithfully in their context. In short, borrowing discipleship materials or approaches used in another context ought to be resisted. Instead, national leadership must be encouraged and empowered to design their own curricula and approaches to disciple the new believers.

## Discipleship without Context

Each context presents a different set of challenges for the followers of Jesus Christ. We can see this difference by comparing the context of the book of Revelation with the context of the book of Matthew. In the book of Revelation, John defines 'disciples' as those 'who follow the Lamb wherever he goes' (Rev. 14:4). They are the ones who per-

severe right to the end and come to the wedding supper of the Lamb by overcoming the world.<sup>8</sup> To come out as victor, the followers of the Lamb must face the following two challenges:

- The relentless force of seduction by the 'Babylon' with all its glamour and charm, which is nothing but deception and destruction. The churches at Ephesus, Pergamum, Sardis, Thyatira and Laodicea were warned against this.
- The fierce force of persecution by the Beast which, in no ambiguous terms, demands worship from people. The churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia did not fall prey to this force and were commended by Jesus in turn.

John writes that seduction and persecution, the twin evils designed to illicit apostasy from the believers, will climax at the end. He urges the believers to live godly and faithful lives right to the end and arrive safely at the wedding supper of the Lamb.

In John's context, to follow Jesus means to overcome the world at all personal cost:

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<sup>8</sup> If we take the late dating of Revelation, the book of Revelation was written to the seven churches faced with the emperor cult (the worship of the emperor). These churches in Asia Minor adopted the emperor cult enthusiastically, '... possibly more than elsewhere in the Roman Empire' (I. Beasley-Murray, 'Revelation, Book of' in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament Writing*, p. 1028). Domitian was perhaps the worst of all emperors as he demanded that people address him as *dominus et deus* (Lord and God). As for the Christians, the pressure to avoid the emperor cult was compounded by the pressure coming from traditional religious cults. Together, they asked for a concrete response from the believers.

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<sup>7</sup> Melba Maggay, *The Gospel in Filipino Context* (Manila: OMF Literature, 1987), p. 4.

Yet, you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. *They will walk with me*, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who *overcomes* will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but I will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels (Rev. 3:4-5).

Discipleship in John's context is different from discipleship in the context of Matthew's community. The main problem with the Matthean community was their group identity as God's people. Mostly composed of Jewish stock, the Matthean community stood at a crossroad between insisting on Jewish identity and facing extinction or enlarging their tent by reaching out to the Gentiles. Mission to the Gentiles was Matthew's answer to this community in crisis. Mission was used as a form of discipleship. The gospel of Matthew was written '... not to compose a life of Jesus but to provide a guidance to a community in crisis'.<sup>9</sup>

Discipleship in John's context meant resisting seduction and enduring persecution. Discipleship in Matthew's context meant letting go of one's identity and accepting God's plan for a new identity. We can see from these biblical examples that it is the context that determines the issues of discipleship. The text (the Bible) teaches us *who* to follow while the context teaches us *how* to follow Jesus. Needless to say, when we use transferable or generic discipleship material,

we miss out the important issues of a particular context that stand in the way of discipleship.

In the Philippines context, it is easy to identify corruption as one of the critical issues facing discipleship. Corruption is a way of life, rampant in every sector of the Filipino society.<sup>10</sup> It stands in the way of the believer's spiritual maturity. Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano draws attention to 'a trilogy of maneuvers' deeply ingrained in the Filipino psyche, *lusot*, *lakad* and *lagay*. She defines them as follows:

- *Lusot* means to escape from something by wriggling into a hole or through a slit.
- *Lakad* literally means 'walk,'; a euphemism for making an attempt to smooth out difficulties by using a network of 'connections'.
- *Lagay* means grease money, payola, *tong* (when illegal gambling operations are concerned) or plain bribe.<sup>11</sup>

Those who seriously desire to follow Jesus Christ in the Philippines, must deal with the problem of corruption. They have two important questions: 1) How do I stay pure from corruption? and 2) How do I help trans-

<sup>10</sup> The Philippines ranks fourth from the worst in Asia out of 15 Asian countries rated and 92nd in the world in the Corruption Perception Index 2002 according to Transparency International. The country has the dubious distinction of having two of the top ten corrupt heads of the government in the world, those of Ferdinand Marcos (1972-86) and Joseph Estrada (1998-2001). See *The Wallace Report*, June 2004, pp. 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano, *Filipino Values and Our Christian Faith* (Manila: OMF Literature, 1990), pp. 2-5.

