THE CHALLENGE OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

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Introduction

Theology is commonly defined as "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum).* Since what we mean is Christian theology, we can also define it as Christian faith trying to understand the things of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. As Jesus is the Word made flesh, he is God in context, sharing our condition in the human culturally conditioned world. He was a male, a first century Jew, and shared the culture of his own people. In this mystery of the incarnation, he made use of all that is familiar to us, in order to communicate his divine life and grace. This is the way for theology to follow if it is to remain relevant in today's world. Theology must be contextual. It must speak to man where he is. It must address human questions and concerns in the light of the faith. In this way, theology is no longer simply a study of God but a study of what God says and does in a context. This is because we Christians believe in God who is present and active in each local context – in the face of neighbour and stranger, in the depths of human culture and experience, or in the life we seek to build together. That is why theology ought to be contextual. It is not just a matter of academic analysis, it rather emerges from a life of prayer and practice – in a community that meets God in Word and Sacrament, that listens to the wisdom of Tradition, and that seeks to discern and respond to his presence and action in the world. It is therefore the contention of this article that the challenge of contextual theology is the challenge of relevance. Every genuine theological reflection must show its relevance by engaging consciously the context of its theologizing.

1. Definition of Contextual Theology

In his book, Models of Contextual Theology (1992), the American Catholic theologian, Stephen B. Bevans gives a classic definition of contextual theology as:

> a way of doing theology in which one takes into account the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Church; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change within that culture, whether brought about by western

> technological process or the grass-roots struggle for equality, justice and liberation[1].

Bevans here goes beyond classical or traditional theology by positing three main sources for contextual theology, namely, Scripture, tradition and socio-cultural context in which one is theologizing. For him, contextual theology is a way of theologizing on the Christian faith not only on the basis of Scripture and tradition - the two main theological sources of reflection of classical/traditional theology, but also on the basis of concrete culturally conditioned human experience or the socio-cultural and historical context. Thus, as an interpretation of Christian faith which arises in the consciousness of its context, contextual theology occurs in connection and in dialogue with human experience, phenomena and traditions of our age and the surrounding world. According to Bevans, what makes contextual theology precisely contextual is the recognition of the validity of another *locus theologicus* or theological source, namely, present human experience.[2]

Lurdino A. Yuzon has rightly noted that contextual theology differs from traditional/classical theology in two ways. In the first place, it recognizes the critical importance of human experience as a source for reflection on Christian faith and moral. Second, due to its rootedness in concrete human experience in a particular culture and society, it speaks primarily to that context. As such, it does not pretend to be unchanging, above culture and universally applicable in a normative way to all other particular contexts at all times and places. Since it is a theology that arises out of a particular context, contextual theology is something that is relevant in relation to a certain place and time. It can therefore be definite, at best, but not definitive.[3] In view of the contextual nature of all genuine theologizing, Robert J. Schreiter, contends that it is more apt to speak not of universal, permanent and unchanging theologies, but of "local theologies."[4]

2. Theological Method

We have seen that contextual theology is an interpretation of Christian faith, which emerges in the consciousness of its context. It differs from the

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[1] Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll/New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 1.

[2] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 2.

[3] Lourdino A. Yuzon, "Towards a Contextual Theology," http://cca.org.hk/home/ctc/ctc94-02 /1.yuzon.htm (Assessed 2014-04-12).

[4] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1985).

traditional/classical theology which was considered as changeless in content and is above culture and historically conditioned expression. Because contextual theologians do not consider theology simply as a study of God, but as a study of what God says and does in a context, contextual theology actualizes a theological method which considers culture, history and contemporary thought forms along with Scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theological expression.[5] Thus, Albert Nolan could even go to the extent of saying that theology is rather a study of the context per se. In a similar vein, Sigurd Bergmann holds rightly that the interpretation of God today or the hermeneutic of Christian faith "occurs in connection and in dialogue with people, phenomena and traditions in our age and the surrounding world". By so doing, contextual theology strives not only to gather the experiences that emerge in specific situations or contexts but also strives to actively change the context, and making theology part of the process of cultural renewal.[6] Bergmann opines that contextual theology is an umbrella term indicating a group of attempts, which in different circumstances use and develop the above theological method. He makes a list of common traits which characterize these attempts some of which are as follows:

