

Mission Study Group No. 10

Indigeneity and Inculturation Working Group

Participants

Samuel Man Jim Chiu (Hong Kong), John Edge (UK), John Borski (Bolivia), Harriet Hill (USA), Eddy Ho (Malaysia), Graeme Humble (Australia), Jacob Kaunkal Elizabeth Koepping (UK), Eleazar Lopez (Mexico), Jorn Olsen (Denmark), Darrell Whiteman (USA).

Papers presented:

“Two-way Contextualization: Insights from Bible Translation” (power point presentation) Harriet Hill

“Contested Light: Some Religious Contestations in eastern Dabab Kadazan Villages” Elizabeth Koepping

“Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap and the Challenge” Darrell Whiteman

Oral report on Contextualization in India, Jacob Kaunkal.

“Breaking the Dividing Walls: A Theological Reflection” Betsy Glanville

Outcomes

Looking at numerous cases, we developed the concepts of contextualization and inculturation as follows:

► Contextualization: the process of connecting gospel and culture. Multiple approaches are necessary for pluralistic societies. Actual contexts are targeted, not traditional ones gone by. These contexts are always changing.

Bible translation can play a key role in this process, both by expressing biblical concepts in local categories and by bridging local cultures to biblical ones. It also provides a model for contextualized theology, as developments in communication theory show the importance of context, how it is accessed, and how it is transformed. Translation is a theological task, reflecting the worldview of the translators, so it is imperative that local theologians take charge of the translation in their local languages so that the contextualization process passes through the least number of filters possible. It is also imperative that translation be done in community, so that the community works out and learns their theology in the process.

Contextualizing the Gospel to one audience distances others. For example, saffronization in India appealed to high caste but repelled lower castes. The reverse would be true for the kaili approach, which appeals to low castes but may repel higher ones.

Contextualization relates the Gospel to worldview and culture, which removes inauthentic barriers to the Gospel and allows the authentic offense of the Gospel to the culture surface clearly. For example, in India, the contextualized Gospel challenges notions of caste.

► Inculturation *of the faith* is the result of the process. The Holy Spirit and local people are the primary agents; it can't be forced or done by an outsider. The missionary's role can be compared to that of a midwife helping the process to happen. Both parties are changed in the process, and the universal church is enriched.

Inculturation is about a fundamental change in way of being, not just an adoption of superficial forms. It can take a significant amount of time, but it can also get stuck en route (for example, elite congregations set up by de Nobili in India as a temporary measure which has lasted over 450 years). The seed that is sown may have to die before it springs to life in the cultural context. In the process, people may have multiple identities, but it should lead to an overall

integration of identity, rather than contradictory identities. Inculturation can be measured by the spiritual fruit/vitality that a community has.

Inculturation is a theologian's word, not an anthropological one. **

Other terms:

▶ Acculturation: one culture being assimilated into another. The Malay government would like to acculturate the Orang Asli into Malay society. This is often a goal of nation-states, and sometimes of the church.

▶ Adaption: a culture adopting things from another, blending it in. When this happens with Christian concepts, it can be labeled syncretism and considered to be negative, or it can be considered contextualization and positive.

Future

Do we want to continue networking? How? Do we want to establish this as a regular working group of IAMS?

What issues do we feel need to be addressed?

What is the role of Scripture and the appropriate language in contextualization?

How can anthropologists help theologians know what culture is?