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Thomas speaks of the 'Antioch model of every-member ministries'.<sup>60</sup> A local church which wants to integrate Christian migrants should replicate this model.

An important step to integrate migrants into the local church is to help them to find opportunities of service according to their abilities and gifts. Serving others is an important

dimension of Christian life. The status of migrants should not reduce people to the passive receipt of service from other church members. Migrants need an equal chance to serve side by side with indigenous Christians in roles of mutual reciprocity. Where equal opportunities exist their contribution towards God's mission can be recognised by the whole church and in the process their participation enables them to get to know other members of the church better and to form friendships.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas, 'The Church in Antioch: Crossing Racial, Cultural, and Class Barriers', 148.

# Bevans and Bediako: Reconsidering Text-Based Models of Contextual Theologising

Alan Thomson

**KEYWORDS:** *Translation model, countercultural model, radical discontinuity, narrative, dialectic, practitioner, best practice.*

The primary problem this paper wants to address is the question of how to understand these models. Bevans was writing to identify current practices, and the level of interest his book engendered amply demonstrates he hit a chord. Now, more than fifteen years after it first appeared, it is appropriate to look back and consider the ramifications of this publication. Over the course of time *Models of Contextual Theology* has gained stature; it is now a text book for courses around the world and an integral element of missionary and missiological thinking and strategising. In short, it has entered into received wisdom, becoming less an account of contemporary practice and more a normative theoretical framework providing the foundations for emerging approaches.

The following article addresses this transition considering the models not as expressions of what is but as plat-forms for what will be. This necessarily involves consideration of how well

## I Introduction

IN 1992 STEPHEN BEVANS published *Models of Contextual Theology*, a typology of contextual theologising that outlined five methodologies: the translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic and transcendental models. A decade later Bevans published a revised and expanded edition that incorporated the countercultural model. These models are located across a continuum bounded by two primary parameters: text and context with each model being considered paradigmatic: representative of a number of approaches bearing similar characteristics. As Bevans further notes, the six models can be grouped into two categories: two *text-based* models and four *context oriented* models.

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Bevans' theoretical observations fitted the data he relied upon, but it involves this also as a means of critically probing his theoretical constructs. The real question concerns the extent to which his models are useful in a normative rather than descriptive role.

Bevans' work was wide ranging, drawing from numerous sources and condensing a significant amount of material. Tackling this again is quite beyond the scope of an article and therefore the parameters of consideration here are much narrower. The focus will be on his two-text based approaches—the Translation and Countercultural models. Even within this narrow focus there is a need for further refining, hence the ensuing will concentrate on highlights—on establishing a *prima facie* case that these models should be reconsidered if they are to be used normatively.

Propelling this investigation is the question of what might constitute *best practice*, of how contextual theologising could (at least theoretically) be done. Within this schema Bevans' two text-based models become very interesting dialogue partners, not just by usefully pointing to key aspects that need to be thought through but more importantly by the way they interact with each other. This last point occupies a central role in the discussion because Bevans describes them as distinct models. It is hoped that the following will show that while to some extent they can be separated, describing them in this way predominately misses an important opportunity for defining a more sophisticated and robust model for text-based theological engagements with different contexts.

The key to establishing this case is

showing that Bevans' typological analysis results in a theoretical and practical separation between the two text-based models that overemphasises their differences and underplays their similarities. While it will be found that this is indeed the case, it will also be shown that this approach is exacerbated by an unfortunate reductionism in his summaries. The net effect of these influences is for the two models to seem quite distinctive, as if separated by irreducible differences, despite Bevan's best efforts to ameliorate this consequence. In essence, the general case is considerably more fluid than he allows.

As a corrective this paper explores the possibility that the points of difference he notes actually signify, in many cases, relative degrees of emphasis rather than qualitative differences. Further, when this observation is coupled with a greater emphasis upon similarities between the Translation and Countercultural models it becomes clear that his two model structure can be displaced by a quite different framework.