<sup>9</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), p. 57.

form this society from corruption? To quote Feliciano, 'How truly honest can a Christian be in a culture that has accepted *lusot*, *lakad* and *lagay* as a system operating outside legal and official policies?'<sup>12</sup> Discipleship material designed for a Southern California middle class church does not cover corruption since it is not a pressing issue for the believers there. Hence, by adopting a material intended for Southern California, the discipler conveniently overlooks the critical issues of discipleship in the Philippines altogether.

We can also talk about other critical issues in discipleship such as the residue of folk Catholic beliefs. They need to be brought out into open and evaluated as the new believer makes a fresh start in following Jesus wholeheartedly. There are also social values like *pakikisama* (being together) and *utang na loob* (the debt of gratitude) which are not bad in and of themselves, but which can be used to hamper Christian growth in the Philippines context. These values need to be discussed and transformed in the service of the kingdom of God. If they are not discussed, disciple-making will remain superficial and people's deep-level assumptions and beliefs will go unchallenged.

### Steps in Contextual Discipleship

How then does one enter into another's culture and engage in a cross-cultural discipleship process? I will now pro-

pose several steps involved in contextual discipleship. Before we take the first step, we must first identify our own theological convictions about contextualization. Stephen Bevans discusses six models of contextual theology in his book, *Models of Contextual Theology*: the Translation model, the Anthropological model, the Praxis model, the Synthetic model, the Transcendental model and the Countercultural model. Of the six, three are of particular importance to us:

- *The translation model* starts with the text. It assumes that there is the supracultural, supracontextual essential doctrine. This essential doctrine is put into other terms in a way that the receptor can understand (also referred to as accommodation).
- *The anthropological model* starts with the context. The present human situation is the focus of divine revelation as much as scripture and tradition have been the foci of divine revelation in the past. Thus one needs to attend and listen to God's presence in the present context (also known as indigenization).
- *The synthetic model* believes in the universality of Christian faith. However, it does not define the constant in Christian identity narrowly in a set of propositions. Each context has its own distinctiveness to work out the universality of Christian faith. Thus, theology is a reflection of the context in the light of the text (alternatively called the dialogical model).

In advocating discipleship in context, I propose that we choose a model of contextual theology that pays due attention to both text and context. Of

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12 Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano, *Filipino Values*, p. 6.



course, we must begin with text, the revealed Word of God. The core message has to do with the redemptive work of God in Christ. One thing we must keep in mind is that the existing category of Christian theology (e.g., the typical order of systematic theology) is not necessarily the best arrangement for people in other contexts. Thinking so is tantamount to ignoring the context.

The following approach to contextual discipleship utilizes the strength of the translation model and the synthetic model. In coming up with a contextualized discipleship material in a particular context, one must take the following steps:

- State the supra-contextual message of the Bible
- Identify the needs and issues of the context
- Create one's own discipleship material
- Determine the best pedagogical approach to the context

**STEP ONE:** State the supra-contextual message of the Bible

We do not need to start everything from scratch. That would be not only a waste of time but also a show of arrogance that God could not teach us through the findings of others. There

are biblical truths or themes that transcend all cultures and contexts. These have been already identified, deposited and passed down through two thousand years of church history (tradition) although we may disagree on how they are arranged. Nonetheless, the essential, supra-cultural message of the Bible can be agreed upon, as reflected, for instance, in the Lausanne Covenant.

While I consider the interaction of text and context essential, I am not assuming that both text and context are culturally conditioned and relative to each other.<sup>13</sup> I believe that there is a supra-cultural, supra-contextual message in the Bible, which has to do with creation and redemption. The redemptive work of the triune God is carried on in the world through the obedience of God's people (the church). The following are the six essential Bible themes I have identified. They make up the overall message of the Bible.<sup>14</sup> These themes in turn interact with the issues raised in a particular context. Naturally, people in one context understand each Bible theme differently from those in another context.

