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DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR CALVARY BIBLE CHURCH EAST  
OF COMSTOCK, MICHIGAN, TO CONTEXTUALIZE THE GOSPEL  
FOR UNCHURCHED YOUNG ADULTS

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Bryan Patrick Craddock

December 2013

**APPROVAL SHEET**

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Bryan Patrick Craddock

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Travis S. Kerns (Faculty Supervisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Adam W. Greenway

Date \_\_\_\_\_

For my mother,  
who challenged me to excel in learning,  
but left this world before she could enjoy  
this latest accomplishment

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
PREFACE .....	x
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose.....	1
Goals .....	1
Context.....	3
Rationale .....	7
Definitions.....	8
Summary .....	10
2. THE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENT OF CONTEXTUALIZATION.....	12
The Beginnings of Culture, National Identity, and Mission .....	12
The Families of the Table of Nations .....	13
Culture and the Scattering of Babel.....	16
Cultural Identity and Mission in the Abrahamic Covenant.....	22
Contextualization and the Great Commission.....	26
Contextualization in the Evangelistic Ministry of Paul .....	33
Summary .....	40
3. A COMPARISON OF CONTEMPORARY STRATEGIES FOR CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL IN AMERICAN EVANGELICAL CHURCHES.....	41
Distinguishing Contextualization Strategies.....	42

Chapter	Page
The Travis Spectrum.....	43
The Allison Spectrum .....	46
Assessing Contextualization Strategies.....	49
Sample Contextualization Strategies.....	55
John MacArthur and Grace Community Church.....	56
Timothy Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church.....	59
Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church.....	63
Dan Kimball and Vintage Faith Church .....	66
The Contextualization Strategy of Calvary Bible Church East .....	72
Theological Convictions.....	72
Preaching Topics .....	73
Preaching Logic.....	74
Word Choices .....	75
Preaching Style .....	75
Meeting Place .....	75
Relational Atmosphere .....	76
Music Style .....	76
Communication Aids.....	77
Response to Preaching.....	77
4. PROJECT METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS .....	79
Instruments to Assess Culture and Contextualization.....	78
The Initial Questionnaire .....	80
The Follow-up Questionnaire .....	82
Training Church Members.....	83
Enlisting Research Participants.....	85
Insights from Questionnaire Data .....	87

Chapter	Page
Congregational Response.....	94
5. PROJECT EVALUATION .....	95
Evaluation of Purpose .....	95
Evaluation of Goals.....	98
Evaluation of Research Methodology.....	100
Theological Reflections .....	105
Personal Reflections.....	107
Conclusions.....	109
 Appendix	
1. INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE .....	110
2. FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE.....	117
3. SUMMARY OF INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE DATA .....	120
4. SUMMARY OF FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE DATA.....	129
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	133

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>EBC</i>	<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
<i>EDT</i>	<i>Evangelical Dictionary of Theology</i>
<i>EDWM</i>	<i>Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission</i>
<i>ISBE</i>	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>MSJ</i>	<i>The Master's Seminary Journal</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Travis’s C1 to C6 spectrum of contextualization in Muslim contexts.....	44
2. Allison’s modification of the Travis spectrum .....	47
3. Contextualization strategy assessment points.....	55
A1. Number of initial questionnaire participants.....	120
A2. Number of participants residing in Comstock .....	120
A3. Interest in religion or spirituality .....	120
A4. Experience with church or religious group.....	121
A5. Current church involvement .....	121
A6. Past church involvement .....	121
A7. Interest in future church involvement .....	122
A8. Belief in the existence of some kind of supreme being .....	122
A9. Explanation of life.....	122
A10. Explanation of the afterlife .....	123
A11. Importance of spiritual beliefs .....	123
A12. Certainty of spiritual beliefs.....	123
A13. Criteria for determining spiritual beliefs.....	124
A14. Person consulted for personal advice.....	124
A15. Person who has most influenced spiritual beliefs .....	125
A16. Source of friends .....	125
A17. Economic group.....	126
A18. Highest level of education .....	126
A19. Media most likely to consult for personal advice .....	127

Table	Page
A20. Media that has most influenced spiritual beliefs.....	127
A21. Openness about personal matters.....	128
A22. Importance of other people’s opinions in decision making.....	128
A23. Speed of decision making.....	128
A24. Number of follow-up questionnaire participants.....	129
A25. Agreement with Calvary East beliefs.....	129
A26. Relevance of Calvary East teaching topics.....	130
A27. Clarity of logic in Calvary East teaching.....	130
A28. Familiarity of words in Calvary East teaching.....	130
A29. Impression of speaker’s body language and tone.....	131
A30. Impression of Calvary East meeting place.....	131
A31. Comfort level with how people at Calvary East relate.....	131
A32. Impression of Calvary East music style.....	132
A33. Impression of Calvary East communication aids.....	132
A34. Impression of ways people are asked to respond to Calvary East teaching.....	132

## PREFACE

I began to develop an interest in navigating cultural differences early in my ministerial career. For my first full-time ministry role, I left my native Southern California to serve at Calvary Bible Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where my fellow staff members included a Scottish senior pastor, a German counseling pastor, and other associate pastors from Michigan, Ohio, and Texas. Every staff meeting was an exercise in cross-cultural communication.

My interest in culture became more formal a few years later when these men and the other leaders at Calvary encouraged me to take leadership over the church's missions and local evangelism ministries—a role that required me to provide encouragement and support for international missionaries and to train and lead short-term missions teams. I learned much in seeking to carry out these responsibilities and desired to learn more by studying at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I am grateful for the support that Calvary provided to enable me to begin my doctoral studies.

This project would not have been possible without the cooperation of the Calvary East church family. They financially supported me, faithfully prayed for me, and enthusiastically participated in my research. I am blessed to serve alongside such a humble, sincere group of believers who work hard to cross cultural barriers in order to make people feel welcomed at all our gatherings. I believe that the Lord will continue to use the lessons all of us have learned from this project to build his church in Comstock and beyond.

Finally, I am grateful for the support and encouragement of my wife, Shari, and our children, Matthew, Priscilla, and Lydia. As I faced various challenges and

setbacks, they waited patiently for the time when we could celebrate the completion of my doctoral studies. Thankfully, that time has finally arrived.

Bryan Patrick Craddock

Kalamazoo, Michigan

December 2013

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop a strategy for Calvary Bible Church East of Comstock, Michigan, to contextualize the gospel for young adults. In January 2007, the 1,500 member Calvary Bible Church of Kalamazoo merged with a dwindling congregation seven miles east in neighboring Comstock Township. The new ministry was initially approached as a second site of Calvary Bible Church under a multi-site church model of ministry. In order to maintain a sense of unity, efforts were made to duplicate ministry style and activities at every level. This strategy showed reasonable success as the congregation at the Comstock site grew to include 140 adults, 20 of whom are between the ages of 18 and 30. After a change in leadership at Calvary, however, the decision was made to abandon the multi-site strategy. In June 2009, the Comstock site began preparations to become an independent church once again under the name Calvary Bible Church East. As Calvary East develops its own distinct identity and strategy, guidance is needed in order for the church to expand upon its initial success in reaching young adults.

#### **Goals**

This project sought to accomplish five goals. The first goal was to develop a clear understanding of the religious views, experience, and culture of unchurched young adults in and around the Comstock area. According to the United States Census Bureau, 1,772 people between the ages of 25 and 34 resided in Comstock Township in 2000.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, "Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000" [on-line]; accessed 4 December 2009; available from <http://factfinder.census.gov>; Internet.

None of the churches in the township have been particularly effective at reaching this population. Developing a good understanding of the culture of this group was a necessary step toward achieving the subsequent goals of this project.

The second goal of this project was to evaluate how effectively the ministry at Calvary East contextualizes the gospel for unchurched young adults. As mentioned above, the congregation has been relatively effective in reaching young adults thus far. In order to increase this effectiveness, the aspects of the ministry that contributed to this, and the aspects that hinder the congregation from reaching other young adults had to be determined.

The third goal of this project was to discern and develop new strategies that God may use to reach unchurched young adults in the Comstock area. Since Calvary East is still a relatively new ministry, the leadership and congregation are open to trying new ministry strategies. The findings of this project have helped to shape and direct the ministry as it moves forward.

The fourth goal of this project was to develop my own ability as a communicator of biblical truth. While not the sole focus, communication methods are certainly central to the practice of contextualization. I desire to communicate the Scripture in a way that unchurched young adults find both understandable and compelling.

The fifth goal of this project was to equip and inspire Christian young adults from the Calvary East congregation to engage in cross-cultural ministry. There is a natural tendency among devout Christian believers to withdraw from the world into their own sub-culture. In their attempt to escape from ungodly influences, they often cut themselves off from meaningful relationships with non-Christians that are essential for evangelism. Young adults at Calvary East needed training to help them effectively relate and communicate the gospel to their own generation.

## Context

Comstock Township is a 35-square-mile community located in Southwest Michigan midway between Chicago and Detroit along Interstate 94 just east of the city of Kalamazoo. The 2000 U.S. Census showed that the township was home to 13,851 people, 92 percent of whom are white. The northwest corner of the township is a suburban residential community with a population density of 1,404.3 persons per square mile including some large apartment complexes and several major retail stores. Moving out from that corner, the rest of the township quickly becomes more rural, dropping the population density for the entire township to 420.2 persons per square mile.<sup>2</sup>

The population of Comstock Township could best be described as working class white people. Only 22 percent of the population over 25 years of age has earned a bachelor's degree or higher, 2.4 percent less than the national average.<sup>3</sup> The township is known as the "Bedding Plant Capital of the World" due to the large number of greenhouses located in the area, yet only 2.1 percent of the population is employed by the agricultural industry. The top category of industry in the area is manufacturing followed by the category of education, health, and social services. Many people are employed by pharmaceutical giant Pfizer which maintains factories and a veterinary medicine research facility in the area. Although there are some high end jobs in the area, the local population is predominantly middle class with 41.7 percent of households having an income between \$35,000 and \$75,000. A fairly large portion of the population, 36 percent of households, has an annual income of less than \$35,000.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, "Population, Housing Units, Area, and Density: 2000" [on-line]; accessed 4 December 2009; available from <http://factfinder.census.gov>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, "Fact Sheet: Comstock Township 2000" [on-line]; accessed 18 December 2009; available from <http://factfinder.census.gov>; Internet.

<sup>4</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, "Profile of Selected Economic Characteristics: 2000" [on-line]; accessed 4 December 2009; available from <http://factfinder.census.gov>; Internet.

The Calvary Bible Church East building is located on the western edge of the township adjacent to Comstock High School. The property is situated in a residential area on East Main Street two blocks east of Sprinkle Road, a major north-south artery. The traffic flow from Sprinkle to the high school and neighborhoods farther east gives the church building good visibility in the community. Kalamazoo Bible Church purchased this ten acre property in 1965 after a fire destroyed their original location in downtown Kalamazoo. Church members volunteered their time to erect a sturdy tan brick building completed in 1969. They chose to use an unusual asymmetrical A-frame design with two stories of education space totaling 3,700 square feet on one side of the building and a 200 seat sanctuary on the other side. Though the building's design is dated, Calvary Bible Church invested significant funds to make cosmetic updates such as paint, new carpet, a new roof, and a new expanded parking lot with 82 spaces. Additionally, the previous parsonage which sits across the parking lot from the church building was modified to provide offices and 1,800 square feet of additional education space.

When the building was first built, the Kalamazoo Bible Church congregation was strong and vibrant with a membership of approximately 300 people. Church members relate the gradual decline in membership to a change in pastoral leadership soon after the church relocated. The new pastor advocated a strongly separatistic form of fundamentalism that began to offend "evangelical" minded church members. A division developed from which the congregation never recovered. On the Kalamazoo Bible Church's hundredth anniversary in October 2006, the 12 remaining members voted to merge with Calvary Bible Church.

In January 2007, 30 adults from Calvary Bible Church helped launch the ministry in Comstock that was initially known as the East Main Street Campus of Calvary Bible Church. The ministry included a Sunday morning worship service and Sunday school classes for all age groups. Various small groups were also added. By 2009 76 people attended the Sunday School hour on average, while an average of 136 attended

during the worship hour. The congregation generally mirrors the age demographic of Comstock Township, however, only one third of the congregation lives within the Township's boundaries. The rest of the people in the congregation live in neighboring rural areas. Like the local population, over a quarter of the Calvary East congregation work in health, education, or social services. Unlike the local population, however, almost one quarter of the congregation work in professional, management, or administrative jobs. While this could create a cultural gap, living in a rural setting seems to allow these professionals to relate well to those who work in manufacturing.

Since Calvary East began as the second site of a much larger parent church, similar doctrine and philosophy of ministry were adopted. The church stands in the stream of independent, fundamental churches with a reformed soteriology, baptistic ecclesiology, and dispensational eschatology. Worship services are designed to edify believers and still be understandable to the unchurched. The preaching is textual and expositional rather than topical. The sermon delivery emphasizes understanding and thoughtful application more than emotion. The music used in worship is generally contemporary with one or two hymns included each Sunday. Piano, acoustic guitar, keyboard, bass and drums are used most weeks. The service feels somewhat traditional, yet members dress is casual.

Unlike its parent church, however, Calvary East has embraced simpler methods of discipleship. In the first year of the congregation's existence, attempts were made to imitate the mid-week ministries for different groups offered by the parent church. To maintain the connection with the parent church, members were also encouraged to attend Sunday evening services and other special events there. When the decision was made to abandon the multi-site strategy, leaders at Calvary East chose to scale back. The current ministry program includes three elements: Sunday School, worship, and Sunday evening small groups for men, women, and teens focused on applying the Sunday morning sermon.

One of the distinct characteristics of the Calvary East congregation is the value members place on relationships. Though the core leaders all came from a 1,500 member church, they quickly grew to love the closeness of a small congregation. Others who assimilated into Calvary East have expressed similar sentiments. Potlucks and church cookouts have been extremely well attended and have become a key element in the church's ministry. Members have, nevertheless, resisted the temptation to become inward focused. Their effectiveness in welcoming and assimilating newcomers was demonstrated in 2009. Out of 95 visitors that year, 30 people began to attend regularly. Members recognize that in order to maintain small church closeness and be faithful to the church's mission of making disciples, new churches must be planted. This research project was designed to play a key role in defining how Calvary East reproduces itself in the future.

I have had the great privilege of serving as Calvary East's founding pastor. During the first two years of the church's existence, our parent church was without a Senior Pastor. Though I preached at Calvary East on Sunday mornings, much of my week was still devoted to overseeing the staff at the parent church and providing pastoral care for that large congregation. This divided focus forced me to lean heavily upon lay leaders at Calvary East. I was unable to do much more than preach and provide general vision and direction. What seemed to be a limitation and a hindrance at the time, now seems to have been a great blessing. I learned to trust lay leaders and began to develop the skill of influencing without hands-on control. I have come to believe that my primary responsibility as organizational leader is to keep the congregation focused on our biblical mission and to guide them in developing creative ministry methods that will fit their personality and giftedness. I regularly use group discussion in email and in our adult Sunday School class to prompt people's thinking, generate ideas, and receive feedback. I have sought to cultivate a church culture where frank, open discussion is the norm, but where final decisions are left in the hands of the church leadership team composed of lay elders, deacons, and me.

## **Rationale**

This project was prompted by three needs. First, I personally needed this project to be better equipped for ministry. After my first year of ministry at Calvary East, I began to recognize a cultural gap that exists between me and much of my congregation. I was born and raised in a multi-cultural suburban community north of Los Angeles, California. Even in elementary school, my parents emphasized the importance of preparing for college. Upon my graduation from high school the United States Air Force awarded me a full scholarship to study Systems Engineering at the University of Southern California. It was during my freshman year of college that I sensed the Lord's call to ministry. I abandoned my scholarship and devoted myself to earning the degrees of Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies and subsequently Master of Divinity through the Master's College and Seminary. When I first moved to Michigan in 1999 to serve as an associate pastor, the cultural difference did not seem significant. I ministered to college students and many members at Calvary Bible Church were engineers and medical professionals who had lived in various parts of the country. I felt a natural fit with these people. I assumed that I would find this same culture at Calvary East, but this was not the case. The Calvary East congregation comes from a more rural culture. Though none of the congregation farm for a living, several live on farm land and raise animals as a hobby. They love hunting and fishing. A good number of men have not attended college, but work in construction and skilled trades. Being the bookish student that I am, I found myself needing to follow Paul's missionary method of becoming all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some (1 Cor 9:22). I personally needed a model of contextualization that will help me bridge this cultural gap in the way I approach preaching, teaching, outreach, discipleship, and leadership.

Second, the ministry of Calvary East needed this project to maintain momentum and focus in the congregation. The core group of leaders who launched the ministry in 2007 abandoned the comfort and security of a large church with its niche

ministries for the express purpose of outreach. They had a missionary mind set. They came to serve, and this spirit has given the church great momentum and focus. As the church moves forward, fresh vision was needed to maintain this same missionary spirit in others who were not part of the original core group. While the church had seen some success at connecting with young adults, those young adults had not yet embraced this missionary spirit. A focus on reaching their peers was essential to draw them into deeper levels of commitment and ministry involvement. This project helped cultivate that focus.

Third, I believed the field of church growth needed this project. Young pastors are tempted to pattern their ministries after churches known for their effectiveness in reaching young adults, such as Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York or Mars Hill Church in Seattle. Simply copying such ministries, however, may blind up and coming leaders to the real culture of young adults in their immediate community. From his assessment of potential church planters with the Acts 29 Network, Bill Streger has observed: “It’s amazing how many young pastors feel that they are distinctly called to reach the upwardly-mobile, young, culture-shaping professionals and artists.”<sup>5</sup> While this description may accurately describe the urban congregations of influential pastors like Mark Driscoll and Tim Keller, it does not necessarily describe young adults in Comstock or many other areas across the United States. Even works that rely on data gathered from nationwide surveys, as helpful as they may be, cannot capture the unique characteristics of any particular locality.<sup>6</sup> It is hoped that the research undertaken in this project may inspire and equip other leaders to undertake similar research in their own community.

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<sup>5</sup>Bill Streger, “Uncool People Need Jesus Too” [on-line]; accessed 15 April 2010; available from <http://billstreger.com>; Internet.

<sup>6</sup>Excellent examples of such works include Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011); and Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009).

## Definitions

This project uses a number of terms which must be defined. The first is one of the terms included in the title of this project: *contextualization*. As Hesselgrave notes, “It is apparent, then, that theological presuppositions will in large measure determine both contextualization definitions and directions, both the meaning and the method of contextualization.”<sup>7</sup> The third chapter of the project will include a detailed consideration of various definitions and models of contextualization such as the Travis scale. Nevertheless, it will be helpful at this point to establish a simple working definition. For the moment it may be sufficient to say that contextualization is the effort to express the Christian faith in such a way that it is understandable and meaningful to people within a particular cultural setting.<sup>8</sup>

But what is *culture*? That term is also notoriously difficult to define. Conn explains, “We use the term ‘culture’ to refer to the common ideas, feelings, and values that guide community and personal behavior, that organize and regulate what the group thinks, feels, and does about God, the world, and humanity.”<sup>9</sup> While this definition is helpful, further specificity is needed in order to achieve the goals of this project. Hesselgrave proposes seven dimensions of culture: (1) worldviews—ways of perceiving the world; (2) cognitive processes—ways of thinking; (3) linguistic forms—ways of expressing ideas; (4) behavioral patterns—ways of acting; (5) social structures—ways of interacting; (6) media influence—ways of channeling the message; and (7) motivational

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<sup>7</sup>David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 137.

<sup>8</sup>This definition represents the translation model described in Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 37-53. Bevans identifies five other models: anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and countercultural. The translation model is adopted here because it does not allow culture to determine theological conclusions. More will be said about the relation of theology to culture in Chapter 3 of this project.

<sup>9</sup>Harvie M. Conn, “Culture,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

resources—ways of deciding.<sup>10</sup> These dimensions provide useful categories for investigating the culture of young adults in Comstock.

The terms identifying the target group must also be defined. Researchers employ various generational titles to describe young adults. At the moment it seems most popular to refer to young adults as *Millennials*, indicating that they entered adulthood in the Third Millennium. A 2010 report from the Pew Research Center identifies the Millennial generation as those 18 to 29 years of age. To support the identification of this age group as a distinct generation, the authors state,

Most Millennials (61 percent) in our January, 2010 survey say their generation has a unique and distinctive identity. That doesn't make them unusual, however. Roughly two-thirds of Silents, nearly six-in-ten Boomers and about half of Xers feel the same way about their generation.

But Millennials have a distinctive reason for feeling distinctive. In response to an open-ended follow-up question, 24 percent say it's because of their use of technology. Gen Xers also cite technology as their generation's biggest source of distinctiveness, but far fewer—just 12 percent—say this.<sup>11</sup>

This argument provides sufficient rationale for viewing 18 to 29 year olds as a distinct cultural group worthy of investigation for the purposes of contextualization.

### **Summary**

Accomplishing the goals of this project required careful attention to biblical, missiological, and methodological concerns. These areas are developed in the chapters that follow. Chapter 2 examines three key biblical texts to conclude that contextualization in ministry is a biblical requirement. Chapter 3 considers methods for assessing contextualization strategies in order to define the strategies of four notable evangelical churches in comparison to Calvary East. Chapter 4 chronicles the methods used in a 15 week research project during which Calvary East church members were trained in

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<sup>10</sup>Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 164.

<sup>11</sup>Pew Research Center, *Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2010), 4.

contextualization and enlisted to study the culture of local young adults. Significant findings from that study are identified along with their implications for the Calvary East contextualization strategy. Finally, Chapter 5 evaluates the project and gives concluding thoughts.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BIBLICAL REQUIREMENT OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

The practice of contextualization provokes vigorous debate among evangelical church leaders in North America. Some contend that it is nothing more than an accommodation of worldliness, while others assert that it is an essential part of fulfilling the mission of the church. Even those who argue for the legitimacy of contextualization show marked differences in how their view actually translates into practical ministry strategies.<sup>1</sup> In order to evaluate their arguments a biblical foundation for contextualization must first be established.

This chapter argues that careful contextualization is required in order to fulfill the biblical mission of the church. The argument begins by showing the significance of culture and national identity in the fulfillment of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-3), particularly when viewed in light of the Table of Nations (Gen 10) and the events at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). This fundamental Old Testament background will then be applied to the interpretation of the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20). Finally, Paul's method of fulfilling the Great Commission in his ministry in Athens (Acts 17:16-34) will be considered.

#### **The Beginnings of Culture, National Identity, and Mission**

The Abrahamic Covenant is an essential starting point in advocating careful contextualization because it establishes God's missionary intent and plan. Kaiser states,

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<sup>1</sup>The positions of various evangelical pastors in this debate are considered in detail in the third chapter of this project.

“If an Old Testament ‘Great Commission’ must be identified, then it will be Genesis 12:3—‘all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through [Abraham].’”<sup>2</sup> But how should one identify these peoples who will be blessed? What part will their cultural identity play in their blessing? Are their cultural differences a temporary evil that will one day be eliminated or could these differences be designed by God to be preserved in some way throughout eternity? Genesis 10 and 11 provide the necessary theological context for understanding the Abrahamic Covenant. To gain a complete understanding, subsequent prophetic references regarding the fulfillment of the covenant must also be examined.