This schema reflects the possibility that beneath the two apparently distinct models there lurks a single, perhaps ideal, model of text-based cultural engagement. When this model is applied to the evidence presented by Bevans, it becomes clear that at least some practitioners operate by way of a dialectical or negotiated process of cultural engagement, carefully weighing the degree of affirmation and prophetic critique required in each context. A tendency for adopting either a positive or negative stance towards culture does not therefore stem from the application of a different model, as Bevans

notably suggests with Pope John Paul II, but emerges from a specific response to contingent requirements. As will be seen, this has important implications for both mission theology and mission practice.

There are two important caveats over the following discussion. First, this is an exploratory analysis, a study that aims to highlight another potentially useful way to construe the underlying data upon which Bevans relies. The length of this article necessarily constrains the amount of evidence that can be used in adducing this conclusion, and therefore the evidence is paradigmatic rather than exhaustive. The specific data highlighted is therefore to be treated as representative rather than comprehensive, though those acquainted with Bevans work will be able to extrapolate it beyond the particular claims highlighted here. Second, this article makes its central point by focussing upon the translation model, an approach that allows an element of in depth consideration not otherwise attainable. This unfortunately truncates discussion of the countercultural model. At a later point it is hoped to publish a similar engagement from the countercultural perspective, for which Michael Goheens' work on Lesslie Newbigin provides an important resource.

## II An Initial Foray

Bevans' analysis of each model consists of two inter-related components. The first, comprising the bulk of his text, is a detailed discussion of the main elements in each model built up on the basis of supporting examples. The second consists of a concluding summary

that allows him to highlight the main points. It is this summary that then forms the skeletal foundation which Bevans later uses to describe and therefore separate his models; hence it becomes the 'detail' in his account of how these models differ from each other. In terms of how he distinguishes between his models it is therefore this summary section that is particularly important; it is a way of approaching the project that has significant implications for his overall conclusions.

At one level this overall strategy is a very useful process, for it allows Bevans to establish classifications that express commonalities between certain practitioners within a specific model, and to highlight differences of method between pools (or models) of practitioners. But summaries are notoriously reductive mechanisms, tending to depict fine gradations of emphasis in aggregate terms, terms that can sometimes belie the underlying subtleties they are reporting. This is, as it were, a 'necessary evil', but its effects should be mitigated by a comparatively high degree of correlation between the detail and the summary in terms of overall thrust. This aspect of his discussion therefore needs to be carefully examined.

In the translation model, for example, Bevans summarises the translation view of 'context' as 'basically good and trustworthy'.<sup>1</sup> Later he moderates this description by noting that the model 'recognizes cultural ambiguity'.<sup>2</sup>

1 Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (rev.ed.) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 44

2 Bevans, *Models*, 44.

Given this description it would be fair to suppose that these practitioners understand cultural contexts to be 'basically good' but that there is some recognition of ambiguity. Bevans provides an expanded comment on this in the body of his analysis: 'The practitioner of the translation model is one who can accept the good in all cultures or contexts while still being committed to the transforming and challenging power of the gospel.'<sup>3</sup> Here Bevans is clearly distinguishing between grades of emphasis, in this case presenting both a primary and a secondary emphasis. The primary emphasis centres upon a positive evaluation of context, and it is this view that characterises the model in Bevans' final summary.<sup>4</sup> By contrast the secondary thrust is an implied negative assessment; that each context contains elements requiring prophetic engagement.

Turning to the countercultural model, Bevans is even clearer in his descriptions. Practitioners are portrayed as focussing on the negative aspects of context: 'Context: radically ambiguous and resistant to the gospel'.<sup>5</sup> Within the body of his analysis this apparently unambiguous statement of radical contextual ambiguity is moderated by a far more optimistic perspective. So, on the one hand adherents advocate the need to 'express the strong critical function that the model plays over against human context.'<sup>6</sup> But on the other hand, 'Contextual the-

ology is best done... by an analysis of culture and by respect for it.'<sup>7</sup> This element of respect is more clearly articulated as the need to explicitly recognise the requirement for the gospel 'to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful' and that in fact 'culture itself is not an evil'<sup>8</sup> even though, as a human product, it displays sinful propensities that degrade it.

These observations lead Bevans to argue the countercultural model's central emphasis is 'respectful yet critical analysis and authentic gospel proclamation in word and deed'.<sup>9</sup> Once again this seems to indicate shades of emphasis, with the countercultural model based on a dual cultural thrust in which one aspect (the negative assessment) is considered a primary focus while the other (the positive perspective) forms an important though distinctly secondary factor. Once again, though this time in reverse order to the translation model, this latter secondary feature is absent from his final summary.