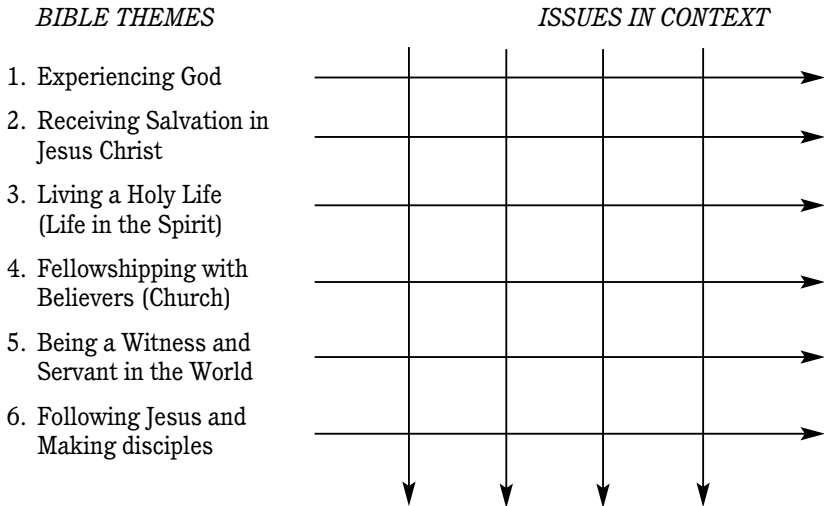
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<sup>13</sup> Bruce Nicholls, *Contextualization*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>14</sup> The number of the themes can vary, depending on how one regroups them.

## Interplay between Bible Themes and Issues in Context

Fig. 2



STEP TWO: Identify the needs and issues of the context

The needs and issues of a particular context must be identified in so far as they bear on the task of discipling new believers. In other words, we need to ask, 'What are the issues that stand in the way of the new believers from becoming mature disciples of Jesus Christ?'

We can start with more obvious issues and move down to subtle ones. For example, one of the obvious challenges facing the Myanmar churches is folk Buddhism. It is so prevalent in the Burmese culture that a new believer in Christ must make a clean break from his past if he is going to mature in Christ. In my visit to the homes of Burman people in Yangon City, I have consistently seen two altars in their living room, a spirit house for Buddha and *payasin* (a spirit house) for *Nagana* (the

local spirit or a *nat*). While Buddha takes care of them in the afterlife, *Nagana* guides and protects them in this life.<sup>15</sup> Their religion (folk Buddhism) is a harmonious response to these two sources of protection. A Burmese pastor told me that most new believers are still afraid of throwing out the altars when they become Christian due not only to the fear of the spirits but also the fear of rejection by family and neighbour.

When I visited a local Christian

<sup>15</sup> His name is *Maung Tin Tae* and he is known as 'the Lord of the Great Mountain'. According to the legend, the king, afraid of the power of *Maung Tin Tae*, a strong blacksmith, burned him to death. So people today offer coconut and red cloth to him regularly. See D. Senapatiratne, S. Allen and R. Bowers, *Folk Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (Phnomh Phen: Training of Timothy, 2003), pp. 22-23.

bookstore in Yangon in order to look for discipleship materials, I was not able to find a single book that addressed the topic of folk Buddhism. Instead, what I found was the straight translation of discipleship materials by the Navigators and other para-church groups. Needless to say, in the Burmese context, part of discipling new believers includes giving instructions on how to make a break with the idols, both physically and spiritually. That is why identifying the needs and issues of the Burmese context is the first step in helping believers become serious followers of Jesus Christ.

If one were to examine the Filipino context, the following issues and needs will be part of the list:

- Debilitating fear of the spirits<sup>16</sup>
- Incorrect notions about God, Church, the Gospel, the Bible, prayer and so on (negatively influenced by nominal Catholicism)
- Extreme family obligations and other excessive demands on relationships (*pakikisama* applied wrongly)
- Immoral living, drinking, gambling and other social ills
- Corruption (*pandaraya*) at all levels of society and other societal and environmental problems
- Lack of material resources (dire poverty)
- The increasing gap between the rich and the poor.

Issues such as above need to be

identified and studied. Ultimately, we need to understand these issues from the perspective of the Filipino worldview. How do these issues touch upon the Filipino worldview? For example, how does their understanding of the spirit world deviate from the biblical understanding of the spiritual reality? An ontological analysis is in order.

While we ought to pay attention to the critical issues present in a particular context, we must also identify the *positive* aspects of context that make the task of discipleship easier. For example, the early rise prayer meeting has been an integral part of spiritual discipline in Korean churches. When we trace the early rise prayer movement in Korean church history, we find that it was an excellent model of the accommodation principle.<sup>17</sup> In Korea today almost all churches practise communal, early rise prayer meetings as part of spiritual discipline and discipleship. This practice predates Christianity. To rise early in the morning and to pray to a higher power was a generally accepted and practised pattern in Korean spirituality. The Korean church has adopted this existing practice and utilized it in the church setting.<sup>18</sup>

In the Philippines, *Ninong and ninang* (the male and female sponsors) can be found at weddings. They promise to provide life-long counsel

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<sup>16</sup> For example, believing that *duendies* (spirits) live in termite hills, some people do not remove termite hills near their house even though termites can one day damage the wooden structure of the house.