### **The Families of the Table of Nations**

The first occurrences of the word *nations* in the Old Testament are found in Genesis 10, the chapter commonly known as the Table of Nations.<sup>3</sup> Genesis 10:32 provides a succinct summary of the whole chapter. Noah’s immediate family was all that remained of mankind after the flood, so God gave Noah clear instructions to repopulate the earth (Gen 9:1, 7). Genesis 10 presents a genealogical record, chronicling the obedience of Noah and his sons to this mandate, yet the chapter also presents a number of questions.

What distinguishes these families or clans descended from Noah as nations? Sailhammer notes, “The key words that provide the framework for the arrangement of this list of names are מִשְׁפָּחֹת (*mišp̄hōt*, ‘clans’), אֲרָצוֹת (*’arsōt*, ‘territory’), and לְשֹׁנֹת

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<sup>2</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 7.

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of various hermeneutical approaches to Genesis 10 see Allen P. Ross, “The Table of Nations in Genesis 10—Its Structure,” *BSac* 137 (1980): 340-53; and W. Osborne, “Nations, Table of,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 588-92. The discussion here accepts the text as an historically accurate genealogical record penned by Moses to identify the first nations that developed after the worldwide destruction of the Flood.

(*l'šōnōt*, 'language') (vv. 5, 20, 31-32)."<sup>4</sup> Although they originated from the same family and are identified by their early ancestors in genealogical form, these nations in Genesis 10 are defined by the areas in which they lived and the languages they spoke. O'Connell even notes, "The apparent apposition of *mišpāḥā* and *lāšōn*, language, in Gen 10:5, 20, 31 suggests that, in these verses, *mišpāḥā* may designate a common language group."<sup>5</sup> As noted previously, linguistic forms are one of the seven dimensions of culture identified by Hesselgrave.<sup>6</sup> This concept of nations differs from modern times, in which nationality is generally defined by the political authority that governs an individual. Instead, nationality in the Table of Nations is presented in the relatively fluid terms of culture.

How fluid is this definition of nationality? Only seventy nations are listed in Genesis 10, but the structure of the genealogy itself suggests that others could be added. Some lines of descent are only carried out to the next generation after Noah's sons, while others are carried to the fourth generation (Sheba and Dedan, v. 7), the fifth generation (Peleg, v. 25), and even the sixth generation (sons of Joktan, vv. 26-29). Presumably, the lesser developed lines of descent multiplied and formed other nations. Sailhammer suggests that the Table is limited to seventy nations because the number symbolically expresses the totality of humanity.<sup>7</sup> Block, on the other hand, traces the number to, "the Hebrew view of the origins of the nations reflected in the LXX of Dt. 32:8 (also 4QD), which states that the human population was divided into nations according to the

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<sup>4</sup>John H. Sailhammer, *Genesis*, in vol. 2 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Regency Reference Library, 1990), 99.

<sup>5</sup>Robert H. O'Connell, "מִשְׁפָּחָה," in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:1141.

<sup>6</sup>David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 164.

<sup>7</sup>Sailhammer, *Genesis*, 98.

availability of patron ‘sons of God’ (angels).”<sup>8</sup> As an alternative, following the MT which reads, “sons of Israel,” Block suggests that the number may correspond with the seventy family members who accompanied Jacob to Egypt (Gen 46:27). Whatever the actual reason may have been for limiting the number to seventy, an additional nation is clearly identified just two chapters later in Genesis 12:2 where God promised to make Abram a great nation. It is clear, then, that the concept of national identity is not limited to those listed in this table, but allows for and even requires the development of other cultural groups that may be identified as nations.

The most significant question presented by Genesis 10 is how this Table of Nations relates to the account of events described in Genesis 11. Did these national distinctions exist prior to the scattering of chapter 11 or were they the result of it? In support of the former view, Hamilton suggests that the one language of chapter 11 may have been an international trade language.<sup>9</sup> While chapter 10 uses the specific term לְשׁוֹן, chapter 11 uses שִׁפְהָ, a more generic term which is elsewhere translated as “lip” or “speech.” Nevertheless, Hamilton decides to call this, “a case of deliberate dischronologization.”<sup>10</sup> For support, he argues that the one language in 11:1 must have preceded the multiple languages referenced in chapter 10. Keil and Delitzsch find further support for this view in Genesis 10:25, “in his [Peleg’s] days the earth was divided.”<sup>11</sup> This would place the events of chapter 11 in the fifth generation after the Flood, presumably before the families of chapter 10 could have multiplied into nations.

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<sup>8</sup>Daniel I. Block, “Table of Nations” in *ISBE*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:710.

<sup>9</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapter 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 350.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:171.

If the nations of Genesis 10 are, indeed, the result of the construction of Babel, why does the Table of Nations precede the scattering in chapter 11? Sailhammer claims, “What [the author] has described ‘geographically and linguistically’ in chapter 10, he will describe ‘theologically’ in chapter 11, namely, God’s judgment of Babylon and the dispersion of the nations.”<sup>12</sup> While this description is accurate, it fails to suggest the intent behind the biblical author’s arrangement of these sections. Gordon proposes the following rationale:

The positioning of the Babel narrative after the Table of Nations in Gen 10, in which Babylon/Babel is already mentioned (10:10), has the effect of making the division into peoples and languages appear as a natural development following upon the Flood (‘From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood’ 10:32). By the arrangement of its material Genesis is, therefore, making the ethnic and linguistic divisions of the world more primal and less a consequence of divine judgment than might otherwise be the case.<sup>13</sup>

Hamilton carries this line of thought a step farther, noting, “The Table fills out and fulfills the divine promise and imperative in 9:1, ‘be abundantly fruitful.’ Thus the dispersal of humanity throughout the world reflects both God’s blessing (ch. 10) and his displeasure (ch. 11).”<sup>14</sup> The placement of the Table of Nations before the account of the Tower of Babel demonstrates that, as is so often the case in the unfolding of God’s sovereign plan, God accomplishes his good and perfect plan even when carrying out judgment upon evil deeds.

### **Culture and the Scattering of Babel**

Much has already been said about the scattering from Babel in the effort to understand the concept of national identity found in the Table of Nations. Nevertheless,

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<sup>12</sup>Sailhammer, *Genesis*, 103.

<sup>13</sup>Robert P. Gordon, “Babel: Tower of,” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:429.

<sup>14</sup>Hamilton, *Genesis*, 347.

there is still more to be gleaned from Genesis 11:1-9 regarding God’s view of culture. A thoughtful examination of the passage shows that cultural diversity exists by God’s intent, initiative, and grace.

The descendants of Noah strongly resisted the development of cultural differences. God’s command after the flood to multiply and fill the earth (Gen 9:1, 7) implied geographic distribution. If the people had followed this plan, different customs, dialects, and languages would have naturally developed over time. The last clause in Genesis 11:4 indicates that they resisted this natural scattering process with its inherent results. Gesenius captures the strength of this clause by noting that in this instance the conjunction  $\text{וְ}$  is used, “where an action precedes, by which something is prohibited which we fear and wish removed.”<sup>15</sup> Yet the context does not indicate why the people feared this scattering. They may have been concerned about their safety. Hamilton explains, “With such a fortress they would be less vulnerable. A plain (v. 2) offers the least amount of protection in time of crisis.”<sup>16</sup> If one accepts that the Flood was a global event, however, it would seem that the people had relatively little reason to fear for their safety. Animals could have threatened them, but no other humans remained. A more likely explanation is that they feared the relational separation and estrangement that would result from being scattered. Keil and Delitzsch argue, “But the fact that they were afraid of dispersion is a proof that the inward spiritual bond of unity and fellowship, not only ‘the oneness of their God and their worship,’ but also the unity of brotherly love, was already broken by sin.”<sup>17</sup> As the population multiplied, the relational unity of the descendants of Noah was undoubtedly already being stretched to the breaking point. The

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<sup>15</sup>Samuel P. Tregelles, trans., *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), s.v. “ $\text{וְ}$ .”

<sup>16</sup>Hamilton, *Genesis*, 353.

<sup>17</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 1:173.

fear of further estrangement may have prompted their efforts to maintain their unity at all costs.

Noah's descendants sought to maintain their unity through three actions. First, they built a city. Despite whatever conflicts they faced, dwelling in close proximity with one another within a city served as a unifying force. Rather than filling the earth, they would remain within the boundaries of their city that came to be called Babel (v. 9). Yet this is not the first reference to Babel. As noted earlier, Babel was first mentioned in Genesis 10:10 as part of the Table of Nations. There the city is listed alongside Erech, Accad, and Calneh as part of a kingdom established by Nimrod. This mention of a kingdom has prompted some to speculate that Nimrod may have instigated the construction of the city and even used coercion to enforce cultural unity,<sup>18</sup> but there is no mention of Nimrod in chapter 11. The account in chapter 11 clearly speaks of the whole earth as taking joint initiative in constructing this city.

The next ingredient in their recipe for unity was a tower, but the significance of this tower is explained in different ways. Kaiser asserts, "They sought their unity not in their Creator, but in a tower that would symbolize their own genius."<sup>19</sup> Yet chapter 11 is not so explicit about the significance of the tower. Hiebert notes that in both places where the tower is referenced (vv. 4 and 5), it is mentioned along with the city.<sup>20</sup> In fact, when verse 8 speaks of the scattering, the tower is not mentioned at all. The text records that construction of the city ceased. The only textual indication of the significance of the tower, then, is the brief phrase in verse 4 noting that its top would reach into heaven. Hiebert claims, "The purpose of this idiom is to emphasize the impressive height and strength of the city's fortifications. . . . the Hebrew term in Genesis 11 for tower, מגדל, is

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<sup>18</sup>Theodore Hiebert, "The Tower of Babel and the Origin of the World's Cultures," *JBL* 126 (2007): 30, 34.

<sup>19</sup>Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 17.

<sup>20</sup>T. Hiebert, "The Tower of Babel," 37.

used consistently in biblical discourse for towers incorporated into cities' fortifications."<sup>21</sup> These other uses of the term, however, refer to watchtowers in Canaan. Pinches argues that Babylonian towers were erected for a different purpose, a religious purpose. He claims,

The tower of Babel or Babylon, however, was a structure peculiar to Babylonia and Assyria. According to all accounts, and judging from the extant ruins of the various buildings in these countries, Babylonian towers were always rectangular, built in stages, and provided with an inclined ascent continued along each side to the top. Since religious ceremonies were performed thereon, they were generally surmounted by a chapel in which sacred objects or images were kept.<sup>22</sup>

Reimer rejects this common view that the tower had religious significance by arguing that Babylonian ziggurats occur chronologically late in the archaeological record, but this is essentially an argument from silence.<sup>23</sup> Since religion and worldview are core elements of culture, a central place of worship reaching into the heavens would have been a powerful tool to unify the descendants of Noah to resist God's command to fill the earth, even as the temple in Jerusalem later helped unify the people for obedience.

The religious significance of this tower is further supported by the third element in their pursuit of unity. The descendants of Noah sought to maintain their unity by making for themselves a *name*. Some have interpreted this as a sinful desire for self promotion. For example, Hamilton claims, "The sin of these tower builders is undoubtedly the sin of pride and pretentious humanism."<sup>24</sup> Lacocque explains, "They want to be the agents of their own eminence and create for themselves a good

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>22</sup>T. G. Pinches, "Babel, Tower of," in *ISBE*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:383.

<sup>23</sup>Steve Reimer, "The Tower of Babel: An Archaeologically Informed Reinterpretation," *Direction* 25 (2006): 65.

<sup>24</sup>Hamilton, *Genesis*, 356.

conscience.”<sup>25</sup> Yet Hiebert has opposed this traditional view. He argues, “Making a name is always considered a noble venture, essentially the act of establishing an identity that will endure.”<sup>26</sup> For support, he cites God’s promise in Genesis 12:2 to make Abraham’s name great. It is indisputable that human beings are drawn toward establishing a reputation for themselves for good or evil, but how would this fame have helped the descendants of Noah maintain their unity? Harland argues, “*šēm* is the title by which the group is to be known.”<sup>27</sup> This unifying effect would make sense in the context of a heavily populated world in which a group might seek to establish an identity apart from others, but accepting the Flood as universal leads to the conclusion that these descendants of Noah were the only people in existence at this point in history.

Another possible interpretation of this “name-making” is to see it as an act of idolatry. The term *name* is often related to the act of worship. Genesis 4:26 tells how men began to call upon the name of Yahweh. Later on in Deuteronomy 12, the Israelites are told to destroy the idolatrous places of worship in Canaan in order to prepare a place for God’s name where the Israelites can bring their offerings and sacrifices (vv. 5, 11, and 21). It would make sense, then, to interpret the name-making at Babel as an attempt to manufacture a different name upon which they may call, a new god designed to unify them in their resistance to Yahweh’s command to fill the earth. This interpretation would explain why Revelation 17:5 calls Babylon, “the mother of harlots.” Harlotry is a common Old Testament metaphor for idolatry. By making this name for themselves, the people of Babel were attempting to unify themselves by establishing a new culture founded upon a new theology and its accompanying worldview.

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<sup>25</sup>André Lacocque, “What Happened in the Valley of Shinar? A Response to Theodore Hiebert,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 34.

<sup>26</sup>T. Hiebert, “The Tower of Babel,” 40.

<sup>27</sup>P. J. Harland, “Vertical or Horizontal: the Sin of Babel,” *VT* 48 (1998): 529.

God responded to these efforts to resist his mandate in terms that imply both judgment and blessing. The sense of judgment is expressed when God says, “Now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them” (Gen 11:6 NASB). This is clearly an outcome which God wanted to prevent. Hamilton explains,

Even if the people did not build another tower, they could choose another equally presumptuous project. The solution must go deeper than that. It is not the tower that must be done away with, but what makes possible the building of that tower—an international language that provides communication among linguistic groups.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, in verse 7 God declares his intent to confuse their language so that they will not understand one another’s speech. Keil and Delitzsch capture well the destructive effect of God’s action:

The differences, to which this event gave rise, consisted not merely in variations of sound, such as might be attributed to differences in the formation in the organs of speech (the lip or tongue), but had a much deeper foundation in the human mind. If language is the audible expression of emotions, conceptions, and thoughts of the mind, the cause of the confusion or division of the one human language into different national dialects must be sought in an effect produced upon the human mind, by which the original unity of emotion, conception, thought, and will was broken up. This inward unity had no doubt been already disturbed by sin, but the disturbance had not yet amounted to a perfect breach. This happened first of all in the event recorded here, through a direct manifestation of divine power, which caused the disturbance produced by sin in the unity of emotion, thought, and will to issue in a diversity of language, and thus by a miraculous suspension of mutual understanding frustrated the enterprise by which men hoped to render dispersion and estrangement impossible.<sup>29</sup>

This linguistic confusion has been and continues to be a source of great conflict among different cultural groups. As Peters says, viewing these events in light of Romans 1:28-32, “God punished sin with sin, lifting the divine restraints and permitting the nations to go their own ways and design their own cultures and religions.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, every culture

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<sup>28</sup>Hamilton, *Genesis*, 355.

<sup>29</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 1:174-75.

<sup>30</sup>George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of World Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 89.

exhibits elements that perpetuate the same rebellious and idolatrous spirit that was exhibited at Babel.

Even in the midst of judgment, Genesis 11 also implies the gracious blessing of God. Although it was not what they desired in their rebellious resistance, God's scattering of Noah's descendants had the beneficial effect of enabling them to fulfill God's mandate to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. As Kaiser says, "The earth is filled with a multitude of peoples and nations by the time we finish the first eleven chapters of Genesis. All of this is a result of the blessings of God."<sup>31</sup> God's blessing is also seen in the way the confusion of language restrains human sinfulness. Keil and Delitzsch explain, "By the firm establishment of an ungodly unity, the wickedness and audacity of men would have led to fearful enterprises. But God determined, by confusing their language, to prevent the heightening of sin through ungodly association, and to frustrate their design."<sup>32</sup> McIntosh carries this line of thought a step further, stating, "[God] prevents any preempting triumph of self-sufficient, self-determining human society, and so averts the necessity of destroying humankind."<sup>33</sup> The linguistic confusion and geographical scattering of Noah's descendants from Babel was an act of divine mercy that effectively restrained the downward progress of humanity into deeper acts of sinful rebellion against God.

### **Cultural Identity and Mission in the Abrahamic Covenant**

Although the descendants of Noah rebelled against God by pursuing a geographical and cultural unity, their division into various nations with unique cultures fulfilled the perfect plan of God. Any doubt as to the goodness of these cultural

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<sup>31</sup>Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 15.

<sup>32</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 1:173.

<sup>33</sup>John A. McIntosh, "Babel," in *EDWM*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000),

differences is dispelled by a consideration of the promises God revealed to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3. There God expressed his missionary intent to bless people within various cultural groups in such a way that many of their cultural distinctions would become a lasting part of God's eternal kingdom as expressed in subsequent prophecy.

The first clue to the enduring significance of national identity is God's promise to make of Abram a great nation (Gen 12:2). As discussed in reference to Genesis 10, the term גוי encompasses many factors. Block argues that the Ancient Near Eastern conception of nationality includes ethnicity, territory, theology, kingship, and language.<sup>34</sup> In time Abram's descendants would come to possess all of these components, but in order for this development to take place, it was essential for Abram to separate himself from his family as God commanded him in verse 1. Essex explains, "According to Genesis 10, common ancestry was the basis of national identity. Thus, the LORD called Abraham to renounce his identification with the nations who were in rebellion against Him."<sup>35</sup> Peters takes this thought further, when he states, "Genesis 12 – the call of Abraham – is the beginning of a divine counterculture designed both to arrest evil and unfold the gracious plan, salvation and purpose of God."<sup>36</sup> God clearly intended to establish Abram's descendants as a unique nation and cultural group among the other nations of the world.

The national identity of Abram's descendants becomes central to God's mission. When God leads the Israelites out of Egypt in the exodus and prepares to deliver his Law to them, he indicates that if they are obedient they will serve as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:5-6). Though Ancient Israel fell far short of this calling, the eschatological vision revealed to the Old Testament prophets maintained this

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<sup>34</sup>Daniel I. Block, "Nations/Nationality," in *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:967-70.

<sup>35</sup>Keith H. Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," *MSJ* 10 (1999): 197.

<sup>36</sup>Peters, *World Missions*, 90.

central role for the nation descended from Abram. Isaiah speaks of the nations streaming to Jerusalem to learn God's word and giving their wealth to the city (Isa 2:2-4; 60:11-12). Similarly, Zechariah speaks of the nations seeking out Abram's descendants in their desire to seek the Lord and coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Zech 8:20-23; 14:16-21). This same theme is reinforced in the account given in Revelation 21:24 of Jerusalem in the new heaven and earth. Abram's descendants maintain a distinct national identity that is integral to God's work among other nations.

While the above mentioned prophetic passages demonstrate the abiding significance of a Jewish national and cultural identity, they likewise demonstrate the continuity of national and cultural identity of other people groups. Again, this can be traced back to God's promises to Abram. In Genesis 12:2-3, God reveals his plan to bless Abram so that ultimately all the *families of the earth* will be blessed in him. Piper furnishes a helpful explanation of the significance of this reference to families:

In 12:3 and 28:14 the Hebrew phrase for 'all the families' (*kol mishpahōt*) is rendered in the Greek Old Testament by *pasai hai phulai*. The word *phulai* means 'tribes' in most contexts. But *mishpaha* can be, and usually is, smaller than a tribe. For example when Achan sinned, Israel is examined in decreasing order of size: first by tribe, then by *mishpaha* (family) then by household (Joshua 7:14).

So the blessing of Abraham is intended by God to reach to fairly small groupings of people. We need not define these groups with precision in order to feel the impact of this promise.<sup>37</sup>

As explained previously, this term מִשְׁפָּחָה is used often in Genesis 10 in reference to the development of distinct groupings among Noah's descendants. Keil and Delitzsch note that God's blessing of these families through Abram will ultimately reunite them.<sup>38</sup> This is true in the sense of an eventual absence of conflict, but it does not mean that cultural and national identity will be obliterated. On the contrary, as Richardson states, "The

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<sup>37</sup>John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 182.

<sup>38</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 1:193.

phrase ‘all peoples’ constitutes a divine recognition of ethnic distinctions within our race. The same God who caused the proliferation of human cultures by his sovereign intervention at Babel now targets His special blessing through Abraham toward every ‘people’ thus formed.”<sup>39</sup>

Certainly, some aspects of the cultural/national identity of these family groups are sinful, but many aspects are not. Prophetic passages have already been cited that speak of the eschatological existence of nations and the blessing contingent upon their relationship with Israel. Other passages in Revelation, however, communicate God’s disposition toward the continuing existence of these groups. The song of the twenty-four elders celebrates how the Lamb purchased for God with His blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev 5:9). Later in the book when a multitude of people stand before God’s throne, they are identified as being from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues (Rev 7:9). Lenski elaborates on these terms: “In tribe there is the idea of the same descent, in tongue that of the same language, in people that of the same interests, in nation that of the same political unity.”<sup>40</sup> While the primary purpose of these statements in Revelation is to confirm the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abram, they are meaningless if national and cultural distinctions simply disappear once someone receives the promised blessing. The cultural differences that began at Babel are part of the identity that people will carry into eternity.

Genesis 10, 11, and 12 thus establish a foundational theology of culture and nationality. God intended for Noah’s descendants to multiply and develop into a diverse population, but they chose to resist this. Instead, they sought to create a unified culture through the geographical connection provided by a great city and the religious connection provided by the creation of their own god worshiped in a magnificent central place of

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<sup>39</sup>Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1981), 126.

<sup>40</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 1943), 208.

worship. Their efforts proved to be futile as God scattered them, achieving the very diversity he desired and would later bless and sanctify through Abram. Contextualized ministry in the Church today is thus consistent with God's desire for cultural diversity.

### **Contextualization and the Great Commission**

The preeminent text used by evangelicals to define the mission of the Church is the often cited Great Commission spoken by Jesus and recorded in Matthew 28:16-20. Indeed, the words of this passage are so familiar and ingrained in evangelical believers that one finds it difficult to read them without bringing a whole host of assumptions to his interpretation. For the purposes of this project, the question must be posed as to what the Commission has to say both explicitly and implicitly regarding the role of culture and contextualization in the Church's efforts to fulfill the Commission.

The first hint of cultural significance is seen in the setting in which Jesus chose to utter the Commission. The angelic announcement to the women who discovered the empty tomb was that the disciples should proceed to Galilee where they would see Jesus (Matt 28:7). Verse 16 affirms this in stating that the Commission was delivered to the disciples on a predetermined mountain in Galilee. Luke and John both tell of Jesus appearing to the disciples in Jerusalem, but Matthew places a strong emphasis on this encounter in Galilee. As to the rationale for choosing this location, Hiebert suggests, "The safest and most natural place for this appearing to all His followers was the indicated mountain in Galilee, since most of Jesus' disciples were from Galilee and would readily be able to assemble there."<sup>41</sup> Thus this occasion is probably the one to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15:6 when five hundred saw the risen Christ. But the proximity of the location to the greatest number of Jesus' followers cannot fully explain the selection of Galilee. As Matthew points out in Matthew 4:12-16, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of

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<sup>41</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20," *BSac* 149 (1992): 342.