- The significance of the subject's specific experiences, in particular experiences of suffering and deliverance.
- The criticism of the theology of eternity and the confusion between local and universal claims to validity.
- The striving for social and emancipating relevance
- The renewal of theological ways of expression in close collaboration with local forms of culture.[7]

Furthermore, it is the heightened awareness of human culture or experience as a theological source by contextual theology which is responsible for this basic shift in theological method between it and traditional theology which is based only on Scripture and tradition substantially speaking. Contextual theologians agree that "culture and historical context plays a part in the construction of the reality in which we live and so our context influences our understanding of God and the expression of our faith."[8] Consequently, "both poles – human experience and the Christian tradition – are to be read together dialectically."[9] Thus, Jurgen Moltmann opines that "interpretation of the Christian faith needs to be partly authentic, that is identical with the

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[5] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 2.

[6] Sigurd Bergmann, *God in Context. A Survey of Contextual Theology* (Hants: Ashgate, 2003), 4.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 2.

[9] Ibid., 11.

specific traits of Christian tradition, and partly relevant, meaning that it would be applicable in a liberating way to different situations in society."[10]

Behind the quest of contextual theologians in their theological method is the issue of relevance of the enterprise of theology. Contextualization of theology or the restatement of the faith in a relevant way in ever new situations or contexts enables theologians to address current issues and needs of the Church in a particular culture. By continually contextualizing our theology and thus, understanding and reconfessing the faith in a relevant way enables the Church to lead her members into a full and vivid grasp of the faith. Michael Goheen could therefore state: "Theology that does not speak to the issues and needs of the present will not enable the Church to take hold of and own the faith."[11] This points to the need for "servant theology."

3. Servant Theology

The great Dutch evangelical theologian, Hendrikus Berkhof, comments that theology is "meant to equip the saints for service." Contextualization is but another way of referring to this "servant role of theology."[12] David Wells in this light calls on contemporary theology to be truly rooted in context by modelling the incarnation in its methodology: "The Son of God assumed the form of a servant to seek and save the lost and theology must do likewise, incarnating itself in the cultural forms of its time without ever losing its identity as Christian theology." [13] By so doing, theology is able to serve both its ecclesial and cultural context. In other words, Christ's willingness to accommodate the needs of our situation even to the extent of becoming incarnate in the form of a man, stands as the model for a humble theology that exists primarily to meet the real needs of the context.[14]

4. Incarnation Theology

Contextual theologians have relied heavily on the insight drawn from the mystery of incarnation in order to elaborate their theological synthesis. We shall consider such two syntheses by the analysis of the contribution of two of the principal exponents of contextual theology.

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[10] Jurgen Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi. Christologie in messianischen Dimension* (Munchen, 1989), 56-58.

[11] Michael W. Goheen, "Theology in Context: Lesslie Newbigin's Contribution" (2001), newbig.net/assets/pdf/Inc_pdf. (Assessed 2014-03-30).

[12] David Wells, "The Nature and Function of Theology," in *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options,* ed. R. K. Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 15.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Marc Cortez, "Creation and Context. A Theological Framework for Contextual Theology," in *Westminister Theological Journal,* 67.2 (2005): 347-362.

4.1. Stephen B. Bevans

Bevans treats the incarnational nature of Christianity under the internal factors that point to contextualization as a theological imperative. He sees God's love as the motive behind His desire to communicate His life-giving relationship to human beings. But if He was to do this, the *modus operandi* will be such that human beings could fully grasp the meaning and import of this divine economy. He became flesh not in any general way, but in a particular way. In other words, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew, son of Mary, a male, God became a human being. God incarnated Himself in a human person with particular physical features and with particular personality traits. Bevans therefore sees incarnation as a process of becoming particular, and in and through the particular, the divinity could become visible and in some way become graspable and intelligible. On the basis of this sound theology, he concludes: "Christianity, if it is to be faithful to its deepest roots and most basic insight, must continue God's incarnation in Jesus by becoming contextual." Rene Padilla expresses a similar view as follows:

> The incarnation makes clear God's approach to the revelation of himself and of his purposes: God does not shout his message from the heavens; God becomes present as a man among men. The climax of God's revelation is Emmanuel. And Emmanuel is Jesus, a first-century Jew! The incarnation unmistakably demonstrates God's intention to make himself known from within the human situation. Because of the very nature of the Gospel, we know this Gospel only as a message contextualized in culture.[15]