This initial foray shows that both models, when considered at the detail rather than summary level, display closer affinities to each other in terms of their attitudes towards culture than first appears. Furthermore the nature of the similarity seems to suggest the possibility, or at least a *prima facie* case, for the existence of an underlying structural similarity. Having established this as a possibility there then arises the question of how this should be understood, some explanation of

which can be gained by considering another of the examples Bevans uses.

One of Bevans' key examples of the translation model, Pope John Paul II, usefully highlights the theoretical point under consideration. Using the work of Aylward Shorter, Bevans notes that the pope had been primarily concerned with cultures influenced by western thinking, particularly those that were then under the sway of communist thought. Bevans comments that this communist concern 'would explain a certain hesitation on the pope's part regarding the value of particular cultures'<sup>10</sup> and that 'for him, while culture is important and central to human existence, it is nevertheless something thoroughly ambiguous and therefore something in need of purification and redemption.'<sup>11</sup> This is language decidedly reminiscent of the central convictions guiding Bevans' description of the *countercultural* model.

Bevans acknowledges this apparently discordant note, and therefore uses Pope John Paul II to demonstrate the existence of what may be called modular transitions—examples of how, in this case, translation modelists can at times seem very countercultural in their approach. He argues that when the exigencies of individual contexts require it, practitioners switch models. The pope, given the change of situation when his attention shifts from Africa to the West, is presented as an exemplary example of

this.<sup>12</sup> This strongly suggests the interesting scenario that the pope is concurrently operating with and comfortably conversant with two distinctive models.

But, we can note, the idea of switching models is not the only possible explanation. It is perhaps simpler, and more likely, to suppose that Pope John Paul II was not shifting models between contexts but merely changing his emphasis. Instead of a convoluted mechanism of model transition it is surely more plausible to suggest that he was operating with a flexible model. The evidence is in fact suggestive of a single context sensitive model of contextual engagement that adapts into a primarily translation mode when confronting a virgin or newly opened territory of Christian influence and a countercultural mode when faced with a syncretistic, 'old' territory.<sup>13</sup> Instead of each 'mode' reflecting a separate model, as argued by Bevans, it represents the result of a process of dialectical engagement in which context considerations are pragmatically balanced.

So far we have been primarily concerned with thinking this question through by way of Bevan's analysis, considering thereby the implications of certain discordant notes within his

3 Bevans, *Models*, 43

4 Refer particularly to the tables with which he concludes his book.

5 Bevans, *Models*, 126.

6 Bevans, *Models*, 119.

7 Bevans, *Models*, 119.

8 Bevans, *Models*, 119.

9 Bevans, *Models*, 119.

10 Bevans, *Models*, 50, at which point Bevans provides n. 64, in which it is argued that the Pope is following the countercultural model.

11 Bevans, *Models*, 50.

12 Bevans, *Models*, 50.

13 This is a bold statement of the thesis with many important nuances simply assumed, some of which are described later. Certain other factors, such as elements of the historical development of missions, also play an important part in the distinction between the older and newer territories; however this discussion ranges far beyond the parameters of our purpose here.

framework. We are not limited to this resource though; in a quite different context another theologian has been working through very similar issues; providing a very instructive analysis for our purposes.

### III Kwame Bediako and African Theology

Kwame Bediako, a Ghanaian theologian, has, in the course of his analysis of the African theological context, helpfully considered aspects of the question we are currently pursuing.<sup>14</sup> In his assessment African theological discourse was being conducted within an overly dichotomous framework that tended to emphasise either of two popular postures. He argued that instead of pursuing either of these paths African theologians would be better served adopting a mediating, 'third way' position.

At one extreme he located those who argued for a radical continuity between the gospel and culture, or what in Bevans' terms amounts to an extreme translation model perspective. Bediako called these theologians 'indigenisers', with Bolaji Idowu presented as an exemplar. Idowu's position can be broadly characterised as an argument against an essential foreignness of the gospel and a contention for recognising instead a foreignness stemming from the Western imperial garb that cloaked the gospel when it arrived in Africa. He goes on to contend

for the need to recognise African pre-Christian revelation—a divine preparation in African religions. The gospel, once uncloaked, is not foreign to the African mindset; instead it fulfils a divine preparation already present within African cultures. Bediako argues that this position minimises the 'newness' of the gospel in the context of African tribal religions, thereby truncating the challenging or prophetic role the gospel plays over against traditional African culture.