Isaiah 9:1-2 by centering his ministry there. “Galilee of the Gentiles,” as Isaiah labels it, was not an ideal context to impact the greatest number of Jews, but it did make sense as a launching place for a mission to the nations.

In verse 17 Matthew notes that the disciples worshipped Christ, though some were doubtful. This verse has puzzled commentators. Most assume that these were doubts about whether the man they saw was actually Jesus. Some speculate that these doubts came from other disciples, rather than the eleven. Perhaps the doubt was not regarding the person, but the response of worship. Lenski says, “Only after the resurrection did the disciples engage in this form of adoration; for all the Jews were averse to worshipping a creature.”<sup>42</sup> Regardless of whether their doubts concerned the appropriateness of worshipping Christ, the action certainly violated Jewish cultural standards. God’s discipline of previous generations for idolatry and Jewish conflict with idolatrous nations had prompted a deeply ingrained hatred of idolatry that transcended obedience to God’s law, making it extremely difficult for the devout Jew to accept the deity of Christ. The worship of the disciples on this occasion was counter-cultural.

Jesus claims in verse 18 that all authority had been given to him in heaven and earth. This statement may have been intended to settle any lingering doubts in the disciples’ minds about worshipping Him. Jesus certainly had the ability to overrule the Jewish cultural standards engrained in their consciences. But his claim of authority here also laid the foundation for the Commission he was about to give. Carson explains, “The dawning of the new age of messianic authority changes the circumstances and impels his disciples forward to a universal ministry he himself never engaged in during the days of his flesh.”<sup>43</sup> Here again, this universal ministry ran counter to the prevailing Jewish

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<sup>42</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel 15-28* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1943), 1168.

<sup>43</sup>D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelain and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 595.

culture. The Jews hoped for a Messiah who would conquer the Gentile nations, not redeem them. By asserting his authority Jesus confirmed his power to overrule this wrong way of thinking.

The main imperative in Jesus' Commission, *μαθητεύσατε*, demonstrates contextualization in action. The term *μαθητής* was commonly used of those who bound themselves to a particular rabbi. Rengstorf argues that the idea originated through Judaism's contact with Greek philosophy.<sup>44</sup> Meye explains, "In this system, both teacher and disciple typically sat in an appointed room, and the teacher taught by question, and through repetition and memorization. It was expected that the disciple would render respectful service to his teacher during his apprenticeship."<sup>45</sup> Rogers notes,

The students lived in close fellowship with their teacher. They travelled with him, ate with him, attended weddings or other festive occasions with him. The students of a teacher were characterized by complete submission to the authority of the teacher, as well as by a devotion to him which was to surpass devotion to father or mother and which displayed itself in service to the teacher.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, first century Jewish culture already possessed a well-defined concept of discipleship. Both John the Baptist (Matt 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 7:18; John 3:25) and the Pharisees had disciples (Luke 5:33). The Pharisees even claim to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28). So Jesus adopted this same terminology and the culturally familiar practices it implied.

Jesus did not, however, limit his concept of discipleship to what was culturally familiar. At times *μαθηταῖς* is used to designate the Twelve, but people outside that inner circle are also designated as disciples of Jesus. Thus the formal relationship of rabbinic

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<sup>44</sup>K. H. Rengstorf, "μαθητής," in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 4:437.

<sup>45</sup>R. P. Meye, "Disciple," in *ISBE*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:947.

<sup>46</sup>Cleon Rogers, "The Great Commission," *BSac* 130 (1973): 264.

discipleship reflected in the Twelve was not required of all Jesus' disciples. Blendinger lists other modifications.<sup>47</sup> Most significantly, Jesus did not wait for followers to volunteer, but took initiative in calling them to himself – the practice he describes in the Great Commission. In fact, their pursuit of people was to expand even farther than his. Jesus focused his ministry on the Jewish people, but in the Commission he instructs his followers to transcend ethnic and cultural barriers calling forth disciples from all nations.<sup>48</sup> This emphasis is reinforced by the participle *πορευθέντες*. Hiebert explains, “Accepting that this Great Commission was given not only to ‘the eleven disciples’ but to all those assembled, this first aspect of the commission commands an aggressive outreach with the gospel on the part of all believers.”<sup>49</sup> Though some rabbinical disciples engaged in proselytization (Matt 23:15), their efforts could not compare to the scope of what Jesus demanded of his disciples.

Perhaps the most revealing evidence of contextualization in regard to the imperative to make disciples is that outside the Gospels and Acts the authors of the New Testament felt the freedom to abandon Jesus’ discipleship terminology. The Commission was still carried out, but other descriptions are used. Christians are called brothers, saints, and believers, but not disciples. Interpreters must find some explanation for this change which seems so shocking in light of the importance of the Great Commission. Rayburn concludes,

Apparently disciple was no more adequate as a permanent title for Christians than teacher or rabbi was for Jesus, whose lordship was now fully revealed and understood. It had the further disadvantage that the term was common in Greek and

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<sup>47</sup>C. Blendinger, “ἀκολουθέω,” in *NIDNTT*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1:482.

<sup>48</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 746.

<sup>49</sup>D. E. Hiebert, “An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20,” 348.

Jewish circles and thus required some elaboration to be distinctively Christian.<sup>50</sup>

Though the term, “disciple,” was appropriate in a Judean context, other titles were used as the gospel spread in Roman context, descriptions that were more appropriate or relevant to the Roman culture that was dominant outside of Jewish circles.

The object of the command to make disciples is expressed by the theologically loaded phrase *πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*. Jesus’ use of this terminology was undoubtedly intended to remind his followers of Genesis 10-12. Carson explains,

Matthew’s Gospel is now, in its final verses, returning to the theme introduced in the very first verse—that the blessings promised to Abraham and through him to all peoples on earth (Gen 12:3) are now to be fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah. And when that covenant promise is reiterated in Genesis 18:18; 22:18, the LXX uses the same words found here: *panta ta ethnē*.<sup>51</sup>

Because of this connection, the term *ἔθνη* must be understood not as a political grouping, but as a cultural grouping according to the definition of national identity established in Genesis 10 and 11 as expressed above. Similar reasoning leads Piper to conclude, “One would have to go entirely against the flow of the evidence to interpret the phrase *panta ta ethnē* as ‘all Gentile individuals’ (or ‘all countries’). Rather the focus of the command is the discipling of all the people groups of the world.”<sup>52</sup> Carson disagrees with this conclusion. He argues, “Plural collectives may have all-embracing force, whether in Greek or English. . . . The aim of Jesus’ disciples, therefore, is to make disciples of all men everywhere, without distinction.”<sup>53</sup> In spite of Carson’s assertion, the particularity of the term as specifying individual nations is supported by the ultimate conclusion expressed in Revelation 5:9 and 7:9 where every tribe, tongue, and nation are

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<sup>50</sup>R. S. Rayburn, “Christians, Names of,” in *EDT*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 217.

<sup>51</sup>D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 596.

<sup>52</sup>Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 203.

<sup>53</sup>Carson, *Matthew*, 596.

represented. The Great Commission should thus be interpreted as a call to make disciples in every definable cultural group.

Three participial phrases are subordinate to the main imperative of the Commission. The first participle, *πορευθέντες*, was addressed above. The second participle is the call to baptize disciples in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Hiebert explains well the relationship of *βαπτίζοντες* to disciple-making when he states, “The order is that they have first become disciples through personal faith in Him, followed by baptism as their personal confession of their faith, and a pledge of discipleship as acknowledged members of the body of believers.”<sup>54</sup> Unlike discipleship terminology with its Greek philosophical history and strong connections to Jewish rabbinical culture, the term *βαπτίζω* is almost exclusively used of the ministry of John the Baptist and the Christian Church. Beasley-Murray states, “While there is some evidence that *baptō* was occasionally used in secular Greek of a ritual bath, there is none to show that *baptizō* was so employed.”<sup>55</sup> Regarding Jewish use of the term, he says,

A Gentile convert to Judaism at the beginning of the Christian era was required to receive circumcision, to undergo a ritual bath and to offer sacrifice. For this so-called ‘proselyte baptism’ the Heb. and Aram. texts employ the term *tābal*. The few references to it in Gk. literature employ *baptō* but not *baptizō*. This may be accidental, but it is consonant with the avoidance by Gk. writers of *baptizō* when describing rites of purification.<sup>56</sup>

From a cultural standpoint, *βαπτίζω* is thus a new idea beginning with John the Baptist and continuing in the ministry of Jesus. Though ritual washings were familiar to both Jews and Greeks, *βαπτίζω* and the concepts of repentance, forgiveness, and identification with a group of people are not. It should also be noted that unlike discipleship

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<sup>54</sup>D. E. Hiebert, “An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16-20,” 350.

<sup>55</sup>G. R. Beasley-Murray, “*βαπτίζω*,” in *NIDNTT*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 1:144.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

terminology, βαπτίζω continues to be used in the epistles. It would seem, therefore, that the practice of baptism was intended to be embraced as a supra-cultural ordinance of the church.

The last of the three participial phrases found in the Commission is διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν. Here again one finds innovation, as Carson notes, “The focus is on *Jesus*’ commands, not OT law” (emphasis original).<sup>57</sup> Jesus’ ministry was characterized by an authority that was not seen among the teachers of his day (Matt 7:28-29). His disciples were to continue this practice relying not upon rabbinical traditions, but the authority of Christ. While the disciples were to disregard their Jewish culture in this sense, the responsibility of teaching new disciples from the nations rather than from Israel required much attention to context. Thomas explains,

The true intention of Jesus must not have been for the disciples to teach the precise words He taught them, but that they should use discernment in interpreting what and how to teach. They needed to recall the historical context and the theological circumstances of His teachings and to make appropriate judgments as to how some of His commandments fit new circumstances such as going to all nations rather than just to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, teaching among the nations required a contextual shift from the Jewish world to the Gentile world. But sensitivity to culture could not stop there. Accurately teaching new disciples from different nations would require an effort to understand their cultural context: their worldview, language, customs, and anything else that might prevent them from clearly understanding the commands of Jesus.

The demands of the Commission must have seemed overwhelming to the disciples who heard it, but in the final clause Jesus assures his followers of his continuing presence with them. Lenski comments, “He does not send his disciples out into the world

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<sup>57</sup>Carson, *Matthew*, 598.

<sup>58</sup>Robert L. Thomas, “The Great Commission: What to Teach,” *MSJ* 21 (2010): 8.

of nations alone. Invisibly he will always be at their side, assuring their success.”<sup>59</sup> The disciples needed divine enablement and wisdom to help them accomplish Jesus’ mission, particularly in regard to the contextualizing effort it would require. For an example of such a ministry, however, one must look beyond the group gathered with Jesus that day.

### **Contextualization in the Evangelistic Ministry of Paul**

While Genesis 10-12 establishes a foundational understanding of culture and Matthew 28:16-20 establishes the church’s responsibility and reason for engaging different cultures, the only clear example of such engagement is the ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. There are occasions in the epistles where he speaks of principles that guided his evangelistic ministry, but the fullest treatment is found in Luke’s record of Paul’s missionary journeys in Acts, particularly the account of Paul’s ministry in Athens recorded in Acts 17:16-31. Bock calls this passage, “the most complete example of how Paul addresses a purely Gentile audience.”<sup>60</sup> Flemming labels it a “pivotal text” for the study of New Testament patterns of contextualization.<sup>61</sup> This passage is thus a crucial focus for this project. Paul’s example will be considered to establish principles of contextualization.

Before proceeding further, however, some questions regarding the account of Paul’s ministry at Athens must be addressed. In comparing Acts 17 with Romans 1, some have charged Luke with creating a fictitious narrative. Gardner calls it, “the least authentic of the Pauline discourses in Acts,” arguing that the author of Acts must not

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<sup>59</sup>Lenski, *St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 1180.

<sup>60</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 558.

<sup>61</sup>Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 72.

have read the letters of Paul.<sup>62</sup> Aside from the fact that this view undermines the inspiration and reliability of Scripture, it will be seen that the concepts presented in the Athens account actually parallel Romans 1. As Bruce says, “If the author of Romans 1–3 had been invited to address an Athenian audience on the knowledge of God, it is difficult to see how the general purport of his words could have been much different from what Luke here reports Paul as saying.”<sup>63</sup> In comparing Acts 17:16-31 with 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, others have argued that Paul regretted the way he approached the ministry at Athens. Recently, Pathrapankal has advocated this view.<sup>64</sup> But if this were the case, one would think there would be some indication of it in the account. On the contrary, as Lenski says, “Luke lays so much stress on this masterly address that he makes it the main part of his report in regard to Athens.”<sup>65</sup> Longenecker explains, “For one who elsewhere said he was willing to be ‘all things to all men’ for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9:20-22), Paul’s approach to his Areopagus audience is by no means out of character.”<sup>66</sup> To be faithful to the text, interpreters must proceed on the assumption that Luke recorded Acts 17 as an example that is doctrinally sound and worthy of imitation.

The first principle that may be drawn from Luke’s account is that Paul found appropriate settings for communicating the gospel. Luke notes that the city’s idolatry provoked Paul (v. 16). Prior to his conversion, such “sharp indignation,” as Lenski calls

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<sup>62</sup>Percy Gardner, “The Speeches of St. Paul in Acts,” in *Cambridge Biblical Essays*, ed. H. B. Swete (London: Macmillan, 1909), 401-2.

<sup>63</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 334.

<sup>64</sup>Joseph Pathrapankal, “From Areopagus to Corinth (Acts 17:22-31; 1 Cor 2:1-5): A Study on the Transition from the Power of Knowledge to the Power of the Spirit,” *Mission Studies* 23 (2006): 61-80.

<sup>65</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles 15-28* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1944), 739.

<sup>66</sup>Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, in vol. 9 of *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 475-76.

it, might have prompted Paul to take some extreme action in one of the many temples.<sup>67</sup> Instead, Paul responded by channeling this emotional energy into ministry in two different settings. He first reasoned with Jews and God-fearing Gentiles at the synagogue—the same approach he used in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-3) and Berea (Acts 17:10). He also reasoned with people in the Agora. Lenski explains,

This ‘market place’ was by no means devoted only to selling and to buying all sorts of provisions. Nor was it frequented only by busy, bustling crowds that were occupied with nothing else. The Athenian Agora was also the meeting place for philosophers and their following, for idlers and persons of leisure, a place of conversation, discussion, plus business.<sup>68</sup>

In the culture of Athens, the Agora was a natural setting for Paul to communicate the gospel. Lenski says, “He adapted himself to the Athenian ways by first gathering circles of hearers in their Agora and then entering into public discussions with their philosophers.”<sup>69</sup>

Next Paul responded to what might be called a prevailing question in the culture. As the leading academic city in the ancient world, Athens took great pride in its knowledge. In verse 21, Luke explains that they were known for their intellectual curiosity. Thus the prevailing question in the mind of the average Athenian was, “What ideas have I yet to hear?” This idiosyncrasy of Athenian culture could be viewed as either an obstacle or an opportunity. Negatively, they may have simply wanted to add another viewpoint to their mental collection, debating and comparing but never concerning themselves with taking any sort of action. The Athenians’ disparaging remarks about Paul in verse 18 reflect this arrogant attitude. Had Paul taken this negative perspective of Athens, he might never have bothered to interact in the Agora. It would have seemed like

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<sup>67</sup>Lenski, *Acts of the Apostles*, 709.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 710.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 711.

a waste of time. It was this Athenian curiosity that led to the opportunity for him to speak before the council of the Areopagus. The true motive behind this invitation is unclear. Bahnsen explains, “Paul appeared before the Areopagus Council for a reason that probably lies somewhere between that of merely supplying requested information and that of answering to formal charges.”<sup>70</sup> Whatever the true reason, Paul seized the opportunity to preach Christ.

Third, Paul works within the existing social structure of Athenian culture. Luke tells us in verse 17 that while in the Agora, Paul reasoned with “those who happened to be present” (NASB). In that setting, he does not seem to have recognized any distinction among people, but as he comes before the Areopagus, such openness would have been inappropriate. Lenski explains,

Ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι is the form of address used by Demosthenes and by all the orators and is thus exactly suitable for Paul. He is speaking to Athenian citizens. There were three classes of men in Athens: the citizens with the precious right of suffrage in the Assembly and of holding office (the latter being held by almost all in course of time), the residents who had neither right, and the slaves. Luke refers to the residents in v. 21 when he says that they were as avid to hear the latest as the Athenians themselves. Paul does not make the mistake of placing these foreign residents on a par with the citizens. They were not at all on a par with them although some of them were present to hear Paul. To have named them on a par with the citizens would have been resented by the latter.<sup>71</sup>

Regardless of what he may have felt about this social structure, by respecting it, Paul avoided causing unnecessary offense.

A fourth contextualization principle is evident in the organization of Paul’s message. He arranged his thoughts in a way that was familiar to the culture. Flemming explains,

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<sup>70</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Encounter of Jerusalem with Athens,” *Ashland Theological Bulletin* 31 (1980) [on-line]; accessed 30 July 2011; available from <http://www.cfmnow.com>, pa045.htm; Internet.

<sup>71</sup>Lenski, *Acts of the Apostles*, 721.

The sermon itself is highly rhetorical in its structure. We can observe the following elements: (1) an opening *exordium*, designed to gain a hearing from his listeners (Acts 17:22-23a); (2) a thesis (Acts 17:23b), stating the desired goal of the speech—to make the unknown God known to the Athenians; (3) the main proof (*probation*, Acts 17:24-29), in which he argues his case; and (4) a concluding exhortation (*peroratio*, Acts 17:30-31), which attempts to persuade the audience to take the right course of action, namely, to repent (Acts 17:30).<sup>72</sup>

Regardless of whether Paul’s hearers would accept his argument, his use of this familiar structure at least insured that they would follow it.

A fifth contextualization principle that stands out in Luke’s account is that Paul used cultural references in his communication. He introduces his message by mentioning an altar to an unknown god (v. 23). He also cites a statement made by some of their own poets (v. 28). Beyond these explicit examples, many commentators have noted in Paul’s words what Bruce calls “delicately suited allusions” to Stoic and Epicurean tenets.<sup>73</sup> For instance, Bock says, “The idea that a temple cannot contain the gods is something other Greeks also recognized, as Euripides, frg. 968, expresses the idea that a house built by craftsmen could not enclose the divine form.”<sup>74</sup> He also notes, “The Greeks shared this idea of deity as independent.”<sup>75</sup> The crucial question regarding these references is what Paul’s intent was in using them. Did he view the presence of these concepts in Greek culture as a positive or a negative? Most contemporary commentators assume that Paul uses them approvingly. Charles says, “The Apostle adapts his preaching to his audience by assimilating a more or less Greek view of the universe, with its human quest for God.”<sup>76</sup> But Bahnsen looks to Romans 1 and argues, “Paul did not utilize pagan ideas in

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<sup>72</sup>Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, 74.

<sup>73</sup>Bruce, *Acts*, 342.

<sup>74</sup>Bock, *Acts*, 565.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>J. Daryl Charles, “Engaging the (Neo)Pagan Mind: Paul’s Encounter with Athenian Culture as a Model for Cultural Apologetics (Acts 17:16-34)” *TrinJ* 16NS (1995): 52.

his Areopagus address. He used pagan expressions to demonstrate that ungodly thinkers have not eradicated all idea, albeit suppressed and distorted, of the living and true God.”<sup>77</sup> It seems impossible to decide the matter based solely upon Luke’s account. Perhaps those who heard Paul that day were left wondering whether Paul was commending Greek thought or condemning it. His ambiguity here suggests a helpful principle in and of itself. He used cultural references without expressing his judgment concerning them.

Sixth, it should be noted that Paul does not make direct appeal to Scripture. He certainly presents biblical concepts. Bahnsen points out similarities between Paul’s message in Athens and Isaiah 42:5-8.<sup>78</sup> Paul does not, however, mention Isaiah or any other Old Testament author as he would before a Jewish audience (cf., Acts 13:16-41). Longenecker states, “[Paul] knew it would be futile to refer to a history no one knew or argue from fulfillment of prophecy no one was interested in or quote from a book no one read or accepted as authoritative.”<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, Paul still spoke with authority as seen in verse 23 when he says, “What you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you,” and in verse 27 when he calls them to repentance.

A seventh contextualization principle is that Paul addressed the fundamental problems in the worldview of his hearers. He begins with their view of God and his relationship with the world in verses 24 and 25. Bahnsen explains Paul’s argument:

Against the monism of the philosophers, Paul taught that God had created all things (v. 24; cf. Ex. 20:11; Ps. 146:6; Isa 37:16; 42:5). This precluded the materialism of the Epicureans and the pantheism of the Stoics. Against naturalistic and immanentistic views Paul proclaimed supernatural transcendence. As his listeners looked upon the Parthenon, Paul declared that God does not dwell in temples made with hands (1 Kings 8:27; Isa 66:1-2).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Bahnsen, “Encounter of Jerusalem with Athens.”

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Longenecker, *Acts*, 475.

<sup>80</sup>Bahnsen, “Encounter of Jerusalem with Athens.”

Next, Paul moves on to address their view of man in verses 26 through 29. Kistemaker explains,

The Athenians divided the people of the world into two classes: the Greeks and the barbarians. Everyone not born in Greece was considered a barbarian. Paul challenges this theory by focusing attention on the origin of man. . . . Because of his common origin, a Jew ought not to despise a Gentile and an Athenian philosopher ought not to loathe a Jew.<sup>81</sup>

Having exposed the ignorance of their worldview, in verses 30 and 31 Paul proceeds to call the Athenians to repentance in light of God's judgment. In light of Paul's teaching in his epistles, one expects him to say something concerning the cross of Christ and the saving grace of God, but Luke's description of the response of some of Paul's hearers in verse 32 suggests that he was either interrupted before completing his thoughts or simply chose to stop because further teaching on salvation would be meaningless unless the Athenians repented of their defective worldview.

One final principle should be noted. Paul does not discard essential biblical truths in his process of contextualization. In Athenian culture, the concept of bodily resurrection seemed foolish. Luke indicates in verse 32 that some of those present began to sneer. Bruce explains, "The idea of resurrection of dead people was uncongenial to the minds of most of Paul's Athenian hearers. All of them except the Epicureans would no doubt have agreed with him had he spoken of the immortality of the individual soul."<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, before the Areopagus, Paul unashamedly presents the resurrection of Jesus in verse 31 as proof of God's coming world judgment. Culture cannot be allowed to overrule biblical truth.

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<sup>81</sup>Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 634.

<sup>82</sup>Bruce, *Acts*, 343.

## **Summary**

The passages considered above point to the conclusion that contextualization is a requirement of faithful ministry. Though Noah's descendants resisted God's instructions to spread throughout the earth, God initiated cultural differences as he confused their language and scattered them around the earth. Over time those cultural differences would only multiply resulting in an increasing number of cultural groups. Nevertheless, God promised to bless those groups through Abram, even down to extended family groupings. Jesus emphasized this same goal as he articulated the mission of the church in his Great Commission. He called his followers to carry his ministry to every cultural group. Through his ministry in Athens, Paul modeled the kind of efforts required in engaging culture in order to communicate the gospel and fulfill the church's mission.