4.2. Sigurd Bergmann

Of all the reasons for contextualization which emanate from an interpretation of Christianity's own tradition, the strongest as Bergmann sees it, lies in the mystery of incarnation. According to him, what is most distinctive of Christianity among other religions lies squarely on the belief that God has become human, that the Creator has become flesh and blood among men and women. Revelation has thus, historically occurred at a certain time, in a certain place and in a certain culture. God has in Jesus the man, become part of a certain socio-cultural context. "The universal God, Creator, has become particular: he is a male Jew, ideologically diffuse, wandering freely around in

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[15] Rene Padilla, "The Contextualization of the Gospel," in C. H. Kraft and T. N. Wisley, eds., *Readings in Dynamic Indigene*ity (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1979), 286. See Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 8.

Palestine".[16] Bergmann therefore draws out the implication of this mystery for the dynamics of the Christian faith:

> If Christian faith wants to preserve the continuity of its historical origins it needs somehow to preserve this particularity. After the revelation of God in Jesus the man, we cannot interpret Christian faith as a faith in a common, supernatural God. The distinctive features of the Christian image of God remain belief in a God, which meets us in a specific earthly and historical context with all the restrictions this signifies. This earthly historical belief cannot be reduced to metaphysics, a science of the supernatural.[17]

In view of the fact of the incarnational nature of Christianity, Bergmann holds that contextual theologians are noted for striving to interpret what he calls 'the ongoing incarnation'.[18] In other words, the incarnation of the Christian faith in different cultures and historical situations prolongs or continues the process which was begun by God in Jesus Christ. As incarnation theology, contextual theology which is a servant theology fulfils its being and preserves the historical continuity of Christianity by constantly asking how God meets us in specific contexts.

5. Contextualization in the History of Theology

Is the enterprise of contextualization merely a theological movement associated with the contemporary times or is the traditional way of doing theology also contextual? Bevans responds to this question in a nuanced way. According to him: "While we can say that the doing of theology by taking culture and social change in culture into account is a departure from the traditional or classical way of doing theology, a study of the history of theology will reveal that every authentic theology has been very much rooted in a particular context in some implicit or real way."[19] But contemporary contextual theologians take culture into account in a conscious and explicit way in their theologizing. They assume that local and particular situations are the locus of truth, and therefore take them into account explicitly as a source of their theological enterprise. This is the understanding of what contextual theology stands for in our contemporary period of history.

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[16] Bergmann, *God in Context*, 15.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 4.
[19] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3.

But on the other hand, as we have seen, contextualization is a prerequisite of all genuine theological thought, and as such very traditional. Even though explicit contextual theologizing is a mark of contemporary contextual theologies, all genuine theological traditions prior to the contemporary times were marked implicitly by elements of contextuality as we shall now see.

5.1 Contextualization in the Scriptures

Contemporary Scripture scholarship has shown that the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are a repository of a plurality of theologies. "The Bible literally means 'books' (*biblia*), and the Bible is a library, a collection of books and consequently of theologies."[20] In the Hebrew Scriptures alone one can name many different theologies: Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly, Deuteronomic and Wisdom theologies. These theologies of the Hebrew biblical tradition "reflect different times, different concerns, and even different cultures as Israel moved from an agrarian society to a monarchy, from an independent state to a vassal of Assyria, Greece, and Rome."[21]

The same story of plurality of theologies can also be told of Christian scriptures. Due to the different local contexts in which they were written, each New Testament writing addresses the concerns of quite different communities, and thus, engendering different theologies. For instance, the theology of Paul is different from that of James, that of Matthew different from John's. Also, the deutero-Pauline pastoral epistles differ from the genuine letters of Paul in terms of the different concerns by which they are marked. The great American scripture scholar, Raymond E. Brown, in his work, *The Churches the Apostles left Behind*[22], studies seven very different churches in the New Testament period after the death of the apostles. The result is a plurality of ecclesiologies as these churches had quite diverse emphases in their community life, as detectable from the biblical writings addressed to them. The plurality of theologies in the New Testament is a pointer to the work of contextualization of the gospel message undertaken by the different sacred writers under diverse circumstances and historical epochs.