In the next section Bediako cites Byang Kato as a champion of radical discontinuity, or what Bediako calls the Biblicist position. Notably Kato is explicitly listed by Bevans as an example of the translation model. However where Bevans' analysis of the translation model is suggestive of an emphasis on cultural continuity, or at best neutrality, Bediako presents Kato as stressing an assertive Biblicism that *highlights the distinctiveness* of the gospel message and the newness of the biblical revelation to the African cultural environment. This approach ultimately leads Kato into an antithetical stance regarding the gospel and culture relationship.

In an important way even this countercultural expression of the translation model is benign relative to the clear intentions Kato expresses through his other writings. He markedly constrains contextualization, limiting it to the physical expressions of the context; the gospel is not to interact with the underlying thought forms of the context.<sup>15</sup> For Kato 'theo-

logical meanings must not be sacrificed at the altar of comprehension... the congregations should be taught the meaning of the term as originally meant.'<sup>16</sup> In similar vein he concludes his 1974 Lausanne presentation by picking up on Donald McGavran's observation that Christianity purges cultures.

Returning to Bevans' analysis for a moment, it is instructive to pause here and note the effects of the preceding. Working from Bediako's analysis and Kato's own statements it is apparent that Kato is a curious example for Bevans to call upon. Far from the generally affirmative stance towards culture that Bevans' summary suggests, Kato demonstrates a very strong sense of cultural ambiguity and suspicion. In fact it would appear that Kato ostensibly undermines the conclusions Bevans reaches in his presentation of the translation model.

Kato certainly does not advocate context as 'basically good and trustworthy', though he still maintains a distinctively text-based translational emphasis. In Bevans' analysis such a stance is difficult to describe; it combines core elements of both the Countercultural and Translation models. Further, Kato's position is not articulated such that the modular transition argument applied to Pope John Paul II can rescue it; the elements are all inherent in his overall posture.

Certainly the existence of a single instance such as this is not sufficient in and of itself to disturb Bevans' contentions; it could perhaps operate as the exception proving the rule. Yet it does seem to contribute to a wider picture, providing further evidence in support of an alternative view; namely that missionaries and missiologists operate in a context of negotiation considerably more nuanced than Bevans' is able to suggest through his typology, at least as it currently stands. A translational or countercultural stance is not necessarily reducible to the effects of a similarly labelled model but is more likely, it is contended here, to emerge from a complex interaction that incorporates elements of both.

Bevans does seem to ameliorate this critique somewhat by proposing that the models be understood as relatively porous; that is, they are theoretical constructs that shade into each other. Yet this fuzzy demarcation can only be applied so far before the practicality of his modular approach begins to lose cogency. At what point do they shade into each other such that their separable identities are still maintained? It is time now to press the positive case for the existence of a mediating model that better explains the examples Bevans refers to and the theoretical framework he is seeking to portray.

### IV Bediako's Mediating 'Third-Way'

Bediako's analysis of the 'Biblicist' and 'Indigenisers' positions presents a picture that is very similar to Bevans' 'Translation' and 'Countercultural'

<sup>14</sup> Kwame Bediako, 'Understanding African Theology in the 20th century', *Themelios*, 20(1)(1994):16-17; idem, 'The Roots of African Theology', *IBMR*, 13(2)(1989):61-62.

<sup>15</sup> Byang Kato, 'The Gospel, Cultural Context and Religious Syncretism' in J.D. Douglas

(ed.), *Let The Earth Hear His Voice, International Congress on World Evangelization. Lausanne, Switzerland: official Reference Volume: Papers and Responses* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 1217

<sup>16</sup> Kato, 'The Gospel', 1217

models. Given the significance of the challenges which each view presents to the contextual practitioner, Bediako goes on to articulate the need for a third perspective that takes the middle ground between the two options championed by Idowu and Kato. Bediako explicitly describes this model as a Translation model, labelling its adherents as 'translators'.<sup>17</sup> In his ensuing discussion he suggests scholars such as John Mbiti, Harry Sawyerr, and Kwesi Dickson as exemplars of this stream of thought, before noting that it is his own preferred option for contextual understanding.