## CHAPTER 3

### A COMPARISON OF CONTEMPORARY STRATEGIES FOR CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL IN AMERICAN EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

The fundamental question raised in contextualization is how the culture of a given group of people should influence ministry in that context. The missionary who travels to a distant country to minister to a people speaking a foreign language cannot avoid this question. At the very least, he must find some way to communicate. He quickly finds, however, that language is not the only cultural barrier to his ministry. Hesselgrave identifies seven dimensions of culture: (1) worldviews—ways of perceiving the world; (2) cognitive processes—ways of thinking; (3) linguistic forms—ways of expressing ideas; (4) behavioral patterns—ways of acting; (5) social structures—ways of interacting; (6) media influence—ways of channeling the message; and (7) motivational resources—ways of deciding.<sup>1</sup> A missionary may encounter differences in each of these dimensions, differences that may significantly hinder the communication of the gospel. Some differences will stand out as contrary to biblical teaching, but others will simply be differences from the missionary's home culture. The missionary is thus forced to develop a contextualization strategy for either resisting or adapting to those cultural differences.

Though cultural barriers exist among people groups in North America, they are not as obvious or as pressing as those encountered by the foreign missionary. Church

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<sup>1</sup>David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 164. Other similar lists of cultural dimensions can be found in Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 152-53; Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 42-43; Scott Moreau, "Contextualization That Is Comprehensive," *Missiology: An International Review* 34 (2006): 325-35; and Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 89-107. Hesselgrave's list of cultural dimensions was selected for this project because it presents a comprehensive view of culture, but also uses a succinct number of categories that are clearly evident in local church ministry.

leaders may assume they do not face any cultural barriers in reaching their community because they live there and speak the same language. Yet the historically strong influence of Christianity in America has enabled Christians to develop their own distinct culture in many respects. Though this culture may be foreign to those outside of the church, many Christians are content to function within it, expecting outsiders to adapt to it. In recent years, American evangelical leaders have shown an increasing awareness of the barriers presented by cultural differences, yet there has been little agreement over how to address those barriers.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish a method for assessing the existing contextualization strategy at Calvary Bible Church East in order to determine what changes may be needed for the ministry to be more effective in communicating the gospel to unchurched young adults in Comstock, Michigan. In order to accomplish this purpose, two attempts at distinguishing contextualization strategies will be described and evaluated. Next, a scheme for quantifying and assessing contextualization strategies will be proposed. Then, the contextualization strategies of four influential church leaders will be quantified using the proposed scheme in order to establish concrete examples. Finally, the same scheme will be used to quantify the contextualization strategy currently practiced at Calvary East.

### **Distinguishing Contextualization Strategies**

One of the most helpful contributions to the substantive comparison of contextualization strategies was made by a man who was unable to reveal his true identity for security reasons. Writing under the pseudonym John Travis, he articulated a spectrum to compare and contrast how groups of believers related to the prevailing culture in the Muslim world where he ministered.<sup>2</sup> Others subsequently adapted Travis's spectrum to

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<sup>2</sup>John Travis, "The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of 'Christ-centered Communities' ('C') Found in the Muslim Context," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34 (1998): 407-8.

describe ministry among different cultural groups. Gregg Allison, for instance, proposed a similar spectrum to categorize “the emerging church phenomenon.”<sup>3</sup> Allison’s spectrum is helpful because it discusses contextualization strategies for a North American context. These two helpful paradigms are presented and critiqued below.

### **The Travis Spectrum**

In his C1 to C6 spectrum, Travis seeks to define the approaches to contextualization reflected among various Christ-centered communities found in Muslim contexts. He identifies six different community types (C1 to C6) by examining how these communities handle five dimensions of contextualization. In his original article, Travis presents descriptions of each of these community types in paragraph form, but in order to better analyze his scheme, his descriptions are broken out into tabular form below in Table 1.

The first community type, labeled C1, is the least contextual. They use the language of the country from which they originated even though it is foreign to the local population. C2 communities, however, use the language of the local people. Since the remaining four groupings do not adhere to a traditional form of worship imported from the West, Travis abandons the word *church* and calls them *Christ-centered communities*. The communities in these four groupings all use local language, so he differentiates these groups according to how they adopt or maintain local culture. C3 communities adopt neutral cultural forms, but separate themselves from the local religious community by identifying themselves as Christians. C4 communities go a step further by maintaining local religious customs and practices as long as they do not violate Scripture. While persons in this grouping would not explicitly identify themselves as Christians because of the cultural baggage attached to that title, they still stand apart from the local non-

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<sup>3</sup>Gregg Allison, “An Evaluation of Emerging Churches on the Basis of the Contextualization Spectrum (C1-C6)” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington, DC, 17 November 2006).

Christian religious community. C5 communities are comprised of people who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior but continue to identify with the local non-Christian religious community. The final grouping, labeled C6, does not really gather in communities as such because they keep their faith in Christ secret from all but a handful of people.

Table 1. Travis’s C1 to C6 spectrum of contextualization in Muslim contexts

<i>Community Type</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Cultural forms</i>	<i>Meeting location</i>	<i>Religious identity</i>	<i>Participation at mosque</i>
C1	Outsider	Traditional Western church	...	Christian	...
C2	Insider with Christian religious vocabulary	Traditional Western church	...	Christian	...
C3	Insider	Religiously neutral forms	Church building or neutral location	Christian	...
C4	Insider with Islamic religious terms	Islamic when biblically permissible	Not in church buildings	Follower of Isa	...
C5	...	...	Messianic mosque when possible	Messianic Muslim	Varies
C6	...	...	...	Muslim	Yes

Travis’s spectrum has two notable strengths. First, the very idea of identifying a spectrum has provided a new level of clarity in missiological discussion. Some tend to approach the issue of contextualization by simply labeling it good or bad, but Travis makes it clear that there are more options than outright refusal or acceptance of this practice. A second strength is Travis’s use of multiple dimensions of contextualization. The five contextualization dimensions he uses (language, cultural forms, meeting

location, religious identity, and participation at mosques) represent three of Hesselgrave's seven dimensions of culture (linguistic forms, behavioral patterns, and media influence). Again, this level of detail clarifies and deepens the discussion.

The Travis spectrum has four weaknesses, however, that must be recognized before adapting it to a different context. First, the spectrum was specifically designed to describe contextualization approaches used among people groups where the culture is dominated by Islam. Thus, the criteria Travis employs to differentiate his groupings have special relevance to a Muslim population, but are not as relevant in other contexts. His description of *insider* and *outsider* language, for example, best applies to a context where there are clear distinctions. But in many contexts, linguistic differences may be more subtle.

Second, Travis's terminology is vague, particularly if applied to a North American context. For example, Travis uses the term *traditional* to refer to cultural forms imported from Western churches, but the term has several other connotations for North American readers. A more precise description would prevent misunderstanding. Another example of this vagueness becomes evident when Travis abandons the term *church* for *community*. The reader is left wondering whether these communities simply do not follow a common Western form of church, or do they also lack essential biblical characteristics of a local church.

A third weakness of Travis's spectrum is that it fails to address several important cultural dimensions. Nothing is said about how the six community types adapt, or fail to adapt, to the local context's worldview, cognitive processes, social structures, or motivational resources. Insights from these dimensions would provide church planters with the kind of practical help that Travis desires.

Finally, Travis fails to address whether the degree of contextualization observed in a community is actually more effective in ministering to a particular group of people. One may infer from his spectrum that more extreme contextualization will

necessarily be more effective, but no measurement is suggested to confirm this inference.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Allison Spectrum**

Over the past decade much discussion has surrounded the so-called *emerging church*, but much that has been written fails to recognize significant differences between leaders and ministries placed into this category. Gregg Allison argues this movement is best understood by examining approaches to contextualization. With this in mind, Allison adopts the Travis spectrum and makes minor modifications to create a similar spectrum for North American and British contexts. He retains the six community types and also differentiates them by different cultural dimensions. He relies primarily upon language and cultural forms as contextualization dimensions. The descriptions he provides of the different community types, however, include three additional cultural dimensions: music style, leadership methods, and communication methods. His scheme is presented in Table 2.

Allison maintains Travis's C1 and C2 descriptions of "traditional churches" distinguished by outsider or insider language, but Allison defines language so as to include regional dialects. For instance, he considers a Southern Baptist church located in a northern city that attracts southern dialect English language Southern Baptists who have moved there from the American South as a Cm1 traditional church using outsider language. Allison also broadens the definition of a *traditional* church. He specifically includes any church that "eschews—mostly by conviction, perhaps by traditional structuring or isolationism—most if not all of what has become associated with the

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<sup>4</sup>Since Travis's spectrum was published, several authors have used his spectrum to discuss the validity of C5 level contextualization without discussing the validity of the spectrum itself. Recent critiques of the spectrum can be found in Mark S. Williams, "Revisiting the C1-C6 Spectrum in Muslim Contextualization," *Missiology: An International Review* 39 (2011): 335-351; and Roger L. Dixon, "Moving on from the C1-C6 Spectrum," *St. Francis Magazine* 5 (2009): 3-19 [journal on-line]; accessed 29 August 2013; available from <http://stfrancismagazine.info>, RogerDixon-MovingOn-August%202009.pdf; Internet.

Table 2. Allison’s modification of the Travis spectrum

<i>Community type</i>	<i>Language or dialect</i>	<i>Cultural forms</i>	<i>Music style</i>	<i>Leadership methods</i>	<i>Communication methods</i>
Cm1	Outsider	Traditional Christian	...	...	...
Cm2	Insider	Traditional Christian	...	Eschews church growth methods	...
Cm3	Insider	Secular when biblically permissible	Blended	Mission Statement	...
Cm4	Insider	Religiously neutral forms	Contemporary	Corporate	Significant media use
Cm5	...	Postmodern	...	...	Dialogue
Cm6	...	Protest against tradition	...	...	...

church growth movement, the megachurch movement, the ‘seeker sensitive’ ethos, the ‘purpose driven’ ethos, etc.”<sup>5</sup> Allison then switches Travis’s descriptions for C3 and C4. Travis speaks of C3 groups as using religiously neutral forms and C4 groups using biblically permissible forms from Islamic culture. The biblically permissible forms Allison lists under Cm3 include mission statements and blended worship adapted from secular culture. Under the Cm4 label Allison lists media use, contemporary music styles, corporate business strategies, CEO leadership structures, and multi-site ministry as religiously neutral forms. Allison’s Cm5 and Cm6 descriptions are entirely different from those of Travis. Where Travis speaks of C5 as “Messianic Muslims,” Allison defines Cm5 Communities as those that strongly adapt to postmodern culture. Where Travis speaks of C6 as secret believers, Allison speaks of Cm6 as protest driven groups that,

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<sup>5</sup>Allison, “An Evaluation of Emerging Churches.”

“eschew many/most of the activities, attitudes, traditions, even doctrines,” of the other groups.

Allison’s scheme maintains the same basic strengths as that of Travis. First, Allison helps reframe the discussion of ministry approaches of emerging churches in terms of contextualization. This use of a spectrum helps defuse overly simplistic, dichotomistic thinking regarding the emerging church phenomenon. Second, Allison addresses multiple cultural dimensions and adds an additional cultural dimension that Travis does not address. He refers to leadership methods, thus addressing the cultural dimension that Hesselgrave calls social structures.

The weakness of Allison’s spectrum, however, is that he adheres too closely to Travis. He maintains, for example, the term *traditional*, but fails to define it. As mentioned previously, Travis defines traditional churches as those that have imported Western cultural forms. The only definition that Allison gives is to say that traditional churches are those that have not adopted church growth methods. Though his stated purpose is to explain the emerging church phenomenon, it would have been helpful to provide a clearer explanation at this point of what it means to be “traditional.” Another example of the weakness of adhering to Travis too closely becomes apparent in Allison’s discussion of cultural forms. Travis is able to make a clear three-fold distinction between Christian forms, neutral forms, and Islamic forms. These distinctions are what Travis uses to define his community types. In looking at the North American and British context, however, Allison can only refer to traditional Christian forms and secular non-religious forms. The absence of a dominant alternative religion makes it difficult to maintain the same number of community types. Allison particularly struggles to differentiate between his Cm3, Cm4, and Cm5 community types. Finally, like Travis, Allison also lacks any measurement to confirm whether a particular degree of contextualization is justifiably effective.

## Assessing Contextualization Strategies

Distinguishing various types of contextualization strategies is helpful, but it does not provide church leaders with the information they need in order to develop an effective contextualization strategy for their own cultural context. Whether they realize it or not, every church leader has a contextualization strategy. Furthermore, even though that leader may articulate an overarching view regarding how their ministry should interact with culture, that perspective may not be implemented consistently in the variety of practical decisions that make up a comprehensive contextualization strategy. An assessment tool is needed that will quantify a leader's strategy and provide a way to assess how people within that cultural context perceive those practical ministry decisions. Such a tool must build upon a thorough understanding of culture. Hesselgrave's seven dimensions of cross-cultural communication will serve as a helpful framework. From each of these dimensions, the points where culture may influence ministry decisions will be identified.

Hesselgrave's first dimension of cross-cultural communication is worldview—the fundamental concepts a group of people hold about, “supernature, nature, man, and time.”<sup>6</sup> The worldview of a group of people consists of their answers to questions about the prime reality and the nature of external reality, about what a human being is and what happens to a person at death, about why knowledge is possible and how right and wrong are determined, and about the meaning of human history.<sup>7</sup> These questions are essentially theological—questions that the Bible itself addresses. Syncretism occurs when biblical answers to worldview questions are ignored in favor of prevailing cultural ideas. Though such a practice violates the authority of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16), church leaders may be tempted to conform their theological beliefs to the culture's worldview. Rather than

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<sup>6</sup>Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 202.

<sup>7</sup>James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 22-23.

simply relying upon Scripture, other leaders might develop their beliefs with the intent of contradicting the culture's worldview. The role a leader allows culture to play in the development of his theological convictions is thus an important indicator of his overall contextualization strategy. Though they probably could not articulate it, unchurched people visiting a church for the first time will perceive something of the role culture plays in a church's beliefs.

The selection of preaching topics is a second ministry decision related to the cultural dimension of worldview. As discussed previously, Paul interacts with the worldview questions of the Athenians in Acts 17. He began with the Greek concept of gods and used it to point them to the existence of the one true Creator God. Similarly, church leaders may give culture some degree of influence in guiding their selection of preaching topics. Even those who present verse by verse expositions make choices about which passages they will exposit and what topics within those passages they will emphasize. The topics chosen may be positive and accommodating or negative and attacking. Most leaders will take both approaches at certain times, but the overall tenor of their ministry will lean one way or the other. Thus in quantifying a contextualization strategy, the influence of culture over the selection of preaching topics must be considered. Outsiders who visit a church may not understand the rationale behind the choice of a topic, but they will undoubtedly sense whether the topic is relevant to their lives.

The second dimension of cross-cultural communication identified by Hesselgrave is cognitive process. He argues, "We are all scientists, mystics, and artists if one chooses to put it this way. Where we differ is in degree, or in the priority given to one approach over another."<sup>8</sup> The scientific approach he labels conceptual thinking, the

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 302.

mystical intuitional thinking, and the artistic concrete relational thinking.<sup>9</sup> Scripture appeals to each approach on different occasions. The use of concrete relational thinking can be seen in the Old Testament sacrificial system and the parables of Jesus.<sup>10</sup> Intuitional thinking is reflected in apocalyptic literature and the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> Conceptual thinking is heavily employed in the epistles of Paul.<sup>12</sup> A faithful ministry will no doubt encounter each type of thinking in teaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). In practice, however, efforts to communicate contextually in light of the dominant cognitive process of a group of people will be reflected in the way ideas are presented and argued. Does the communicator rely most heavily on logical propositions (conceptual), illustrations (concrete relational), or emotional impressions (mystical), and to what degree does culture guide this decision? Whatever approach is chosen, the unchurched visitor will simply perceive whether or not the teaching is engaging and easy to follow.

Hesselgrave's third dimension of cross-cultural communication is linguistic forms. The importance of biblical words is clearly demonstrated in Jesus' use of the Old Testament. In Matthew 22:45, for instance, he exposed the Pharisees' misunderstanding of the Messiah by emphasizing David's use of the phrase "my Lord" in Psalm 110:1. In Matthew 22:32, he pointed to the use of the present tense in Exodus 3:6 to refute the Saducees' denial of the resurrection. It stands to reason, then, that Jesus' followers should show similar care in communicating biblical words. This kind of communication requires first a proper interpretation of biblical words, and then a careful effort to express those words in a way that will be understandable to the hearer. Even when a communicator and

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 333.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 319.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 309.

a hearer speak the same language, careful contextualization must consider the connotations different words may have to the cultural group of the hearer. Hesselgrave asserts, “The important criterion of correctness in language use is social acceptability.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, contextualization, or the lack thereof, will be evident in a preacher’s choice of words and in how his hearer’s perceive those words.

The fourth dimension of cross-cultural communication identified by Hesselgrave is behavioral patterns. This broad category of communication encompasses such factors as the physical characteristics of the communicator, body language, tone of voice, vocal inflection, spatial relationships such as seating arrangements and conversational distance, concepts of time, and environmental factors such as clothing, decorations, and architectural style. Paul seems to have cultural behavioral patterns such as these in mind in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 when he speaks of becoming as a Jew, as a Gentile, or as someone who is weak. Many people have also noted that Jesus himself practiced contextualization by conforming to many, if not most, of the common Jewish cultural behavioral patterns during his first advent. Much of the criticism he faced during his earthly ministry came from those who were offended by his strategic refusal to conform to certain rituals (Mark 2:15-28). Every local church makes a variety of decisions related to this cultural dimension, but for the purposes of this project two general areas may be considered: the appearance of the building used for worship services and the body language and tone of the preacher.

Hesselgrave identifies social structures as a fifth dimension of cross-cultural communication. He explains, “The conventions of social structure dictate which channels of communication are open and which are closed; who talks to whom, in what way, and with what effect; and when one communicates which type of message.”<sup>14</sup> As noted in the

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 358.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 167.

previous chapter, Jesus chose to conform to Jewish social structure by assuming the role of rabbi to a group of disciples. Paul took advantage of Athenian social structure in speaking at the Areopagus as a philosopher. Similarly, churches today face the question of how they will define their ministry within a culture's social structure. How a church responds to this question will be evident in such ways as how church leaders relate to people, how a church encourages spiritual growth, and how a church practices evangelism. Most cultures in North America already have a concept of how to relate to religious leaders. A ministry is contextual to the degree that it conforms to that cultural expectation. If ministry leaders seek to define their role differently within that cultural group's social structure, they are being counter-cultural. For instance, when a senior pastor of a mega-church attempts to relate to people as a corporate executive or as a celebrity, many cultural groups may perceive this as out of character with their previous understanding of the role religious leaders play in social structure. This difference may be positive to those people who have a negative perception of religious leaders. Contextualization to social structure in the area of spiritual growth may be perceived in the terminology a church uses to describe its ministry efforts. Terms like "Sunday School class" and "Christian Education," identify ministry with a culture's educational system. More generic terms like "small group" will be unfamiliar to many cultural groups. Finally, social structure also affects how people within a culture respond to a church's specific evangelistic strategy. So for instance, people may perceive an aggressive door-to-door evangelism strategy as out of character for a church, if they are only familiar with sales people using this tactic. Newcomers to a church will probably not be alert to these issues of social structure, but they will have a general perception of how people relate to one another.

A sixth dimension of cross-cultural communication is media influence. Here Hesslegrave stresses that whatever media are used to convey a message affect the

message and become a message in and of themselves.<sup>15</sup> For instance, the decision by Paul and others to write the epistles contained in the New Testament communicated an emphasis on accuracy and careful reflection that would not necessarily have been evident in oral communication alone. In their worship gatherings today, churches use a variety of communication aids such as music, slides, live drama, and movie clips. Even the use of Bibles or note sheets fits into this cultural dimension being a form of print media. Those who seek to be contextual must be aware of how people in a given cultural group perceive both music style and various media that are used.

Hesselgrave's seventh and final dimension of cross-cultural communication is motivational resources, the ways people arrive at decisions. The Christian life is filled with decisions, from the initial decision to repent and believe to each subsequent step of obedience. Paul's passionate plea in 2 Corinthians 5:20 emphasizes the importance of calling for such decisions in response to the preaching of the gospel. Thus the most practical questions ministries face today in the dimension of motivational resources relate to how a preacher will guide hearers to respond to his preaching. Will he press for an immediate decision or simply encourage people to process what they have heard? Will he entice people by appealing to their sense of self-advancement or their sense of logic and reason? Or will he seek to compel people by appealing to their respect for authority, or their sense of guilt or shame? Newcomers will simply perceive whether or not the approach to persuasion seems appropriate.

These ten ministry decision points drawn from Hesselgrave's seven dimensions of cross-cultural communication (summarized in Table 3) can be phrased as key questions for assessing a contextualization strategy. A clearer picture of the contextualization efforts of church leaders will be seen as they indicate the degree of influence they have allowed culture to have over each of these ten ministry decisions

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 167-68.

using a seven point scale, ranging from (-3) a strong effort to contradict or attack culture to (+3) a strong effort to accept and agree with culture. A ministry leader's responses will thus serve to quantify the contextualization strategy used in that ministry. To quantitatively assess the effectiveness of this strategy, people who visit a church may be surveyed to determine their perception of these same ministry decisions on a similar scale, ranging from (-3) a strongly negative perception to (+3) a strongly positive perception. This assessment will thus furnish a ministry leader with the information necessary to evaluate and revise his contextualization strategy.

Table 3. Contextualization strategy assessment points

<i>Cultural dimensions</i>	<i>Ministry decisions</i>
Worldview	Theological convictions
	Preaching topics
Cognitive process	Preaching logic
Linguistic forms	Word choices
Behavioral patterns	Preaching style
	Meeting place
Social structures	Relational atmosphere
Media influence	Music style
	Communication aids
Motivational resources	Response to preaching

### **Sample Contextualization Strategies**

This assessment scheme will now be used to quantify the contextualization strategies of four sample ministries. The ministries have been selected on the basis of three criteria. First, each ministry must fit within the broad doctrinal category of evangelicalism, subscribing to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, the total depravity of man, the substitutionary atoning work of Christ, salvation by grace alone through faith alone, the responsibility of believers to proclaim the biblical gospel, and the visible,

personal return of Christ.<sup>16</sup> The assessment could be used to quantify the contextualization strategy of a ministry that is not evangelical, but the purposes of this project are best served by selecting ministries within this doctrinal category. Second, each ministry selected must be actively involved with a significant number of young adults born after 1980. Third, each ministry selected must be led by an influential leader who has articulated a view of contextualization. Finally, the attempt will be made to profile ministries that are presumed to differ in the degree of influence they allow culture to have in their ministry decisions. With these criteria in mind, the following ministries will be considered: Grace Community Church of Sun Valley, California, led by John MacArthur; Redeemer Presbyterian Church of New York, New York led by Timothy Keller; Mars Hill Church of Seattle, Washington led by Mark Driscoll; and Vintage Faith Church of Santa Cruz, California, led by Dan Kimball.