A good example of contextualization in the Christian Scriptures is evident in the gospel of John. It is a case of an attempt to relate to the culture in a challengingly relevant way. In his gospel, John employs the language, and thought forms of the Hellenistic world pervaded by Gnosticism. Using Gnostic

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] See Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1984).

categories, he addresses Gnostic questions and concerns in such a way that he makes his gospel relevant to Gnostics of all ages. However, despite his accommodation of the Hellenistic thought forms and language which makes his gospel relevant to his Gnostic contemporaries, the absolute contradiction between the word of God and human culture was equally stated in very clear terms. This he achieved by challenging the idolatry at the heart of Gnostic thought. In this light, John opens his gospel by using the Gnostic term, *logos*: "In the beginning was the *Logos.*" In the Gnostic parlance, the *logos* was the impersonal and invisible law of rationality that permeated the universe giving it order. For John, this *logos* is the man Jesus Christ, whom he identified as God (Jn 1:1).

Thus, John sets off by "identifying with the classical longing for the source of order expressed in the term *logos*, but subverts, challenges, and contradicts the idolatrous understanding that had developed in the classical world." [23]As such, his theology is both relevant and faithful. By using familiar categories that express existential struggles in the Hellenistic world, John is relevant to his contemporaries. But because he also challenges with the gospel the idolatrous worldview that shapes those categories calling for repentance, John is faithful to the demands of divine revelation which he mediates.[24]

5.2. Contextualization in Patristic Theology

Furthermore, there were elements of contextuality in the doctrinal thinking of the Church Fathers. As great theologians, they tried to make sense out of the faith in terms of the dominant and all-pervasive Hellenistic culture of their times. In this light, Clement of Alexandria integrated the insights of the Stoics while Origen made use of Plato. On the other hand, the theology of Augustine was shaped by the insights of Plato's philosophy and neo-Platonists of his time.

A good example of contextualization in the early Church can be seen against the background of the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the early centuries of Church history. The ensuring formulation of the Trinitarian faith was the fruit of a missionary encounter between the gospel and pagan classical culture. The Church was entrusted with the mandate to announce the message that in Jesus, the man from Nazareth, God had entered our history to reveal and accomplish the salvation of the world which would be completed at the end of times. But this message of life needed to be communicated to people in the classical world whose thought forms and worldview were very different from that of the Old Testament. The

[23] Goheen, "Theology in Context."
[24] Ibid.

dichotomies of the intelligible and sensible world were fundamental to the classical worldview. This way of understanding the world demanded a whole range of intermediate beings to bridge the gap between pure being which was unknowable and unapproachable (intelligible world), and the ordinary world of things and events (sensible world). If God is conceived as pure being, then it was a natural thing to place Jesus somewhere in this intermediate range – something less than God. This was what the priest Arius did with his Christological heresy. In his bid to protect the divine transcendence, he reasoned that the Word (Logos), while pre-existent in regard to the world, is a created intermediary, a kind of demi-god, neither fully God nor fully human. He allowed the gospel to be swallowed by the Hellenistic worldview of his time.[25]

The challenge of the Church then was how to protect the gospel from being accommodated and absorbed into this pagan Hellenistic worldview. Another challenge was how the Church can offer the gospel to her contemporaries as a way beyond the crippling dichotomies of the Hellenistic thought-world. It was in this context that theologians of the first three centuries, especially Athanasius, developed the gospel into a comprehensive and explicit doctrine of the Trinity. The language with which this Trinitarian faith was articulated or expressed was the language of time and place. Thus, a most significant moment in theology was when, at Nicea, a Greek philosophical term - *homoousios* (consubstantial) – was used to express the scriptural idea of the identity of the Logos or incarnate Word in relation to the Godhead.[26] What is the import of this achievement for contextual theology? Says Goheen:

> The theological articulation of the Trinity was simply making explicit what was revealed in the gospel in the context of a missionary encounter with classical culture. This is contextual theology in the sense that the church formulated its doctrine in interaction with the currents of the contemporary culture, and also in the sense that the language and thought forms of the time were employed to make known and protect the gospel.[27]

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[25] Ibid.

[26] See J. C. Murray, *The Problem of God, Yesterday and Today* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1964), 45-53; and Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea: The Dialectical Development of Trinitarian Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 136-37.

[27] Goheen, "Theology in Context."