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<sup>17</sup> The early rise prayer meetings began during the 1907 Great Awakening in Korea by pastor Kil Sun-Joo. See Kwang Soon Lee and Young Won Lee, *Introduction to Missiology* (in Korean, *Seon Kyo Hak Gae Ron*), (Seoul: Presbyterian Publishing, 1993), pp. 229.

<sup>18</sup> Lee and Lee, *Introduction to Missiology*, pp. 229-230.

and wisdom to couples who are getting married. In a typical Filipino wedding, one can count several *ninongs and ninangs* who stand behind the couple, pledging their support. We can also ask how such a positive cultural (contextual) category can be used in discipleship. In the similar way, festive singing and celebration are part of Filipino social psyche. Due to the Catholic influence, Filipino people are very familiar with annual fiesta and celebration. These are important existing categories that, when utilized properly, can help take the discipleship process one step further.

STEP THREE: Create one's own discipleship material

Assuming that one is using other discipleship materials as a basis or a guide, there are three steps involved in creating one's own discipleship material:

- Eliminate topics found in other materials that are not relevant in one's own context.<sup>19</sup>
- Teach biblical themes that are supra-cultural, but show how they interact with the critical issues of

one's own context.<sup>20</sup>

- Create categories not found in other contexts but are needed in one's own, based on the needs and issues of the local context.<sup>21</sup>

Some discipleship materials coming from the West reflect the cultural values of individualism. For example, despite repeated emphasis on the communal aspect of discipleship in Paul's letters,<sup>22</sup> few topics are devoted to community life in Leroy Eims' famous book on discipleship, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (1978). In the appendix (pp. 159-180), the author presents thirty topics under the heading 'Training objectives for a disciple'. Of the thirty topics, only three are directly related to discipleship in community: Christian fellowship (#5), love (#17) and the

<sup>20</sup> This is perhaps the most important aspect of contextual discipleship. For this step to be effective, the discipeler must thoroughly understand the contextual issues of the receptors. Then, unbiblical issues must be confronted by the biblical norm. See Appendix 1 for a sample.

<sup>21</sup> Western discipleship materials are bound to miss some of the critical issues facing non-westerners. For this reason, new categories must be created. Bong Rin Ro proposes that evangelical contextualization of theology in Asia can 'create new categories of Asian theology according to the diversity of contexts existing in Asia. Several areas have already been suggested such as the theology of suffering and poverty, the theology of change for the Chinese according to Confucius' Book of Change, the theology of demons, and the theology of evangelism under totalitarian rule.' 'Contextualization: Asian Theology,' p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> Here are some examples of the 'one another' passages: Rom. 12:10; Gal. 6:2; Eph. 4:32; Eph. 5:19; Eph. 5:21; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:13; 1 Thess. 5:15.

<sup>19</sup> For example, knowledge-based, propositional truth claims are not that popular in the Philippines, much less the debate over predestination vs. free will; the proof of the existence of God is hardly an issue in the Philippines context. Even those who do not come to church believe in God's existence and accept God's will. For the Filipino, what is real is not a set of doctrines but what he is able to feel. Filipino theological Jose De Mesa jokingly speaks of the Filipino 'worldfeel' (as opposed to 'worldview'), quoting from the special lecture delivered at Asian Theological Seminary, August 15, 2003.

tongue (#18). The other topics present discipleship as more of an individual journey with God. One of the possible reasons for this apparent lack of emphasis on community is that the discipleship movement in America was largely the work of para-church organizations (the Navigators, the Campus Crusade for Christ and so on). Moreover, Eims' book on discipleship was originally designed for use in campus settings, not in local church settings where community life would be emphasized more. At any rate, such an individualistic approach to discipleship is not only unbiblical but also alien to Asian cultures.

Working in the Filipino context, for example, one needs to give more attention to the communal aspect of discipleship (this is a supra-cultural theme in the Bible). But it must be presented in the categories meaningful to the Filipino social world:

- *Pakikisama*—the facility in getting along with others and maintaining a harmonious relationship
- *Amor propio*—self-love in Spanish, and means self-respect. It expects others to behave and avoid giving personal insult or shame (*hiya*).