### **John MacArthur and Grace Community Church**

Grace Community Church of Sun Valley, California, is a non-denominational church that was originally founded in 1956. John MacArthur assumed the pastorate of the church in 1969.<sup>17</sup> Under his leadership the church grew to the point that it currently fills its 3,500 seat auditorium to capacity at two weekly Sunday morning worship services.<sup>18</sup> The church ministers to young adults through a large young adult fellowship group, and an aggressive college ministry with groups meeting at several universities and college campuses in the Los Angeles area. The breadth of MacArthur's influence over the church in North America is seen in over 400 popular books and study guides he has written and

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<sup>16</sup>R.V. Pierard, "Evangelicalism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 379-80.

<sup>17</sup>Grace Community Church, "A Legacy of Grace" [on-line], accessed 29 February 2012; available from <http://www.gracechurch.org/about/history>; Internet.

<sup>18</sup>Grace Community Church, "John MacArthur" [on-line], accessed 29 February 2012; available from [http://www.gracechurch.org/john\\_macarthur](http://www.gracechurch.org/john_macarthur); Internet.

an extensive radio and television ministry that broadcasts his sermons across North America and around the world to 23 countries.<sup>19</sup> His influence over church leaders takes place through his involvement in pastor's conferences, including the Shepherd's Conference held annually at Grace Community Church, and through his role as president of the Master's College and Seminary.

MacArthur has strongly criticized popular approaches to contextualization in North American churches. In 1993, he published a critique of several church growth trends titled, *Ashamed of the Gospel*. A third edition of the book was released in 2010 in which he argues, "The 'contextualization' of the gospel today has infected the church with the spirit of the age. It has opened the church's doors wide for worldliness, shallowness, and in some cases a crass, party atmosphere."<sup>20</sup> At times MacArthur seems to imply that culture should be completely ignored. For instance, when discussing 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, he asserts,

Although Paul ministered to the vilest of pagans throughout the Roman world, he never adapted the church to secular society's tastes. He would not think of altering either the message or the nature of the church. Each of the churches he founded had its own unique personality and set of problems, but Paul's teaching, his strategy, and above all his message remained the same throughout his ministry.<sup>21</sup>

But just prior to the above statement he concedes, "When Paul was with the Gentiles, he followed Gentile customs and culture insofar as it did not conflict with the law of Christ. He avoided needlessly offending the Gentiles."<sup>22</sup> MacArthur's view of the role of cultural influence in ministry decisions is, perhaps, best seen when he states,

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<sup>19</sup>Grace to You, "John MacArthur" [on-line], accessed 21 March 2012; available from <http://www.gty.org/connect/biography>; Internet.

<sup>20</sup>John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 113.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 111.

I'm not in favor of staid formalism or hackneyed custom. I agree with those who warn that stagnation can be fatal to the church. I just don't believe the church needs to abandon the centrality of the Word of God, the primacy of preaching, and the fundamentals of biblical truth in order to be fresh and creative.

. . . An inflexible attitude is the bane of a healthy church. We must be willing to grow and adapt and try new things—but never at the expense of biblical truth, and never to the detriment of the gospel message.<sup>23</sup>

Thus one may conclude that though MacArthur opposes contextualization, he does not necessarily oppose all cultural influence over ministry decisions. His concern is that following biblical teaching be the primary concern of church leaders.

Phillip Johnson, a key leader at Grace Community Church, confirmed the above conclusions.<sup>24</sup> He explained that at Grace Community Church some degree of cultural influence happens naturally, particularly in areas such as music where the church allows a diversity of styles reflective of the church members involved in music ministry. On the other hand, cultural influence is staunchly resisted in areas such as theological convictions where its pressure is most felt. Grace Community Church thus serves as a concrete example of a church whose contextualization strategy is to ignore culture, averaging (0) on the proposed contextualization scale.

The great strength of a contextualization strategy like that of John MacArthur and Grace Community Church is that it should produce a ministry that resembles the ministry practices of New Testament churches. This approach makes sense theologically because it solidly grounds ministry practices in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture and pragmatically because it follows the same patterns that arguably contributed to the dynamic growth of the church in the first century. Yet there are also potential pitfalls that those who choose this contextualization strategy must avoid. The New Testament portrayal of church ministry does not explicitly address many of the practical questions

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 197.

<sup>24</sup>Phillip R. Johnson, telephone conversation with author, April 25, 2012. In addition to serving as an elder at Grace Community Church for over twenty-five years, Johnson has edited all of MacArthur's major books and has served as the Executive Director of MacArthur's media ministry.

faced by churches today. Where the New Testament does address specific ministry methods, it often does so descriptively not prescriptively, thus raising the question of whether those methods were ever intended to be duplicated. After all, the differences between cultures then and now are significant. Furthermore, in ministry decisions where explicit biblical guidance is lacking, those who employ the strategy of intentional cultural ignorance may inadvertently ascribe biblical authority to traditional or personal cultural preferences. In the worst case scenario, such preferences would be deemed non-negotiable and could produce barriers between the church's culture and that of the people among whom it ministers—barriers that would be completely unnecessary.

### **Timothy Keller and Redeemer Presbyterian Church**

Redeemer Presbyterian Church of New York, New York was established in 1989 when Timothy Keller felt called to join with a group of fifteen people who had been praying about planting a new church in the heart of Manhattan for professional New Yorkers. The church is a member of the Presbyterian Church in America. By 2001 attendance at Redeemer had grown to approximately 3,800 people with an average age of 30.<sup>25</sup> In 2007 Keller estimated that half of the congregation were “twenty-somethings.”<sup>26</sup> Since that time the congregation has grown to an average attendance of 5,000 people at six Sunday worship services meeting at two different locations.<sup>27</sup> Keller has exercised significant influence on North American church leaders through speaking at various pastors conferences, including those hosted by the Gospel Coalition, an organization Keller helped found. Keller's influence has also spread through the Redeemer Church

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<sup>25</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “Reformed Worship in the Global City,” in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 223.

<sup>26</sup>Timothy Keller, “Preaching to ‘Emerging’ Culture” (lecture, Preaching to the Heart, Pt. 5 Ockenga Lectures, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Spring 2007), audio recording.

<sup>27</sup>Redeemer Presbyterian Church, “Redeemer's History” [on-line]; accessed 7 March 2012; available from [http:// www.redeemer.com/about\\_us/vision\\_and\\_values/history.html](http://www.redeemer.com/about_us/vision_and_values/history.html); Internet.

Planting Center that has helped to plant over 170 churches in 35 global cities since it was established in 1998.<sup>28</sup>

Keller considers contextualization to be a “crucial principle of ministry for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>29</sup> He claims, “All good gospel ministry is ‘contextualized’ without compromise.”<sup>30</sup> He defines contextualization as

. . . the process by which we present the gospel to people of a particular worldview, in forms that the hearers can understand. It is adapting gospel ministry from one culture into another culture without compromising the gospel. True contextualization, then, is concerned to *both* challenge the culture *and* to connect and adapt to it, for if we fail to do either, we obscure and lose the gospel, either by identifying it too much with the new culture or by identifying it too much with the older one. Contextualization is not ‘giving people what they want’ but rather it is giving God’s answers (which they may not want!) to questions they are asking and in forms that they can comprehend. Everything about a church must be contextualized—its message, its discourse, its approach to decision-making, its leadership approaches, its worship, its use of the arts, its outreach, its instructional methods, its preaching. (emphasis original)<sup>31</sup>

Though Keller speaks broadly here about various aspects of ministry, his presentations on contextualization focus on preaching in a way that intellectually engages someone’s worldview. He advocates what he calls an “enter – challenge – re-establish approach.” First, preachers should enter a person’s frame of reference by identifying with parts of their belief system that are similar to the Christian worldview. Then the preacher should challenge the person by showing them the inconsistency of their worldview. Finally, the

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<sup>28</sup>Redeemer City to City, “History” [on-line]; accessed 21 March 2012; available from <http://redeemercitytocity.com/our-story/history.jsp>; Internet.

<sup>29</sup>Tim Keller, “Advancing the Gospel into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *The Movement: E-Newsletter of the Redeemer Church Planting Center* (February 2004) [on-line]; accessed 26 January 2011; available from [http://www.redeemer2.com/advancingthegospel\\_part3](http://www.redeemer2.com/advancingthegospel_part3); Internet.

<sup>30</sup>Tim Keller, “Church and Culture” (paper presented at the Urban Plant Life London Church Planting Consultation, London, 28 November 2008), 12 [on-line]; accessed 28 March 2012; available from [http://www.lcm.org.uk/Tim\\_Kellers\\_pdf.aspx](http://www.lcm.org.uk/Tim_Kellers_pdf.aspx); Internet.

<sup>31</sup>Tim Keller, “Contextual and Missional” (paper presented at the Urban Plant Life London Church Planting Consultation, London, 28 November 2008), 10 [on-line]; accessed 28 March 2012; available from [http://www.lcm.org.uk/Tim\\_Kellers\\_pdf.aspx](http://www.lcm.org.uk/Tim_Kellers_pdf.aspx); Internet.

preacher should re-establish equilibrium with a new framework by showing the person how what they are looking for can only be found in Christ.<sup>32</sup>

Though Keller argues strongly for contextualization, he also makes statements that either disregard or limit cultural influence. For instance, he argues, “*Every* expression and embodiment of Christianity *is* contextualized. There is no such thing as a universal, a-historical expression of Christianity” (emphasis original).<sup>33</sup> Yet he also asserts that his own approach to preaching the gospel—distinguishing Christianity from religion and irreligion, exposing the idolatry underneath individual sins, and bringing Christ to bear on the heart—“cuts across all worldviews.”<sup>34</sup> By this statement Keller claims that the logic of his approach to articulating the gospel does not need to be contextualized. Culture can thus be disregarded.

An example of limiting the influence of culture can be seen when Keller addresses the issue of corporate worship. Keller asserts, “I propose that we forge our corporate worship best when we consult *all three*—the Bible, the cultural context of our community, and the historical tradition of our church” (emphasis original).<sup>35</sup> He acknowledges that, “Much of what is called ‘traditional’ worship is very rooted in Northern European culture.”<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, in shaping the approach to worship at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, he relies heavily on a form of liturgy drawn from John Calvin.<sup>37</sup> Keller’s dependence upon a traditional Reformed approach to corporate worship limits the degree to which he is willing to contextualize corporate worship.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>34</sup>Keller, “Preaching to ‘Emerging’ Culture,” audio recording.

<sup>35</sup>Keller, “Reformed Worship in the Global City,” 197.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 196.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 201.

In light of what Keller has taught regarding contextualizing ministry, the contextualization strategy of Redeemer Presbyterian Church would seem to average (+1) on the proposed contextualization scale. Keller's emphasis on engaging the worldview of young New York professionals undoubtedly exercises significant influence over his choice of topics, words, logic, style, and response in preaching. Redeemer's strategy in these five categories of ministry decisions would thus presumably rank at (+1) or (+2). In light of Keller's support for theistic evolution,<sup>38</sup> he may also allow culture to exercise a similar level of influence in his theological beliefs. Keller's discussions of contextualization do not address Redeemer's strategy concerning meeting place, relational atmosphere, or communication aids, but he does address music style. He explains that in light of the musical literacy of Manhattan's general population, Redeemer employs a high culture musical style that draws upon both classical and jazz.<sup>39</sup> The depth of cultural influence over music at Redeemer is perhaps best seen in the church's practice of including professional non-Christian musicians in their musical ensembles.<sup>40</sup> Yet in contrast to the influence Manhattan culture has over ministry at Redeemer, they still maintain an overarching traditional liturgical form driven by a countercultural value of transcendence.

Redeemer's limited approach to contextualization has much to commend it. Keller's approach to engaging people's worldview has good biblical precedent in that it reflects the approach Paul used at Mars Hill. This critical evaluation of the worldview behind expressions of culture should also prevent a ministry from blindly embracing either contemporary trends or traditional forms. The real challenge, however, is whether

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<sup>38</sup>Tim Keller, "Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople" (paper presented at the Biologos Foundation Workshop, New York, NY, November 2009) [on-line]; accessed 3 April 2012; available from <http://biologos.org/resources/essays>; Internet.

<sup>39</sup>Keller, "Reformed Worship in the Global City," 237.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 239.

one can maintain a clear commitment to biblical authority while being pulled in different directions by tradition and contemporary culture. Contemporary culture seems to trump biblical authority in Keller's view of creation. Even if an exceptional leader may have the intellectual ability to maintain a commitment to biblical authority, it is questionable whether the average church member will understand that commitment and be able to maintain it in his own intellectual engagement with culture.

### **Mark Driscoll and Mars Hill Church**

Mars Hill Church of Seattle, Washington, was founded in 1996 by Mark Driscoll. The Mars Hill Church website claims that, "Since that time, the church has exploded with upwards of 19,000 people meeting across thirteen locations in four states."<sup>41</sup> The first ten years of the church's growth are chronicled in Driscoll's book *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.*<sup>42</sup> Initially, Driscoll's burden was to reach the "young urban arty types" of Generation X, but he came to regard generationally targeted churches as a flawed methodology.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Mars Hill Church has still been described as "packed with God-hungry Millennials."<sup>44</sup> Driscoll has exercised significant influence over evangelical church leaders through the Acts 29 Network, a church planting organization which has helped plant over 400 churches in the United States, and the Resurgence, an equipping organization that hosts a blog, conducts various ministry training events, and publishes books by Driscoll and others.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Mars Hill Church, "Pastor Mark Driscoll and Grace Driscoll Official Bio" [on-line]; accessed 28 March 2012; available from [http://www.marshill.com/pastor\\_mark\\_driscolls\\_biography.pdf](http://www.marshill.com/pastor_mark_driscolls_biography.pdf); Internet.

<sup>42</sup>Mark Driscoll, *Confessions of a Reformission Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church*, Leadership Network Innovation Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

<sup>43</sup>Driscoll, *Confessions*, 64-66.

<sup>44</sup>Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Pastor Mark Driscoll: Millennials are Honest on Faith," *USA Today*, 27 April 2010 [on-line]; accessed 4 April 2012; available from <http://content.usatoday.com>; Internet.

<sup>45</sup>Mars Hill Church, "Pastor Mark Driscoll and Grace Driscoll Official Bio" [on-line].

Driscoll's first book, *The Radical Reformation*, is devoted to the subject of contextualization. He explains this unusual title by saying,

This "reformation" is a radical call to reform the church's traditionally flawed view of missions as something carried out in foreign lands and to focus instead on the urgent need in our own neighborhoods, which are filled with diverse cultures of Americans who desperately need the gospel of Jesus and life in his church. Most significant, they need a gospel and a church that are faithful both to the scriptural texts and to the cultural contexts of America.<sup>46</sup>

While Keller's strategy of contextualization is intellectually driven, Driscoll articulates an aggressive relational and behavioral approach. He argues for welcoming non-Christians into the church because they will convert first to the church and friendships with its members before they convert to God.<sup>47</sup> Outside of church gatherings, he urges Christians to cross lines of separation and live freely within the culture being as close to sinners as possible.<sup>48</sup> He says, "As we engage culture, we must watch films, listen to music, read books, watch television, shop at stores, and engage in other activities as theologians and missionaries filled with wisdom and discernment, seeking to better grasp life in our Mars Hill. We do this so we can begin the transforming work of the gospel in our culture."<sup>49</sup> Driscoll even devotes an entire chapter to drinking alcohol in moderation as an example of throwing ourselves into culture in a way that many Christians have been unwilling to do.<sup>50</sup>

When it comes to cultural dimensions related to preaching, however, Driscoll demonstrates a more reserved approach to contextualization. On one hand, he claims, "I

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<sup>46</sup>Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out without Selling Out* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 18.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 145-52.

started studying stand-up comedians because, besides preachers, they are the only people in our culture who stand on a stage and speak to an audience for an extended period of time.”<sup>51</sup> Yet Driscoll also describes how he resisted cultural pressure to adopt an open dialogue approach to communicating. He says, “In the end, I decided not to back off from a preaching monologue but instead to work hard at becoming a solid long-winded, old-school Bible preacher that focused on Jesus.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Driscoll’s confrontational style offends both contemporary secular culture and traditional conservative American church culture alike.

Tim Gaydos, campus pastor for the Mars Hill campus in downtown Seattle, agrees that the contextualization strategy used at Mars Hill has a strong relational emphasis.<sup>53</sup> Drawing upon Matthew 5:13, Gaydos stresses that to be effective salt must have contact. He personally embodies this approach by being involved with the local chamber of commerce. This aggressive contextualization strategy is also reflected in the music style used in Mars Hill worship and in the meeting place of the campus Gaydos leads, a former nightclub. Of course, the whole video campus approach itself, demonstrates a strong acceptance of the media technology of contemporary culture. Over 80 percent of the preaching is live video of Driscoll from another location. On the other hand, Gaydos is also quick to point out the countercultural theological positions taught by Mars Hill leaders, such as their complementarian view of women’s roles, their insistence on the sinfulness of homosexual behavior, and their commitment to the practice of church discipline—positions for which Mars Hill has been criticized by secular press. Similarly, Gaydos notes that in selecting preaching topics, Driscoll takes a conservative expositional approach rather than choosing topics based upon culture. Though the contextualization

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<sup>51</sup>Driscoll, *Confessions*, 70.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>53</sup>Tim Gaydos, telephone conversation with author, May 22, 2012.

strategy of Driscoll and Mars Hill is very different from that of Keller and Redeemer, both strategies would average (+1) on the proposed scale.

The greatest strength of the Mars Hill Church contextualization strategy is also its greatest weakness. The relational emphasis at Mars Hill reflects the way Jesus interacted with people. Because of his own relationships with people Jesus testified that he was accused of being a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matt 11:19). In fact, MacArthur raised this concern about the so called “Young, Restless, and Reformed” movement of which Mars Hill is a leading influence.<sup>54</sup> An immature believer can easily twist a relational emphasis into a license to flirt with temptation. On the other hand, this emphasis does counter the impulse many Christians have to isolate themselves from unbelievers, an impulse that undermines personal evangelism. Those who advocate this strategy must be particularly careful to warn believers of its dangers.

### **Dan Kimball and Vintage Faith Church**

Vintage Faith Church of Santa Cruz, California, began in 2004 under the leadership of Dan Kimball.<sup>55</sup> While serving as youth pastor at Santa Cruz Bible Church, Kimball launched a Sunday evening worship gathering for young adults called Graceland. As the Graceland worship service grew, leaders decided to drop the age limits, but this led to tensions with the leadership of Santa Cruz Bible Church. Kimball began to recognize that Graceland had developed a set of values that differed from the rest of the church.<sup>56</sup> At that point the decision was made to end the Graceland worship

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<sup>54</sup>John MacArthur, “Beer, Bohemianism, and True Christian Liberty” [on-line]; accessed 9 August 2011; available from <http://www.gty.org/blog/B110809>; Internet.

<sup>55</sup>Vintage Faith Church, “The History of Vintage Faith Church” [on-line]; accessed 18 July 2012; available from <http://www.vintagechurch.org/about/history>; Internet.

<sup>56</sup>Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship: Creating New Worship Gatherings for Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 173.

gathering. A group of 175 people then began meeting in preparation for the formal launch of Vintage Faith Church two months later.<sup>57</sup> Even before the launch of Vintage Faith Church, Kimball had become a popular conference speaker and leading voice in the Emerging Church Movement through his 2003 book, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*.<sup>58</sup> Though the movement has generally faded, Kimball continues to speak at conferences, write, and collaborate with other influential church leaders through the Origins Project, a network focused on inspiring innovation and creativity among church leaders.<sup>59</sup>

Though Kimball seldom uses the term *contextualization*, he strongly encourages ministry leaders to allow culture to shape ministry. He writes,

As we approach ministry to the emerging culture—a post-Christian mission field—we need to use the same approach we would employ entering a foreign culture. We cannot go on seeing ourselves simply as pastors and teachers; we need to see ourselves as a new kind of missionary. And we must train people in our churches to do the same.<sup>60</sup>

Speaking of his own experience, Kimball says,

We realized we now needed to design a new ministry for people with a postmodern, post-Christian worldview.

As missionaries, we began rethinking evangelism, worship gatherings, spiritual formation, how we taught Scripture. The rethinking eventually moved beyond youth ministry—since the youth ministry is shaped by the church it’s a part of—to rethinking church.<sup>61</sup>

Kimball’s missionary thinking has resulted in a contextualization strategy that is more

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<sup>57</sup>Vintage Faith Church, “The History of Vintage Faith Church” [on-line].

<sup>58</sup>Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003).

<sup>59</sup>Origins Project, “About Origins” [on-line]; accessed 18 July 2012; available from <http://originsproject.org/about-origins>; Internet.

<sup>60</sup>Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 69.

<sup>61</sup>Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 168.

comprehensive than those articulated by the other three churches and leaders profiled above.

Theologically, Kimball identifies himself as a “conservative evangelical.”<sup>62</sup> Yet he also argues for theology to be influenced by culture. He asserts, “It’s not just about what we do in the worship service, but about *everything*. This includes our local ecclesiological expression and ethos, as well as our mind-set about theology” (emphasis original).<sup>63</sup> Kimball’s rethinking of theology was prompted by his own unchurched background and a tension he felt in teaching those from the emerging culture. He explains, “It seemed that maybe we as human beings ended up coming up with a lot of very concise theological answers about things that maybe we just can’t be quite as certain of.”<sup>64</sup> Kimball responded to the culture’s skepticism of authority by placing a greater value on mystery in his theology. He claims, “I became more of a Nicene Creed believer and then left more to mystery after that.”<sup>65</sup> He chose to pare down the number of doctrines to which he held with certainty, while maintaining a strong commitment to teaching fundamental doctrines.<sup>66</sup> Kimball’s allowance for cultural influence would place his approach to the development of theological convictions (+3) on the proposed scale, but his commitment to the Nicene Creed evidences some resistance to culture. Thus Kimball’s approach in this area ranks at (+2).

Kimball’s emphasis on mystery also shapes several other elements of his contextualization strategy. In describing the preaching style of emerging worship

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<sup>62</sup>Dan Kimball, “The Emerging Church and Missional Theology,” in *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives*, ed. Robert Webber (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 85.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>66</sup>Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 206.

gatherings like those of Vintage Faith Church, he states, “But the preaching is not with a I-am-the-wise-one-with-the-answers-from-the-Bible-because-I-went-to-seminary-and-am-giving-it-to-you-now-because-I-have-the-microphone-and-the-power-so-you-need-to-listen attitude. Instead, their messages are presented as humble exploration and teaching of the Scriptures.”<sup>67</sup> This emphasis on mystery is also seen in the way Vintage Faith Church uses multi-sensory experiences in their worship gatherings to communicate truth beyond words. Kimball expresses the importance of these experiences for his logic in preaching when he says, “If we focus only on preaching with words to the exclusion of experiential teaching, we will not have the impact we are hoping for in our emerging culture. We need to give people truthful experiences along with truthful teaching.”<sup>68</sup> The creation of these experiences requires a heavy reliance upon communication aids: decorations, photographs, props for people to handle, and stations with activities such as journaling or painting in which they may participate. Kimball also describes using such activities as a response to preaching.<sup>69</sup> Kimball’s strategy could thus be ranked at (+3) in preaching style, logic, communication aids, and response to preaching.