Bediako notes this approach is characterised by an understanding of 'Christianity, as a religious faith', and as being 'not intrinsically foreign to Africa'.<sup>18</sup> Yet it is distinguishable from the Indigenisers' position because it retains the centrality of the gospel, 'having firmly taken on board the notion that the Christian faith is capable of "translation" into African terms without injury to its essential content'<sup>19</sup> while concurrently upholding a central plank of the Biblicists' position.

<sup>17</sup> This does not necessarily make them translation model adherents, at least according to Bevans' definitions, though such self-definition does imply the acceptance of central tenets of a broadly conceived translation approach. As will become evident, their self-labelling is based on characteristics that do fulfil many of the core elements of Bevans' description, even if in ways not originally envisaged by him.

<sup>18</sup> Bediako, 'Understanding African Theology', 16.

<sup>19</sup> Bediako, 'Understanding African Theology', 16.

Given this, it is suggested that Bediako's 'third way' presents itself as a plausible candidate for a mediating model within Bevans' typology. Instead of the either/or structure to which Bevans subscribes, this would amount to a both/and approach, though one that still maintains a constant tension between the two poles. Within this framework Bevans is therefore right to note that there are some practitioners occupying the outlying regions of the extremities, rigorously maintaining these extreme postures for theological reasons. In short, this approach allows for the separability that Bevans discerns. But it also reflects the essential commonality pointed out above. This commonality, when expressed in terms of Bediako's mediating process, quite explicitly points to the possibility that all three of the 'models' outlined above actually reflect differing manifestations of a single model. Within this framework Bevans' modular typology becomes a description of the extremes within which the model moves, with the translation and countercultural 'models' providing the outer limits of the range of available possibilities.

So far attention has been focussed on the broad thrust of Bevans' arguments, paying little attention to the supplementary components he presents in support of his contentions. Explicit, though brief, consideration of these aspects, with an emphasis on the countercultural model, will sharpen the analysis and lead to a statement of the core conviction being expressed through this paper.

## V The Core Components Rethought

This section will briefly run through three central points. Turning first to context, Bevans describes the counterculturalist perspective as '*radically ambiguous and resistant to the gospel; unequal to scripture/tradition*'.<sup>20</sup> We need not dwell on this point here because it has been covered above within the translation model analysis. Suffice it to say that even in Bevans' own analysis this does not adequately convey the heart of the model, for there is some considerable nuancing of this bald statement within the body of his book. The foregoing discussion shows that, far from a dichotomous presentation, it is more appropriate to depict the model as a 'mode' within a context sensitive process of dialectical engagement that gives rise to a spectrum of pragmatically determined responses. Admittedly the translation and countercultural 'models' as described by Bevans occupy opposite ends of this spectrum, but they are nonetheless found across the same continuum.

Regarding the second point, revelation, the countercultural model is described by Bevans as upholding '*narrative and story; the "fact" of Jesus Christ*'.<sup>21</sup> The obvious inference is that the translation model generally does not do this, and in fact, Bevans characterises this model as primarily propositional in nature. Unfortunately this characterisation is neither empirically nor theoretically supported, for there is certainly room for a narrative under-

standing within the ambit of the translation model.

Several of the practitioners whom Bevans uses as examples of his translation model engage their task with such an understanding, Kwame Bediako being a prime example.<sup>22</sup> Bediako comments, 'Scripture is a story in which we participate. When understood like this, Scripture becomes recognised by us as the narrative that explains who we are, and therefore as our narrative.'<sup>23</sup> The full range of possible perspectives on scripture that may be upheld from within the confines of the translation model are therefore considerably wider than Bevans intimates, and hence divergent views on scripture do not constitute the boundary between models his schema would otherwise tend to indicate.