Individuals are important in the Philippines context (*pagsasarili*). However, individuals find their identity in the group setting or in their family. In such a setting, everyone learns to value the importance of smooth relationships. Therefore, harsh and insulting words are to be avoided. An answer requiring 'no' is usually softened up by ambivalent phrases like 'maybe...' or 'it is possible...' In such a society, exposing someone to shame is the worst form of social condemnation possible.

**STEP FOUR:** Determine the best pedagogical approach for the context

When we consider the fact that Christianity by nature is an imported religion, it is all the more imperative that a pedagogical approach familiar to the local context must be sought and utilized. Effective contextualization involves the meshing of a foreign (Christian) meaning with a local form. Therefore, a proper contextual discipleship will result in the proper use of local forms, which have been proven to be effective pedagogical methods for the particular context over and over again.

Pedagogical methods for discipleship in the West typically include teaching (lecturing), small group Bible study, group sharing, one-on-one mentoring, short-term mission trips, and evangelistic outreaches. But in non-western settings, some of the above formats may not be as effective as when they are combined with symbols, ceremonies and rituals.<sup>23</sup> During the Holy Week in the Philippines, many Catholics engage in procession, in the reenactment of the Passion, and some

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<sup>23</sup> See A.H. Zahniser, *Symbols and Ceremony: Making Disciples Across Cultures* (Monro, CA: MARC, 1997). Also see Jim Courson, 'Deepening the Bonds of Christian Community: Applying Rite of Passage Structure to the Discipling Process in Taiwan', *Missiology: An International Review*, 26:301-313 (1998). Citing the work of Swanson that 50 to 60 'decisions' are required to produce one 'lasting convert' in Taiwan, Courson proposes that 'a more contextualized approach to Christian discipling in Taiwan, based on a rite of passage model, will help the church more effectively incorporate new converts while deepening the bonds of Christian community' (p. 302).

even in the actual crucifixion. Symbols and rituals come alive, leaving powerful imprints in the minds and hearts of the followers, especially the young. The evangelical insistence on the Bible study (and the Bible study *only*) as a chief vehicle for discipling new believers, is simply one-dimensional in a multi-dimensional world. Even for a simple task like asking questions, we need to be careful not to be too direct in approach. For example, many Asians may be too shy or embarrassed to share their own family problems outright in a small group setting. But by asking them about someone else's problems, it is possible to eventually talk about their own problems. In short, we must be prepared to use pedagogical methods that are more natural to the receptors.

A look at Jesus' pedagogical style in Luke 14 shows his sensitivity to context as well as his creativity. Tension rises in the room while the Pharisees are zeroing in on Jesus and looking for a charge. Nonetheless, Jesus begins his multi-dimensional teaching on discipleship. Here are some characteristics of his teaching:

- Use of a real life situation (not in a classroom!)—on the Sabbath day, Jesus heals a man suffering from dropsy. It is no longer a hypothetical situation in a Bible study. The situation is real and stakes are high.
- Use of high context communication—Jesus was very much aware of what was going on in the room, that the Pharisees were carefully watching him and Jesus was also aware of what they were thinking; 'When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honour...' (v. 7)
- Use of concrete examples—'If one

of you has a son...' (v. 5) or 'When someone invites you...' (v. 8)

- Use of a story (parable)—'A certain man was preparing a great banquet...' (v. 16)
- Encouraging people to think for themselves—'Suppose one of you wants to build a tower...' (v. 28)
- Grounded in spiritual principles—'For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted' (v. 11); 'In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple' (v. 33)
- De-briefing and reinforcement—Jesus ensuring that the disciples understand what is really being taught here (vv. 25-35).

Our pedagogy must fit the context of the receptors. The approach must be natural to the receptors. For example, if people are not used to reading books, then, it would not be effective to do an intense Bible study as part of the discipling process. The right pedagogy for discipleship must touch upon all three dimensions of human learning: the cognitive, the affective and the volitional. In the evangelical community, we are quite strong on passing on the right information (the cognitive). But sometimes we fail to capture the heart of the receptors (the affective). The use of symbols, drama, and rituals can be a powerful means to bring the message to the heart. Courson believes, for example, that baptism should be taken seriously in the Taiwanese context. He proposes that baptism is treated as part of contextualized rites of incorporation beginning on the Thursday before Easter:

- Thursday—the congregation shares testimony, song, Scripture

and meal together in retelling the story of *their* redemption; after this, fasting begins for the candidates until Sunday morning.