In regard to word choices and selection of preaching topics, Kimball’s strategy could be ranked at (+2), because he responds to culture without necessarily accepting it. Regarding word choices, Kimball says, “Biblical terms like *gospel* and *Armageddon* need to be deconstructed and redefined” (emphasis original).<sup>70</sup> Kimball’s goal is to explain the biblical meaning of such words to the unchurched person, but he recognizes that common cultural misunderstandings must first be refuted. Similarly, when choosing preaching topics, Kimball does not simply respond to felt needs. He asserts, “Preaching is an

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<sup>67</sup>Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 87.

<sup>68</sup>Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 187.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 166-67.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 175.

opportunity to shape a theological worldview for people by telling the story. Every time I preach I clearly know what theological concept I am trying to teach and how it fits into the story of the Bible.”<sup>71</sup> On one hand, he encourages preachers to respond to the major life-concerns of their audience.<sup>72</sup> Yet he also challenges them to teach on hell more than ever. He states, “I can hardly think of any more offensive doctrine of the Christian faith. But if hell is a reality, and Jesus sure talked about it a *lot*, shouldn’t we be warning people about it?” (emphasis original).<sup>73</sup>

In regard to meeting place and music style, Kimball draws upon more traditional Christian culture. He speaks of seeking to, “bring a sense of the ancient into a contemporary room”<sup>74</sup> through decorations and props in order to “convey the fact that Christianity is a nonmodern religion.”<sup>75</sup> He also speaks of using hymns<sup>76</sup> or even monastic chant in Vintage Faith Church’s worship gatherings for the same reason. Unlike Keller, tradition is not a limiting factor for Kimball. Kimball does not draw upon tradition in order to maintain continuity with a denominational heritage. He selectively chooses traditional elements to incorporate into worship based upon what will best accomplish the goal of communicating a sense of the ancient. Kimball’s strategy for these ministry decisions thus ranks at (+3).

In regard to the relational atmosphere in the church, Kimball calls church leaders and all Christians to be listeners. He asserts, “Emerging generations desire understanding, not quick analysis and solutions. Leadership in the emerging church is

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 149.

about a lot more listening than talking.”<sup>77</sup> It may be Kimball’s own sensitivity to listen to people that drives his contextualization strategy. His 2007 book, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*, is based on his own extensive interviews with unchurched people.<sup>78</sup> Throughout his books, he gives countless examples of such personal conversations, using them as a basis for his understanding of culture and his response to it. Here again, Kimball’s strategy could be ranked at (+3).

Compared to the other leaders and churches profiled, the contextualization strategy of Kimball and Vintage Faith Church is the most comprehensive and aggressive. It would average somewhere between (+2) and (+3) on the proposed scale. The comprehensiveness of this strategy is its greatest strength. Kimball examines every element of ministry to see where it can be conformed to culture without violating Scripture. But the weakness of the strategy is that it tends to suggest a monolithic view of culture. Though Kimball occasionally speaks of paying attention to local culture, he generally speaks in sweeping terms of “our new postmodern culture.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, he devotes his attention to describing the strategy employed in Vintage Faith Church in Santa Cruz, California as if most, if not all, elements of his strategy will effectively serve other contexts. Church leaders who simply accept Kimball’s description of postmodern culture, may be blinded to the realities of their own local culture.

In summary, the proposed contextualization scale reveals the unique contours of the four sample North American evangelical contextualization strategies profiled above. Though many may perceive MacArthur as opposed to contemporary culture, a careful reading shows that he lands more at (0) on the scale, generally ignoring culture. Driscoll and Keller’s strategies both average (+1). But they show different emphases—

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 235.

<sup>78</sup>Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church*, 19.

<sup>79</sup>Kimball, *Emerging Worship*, 9.

Keller on contextualization through preaching and Driscoll on contextualization in personal evangelism. Kimball blends both emphases into a more aggressive approach that lands between (+2) and (+3) on the scale. To evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies, unchurched individuals who visit one of these churches could give their perception of how appropriate or relevant the church and its leader are in regard to each of the ten ministry decisions in the scheme. Such research is beyond the scope of this project.

### **The Contextualization Strategy of Calvary Bible Church East**

Since the purpose of this project is to develop a contextualization strategy for Calvary Bible Church East, the church's existing strategy must be set forth in detail using the proposed scheme and giving supporting rationale and examples. Each of the ten key ministry decisions from the proposed scheme will be examined. The description of the strategy is necessary in order to fulfill the goal of evaluating its effectiveness. In a subsequent chapter, the strategy will be compared with the perceptions of unchurched visitors gathered during the research phase of this project. This strategy description will also be helpful in fulfilling the goal of equipping young adults from the Calvary East congregation. Presumably, most church members give little thought as to how they and their church family interact with culture. Understanding the strategy already in use at Calvary East will enable them to begin to think more critically about their own outreach efforts and how they personally shape the contextualization strategy of the church through their involvement in the various ministries of the church.

### **Theological Convictions**

I have made a determined effort to ignore cultural influence in shaping the theological convictions of Calvary Bible Church East. For the first ten years of my Christian life after my conversion at age sixteen, I was a member of Grace Community

Church of Sun Valley, California, under the leadership of John MacArthur. MacArthur modeled a love for Scripture that I embraced enthusiastically. My understanding of the relation of culture and theology parallels MacArthur's views. Though a culture will raise questions to which the church must respond, the answers to those questions and the overall shape of a church's theology should be determined solely through the exegesis of the Scriptures in the power of the Holy Spirit. Though cultural assumptions undoubtedly influence exegesis, every effort should be made to arrive at theological conclusions that are eternal and supra-cultural. It is an unacceptable compromise to give either the worldview of contemporary culture or the worldview of some traditional culture a determinative role in the development of theological convictions. On a practical level, the teaching ministry of Calvary East seeks to reflect this dependence upon Scripture by exposing the points where both contemporary culture and traditional culture stray from biblical teaching. I have not hesitated to teach such concepts as the inerrancy of Scripture, a literal seven-day view of creation, or a complementarian view of male headship, regardless of the fact that contemporary culture generally rejects such views. Thus in regard to theological convictions the Calvary East contextualization strategy ranks at (0) on the proposed scale.

### **Preaching Topics**

Culture does, however, play a role in the selection of preaching topics for Calvary East. Due in large part to the influence of MacArthur, I have chosen to use an expositional approach to preaching at Calvary East. The substance of nearly every sermon is an exposition of a passage of Scripture ranging from a single verse to one or two paragraphs. Over consecutive weeks this approach has been used to work from beginning to end of such biblical books as Genesis, Mark's Gospel, Philipians, James and Romans. This approach has also been used to work through other passages of Scripture such as the Psalms of Ascent, the Olivet Discourse, and 1 Corinthians 15. The

same expositional approach has also been used to address topics. So for instance, one series of sermons on a biblical view of money examined Jesus' teaching on the subject by looking at each of his parables referring to money recorded in the Gospel of Luke. This expositional approach has been selected based upon the conviction that it best enables the congregation to hear the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Yet even this expositional approach allows for selectivity in determining which sections of Scripture to preach. At Calvary East this decision is significantly influenced by the prevailing questions raised in culture. So for instance, the exposition of 1 Corinthians 15 was selected in response to popular culture's interest in the afterlife. Because of this awareness and acknowledgment of culture Calvary East's contextualization strategy could be ranked at (+1) in regard to the selection of preaching topics.

### **Preaching Logic**

The logical progression used in preaching at Calvary East has developed in response to perceptions of the cognitive processes of local culture. As described previously, Comstock is a working class community. Even within the Calvary East congregation, most leaders rarely read books of any sort, other than the Bible. This non-intellectual climate has prompted two tactics in preaching. The first tactic concerns the use of illustrations. When illustrations are used in a more intellectual culture, they are typically used to support a concept that has already been presented. In sermons at Calvary East, however, illustrations are presented first to capture interest and to establish a concrete picture prior to explaining a concept. This progression from picture to concept is used for each point in the outline of a sermon. This non-intellectual climate also prompts a second tactic—the rigid use of a preaching outline. A more intellectual culture might perceive a rigid preaching outline to be pedantic, but the approach seems well suited to holding the attention of those who devote most of their time to physical rather than mental work. Calvary East's contextualization strategy thus ranks at (+2).

## **Word Choices**

As with preaching logic, the choice of words in preaching at Calvary East is again significantly influenced by the working class culture of Comstock. Simple terms are used whenever possible, theological terminology is generally avoided, and no effort is made to use local slang of any sort. The goal is simply to be clear and understandable. When a significant theological word is encountered in Scripture, every effort is made to define it in simple terms. This component of the Calvary East contextualization strategy thus ranks at (+2).

## **Preaching Style**

Preaching style undoubtedly has much to do with the preacher's personality. Nevertheless, an attempt is still made at Calvary East to generally accommodate culture. In the local working class culture of Comstock there seems to be a general distrust for both managerial type authority and salesman-like persuasion. Common stereotypes of both managers and salesmen portray them as interested only in personal gain at the expenses of working class people. Thus every effort is made in tone and demeanor to project not personal authority, but a humble submission to the authority of God and his Word. Application points in the sermon are framed as questions rather than imperatives. Even in my dress, I seek not to impress but to blend in with the congregation, dressing more casually than many pastors would. Here again the Calvary East contextualization strategy ranks at (+2).

## **Meeting Place**

Calvary East meets in a facility that was built in 1969 by a congregation that officially dissolved in 2006 and donated the property to Calvary Bible Church of Kalamazoo. The donation of this church building was what prompted the planting of Calvary East, but it also serves as a limiting factor in the Calvary East contextualization strategy. As finances have allowed, minor changes have been made to the facility,

including paint, carpet, and lighting. The leadership currently plans to replace aging pews with chairs. Though there is a sensitivity to the negative perception that an aging and out of date building may evoke in the people of Comstock, relatively few changes have been done. Thus the Calvary East contextualization strategy in regard to meeting place could be placed at (+1).

### **Relational Atmosphere**

From the beginning of the ministry at Calvary East, leaders have made a determined effort to develop a family atmosphere. Aside from the biblical support for this emphasis in passages such as Matthew 12:49 and 1 Timothy 5:1-2, there are also strong reasons within local culture for emphasizing a family atmosphere. Many families have lived in Comstock for several generations. Rather than aspiring to better career opportunities elsewhere, most young adults are content to remain in the immediate area. Their families, however, do not necessarily have healthy relationships. Many have been fractured by divorce and estranged relationships, creating a longing for a genuine experience of family. This family emphasis drives leaders at Calvary East to relate to people not in the pattern of business leaders, but as friends. When facing significant decisions, leaders openly seek input from church members and then make their decision as the heads of an extended household. This family emphasis has also been a consideration in the decision to have one large multi-generational Adult Sunday School class, rather than splitting up into multiple age based small groups. In regard to relational atmosphere, Calvary East's contextualization strategy thus ranks at (+3) on the proposed scale.

### **Music Style**

Calvary East has taken a somewhat limited approach in contextualizing the music style used in worship gatherings. The musical repertoire consists primarily of contemporary praise songs augmented by hymns in contemporary arrangements. The

leading instrument most weeks is acoustic guitar. The effort is made to arrange songs with a subtle country style, consistent with the musical tastes of local culture. Yet the demeanor of the musicians is simple and reserved, rather than showy. Musicians participate with the congregation, rather than putting on a performance as musicians would in other settings. Because of this limited approach, the music style of Calvary East ranks at (+1) on the proposed scale.

### **Communication Aids**

Calvary East uses several communication aids to support preaching in worship gatherings. Each sermon outline point is accompanied by an image projected on a screen. As mentioned previously, each sermon outline point begins with an illustration and progresses to the explanation of a concept and accompanying biblical support. The image projected always relates to the opening illustration of the point. The text of the outline point is also projected with the image. Sermon notes are provided for the congregation with blanks to fill in and follow-up questions encouraging practical application. A more educated context might find this approach to be overly simplistic. Initially, this approach was used on certain occasions when younger children were present in the worship gathering. But adults in the congregation expressed a desire to continue this approach every week. Calvary East has stopped short, however, of using movie clips or drama as some churches have done, thus Calvary East's use of communication aids ranks at (+2).

### **Response to Preaching**

The Calvary East contextualization strategy for response to preaching acknowledges culture in a limited way. Though the local culture may resist authority as mentioned previously, pastors still have a biblical responsibility to reprove, rebuke, and exhort (2 Tim 4:2). In deference to the anti-authority, anti-salesmanship bent of local culture, an altar call style of invitation is not used at Calvary East. Instead each message is concluded with a number of possible responses. Though phrased in different ways in

light of the biblical text expounded, there is always one response inviting unbelievers to be converted. One or more responses are also given inviting believers to commit to some area of spiritual growth. Finally, a possible response is also given for unbelievers who are still exploring Christianity. Typically, this would be an invitation to commit to read a chapter of Scripture related to the sermon. These responses are printed on a response card with check boxes. Every person present is encouraged to complete a card and place it in the offering plate when an offering is collected after the sermon. A brief time of silence is set aside after the sermon during which people are encouraged to reflect, pray, and to complete a response card. Because of the limited influence of culture in this approach to ministry, this aspect of the Calvary East contextualization strategy could be ranked at (+1).

Together these ten components of the Calvary East contextualization strategy average (+1.4) on the proposed scale. The strategy parallels each of the four model strategies at various points, yet it stands distinct because of its unique combination of those elements. The quantification of these elements in this way provides a more contoured picture than the scales of Travis or Allison. This strategy can now be evaluated, not merely by comparison with churches that are successful in other cultural contexts, but by the perceptions of unchurched young adults in the context of Comstock, Michigan.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The practice of contextualization takes into account both the culture of those who communicate that message and the culture of those who receive a message. The greater the difference is between those two cultures, the more care the communicator must exercise to insure that he is understood by the recipient. Contextualization in local church ministry, however, must take into account three cultures. First, the culture of the primary communicator in the local church must be considered. As the pastor of Calvary Bible Church East, I function as that primary communicator. Much of my own cultural background has been described in chapter 1. Second, the culture of the local unchurched population must be considered. As previously indicated, this project specifically focuses on the culture of Millennials in the Comstock area. Finally, the culture of the local church congregation must also be assessed. The congregation fills two roles. They stand as both recipients and communicators. They receive communication from their pastor, thereby shaping his communication since they form the context in which his communication takes place. They also communicate directly through their own interaction with unchurched people. This project thus sought to measure the general culture of unchurched young adults in the Comstock area, the general culture of the Calvary East congregation, and the specific response of both groups to the Sunday morning worship services at Calvary East. This information has made it possible to evaluate the contextualization strategy currently utilized in the ministry of the church, and to develop modifications to make the ministry more faithful to the biblical mandate of contextualization, and consequently more effective.

## **Instruments to Assess Culture and Contextualization**

To achieve the three measurements described above, two instruments were developed. The first instrument was an initial questionnaire designed to examine several cultural dimensions essential to the development of a strong contextualization strategy. The second instrument was a follow-up questionnaire that examines an individual's perception of a Calvary East worship service using the ten cultural dimensions described in chapter 3. Both instruments are described in further detail below.

### **The Initial Questionnaire**

The initial questionnaire (see Appendix 1) contained twenty five questions divided into four sections. The first section obtained two pieces of basic demographic data: whether a person resides in or near the Comstock area and the year of a person's birth. These questions confirmed whether the participant fit within the target group. The content and purpose of the remaining three sections are described below.

The second section examined the person's religious interest and experience. Participants were asked to rate their level of interest in religion or spirituality and to indicate whether they have ever been involved with a church or religious group. Those who have been involved with a church or religious group were asked to identify the church or group, rate their experience on a scale ranging from negative to positive, and to indicate their levels of past and current involvement. The section then concluded with a question asking them to rate their level of interest in being involved with a church or religious group in the future. This portion of the questionnaire demonstrated the receptivity of the target group to show how conversations about religion or invitations to a worship gathering or other event might be perceived.

The third section of the initial questionnaire asked six questions about a participant's spiritual beliefs or worldview. The section began by asking whether the person believes in the existence of a supreme being. The participant was asked to answer

by checking yes, no, or not sure. Next, the participant was asked to select from four basic explanations of life: an Eastern mystical view described by the terms destiny, luck, or karma; an animistic view emphasizing the influence of spirits, a theistic view identified as God directing all things; or an atheistic view in which life consists merely of people's choices. The participant could also answer, "Not sure." The third question covered a similar spectrum of views in regard to life after death. Participants were asked to select from the following options: cease to exist (atheist), come back to life as another person (mystical-Hindu), enter the spirit world (animist); become one with nature (mystical-Buddhist); face God's judgment to be sent to heaven or hell (theist); or not sure. The fourth and fifth questions in this section asked the participant to use a five point scale to rate how important their spiritual beliefs are to them and how certain they are about those beliefs. The section concluded with an epistemological question. Participants were asked to select from seven options describing how they have arrived at their spiritual beliefs: because they seem reasonable; because they can be proven; because they seem beautiful; because they seem right; because they work; because they seem popular; or because important people in their life accept them. The questions in this section were designed to reveal whether participants have a basic theistic worldview. If not, future ministry efforts must address these foundational issues.

The fourth and final section of the initial questionnaire, titled "Culture," explored three cultural dimensions. The first five questions in the section examined social structures. Participants were asked whom they have relied upon for general advice and for spiritual or religious guidance. They were asked to select from the following options: a family member; a friend; a religious leader; a celebrity; a teacher; a counselor; or some other person. Participants were then asked to identify the source of their current group of friends. They were asked to select high school, college or trade school, work, sports and activities, neighbors, religious group, or random connections. Participants were also

asked to indicate their economic group and level of education. Media influence was the next cultural dimension examined. Participants were asked to select the type of resource they are most likely to consult for personal advice and for information on spirituality or religion. The options listed include books, magazines, radio, television, internet, YouTube, social media, or other. The final three questions examined motivational resources. Each question asked participants to respond using a five point scale to indicate their level of openness with people, the importance of other people's opinion as they make decisions, and the speed at which they have made major life-shaping decisions. The questions in this section were designed to help the church identify the best channels through which the gospel may be communicated.

### **The Follow-up Questionnaire**

The follow-up questionnaire (see Appendix 2) consists of ten questions designed to measure the participants' perceptions of a worship gathering at Calvary Bible Church East. Each question asked participants to rate their impression of one of the culturally related ministry decisions presented in chapter 2 using a seven-point scale. The first two questions examined how the church engages the prevailing cultural worldview. Participants were asked to rate both their level of disagreement or agreement with the church's beliefs and the relevance of the topics addressed. The third question explored how the church adapts to the culture's cognitive processes by asking participants to rate the logic used in the teaching as difficult or easy to follow. The fourth question investigated how the church has contextualized its linguistic forms by asking participants to rate the familiarity of the words used. The next two questions looked at perception of two behavioral patterns, the body language and tone of the speaker and the meeting place. Participants were asked to rank their impression of each of these aspects of the ministry on a scale ranging from very negative to very positive. To examine the participants' impression of social structure in the church, they were asked to indicate how comfortable

they were with how people in the church seem to relate to one another. The final three questions all asked participants to rate their feelings from very negative to very positive. The first two examined media influence by asking participants' impressions of music style and communication aids such as note sheets, props, slides, video, or drama. The final question examined motivational resources by asking how participants felt about the way worshippers were asked to respond to the teaching. This series of questions served as a score card to demonstrate how the church's efforts at contextualization are perceived.

### **Training Church Members**

One of the goals of this project was to equip and inspire Christian young adults from Calvary East to engage in cross-cultural ministry to reach their own generation with the gospel. Aside from this project, the achievement of this goal is essential for Calvary East to fulfill Christ's Great Commission. Every church member must be involved in the work of evangelization, and as argued previously in chapter 2, faithful evangelistic effort requires careful attention to culture. The project was thus designed to establish a pattern of life that will continue after the project's completion. Specific objectives related to this goal and a description of how they were implemented are described below.

Six specific objectives needed to be accomplished to achieve this goal. First, the group needed to develop an understanding of culture and the biblical requirement for contextualization as described in chapter 2. Second, the group needed to evaluate their own culture by completing the initial questionnaire. Third, the group needed to be trained to examine the culture of young adults outside the church. To this end, the group was prepared to enlist research participants to complete the initial questionnaire. While helping meet the goals of this project, the initial questionnaire also modeled the kinds of questions that Christians can use informally to explore the people's culture. Fourth, the group needed to develop an understanding of the spectrum of contextualization strategies used by evangelical churches including the strategy of Calvary East as described in

chapter 3. Fifth, the group needed to evaluate their own perception of the Calvary East contextualization strategy. Finally, once the group had information about how unchurched young adults perceive the Calvary East contextualization strategy, the Calvary East young adults needed to contribute to the development of a modified Calvary East contextualization strategy. It was believed that these objectives would prepare Calvary East young adults for a life time of faithful cross-cultural ministry.

To implement these objectives, the initial proposal for this project envisioned three meetings with Calvary East young adults, during the second, seventh, and thirteenth weeks of the project. Several considerations, however, led to the modification of this plan. First, three meetings did not seem to be enough to accomplish the six objectives. Second, most of the young adults at Calvary East have children, so childcare would be needed. Third, as older adults in the congregation heard about the project they expressed an interest in being equipped along with the young adults. Therefore, the decision was made to conduct the training sessions weekly in Calvary East's adult Sunday school class in December 2012, and January 2013.

Thirty-six adults attended the class that was organized as described below. During Week 1, the group discussed the definition of culture and completed both the initial and follow-up questionnaires. Class members were also prepared at that time to invite young adults from outside of the church to complete the initial questionnaire. The teaching for Week 2 focused on God's plan for establishing cultural diversity following the Flood and the way the events at Babel accomplished that plan. During Week 3 the group saw how both the Abrahamic Covenant and the Great Commission require that believers pay attention to culture. The class did not meet during Weeks 4 or 5 due to special holiday activities. When the group next met on Week 6, they examined Paul's contextualization efforts as recorded in Acts 17. For Weeks 7 and 8, the group considered the contextualization strategies used by four prominent evangelical churches: Grace

Community Church of Sun Valley, California, pastored by John MacArthur; Redeemer Presbyterian Church of New York, New York, pastored by Timothy Keller; Mars Hill Church of Seattle, Washington, pastored by Mark Driscoll; and Vintage Faith Church of Santa Cruz, California, pastored by Dan Kimball. For the final class session on Week 9, the group discussed the contextualization strategy used at Calvary East.

### **Enlisting Research Participants**

As previously discussed, two categories of research participants were needed for this project: young adults from within the Calvary East congregation and unchurched young adults. Since the contextualization training was expanded to include older adults, all adults in the congregation were invited to participate in the project. The inclusion of older generations as research participants provides additional perspective on differences between generations. The enlistment efforts for both categories of participants are described below.

Since those from the Calvary East congregation were already familiar with the church's ministry, participants from the church were given both the initial and follow-up questionnaires to complete in one sitting. To enlist their participation, the project was presented through an article in the church's weekly newsletter. This article was also posted to the Calvary East website and emailed to the congregation prior to the first training session.<sup>1</sup> For communication purposes, the project was branded as the Comstock Millennials Survey. A print version of the combined questionnaire was distributed during the first training sessions and time was given for all those in attendance to complete the questionnaire. Additional copies of the questionnaire were also made available in the church lobby so that those who did not attend the training could also participate. In addition to the print version of the combined questionnaire, an on-line version was

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<sup>1</sup>Bryan Craddock, "The Comstock Millennials Survey," 26 November 2012 [on-line]; accessed 15 May 2013; available from <http://calvaryeast.com/cmsurvey>; Internet.

created and emailed to the entire congregation. Fifty-four church members completed the combined questionnaire.