The final characteristic we can examine is the understanding of Scripture/Tradition that practitioners operate with. For Bevans, the countercultural model was characterised by its focus on Scripture/Tradition as '*the "clue" to the meaning of history; complete, even though human understanding of it is not; can be understood more completely through the understanding of other cultures*'.<sup>24</sup> A dynamic historical perspective is central to the premise expressed here, as is an orientation to

<sup>22</sup> Bevans does not explicitly refer to him, but helpfully points out that the participants in the 1982 conference on sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World hold to a translation model understanding, of which one was Bediako.

<sup>23</sup> Kwame Bediako, 'Scripture as the Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition', *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 4(1)(2001):5

<sup>24</sup> Bevans, *Models*, 143.

<sup>20</sup> Bevans, *Models*, 143.

<sup>21</sup> Bevans, *Models*, 143.

a centre of the gospel rather than a doctrinal core. Such alternative perspectives are not actually foreign to translation model practitioners, some of whom adhere to very similar principles, Kwame Bediako being once again paradigmatic.

In all, the distance apparent between Bevans' summary descriptions of the translation and countercultural models has less to do with qualitative differences of separation than with methodological differentiation. When examined according to similarities rather than differences, the practitioners he identifies for each model tell a quite different story. Rather than depicting apparently diametrically opposed models, they seem to engage through a method of contextual engagement in which the specific characteristics of each context determines the particular polarity that is emphasised.

For example, when confronted with a deeply syncretised environment, practitioners adopt a challenging or confrontational stance, whereas in 'virgin' territory the approach is apt to be positive as they seek points of appropriate engagement. Contextualizing theology is therefore not a process of either challenge or relevancy. Rather, it is a process of dialectical engagement that weaves its way between these twin influences. A key indicator that this is a primary underlying process between the translation and countercultural models is the way each of Bevans' examples, at least those which we have examined here, have expressed elements of both aspects in line with what would be expected from a dialectical process.

For Bediako, in the African situa-

tion, there was a need for the reductionist dichotomising characterising entrenched positions to be opened up to a position of inherent tension, to a place where the otherwise polarising positions of continuity and discontinuity could relate to each other through creative interaction. It is at this point of tension that the respective positions are able to most benefit from the valuable insights offered by the alternate perspective. At particular times, and in specific places, one pole or the other will tend to be emphasised, however successful contextualization will only occur when *both* continuity and discontinuity are acknowledged and allowed for.

## VI A Dialectical Model

There are a number of key observations emerging from this study. First, the translation model elaborated by Bevans in his summary is a highly homogenised and narrowly defined description. In effect the complex realities of translating the gospel into various cultural environments have been reduced to a model based on the assumptions of conservative orthodoxy. The specific evangelical examples Bevans uses serve only to reinforce this. Bevans' observations do have some historical relevancy, capturing an important element of mid twentieth century missiology. However mission theology and practice has evolved, moving well beyond the parameters his models imply.

Conservative orthodoxy is no longer the sole foundation upon which a translational engagement of contexts may be based. Kwame Bediako stands as an exemplar of a Two-Thirds World model

that operates through a translational mode derived from alternative roots. In the West, Robert Webber has helpfully described an emergent evangelical movement predicated upon similarly different foundations. Clearly the translation approach is now a much broader and richer model of contextual theology than that envisaged by Bevans' articulation of it.

Second, this broader understanding of the translation model displays greater affinities with the countercultural model than Bevans' analysis suggests. Bediako's formulation of it is particularly instructive and leads to the central implication of this study. Bevans' summaries describe two apparently very distinctive methodologies of contextual theology by focussing on the points of difference between them. This approach becomes a self-fulfilling methodology, bolstered by specific examples that serve to reinforce the defined distinctions. Importantly however, it leads to a result that is inconsistent with the underlying analysis it is based on.

Changing the approach from one focused on differences to one emphasising both similarities and differences results in a quite different conclusion, even when recourse is made solely to the analysis and theologians Bevans relies on. In most cases it was found that the translation model could be intimately connected with the countercultural model in a relationship highly suggestive of an underlying commonality. This finding indicates the possibility of a core model of translational/countercultural contextualization, one related to Bevans' two models in the same way Bediako's 'third way' is related to the polarities it mediates

between. This may perhaps be described as a dialectical model of contextual theologising.