- Friday—the candidates spend the day in fasting.
- Saturday—the congregation stages a procession through the neighbourhood. The candidates take turns to carry a wooden cross. This is in close parallel to temple processions celebrating the birth of Taiwanese gods or goddesses. Church members distribute gospel tracks.
- Sunday—a celebrative pilgrimage to the ocean with baptism as highlight takes place. The congregation returns to the church in joyful songs of the resurrection. At church, neighbours, friends and relatives of the new believers are all invited to a feast. This is an important time of witness by the community of believers to non-believers.<sup>24</sup>

The use of a procession and a meal invitation is quite natural to the local context. By employing such an approach, we are able to communicate the gospel message to people's heart, as well as to their head. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of pedagogy that fits the context of the receptors.

### Discipleship in Context

Discipleship in context or contextualized discipleship is a receptor-centred approach to disciple-making. It pays attention to context while being faith-

ful to the supra-contextual message of the Bible. It also pays attention to how the supra-contextual message should be communicated.

In this paper I have argued that it is inappropriate to borrow discipleship materials from one context and use them in another context without making due adjustments. It is inappropriate because issues in one context are different from those of another context. By ignoring this difference, the discipler conveniently avoids the issues that must be dealt with, the issues that stand in the way of the believer's maturity in Christ.

I have given as an example the problem of corruption in the Philippines. Discipleship in context does not give us the liberty to conceal the problem of corruption in such a context. A serious follower of Jesus Christ cannot turn a blind eye to the structural evil of corruption and injustice. If a self-professing disciple of Christ is every much a part of the evil structure as an unbeliever is, then the church is in no spiritual shape to announce the reign of God to the unbelieving world. Therefore, every sincere disciple of Jesus Christ ought to ask, 'How can I stay pure from the temptation of corruption?' and, 'What can I do to cleanse this society from the stain of corruption?' Discipleship in context calls for an astute examination of the needs and issues of the context in light of the timeless and unchanging message of the Bible. It also calls for our commitment to raise up national leaders who will bring the gospel home to their own people. Discipleship in context is not an option, but an imperative.

<sup>24</sup> Courson, 'Deepening the Bonds of Christian Community', pp. 310-311.

## APPENDIX 1: A Few Examples of Contextual Issues in the Philippines

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Examples of Biblical Truths</i>	<i>A Few Examples of Contextual Issues (in the Philippines setting)</i>
Experiencing God	God is near. He loves us. We can experience him. God is also just. There will be punishment for the wicked.	How do Filipinos view God, gods & spirits? How does the Filipino understanding of the spirit world and the use of <i>swerte</i> (fate) and <i>bahala na</i> ('come what may') compare with the biblical understanding of God?
Salvation in Jesus Christ	We are utterly sinful before God. Christ died for us. We are redeemed from the sinful life when we put our trust in the <i>finished</i> work of Christ on the cross.	How do Filipinos understand the term 'sin'? Who is Jesus Christ? How do the existing concepts of Christ in the Philippines (such as <i>Santo Ninyo</i> or <i>Black Nazarene</i> ) distort the biblical image of Christ? How does the Catholic teaching on salvation and works affect the way people understand the concept of forgiveness?
Living a holy life	We are called to live a holy life. The Holy Spirit helps us to lead a holy life.	How does a new believer overcome temptations imposed by his or her <i>barkada</i> (a social group prior to conversion)? How do people re-orient their understanding of true power?
Fellowshipping with other believers	Jesus calls us to be part of his Body. We are to love and serve one another.	What is the typical understanding of 'church' for those of us coming from the Catholic Church background? How do we love one another when we are in such a dire need for resources? How do we love one another when we are so divided along the socio-economic line?
Bearing a witness in the world	God calls us to be the salt and light of the world. We need to bear the image of God, who loves justice and mercy (Micah 5:2ff.). We are also called to bring Good News to all peoples.	How do we live as God's witness in this world? What can I do to make this world a better place to live in? How should Christians approach the problems of <i>lusot</i> , <i>lakad</i> , and <i>lagay</i> ? How do we share the gospel message with our Catholic or Muslim neighbours?
Following Jesus and making disciples	Jesus calls us to follow him faithfully. We are also to make disciples of all nations.	What does a mature disciple look like in the Philippine setting? In the urban poor setting? What are the preferred ways of teaching discipleship concepts in Filipino?