There lies the true significance of Nicea, and later of Chalcedon, namely, "the underlying challenge they pose to us to have our own contemporary culturally based Christological formulations."[28]

5.3. Contextualization in Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas classical theological tradition developed in the context of the new intellectual climate and culture of 13th century which was occasioned by the emergence of universities. This new cultural context was also marked by the newly discovered works of Aristotle which Aquinas used as vehicle for a new synthesis of Christian doctrine. Though, Aquinas' theology was contextual, and later became a paragon of orthodoxy, it tended to view theology as an unchangeable and metaphysical project whose conclusions have universal validity, are timeless and above any historical conditioning or culture. This is a so-called *theologia perennis* or the theology of eternity. The central issue in the criticism directed against this classical theological tradition is the relevance of theological practice.

5.4. Contextualization in the Modern Period

Martin Luther proved himself as a great theologian by, among other things, successfully articulating the whole new consciousness of the individual as it emerged in the West at the dawn of modernity. He sought to discover a personal relationship with God, an important move which was in conformity with the spirit of the time. It was no wonder then that his call for the reformation of the Church was heard by so many people. Since his Protestant theology captured the modern emphasis on the place of the individual in the creation of his destiny, it can be said without fear of contradiction that this theology was nothing if not contextual. On the other hand, the theology of Catholic Counter-Reformation was developed in the context of opposition to the Protestant challenge spearheaded by Luther. In this sense, this particular Catholic Church theology was contextual.[29]

Furthermore, we can also cite many other examples from the modern period to show how theology was contextual. A good example was the 19th century monumental attempt by Friedrich Schleiermacher to root theology in experience in response to the romanticism of his age. It was also a positive attempt at contextualization by the effort made by the Catholic school of Tubingen to align Catholic theology with post-Kantian philosophy particularly

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[28] V. Fabella, "Christology from an Asian Woman's Perspective," in *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, ed.V. Fabella and S. Ai Lee Park (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), 9.

[29] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 4.

that of Schelling. It is also noteworthy to underline two of the attempts to contextualize theology in the 20th century: One is that of Paul Tillich who was convinced that theology needs to be done as a correlation of human "existential questions and theological answers in mutual interdependence"[30]. The other is Karl Barth's highly contextual theology of the Word of God.[31] In view of the forgoing historical excursus, it will be pertinent to conclude with Bevans as follows: "What becomes clear, in any case, is that even a cursory glance at the history of theology reveals that there has never been a genuine theology that was articulated in an ivory tower with no reference to or dependence on the events, the thought forms, or the culture of its particular place and time."[32]

5.5. Contemporary Contextual Theologies

Colonialism began to take the centre stage as from the seventeenth century onwards. This historical event was accompanied by a fervour for overseas mission. It was in the work of some Christian missionaries that contextual theology was first made explicit. As these missionaries tried to bring the gospel to cultures which were remarkably very different from their own, they saw the necessity of adapting the message to the context of the people they were preaching to.[33] This was the antecedent of contemporary contextual theology.

However, the rise of contextual theology as a professional discipline began to gather momentum as from the 1970s. This was earlier given a big boost by the Second Vatican Council which, in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), opted for the contextual method in its theological reflections. Thus, in 1973 two theologians from Asia, Shoki Coe and Aharon Sapsezian, pleaded for a contextualization of theology.[34] Their demand was that the educational programme of the ecumenical movement should be situated in context. In other words, they insisted that theological education should be brought into "the field" to a greater extent. As Bergmann puts it: "Theology should be a living meeting between a universal Gospel and the specific reality where people are."[35] 1970s

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[30] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 60.

[31] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 4.

[32] Ibid.

[33] "Problems and Methods in Contextual Theology"; http://moodle.bookes.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/109881/mod_resource... (Assessed 2014-02-25).

[34] Shoki Coe, "In Search of Renewal in Theological Education," *Theological Education*, vol. 9, 4 (1973).

[35] Bergmann, *God in Context. A Survey of Contextual Theology*, 3.

and 1980s recorded an immense number of systematic attempts to give human experiences in particular situations a central function in theology especially as it pertains to the experiences of suffering and structural injustice. This explicit and engaged awareness of the contextual nature of theology led to the emergence of the new types of theology – contextual theologies. This new type of theology (or contemporary contextual theologies) includes, liberation theology, black theology, Minjung theology, feminist theology and African Christian theology.