To enlist participants from outside the congregation, church members were equipped with two resources. First, business cards were created that included a brief description of the project and a website address to direct participants to the initial questionnaire. Church members were given several copies of these cards and encouraged to use them to invite Comstock young adults to participate. Some church members gave them to family members and coworkers, while others gave them out to any young adult they encountered. The exact number of cards distributed is unknown, but approximately 100 cards were distributed.

The second resource created for church members to use in enlisting participants outside the church was a social media page.<sup>2</sup> This page included a brief description of the project and the website address for the initial survey. It is unknown how many church members shared this page with acquaintances on social media, but 34 people followed the page which in turn exposed the page to their connections—as many as 10,000 people. To broaden the reach of this social media page further, three advertisements were created to run on this social media website during Weeks 6 and 7, Weeks 10 and 11, and Weeks 13 and 14 of the project. These advertisements were viewed by over 5,000 young adults in Comstock. Fifty-four people responded to these advertisements and viewed the initial questionnaire, but many of them did not complete the questionnaire.

Over the course of the fifteen-week project, 22 young adults from outside the Calvary East congregation completed the initial questionnaire. Nine of these young adults attended a local church other than Calvary East at least monthly. The other 13 were

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<sup>2</sup> Bryan Craddock, “The Comstock Millennials Survey Facebook Page” [on-line]; accessed 15 May 2013; available at <http://www.facebook.com/cmsurvey>; Internet.

unchurched, having no connection with a local church or attending a church a few times a year or less. None of these 22 participants were willing to visit a Calvary East worship service in order to complete the follow-up questionnaire.

### **Insights from Questionnaire Data**

The original goal for this project was to find 200 unchurched young adults to complete the initial questionnaire and 20 to visit a Calvary East worship service in order to complete the follow-up questionnaire. As indicated above, the number of unchurched participants fell far below that goal. The inclusion of older adults at Calvary East, however, was particularly helpful because their responses allowed for the comparison of cultural differences between generations within the church. The data gathered through both questionnaires is summarized in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4. Participants were divided into six groups: Calvary Silents (those born before 1945); Calvary East Boomers (those born between 1945 and 1964); Calvary East Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1979); Calvary East Millennials (those born in 1980 and later); other church Millennials (who regularly attend churches other than Calvary East); and unchurched Millennials (who do not attend a church or attend a few times a year or less). Though the limited sample of unchurched participants undermine any firm conclusions, the data gathered through the questionnaire still reveal several key insights. Those insights are tentative and need to be confirmed by further research, but they still help fulfill the goals of this project. These insights will be listed below along with implications for the ministry and contextualization strategy of Calvary East.

First, unchurched Comstock Millennials do maintain loose connections with churches. Eighty-five percent of this group presently attend a church a few times a year, compared to only 15 percent who had no church involvement. Such visits probably occur during holidays like Christmas and Easter. This pattern seems to have been established in their youth, since 67 percent of this group indicated that their past church involvement

was a few times a month or a few times a year. This lack of faithful church involvement may have contributed to their general lack of interest in religion or spirituality. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being low and 5 being high, 77 percent placed their interest level at 3 or less. Thirty-one percent placed their interest level in religion at 1. With such a low interest level, one wonders what motivates these unchurched Comstock Millennials to attend church at all. Perhaps they are simply continuing a family tradition. Those Millennials who are presently involved with a church a few times a month or more, however, were also previously involved at a similar level. This correlation reinforces the strategic importance of devoting significant resources and effort to the development of strong ministries for families, children, and teens. By encouraging family involvement, such ministries establish patterns of commitment that continue into adulthood. In regard to unchurched Millennials, however, Calvary East and other churches must be prepared to engage them and present the gospel clearly on those few occasions during the year when they decide to attend. The potential for such efforts is demonstrated in that 38 percent of this group rated their interest in future church involvement at 4 or above on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being lowest.

Second, Comstock Millennials show a strong belief in the existence of God, but most lack a Christian worldview. Seventy-seven percent of unchurched Millennials said that they believe in the existence of God. Eight percent were uncertain, leaving only 15 percent who did not believe. But when asked to select from different explanations of life, only 15 percent chose the explanation, “God directs all things.” Fifty-four percent selected, “People choose their own course and destiny,” while a surprising 23 percent selected, “Destiny, luck, or karma,” as the explanation of life. Even more surprising was that 22 percent of Comstock Millennials from other churches also selected, “Destiny, luck, or karma,” as the explanation of life. An equal portion of this group selected the explanation, “Spiritual beings influence us.” This confusion is also seen in Comstock

Millennials' views of the afterlife. Only 67 percent of other church Millennials and 23 percent of unchurched Millennials selected the explanation that people, "Face God's judgment and then heaven or hell." Forty-six percent of unchurched Millennials and a surprising 22 percent of Millennials from other churches claimed that in the afterlife people "Enter the spirit world." Even more surprising was that 23 percent of unchurched Millennials and 11 percent of other church Millennials selected the explanation that people, "Come back to life as another person." Clearly, local churches cannot assume that Comstock Millennials have a Christian worldview. Many have not embraced the basic framework that underlies the biblical gospel. Therefore, those who preach and teach must follow the example of Paul in Athens, addressing these foundational issues. Thankfully, efforts to address these issues at Calvary East have been effective. Responses from all four generations of adults at Calvary East, including Millennials, revealed a clear understanding of a Christian worldview. Current efforts to address worldview issues in teaching and preaching at Calvary East must continue so that newcomers may learn a biblical Christian worldview.

Third, most Comstock Millennials rely on feelings in determining their spiritual beliefs. Participants were asked to select one of seven epistemological approaches described in simple terms. The most popular choice for unchurched Millennials (54 percent) and other church Millennials (44 percent) was, "I accept whatever feels right." The second most popular choice for both groups (31 percent of unchurched and 33 percent of other church) was, "I accept whatever seems reasonable." In stark contrast, 63 percent of Calvary East Millennials chose, "I accept whatever I can prove." This view was also the most popular choice for the other three generations of Calvary East adults, though not by such a high percentage. This contrast between Calvary East Millennials and their peers reflects a key element of the Calvary East philosophy of ministry. Following the example of the Bereans in Acts 17:11, the church places a strong

emphasis on providing clear biblical proof for any assertions made in preaching or teaching. This contrast between Calvary East Millennials and their peers also reflects a common personality type at Calvary East. Many, if not most, of the congregation tend to be emotionally reserved, myself included. This characteristic of Calvary East might prevent the church from connecting with many Millennials, particularly in the music and preaching of the church. Those who lead music and preach must continually remind themselves of this concern. They should not manufacture artificial emotion, but they can work at expressing emotion in a way that is consistent with their personalities.

Fourth, the most influential people in the lives of Comstock Millennials are their family members.<sup>3</sup> Participants were asked to identify those to whom they would look for personal advice and those who have shaped their religious views. A majority of participants from all four generations identified family members in response to both questions. Even 54 percent of unchurched Millennials said that their family members had the most influence in shaping their religious views. The only exception to this pattern was that a majority of both Calvary East Silents (56 percent) and Calvary East Millennials (63 percent) indicated that the person who has most influenced their religious views was a religious leader. These findings explain why a friendship evangelism strategy has had very little success at Calvary East. Most people in Comstock simply do not look to friends for advice about religion. Calvary East must, therefore, develop a multi-generational family-oriented evangelism strategy. Outreach events must be designed for church members to invite unchurched family members of any age. The contextualization strategy used in worship gatherings must also find a middle ground so that all generations can worship side by side.

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<sup>3</sup>This insight is consistent with what has been observed on a national level. Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 59.

Fifth, in spite of the popularity of various forms of electronic media, a higher percentage of Comstock Millennials claim that books have been the most influential medium in the development of their religious knowledge. Seventy-five percent of Calvary East Millennials selected books as opposed to 25 percent who selected the Internet. Fifty-six percent of Millennials from other churches selected books, compared with 22 percent who selected the Internet. Even among unchurched Millennials, 38 percent selected books over 15 percent who selected the Internet and another 15 percent who selected online social media. In regard to their preferred media resource when seeking personal advice, all three groups relied heavily on the Internet, but this reliance did not extend to religious matters. This reliance upon books surprised me. Personal observation had led me to believe that a high percentage of Comstock Millennials have not attended college and were thus not inclined to rely upon books, but a majority of all three groups had at least some college education. At least a third of participants in all three groups had completed an undergraduate degree. This finding should shape Calvary East's strategies for evangelism and discipleship. Evangelistic books should be recommended and given away. Books should also be used as resources for small group studies.

Sixth, Comstock Millennials are slow to make decisions. On a scale from 1 to 5 with 1 labeled, "very slow," 61 percent of unchurched Millennials ranked their decision making speed at 1 or 2. Fifty-one percent of Calvary East Millennials chose 1 or 2, as did 66 percent of Millennials from other churches. Calvary East adults from Generation X showed a similar slowness in making decisions with 62 percent selecting 1 or 2 in response to this question. Older generations at Calvary East, however, said that they were quicker to make decisions. Silents were the quickest of all with 33 percent ranking their decision-making speed at 4 or 5. This finding may explain why calls for immediate response, such as invitations given at major evangelistic crusades or the practice of

pressing for an immediate decision in a personal evangelistic conversation, were so effective with this generation. Silents are comfortable making relatively quick decisions, but younger generations are increasingly cautious. If these findings are accurate, then Comstock churches would be wise to approach the evangelism of unchurched Millennials more as a process rather than an event. Concluding sermons with high-pressure invitations may actually hinder a Millennial's progress toward conversion or even push them away. Instead, preachers should approach sermon application by presenting various responses for individuals at various stages in the process. In regard to personal evangelism, church members should be trained to communicate the gospel multiple times in multiple ways in order to allow Millennials time to consider their response. Overall, believers, particularly those from older generations, must be patient to allow Millennials time to make decisions whether those decisions relate to their initial conversion or their subsequent spiritual growth.

Seventh, responses to the follow-up questionnaire showed that Calvary East Millennials have a very positive perception of the contextualization strategy currently in use at the church. On a scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being very negative and 7 being very positive, no Millennial rated any of the ten culturally related aspects of the ministry less than a 4. Millennials were more positive than other generations about the clarity of logic, familiarity of words, and ways people are asked to respond in the church's preaching. In response to each of these aspects every Millennial responded with a 6 or 7. They were also more positive than other generations about the ways people relate to one another within the church (86 percent at 6 or 7). In regard to agreement with the church's beliefs and perception of the speaker's body language and tone, every Millennial also ranked their perception at 6 or 7, though a higher percentage of Boomers ranked their perception at 7. Millennials were also just behind Boomers in their positivity about the relevance of the church's teaching and their impression of the church's music style (72 percent at 6 or

7). In regard to the church's use of communication aids Millennials were the least positive group, though 72 percent still ranked their perception of this aspect of the ministry at 6 or 7. The key question, however, is whether the Calvary East contextualization strategy would be perceived in a similarly positive way by unchurched Millennials. Unfortunately, the efforts made to enlist their participation were unsuccessful.

The weakest response from Calvary East Millennials on the follow-up questionnaire concerned the church's meeting place. Twenty-nine percent ranked their perception of the meeting place at 7, 57 percent at 5, and 14 percent at 4. So most did not see the meeting place as a hindrance, but neither was it particularly helpful. This response particularly stands out when compared with the perceptions of Silents and Boomers. Eighty percent of Boomers and 76 percent of Silents ranked their perception of the meeting place at 6 or 7. Their positivity may relate to the fact that the building was designed in the late 1960s. None of the other ten aspects of ministry included in the follow-up questionnaire showed such a divergence of perceptions. If the leadership of Calvary East decides to change the church's meeting place to be more appealing to Millennials, they must consider whether Silents and Boomers will find it less appealing. In fact, changes have already been made to the meeting place since participants completed the follow-up questionnaire. The church's original pews with dark wood and olive green cushions have been replaced with contemporary dark brown chairs. The original heavy dark solid wood pulpit has been replaced with a simple contemporary black metal frame pulpit. Apart from a major construction project, the architecture of the building will always have a 1960s feel, but other efforts may be made to give the building a more contemporary feel.

As stated previously, broader participation from Millennials outside of Calvary East would have yielded more certain results. Nevertheless, these findings do suggest that

the contextualization strategy used at Calvary East (described in chap. 3) is relevant to Comstock Millennials. Some modifications may be made moving forward, but the modifications needed are relatively minor.

### **Congregational Response**

To conclude this research project, the findings detailed above were presented to the Calvary East congregation and leadership during an adult Sunday school class. The twenty-eight adults in attendance discussed the findings, possible changes to the ministry at Calvary East, and their personal response to the overall experience of participating in the project. The majority of the group claimed that the training phase of the project helped them to better understand culture and to better distinguish biblical practices from cultural practices in the ministry of the church. Some also felt that the training equipped them to better communicate the gospel to Millennials. In discussing the process of enlisting participants for the initial questionnaire, only seven people claimed to have invited a Millennial to participate. This limited effort explains why participation in the initial questionnaire fell so far short of the intended goal. Though many of the church members in the class were hesitant to approach unchurched Millennials, those who did invite Millennials to participate in the project said that the response to their invitation was generally positive. About half of the class shared that the findings from the project gave them greater motivation to evangelize Millennials. The class also expressed enthusiastic support for modifying the ministry of Calvary East to be more relevant to Comstock Millennials.

## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION

This research project was undertaken with the hope that other North American pastors might someday benefit from any insights gleaned or methods developed in order to assess the culture of their own local ministry context. To progress toward such a lofty aspiration, every part of this project must be thoroughly evaluated. In this chapter the purpose, goals, and research methodology of the project will be evaluated. Broader theological and personal reflections on the project will also be shared and final conclusions will be summarized.

#### **Evaluation of Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop a strategy for Calvary Bible Church East of Comstock, Michigan, to contextualize the gospel for young adults. The evaluation of this purpose must consider its legitimacy and also whether the project actually accomplished the purpose. Three questions about the legitimacy of the project's purpose are considered below, followed by a consideration of whether the purpose was accomplished.

As discussed in chapter 3, some pastors reject the practice of contextualization, contending that it leads to unavoidable doctrinal compromise and a lack of faith in God's saving power. From that position, the purpose of this project seems foolish if not destructive to biblical church ministry. But this project has argued for a careful approach to contextualization that is willing to adapt cultural aspects of ministry to the local context while remaining faithful to the doctrines and ministry practices taught in Scripture. Furthermore, this project has demonstrated that any attempt to engage in

ministry requires church leaders to make decisions about cultural aspects of ministry that are not explicitly defined by Scripture. If such decisions are not guided by an intentional contextualization strategy, they will be shaped by some other influence such as tradition or personal preference. Undoubtedly many conflicts in church life, such as those over music style, arise when church members and leaders have different personal preferences. Having a contextualization strategy may not eliminate such conflicts, but it does provide a rationale for decisions about the cultural aspects of ministry that is consistent with the biblical mission of the church to preach the gospel and make disciples.

Some might also question whether it is legitimate to target a particular age group. Contextualizing the gospel for young adults would seem to exclude other generations, thus damaging the unity of the church and depriving it of wisdom from older believers. To avoid such a scenario, many large churches develop ministries to target particular age groups while unifying all generations in one worship gathering. Since Calvary East is a small church with a simple ministry structure, no consideration was given to such strategies. This project was pursued under the assumption that the overall ministry of the Calvary East should adapt to the cultural context of Comstock young adults. As recorded in chapter 4, responses to the initial questionnaire showed that Comstock Millennials rely heavily on family influence thus it is imperative that efforts to contextualize the gospel for Comstock Millennials not alienate older generations. The inclusion of church members from older generations as participants in this research project provided the opportunity to see whether Calvary East's current contextualization strategy causes any alienation. Responses to the follow-up questionnaire showed that generational perceptions of the church's ministry differed, yet all generations were generally positive. Furthermore, by participating in the training phase of the project and the development of the contextualization strategy older generations were taught to view the cultural aspects of ministry from the standpoint of the church's mission rather than

personal preference. A contextualization strategy targeting a particular generation might alienate other generations in some settings, but this did not seem to be the case at Calvary East.

Aside from these questions about whether a contextualization strategy is beneficial, a more basic question must be considered. Is it even possible for a congregation to set aside their own preferences in order to reach across cultural differences? Missionaries who engage in cross-cultural ministry are called, gifted, and trained to that end. Is it conceivable that an entire church could embrace that same mindset? As seen in chapter 2, the biblical portrayal of culture and mission makes contextualization imperative for every believer, yet the attitude of humble Christ-like service that prompts a believer to give preference to others for the sake of the gospel can only come about by the work of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. Even with such a Spirit-empowered attitude, there are still limitations as to how far anyone can or should adapt to a different culture. A sixty year old adopting the dress and attitudes of a twenty year old, for instance, would seem strange and out of place. But that same sixty year old can respect the culture of the twenty year old, removing barriers, and find culturally appropriate ways to reach across the generational divide for the sake of the gospel. It thus seems a legitimate purpose for this project to encourage the members of Calvary East to engage in such efforts.

Having evaluated the legitimacy of this project's purpose, the accomplishment of the purpose must now be considered. Did the project effectively develop a contextualization strategy for Calvary East? As stated above, every ministry effort involves cultural decisions. Those decisions and the values that guide them form a strategy. In this sense, every ministry including that of Calvary East already has some kind of contextualization strategy. If guided merely by personal preference, however, that strategy would contradict both the example of Jesus in his incarnation, and the example

of Paul in Acts 17:16-34 and 1 Corinthians 9:19-27. This project has argued that this strategy should be guided by an effort to identify with the culture of the unchurched whenever doing so would not contradict Scripture. This mindset already guided cultural decisions in the ministry of Calvary East as described in chapter 3. To be more specific, then, the purpose of this project was to refine the Calvary East contextualization strategy and to lead church members to understand and embrace it. As described in chapter 4, far fewer unchurched Comstock Millennials participated in the survey than was hoped, making conclusions about their culture tentative at best. From this perspective, the project fell short of its intended purpose. Insights were still gleaned, however, and those insights did help refine the Calvary East contextualization strategy. Significant progress was made in communicating the concepts of culture and contextualization and the specifics of the Calvary East strategy to Calvary East members. From this perspective, the project's purpose was significantly accomplished.

### **Evaluation of Goals**

To accomplish the stated purpose of this project, five goals were determined. The evaluation of these goals must not only consider whether or not the project fulfilled each goal, but also whether the goal was realistic and if so, what a better goal would have been to accomplish the project's purpose. Each of the five goals is thus evaluated below.

The first goal was to develop a clear understanding of the religious views, experience, and culture of unchurched young adults in and around the Comstock area. As mentioned above and described in chapter 4, the number of unchurched Comstock Millennials willing to participate in the project was far less than hoped. The responses gathered from these participants were suggestive, but not of sufficient number to be authoritative. The evaluation of research methodology will consider the factors which contributed to this problem and possible changes in methodology that might improve the enlistment of unchurched participants.

The second goal of this project was to evaluate how effectively the ministry at Calvary East contextualizes the gospel for unchurched young adults. The project failed to enlist any unchurched Comstock Millennials to visit Calvary East and complete the follow-up questionnaire. The responses from Calvary East Millennials to the follow-up questionnaire, however, do suggest how their generation perceives the church's ministry, particularly when their responses are compared with those from other Calvary East generations as summarized in chapter 4. Calvary East Millennials had a very positive perception of the church's contextualization strategy. Since unchurched Comstock Millennials do occasionally visit Calvary East, the church might continue to evaluate its contextualization strategy by inviting those visitors to complete the follow-up questionnaire.

The third goal of this project was to discern and develop new strategies that God may use to reach unchurched young adults in the Comstock area. The accomplishment of this goal was hindered by the same obstacles described above in the evaluation of the first two goals. The insights described in chapter 4, however, did suggest some significant strategies that might be helpful in reaching unchurched Millennials. The generation's reliance upon family seems to be a key factor. Comstock Millennials can be reached by reaching their parents and even grandparents. These family connections provide the necessary bridges to reach Comstock Millennials. Moving forward Calvary East leaders will strongly encourage church members to pray for family members, speak the gospel to them, and invite them to Calvary East worship gatherings and special events.

The fourth goal of this project was to develop my own ability as a communicator of biblical truth. The project accomplished this goal in two major ways. First, the project has challenged me to carefully address basic worldview questions in my preaching. Writing chapter 3 helped me to think critically about presenting the biblical

worldview in my preaching. The responses to the six worldview questions on the initial questionnaire further impressed upon me the urgency for presenting the biblical worldview. As described in chapter 4, a considerable percentage of Comstock Millennials who regularly attend other churches selected unbiblical answers to worldview questions. Seeing this great need has compelled me to diligently articulate the biblical worldview in my preaching whenever possible. Second, the follow-up questionnaire provided a helpful evaluation of several aspects of my preaching. Six of the ten questions in this questionnaire related to preaching. Responses from church members showed a positive perception of my efforts, and their positivity has encouraged me to be even more diligent to preach in a way that is both faithful to Scripture and culturally appropriate.

The fifth goal of this project was to equip and inspire Christian young adults from the Calvary East congregation to engage in cross-cultural ministry. This goal was expanded to include all adults at Calvary East. A church-wide contextualization strategy cannot be implemented apart from the understanding, support, and commitment of all the church's members. One of the shortcomings of this project was that no instruments were developed to measure the outcome of this goal. There were three indications, however, that the goal was achieved. First, the training phase of the project had strong participation from church members of all generations. Second, even members who were unable to participate in the training completed the questionnaires and invited Comstock Millennials to complete the questionnaires. Third, at the conclusion of the training the members who participated felt better equipped and more motivated to reach out to Millennials. Time will tell whether this goal has truly been realized in the congregation of Calvary Bible Church East.

### **Evaluation of Research Methodology**

As described in chapter 4, the research methodology for this project included three components: training for church members; an initial questionnaire investigating

culture and religious experience; and a follow-up questionnaire investigating perceptions of cultural aspects of Calvary East worship gatherings. Each of these components are evaluated below.

The training component of the project was conceived as a step toward accomplishing the survey of Millennials, but it proved to have strategic significance for the life of the church. The original plan for the training called for three meetings with Calvary East young adults held during the second, seventh, and thirteenth weeks. As explained in Chapter 4, the training was expanded to include adults of all generations and became the focus for the Calvary East Adult Sunday School class for seven weeks. Four additional sessions were necessary to sufficiently cover the content of chapters 2 and 3. The content from these chapters provided a good balance between biblical teaching about culture and practical application to personal life and church ministry. Though discussions of the nuances of contextualization are typically reserved for missiology classes, church members maintained a strong interest in the subject throughout the training. To some degree, their interest level was undoubtedly prompted by a desire to support their pastor in his doctoral studies, but other motives were also evident. Church members regularly see news reports about the culture of the Millennial generation and are interested to see how such insights relate to their faith. More importantly, church members have a deep desire for family and friends who are young adults to come to saving faith in Christ, and they want to be better equipped to communicate the gospel to them. In hindsight, training participants should have been asked to complete brief questionnaires before and after the training in order to measure the impact of the training on their understanding of and attitudes toward culture, contextualization, and the Millennial generation. Judging from the informal feedback described above, however, the training participants do seem better prepared to communicate the gospel not only to young adults, but to anyone of a different culture.