The contours of this dialectical model can merely be hinted at here. It is certainly based upon a dialectical process of challenging relevance—and therefore it is the context that determines the particular emphasis given to either a translational or countercultural approach. It encompasses a wide range of theological foundations. Hence the core characteristics of revelation and scripture are not tools of differentiation as such, as if the translation mode was solely related to propositional thinking and the countercultural to narrative approaches. Instead the two modes are separated by a methodological necessity stemming from the specific concerns of the cultural context being encountered. There is certainly a link between content and method that must be acknowledged, yet this is not usually, and nor should it be, a determining factor in deciding the particular approach to be used.

## VII Conclusion

Bevans has provided an important typology of contextual theologising approaches. Through it he has been able to articulate clearly some core aspects of the various approaches key practitioners are using, a strength achieved by highlighting the differences between these practitioners. Unfortunately it is at this very point that a significant problem emerges. With particular reference to his text-based discussion, his models were found to be insufficiently nuanced to act as more than nominal guides to approaches currently in vogue. His

process tended to focus attention on the more hard-line exponents of each approach that then tended to radicalize the views of most of those he included alongside them.

It is suggested that a better approach would be to recognise these radical elements in a more practical way that also identifies broad commonalities. The analysis of Bediako highlighted this need by calling attention to the many complexities involved in engaging different cultures with the gospel, suggesting in the process that practitioners were often more complex and highly nuanced in their engagement than Bevans' findings suggested.

Upon examination it was discovered that the text-based models were not primarily related through their differences but through their similarities. The nature of the relationship was not, therefore, the dichotomous description Bevans provided, but was instead a much more complex process of dialectical interdependence. Instead of two unrelated polarities, the translation and countercultural models were found to be descriptions of the extreme boundaries of a single broad spectrum of context engagement postures. Further inquiry will be necessary in order to derive a more comprehensive understanding of the dialectical model this

implies, but for now it is sufficient to note that such a model exists, and that analysis of it is likely to be of greater practical benefit than the overly simplifying approach of the two models Bevan's advocates.

In closing, we can note the potential for linkage to be made here with the work of Paul Hiebert.<sup>25</sup> His 'critical contextualization' approach would seem to embody a basic framework for thinking through the dialectical approach being advocated above. Instead of the gospel being simply identified with culture, or acting as a rejection of it, he suggests a 'critical' process in which the particular culture being encountered is first carefully examined and assessed. He notes that this is not a distant missionary analysis, but a lived indigenous experience in which relevant aspects of the culture are deconstructed in light of the gospel. This is a methodological clue as to how the dialectical model may both affirm aspects of culture and critique others, or, at a global level, how it may be more inclined towards a positive assessment of some cultures but a negative view of others.

<sup>25</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, 'Critical Contextualization', *IBMR*, 11(3)(1987):104-112.

## Renewed Journey: A study of Philippians 3:10-11

John Lewis

**KEY WORDS:** *Church, mission, power, suffering.*

### I The Context of Ministry

In recent decades the church found confidence in its ability to understand society and connect emotionally with it. Christians around the world established a new and meaningful awareness of their surrounding cultures for the purpose of reaching out with vibrant relevancy. But recently it has become clear that this confidence no longer exists. We are travelling on a journey into a midnight of uncertainty and we do not know what the new dawn will bring. The effect on the church has been dramatic. Once self-proclaimed experts of the collective psyche, Christians in their multitudes have withdrawn to the blog, where, by way of an avalanche of chats, they wait for a clear way forward.

It is unlikely, however, that the type of clarity sought will ever emerge. The world will continue to roll forward in ever new ways and these will continue

to defy Christians' grasp and provide nothing of substance on which hang our plans. The new wine skins will not hold the old wine. Therefore there must be a fashioning of a new awareness if the church is to be faithful to our Lord's commission to preach the Gospel. Instead of seeking to know the world, God's people are called upon to know Jesus Christ with a new and revived passion, so that, through revived fellowships of faith, the world would come to know him.

Indeed, the church is not an institution to be fashioned according to its ability to connect with its neighbourhood but a living entity in movement through history. Each local church is a complex and unique collection of relationships, feelings, backgrounds, perceptions, emotional capacities, wounded hearts, dreams and hopes. To be sure, the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 4:15-16), each congregation or branch having its own distinct personality. The biblical passage for our consideration is a passionate cry of the heart that exhorts these distinct 'per-

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