The theology of liberation has its origin in Latin America where it was a Christian movement at the grass root level. It developed as a reflection on how the Gospel or Christian faith can be relevant to a people's struggle against an unjust dependence upon colonial powers. In black theology, theologians in Africa and the USA reflected on the significance of faith in God for the experience of being black and marginalized. The Minjung theology in Korea reflected on the suffering people's pain and brought it into theological focus. Feminist theology holds the conviction that the voice of and experience of women have been marginalized in Church history, and this reality gives women the justification for revisiting the biblical texts and the doctrines and practices taken from it, from a woman's perspective.

On the other hand, African Christian theology focuses on the interpretation of Christian faith in the context of African experience and culture. In spite of a few dissenting voices,[36] African theologians generally assume that there are two basic types of African Christian theology, namely, inculturation and liberation.[37] Inculturation theology which is a form of contextualization seeks to creatively incarnate the Gospel in African cultures thereby making this message relevant to the African situation. Inculturation involves two elements: Assumption of authentic African cultural values as Christian values and evangelization of African cultures. "Liberation theology, in contrast, is a form of contextualization which places the Gospel in our contemporary African setting. Instead of focusing on the traditional African

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[36] See Ngindu Mushete, "An Overview of African Theology," in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. R. Gibellini (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 9-26. Mushete thinks that there are three types of theology in Africa, namely, mission theology, "African theology" and black South African theology. On the other hand, Timothy Palmer argues that there are four basic types of theology in Africa today, namely, inculturation theology, liberation theology, African evangelical theology and prosperity theology. See Timothy P. Palmer, "African Christian Theology: A New Paradigm." www. Tcnn.org/articles/RB56_Palmer.pdf. (Assessed 2014-04-31).

[37] See Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993); Charles Nyamiti, "Contemporary African Christologies," in *Paths of African Theology*, 62-77 (64).

culture, liberation theology is passionately concerned with rectifying the glaring injustices in our society."[38] It complains that inculturation theology neglects the pressing social issues in our society.

Conclusion: The Challenge of Relevance

From what we have seen so far, we can clearly state that the challenge of contextual theology is the challenge of relevance of the theological enterprise. It is a clarion call to theologians to take seriously the questions, issues, problems and concerns that arise from the context of their theologizing in order to make their theology a service to God's presence and activity among humans in each local context. Time has passed when the model of doing theology is that which considers theology as a universally applicable and unchanging activity. Today, we should talk about a theology that makes sense at a certain time and place. This is not to deny the trans-cultural relevance of theology. But the conclusions of any theology apply primarily to the context from which that theology arises, since as David Tracy rightly observed, the theologian's task is to bring about a "correlation" between tradition and situation (or context).[39] Theology that is relevant thus, has to make human experience or culture and cultural change an important source of its reflection in addition to the Word of God as revealed in the sacred Scripture and transmitted in a living way through the sacred tradition.

This raises to the foreground issues of criteria of orthodoxy. Should we consider culture or human experience on equal footing with Scripture and tradition as sources of the theological enterprise? My submission is that the Gospel as expressed in scripture and transmitted by the living tradition of the Church must be considered as the primary source of theology since it is the objective Word of God. On the other hand, culture or human experience since it contains God's present revelation in context or the seeds of Word of God, can be considered as an important but secondary source of theology in comparison to the Gospel itself. This is the way to avoid a real danger which is inherent in contextualization, namely, that of mixing Christianity and culture to the point of compromising and betraying the truths of Christianity. The Gospel must be given primacy in relation to the present context. One of today's problems in contextual theology is that many models prioritize context over the Gospel. Surprisingly, this is the case in most of the models surveyed by Stephen Bevans in his *Models of Contextual Theology*. In view of such danger, Roman Catholic documents such as *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, while

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[38] Palmer, "African Christian Theology: A New Paradigm."

[39] David Tracy, "Theological Method," in P. C. Hodgson & R. King, eds., *Christian Theology. An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, 2nd ed. Philadelphia, 35-60.

encouraging "theological expression which takes account of differing cultural, social and even racial milieu," does not also fail to caution that the content of faith "must be neither impaired nor mutilated."[40]

[40] James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986). See Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World, 63: Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican II. More Post Conciliar Documents* (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1982), 742.