The second component of the project, the initial questionnaire, must be evaluated by both its design and implementation. A critical factor in the design of the questionnaire was its length. The initial questionnaire was designed to be administered online to participants enlisted through social media. With the brief attention span of internet users, the driving concern was to gain enough information to establish a basic cultural profile while being sufficiently brief to maintain a participant's interest throughout the duration of the questionnaire. Twenty-five questions was assumed to be a reasonable number of questions, though many more could have been added. Responses from a few individuals suggest that several participants may have begun the questionnaire but failed to complete it. Unfortunately, the online system that was used only recorded fully completed questionnaires, so this problem cannot be confirmed. Single stand-alone questions shared through social media might generate a higher number of responses, but such an approach would not allow for the collection of demographic data.

Another factor in the design of the initial questionnaire was the use of multiple choice questions. These questions, particularly in the worldview section, forced participants to choose from brief descriptions of distinct positions. It is possible, however, that participants did not agree with any of the positions or may have chosen one of the positions if it had been expressed in different terms. Responses pointed to three problematic questions. First, question 11 asks participants to select from several explanations of life. Descriptions of four different worldviews were presented: Eastern mysticism, animism, theism, and atheism. The theistic response listed was "God directs all things." It is suspected that some chose other responses, because they interpreted this theistic statement as a fatalistic denial of human choice and responsibility. This question could be improved by changing the theistic response to, "God directs things to accomplish his plan." A second problem with wording may have contributed to confusion on questions 21 and 22. These questions were designed to determine the type of media

resource that the participant considered most reliable, but the questions simply used the word, “resource.” In addition to listing various types of media, participants were allowed to fill-in a response. Some participants misunderstood the questions, chose the fill-in response, and listed a person. These two questions could be improved by specifying “media resource.”

The implementation of the initial questionnaire suffered from one major problem: the low number of unchurched participants. Prior to beginning the project, more time should have been invested in learning how experienced researchers enlist participants. Several factors may have hindered broader participation. Perhaps unchurched Comstock Millennials disliked or even distrusted the corporate feel of an online questionnaire. Another possibility may be that unchurched Millennials have a negative perception of anything associated with religion. One Calvary East Millennial mentioned receiving a negative, almost fearful, response from a co-worker he invited to complete the initial questionnaire. The most significant factor, however, is that Calvary East members seem to lack significant relationships with unchurched young adults in Comstock. Question 18 in the initial questionnaire asked about the participant’s source of friends. The highest source for each generation of Calvary East participants was “a religious group.” In contrast, 46 percent of unchurched Millennials who participated developed their current group of friends through high school. Even though many Calvary East members live in Comstock, very few have grown up in Comstock. They may be acquainted with long-time Comstock families, but they do not have the type of close relationships with the core of the community that come about by growing up together. Furthermore, Comstock residents seem to isolate themselves so that the area lacks a sense of community. One searches in vain to find public places or events where people openly interact and build relationships. Obviously, this problem extends beyond this research project and affects Calvary East’s fulfillment of its biblical mission. To overcome this

obstacle, the leadership of Calvary East has sought to cultivate community connections by donating supplies to and getting members to volunteer at both a local public school and a local secular community center. It is hoped that in time such efforts will allow Calvary East to become deeply rooted among the people of Comstock.

The third component of the research methodology was the use of a follow-up questionnaire to gauge participants' perceptions of ten cultural elements present in a Calvary East worship service. Since none of the unchurched participants in the initial questionnaire agreed to visit Calvary East, the questionnaire was only completed by Calvary East members. If more unchurched Comstock Millennials had participated in the initial questionnaire, it is presumed that some would have been willing to visit Calvary East in order to participate in this component of the project. As described in chapter 4, the responses from Calvary East members provided helpful insights into the ways various generations perceive the church's ministry. Since the questionnaire was designed to be completed by those who had only visited the church once, questions about those cultural facets of ministry that only church members would know were not included in the questionnaire. For instance, church members could be asked about their perception of how church leaders relate to the congregation and their perception of the church's strategies for evangelism and discipleship. The primary weakness of the follow-up questionnaire is that it only examines whether the participant's perception is positive or negative. So for instance, a response to question eight demonstrates whether or not the participant feels positive about the church's music style, but not what music style the participant would prefer. To improve the questionnaire, each of the questions could be followed by a free response question asking participants why they ranked their perception as they did and what they would prefer. With this revision and the addition of some basic demographic questions, this questionnaire could be used as a standard follow-up for church visitors.

## **Theological Reflections**

This project has required sustained focus on the subject of culture. Chapter 2 examined the biblical history of the development of cultural differences and the significance of those differences for the mission of the church. Chapter 3 defined culture and considered the various strategies that notable North American churches and their pastors use to contextualize ministry for their local culture. Chapter 4 chronicled the effort to understand the culture of Millennials in Comstock and to evaluate and improve the contextualization strategy used at Calvary Bible Church East. This focus on culture has prompted reflection on three intersections of culture and theology not addressed thus far in the project.

First, this project has prompted reflection on the intersection of culture and the progressive sanctification of the believer. Culture can have both positive and negative effects on a believer's spiritual life. For instance, the emphasis on literacy in modern American culture has had the positive effect of equipping believers with the ability to read the Bible and other Christian books so that they can better understand biblical truth. The benefit is even more direct when culture mirrors biblical imperatives. This can be seen in the culture of Comstock Millennials as they respect and rely upon the advice of their parents. Overt cultural opposition to biblical values in such areas as sexual morality is easily identifiable, but culture may also negatively impact the spiritual lives of believers in more subtle ways. An example of a subtle potentially negative influence of culture over the spiritual growth of Comstock Millennials, can be seen in their hesitancy to make decisions. This hesitancy may counteract their spiritual growth by keeping them from committing themselves to new steps of obedience when they are convicted of sin. Believers can be grateful for the ways their culture ends up supporting and encouraging spiritual growth, but they must always be alert to the ways culture may be undermining their sanctification.

The study of culture for this project has also prompted much reflection on the unity and diversity of the universal church. Most movements and denominations throughout the history of the church have formed as a result of doctrinal disagreement. Groups of believers define their own group and justify their separation from other groups in stark doctrinal terms. Without minimizing the importance of strong doctrinal convictions formed through the diligent exegesis of Scripture, believers should consider the degree to which those convictions have been shaped by their culture. Calvary East, for example, places a strong emphasis upon the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. This conviction is evident in all of the church's ministries, including ministries to children and youth. While this conviction has strong biblical support, one might also speculate to what degree church members have arrived at that conviction because it fits well with their own rational, emotionally reserved culture. By contrast, a Pentecostal church defined by its strong emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit meets just over a mile away from Calvary East in Comstock. They find biblical support for their conviction, yet their congregation is also marked by a culture of strong emotional expression. Similar observations could be made of other churches in the Comstock area. From a purely doctrinal perspective, the universal church in Comstock seems divided and broken. But from a cultural perspective, these divisions can be seen as strategic efforts to fulfill the Great Commission among different cultural groups in the Comstock area. Though a Bible church member and a Pentecostal church member will have serious disagreements over some points of doctrine, considering the role culture plays in defining their respective congregations will enable them to have an appreciation for each other that fosters a powerful sense of unity and shared purpose.

A third area of theological reflection prompted by this study concerns the role of culture in a pastor's call to a particular ministry. In light of the sovereignty of God, a pastor's cultural background is certainly no accident. Every influence and experience

plays a part in preparing someone for ministry. From the perspective of contextualization, the ideal pastoral leader for a local congregation would be someone raised within the local culture of that congregation, yet such an arrangement seems rare. Perhaps no further explanation is needed beyond Jesus' statement about a prophet not being without honor except in his hometown (Mark 6:4). In the providence of God most pastoral leaders speak from a cultural context that differs from that of the congregations they lead. Though this cultural difference results in the kinds of challenges discussed throughout this project, it also has potential benefits. Coming from a different culture may enable a pastoral leader to be more alert to weaknesses and temptations inherent in the local culture of the congregation. The pastor's cultural differences may also stimulate interest among a local population. Such benefits do not minimize the need for contextualization. The pastor must still work hard to communicate well to the local congregation. But in those difficult moments when cultural differences may prompt a pastor to question God's call to a particular ministry, encouragement may be found in considering the ways God may be using those cultural differences to accomplish his good purpose.

### **Personal Reflections**

The completion of this project marks the culmination of my participation in the Doctor of Ministry program at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Though it is hoped that other students of church growth may find some value in this project, I am undoubtedly the primary beneficiary. The program has deepened the way I think about ministry and has given me a plethora of insights into the best practices in church leadership. More importantly the program has also fostered my personal growth in two ways described below.

This project, indeed the entire Doctor of Ministry program, has been an exercise in perseverance. Along the way I have encountered several obstacles. In January 2008, as I was finishing my coursework for the program, I fractured one of the lower

vertebrae in my back and was placed on bed rest for four months. In April 2009, in an abrupt change of direction from previous plans, Calvary East was forced to begin a year-long transition from being the second site of a much larger church to being an independent congregation. This change required me to abandon a previous project related to the multi-site model of ministry though two chapters and part of a third had already been completed. The current project was thus conceived in the midst of this transition. During 2010, my family and I provided foster care for two young children with special needs—a commitment which proved to be far more emotionally draining than anticipated. Then in July 2013, while I was writing this chapter, my mother suddenly died due to complications from a relatively routine medical procedure. With Christ’s strength I have been able to persevere, and I believe my capacity to persevere when facing future trials has been deepened.

This project has also prompted personal reflections about my own experience with contextualization. One of the surprising findings from my research was that Calvary East Millennials are more positive about my ministry efforts than those from Generation X, my own generation. In eighteen years of ministry, I have worked with teens, then college students, and then young marrieds, before launching Calvary East, but I never realized that I have been tracking with Millennials the entire time. Contextualization is not sterile. Crossing over to another culture, inevitably precipitates personal cultural changes. I am not a Millennial, nor would they ever see me as one of their own generation, but my culture preferences have become more like theirs than those of my own generation. Landing somewhere in an awkward cultural middle is the cost of contextualization. I have observed this process at work in the lives of friends who serve as international missionaries, but until now I had not recognized the same process at work in my own life. This insight is valuable because it enables me to think more realistically about possibilities and limitations in my relationships with church members.

## **Conclusions**

This project has examined contextualization from the perspectives of biblical teaching in chapter 2, general missiological practice in chapter 3, and specific implementation at Calvary Bible Church East in chapter 4. Conclusions from each perspective are summarized below.

From a biblical perspective, this project has shown that contextualization is a necessary practice for North American church leaders because the entire biblical record from Genesis through Revelation demonstrates that God wants to receive worship from every cultural group in ways that reflect the unique characteristics of their culture. Cultural practices that oppose biblical teaching must be exposed and rejected, but neutral practices should be incorporated into the cultural aspects of ministry as part of a contextualization strategy.

From a missiological perspective this project has shown that a contextualization strategy should take into account all dimensions of culture: worldview, cognitive process, linguistic forms, behavioral patterns, social structures, media influence, and motivational resources. Rather than simply following national trends or popular churches, church leaders must be students of the local culture where they minister in order to develop a relevant and effective contextualization strategy. With the modifications discussed previously in this chapter, the questionnaires developed for this project can be used by church leaders to study their local culture.

From the perspective of ministry at Calvary Bible Church East, this project has shown that leaders at Calvary East have developed a relatively effective contextualization strategy, but additional effort is needed to pursue family connections in order to reach young adults with the gospel. The project has also demonstrated that church members are both receptive and responsive to training in contextualization.

## APPENDIX 1

### INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to develop a clear understanding of the religious views, experience, and culture of young adults in the Comstock area. This research is being conducted by Bryan Craddock for the completion of his Doctor of Ministry degree and to shape the ministry of Calvary Bible Church East. In this research, you will be asked to answer 25 questions. Any information you provide will be held *strictly* confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this questionnaire you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

1. Do you currently reside in or near the Comstock/Kalamazoo area?  
 Yes  
 No
2. In what year were you born?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, what is your level of interest in religion or spirituality?  
(1=low, 5=high)

4. Are you currently or have you ever been involved with a church or religious group?
- Yes (continue to Q5)
  - No (skip to Q9)
5. What is the name of that church or group?
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you describe your experience with that church or group? (1=negative, 5=positive)
7. Which of the following best describes your current level of involvement with that church or religious group?
- a few times a year
  - a few times a month
  - weekly
  - more than weekly
8. Which of the following best describes your past level of involvement with that church or religious group?
- a few times a year
  - a few times a month
  - weekly
  - more than weekly
9. On a scale of 1 to 5, how interested are you in being involved with a church or religious group in the future? (1=not interested, 5=very interested)

10. Do you believe in the existence of some kind of supreme being (i.e., God)?
- Yes
  - No
  - Not sure
11. Which of the following do you think best explains life?
- Destiny, luck, karma, or some other mysterious force directs us
  - Spiritual beings influence us
  - God directs all things
  - People choose their own course and destiny
  - Not sure
12. Which of the following do you think best explains what happens when a person dies?
- They simply cease to exist
  - They come back to life as another person
  - They enter the spirit world
  - Their soul becomes one with nature
  - They face God's judgment and are sent to heaven or hell
  - Not sure
13. On a scale of 1 to 5, how important are your beliefs to you? (1=unimportant, 5=very important)
14. On a scale of 1 to 5, how certain are you about your beliefs? (1=uncertain, 5=very certain)

15. Which of the following statements best describe the way you have arrived at your beliefs?

- I accept whatever seems reasonable
- I accept whatever I can prove
- I accept whatever seems beautiful
- I accept whatever feels right
- I accept whatever works
- I accept whatever seems popular
- I accept whatever other important people in my life accept

16. To which of the following people are you most likely to look when you need advice about something personal in your life?

- A family member
- A friend
- A religious leader
- A celebrity (author, musician, actor, etc.)
- A teacher
- A counselor
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

17. Who has had the most influence in shaping your views on spirituality and religion?

- A family member
- A friend
- A religious leader
- A celebrity (author, musician, actor, etc.)
- A teacher
- A counselor
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

18. How have you developed your current group of friends?

- through high school
- through college or trade school
- through work
- through a sport or some other activity
- through being neighbors
- through a religious group
- through random connections

19. Which of the following best describes your economic group?

- Lower Class
- Middle Class
- Upper Middle Class
- Upper Class

20. Which of the following best describes your level of education?
- No diploma or GED
  - High School diploma
  - Trade school
  - Some college
  - Undergraduate degree
  - Graduate degree
21. To which of the following resources are you most likely to look when you need advice about a personal issue?
- Books
  - Magazines
  - Radio
  - Television
  - Internet
  - YouTube
  - Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

22. Which of the following resources have had the most influence in shaping your views on spirituality and religion?
- Books
  - Magazines
  - Radio
  - Television
  - Internet
  - YouTube
  - Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
23. On a scale of 1 to 5, how open are you with people about things that are going on in your life? (1=very private, 5=very open)
24. On a scale of 1 to 5, how important to you are the opinions of other people when you make a decision? (1=unimportant, 5=very important)
25. On a scale of 1 to 5, how quick are you to make a major life-shaping decision? (1=very slow, 5=very fast)

Thank you for completing this survey. Your help is greatly appreciated.

Would you be willing to participate further in this study by attending a Sunday morning worship service at Calvary Bible Church East in Comstock and completing another short questionnaire? If so, please list your name and email address below so that we can send you other information.

## APPENDIX 2

### FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to develop a clear understanding of the religious views, experience, and culture of young adults in the Comstock area. This research is being conducted by Bryan Craddock for the completion of his Doctor of Ministry degree and to shape the ministry of Calvary Bible Church East. In this research, you will be asked to answer 10 questions regarding your experience at Calvary Bible Church East. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this questionnaire you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

1. To what degree do you agree with this church's beliefs?

Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. How relevant to your life were the topics addressed?

Very Irrelevant	<input type="radio"/>	Very Relevant						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. How understandable was the logic of the teaching?

Difficult to Follow	<input type="radio"/>	Easy to Follow						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

4. How familiar were the words used?

Very	<input type="radio"/>	Very						
Unfamiliar	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Familiar

5. How did you feel about the speaker's body language and tone?

Very	<input type="radio"/>	Very						
Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive

6. What was your impression of the church's meeting place?

Very	<input type="radio"/>	Very						
Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive

7. How comfortable were you with how people at the church related to each other and to you?

Very	<input type="radio"/>	Very						
Uncomfortable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Comfortable

8. How did you feel about the style of music?

Very	<input type="radio"/>	Very						
Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive

9. How did you feel about any communication aids that were used? (This would include such items as note sheets, props, powerpoint slides, video clips, or live drama.)

Very	<input type="radio"/>	Very						
Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Positive

10. How did you feel about the ways people were asked to respond to the teaching?

Very Negative	<input type="radio"/>	Very Positive						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

### APPENDIX 3

#### SUMMARY OF INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

Table A1. Number of initial questionnaire participants

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% of total</i>
Calvary East Silents	9	12%
Calvary East Boomers	21	28%
Calvary East Gen X	16	21%
Calvary East Millennials	8	11%
Other Church Millennials	9	12%
Unchurched Millennials	13	17%
Total	76	

Table A2. Number of participants residing in Comstock

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
Calvary East Silents	100%	0%
Calvary East Boomers	90%	10%
Calvary East Gen X	88%	13%
Calvary East Millennials	88%	13%
Other Church Millennials	89%	11%
Unchurched Millennials	92%	8%

Table A3. Interest in religion or spirituality

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Low 1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>High 5</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	11%	89%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	...	100%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	19%	81%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	25%	75%
Other Church Millennials	...	11%	11%	11%	67%
Unchurched Millennials	31%	8%	38%	8%	15%

Table A4. Experience with church or religious group

<i>Generation</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Negative</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Positive</i> <i>5</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	...	11%	89%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	...	19%	81%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	6%	31%	63%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	...	25%	75%
Other Church Millennials	...	...	...	...	44%	56%
Unchurched Millennials	15%	...	...	38%	8%	38%

Table A5. Current church involvement

<i>Generation</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>A few</i> <i>times a</i> <i>year</i>	<i>A few</i> <i>times a</i> <i>month</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>More</i> <i>than</i> <i>once a</i> <i>week</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	11%	56%	33%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	62%	38%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	94%	6%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	25%	63%	13%
Other Church Millennials	...	...	33%	44%	22%
Unchurched Millennials	15%	85%	...	...	...

Table A6. Past church involvement

<i>Generation</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>A few</i> <i>times a</i> <i>year</i>	<i>A few</i> <i>times a</i> <i>month</i>	<i>Weekly</i>	<i>More</i> <i>than</i> <i>once a</i> <i>week</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	11%	33%	56%
Calvary East Boomers	...	5%	5%	62%	29%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	75%	25%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	50%	25%	25%
Other Church Millennials	...	11%	22%	22%	44%
Unchurched Millennials	15%	38%	31%	8%	8%

Table A7. Interest in future church involvement

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Not interested 1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Very interested 5</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	11%	11%	78%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	5%	5%	90%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	13%	13%	75%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	...	100%
Other Church Millennials	...	11%	...	11%	78%
Unchurched Millennials	31%	23%	8%	15%	23%

Table A8. Belief in the existence of some kind of supreme being

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Not sure</i>
Calvary East Silents	100%	...	...
Calvary East Boomers	100%	...	...
Calvary East Gen X	100%	...	...
Calvary East Millennials	100%	...	...
Other Church Millennials	100%	...	...
Unchurched Millennials	77%	15%	8%

Table A9. Explanation of life

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Destiny, luck, or karma</i>	<i>Spiritual beings influence us</i>	<i>God directs all things</i>	<i>People choose their own course and destiny</i>	<i>Not sure</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	100%	...	...
Calvary East Boomers	...	5%	90%	5%	...
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	94%	...	6%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	88%	13%	...
Other Church Millennials	22%	22%	56%	...	...
Unchurched Millennials	23%	8%	15%	54%	...

Table A10. Explanation of the afterlife

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Cease to exist</i>	<i>Come back to life as another person</i>	<i>Enter the spirit world</i>	<i>Face God's judgment then heaven or hell</i>	<i>Not sure</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	100%	...
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	5%	95%	...
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	100%	...
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	100%	...
Other Church Millennials	...	11%	22%	67%	...
Unchurched Millennials	8%	23%	46%	23%	...

Table A11. Importance of spiritual beliefs

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Unimportant 1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Very important 5</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	22%	78%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	...	100%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	13%	88%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	...	100%
Other Church Millennials	...	...	...	11%	89%
Unchurched Millennials	8%	23%	8%	38%	23%

Table A12. Certainty of spiritual beliefs

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Uncertain 1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Very certain 5</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	11%	89%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	...	100%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	25%	75%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	13%	88%
Other Church Millennials	...	11%	...	22%	67%
Unchurched Millennials	8%	8%	8%	38%	38%

Table A13. Criteria for determining spiritual beliefs

<i>Generation</i>	<i>I accept what seems reasonable</i>	<i>I accept what I can prove</i>	<i>I accept what seems beautiful</i>	<i>I accept what feels right</i>	<i>I accept what works</i>	<i>I accept what seems popular</i>	<i>I accept what important people in my life accept</i>
Calvary East Silents	22%	33%	11%	11%	11%	...	11%
Calvary East Boomers	33%	43%	...	14%	10%	...	...
Calvary East Gen X	44%	19%	...	19%	13%	...	6%
Calvary East Millennials	25%	63%	...	13%	...	...	...
Other Church Millennials	33%	22%	...	44%	...	...	...
Unchurched Millennials	31%	15%	...	54%	...	...	...

Table A14. Person consulted for personal advice

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Family member</i>	<i>Friend</i>	<i>Religious leader</i>	<i>Celebrity</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Counselor</i>	<i>Other</i>
Calvary East Silents	56%	11%	22%	...	...	...	11%
Calvary East Boomers	62%	24%	10%	...	...	...	5%
Calvary East Gen X	94%	6%	...	...	...	...	...
Calvary East Millennials	50%	25%	13%	...	...	...	13%
Other Church Millennials	56%	22%	11%	...	...	...	11%
Unchurched Millennials	54%	38%	...	...	8%	...	...

Tables A15. Person who has most influenced spiritual beliefs

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Family member</i>	<i>Friend</i>	<i>Religious leader</i>	<i>Celebrity</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Counselor</i>	<i>Other</i>
Calvary East Silents	33%	...	56%	...	11%	...	...
Calvary East Boomers	48%	10%	38%	...	...	...	5%
Calvary East Gen X	75%	...	25%	...	...	...	...
Calvary East Millennials	38%	...	63%	...	...	...	...
Other Church Millennials	56%	11%	11%	...	...	...	22%
Unchurched Millennials	54%	15%	8%	...	...	...	23%

Table A16. Source of friends

<i>Generation</i>	<i>High school</i>	<i>College or trade school</i>	<i>Work</i>	<i>A sport or some other activity</i>	<i>Neighbor</i>	<i>Religious group</i>	<i>Random connections</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	22%	...	...	67%	11%
Calvary East Boomers	19%	...	5%	5%	...	62%	10%
Calvary East Gen X	6%	6%	13%	13%	...	50%	13%
Calvary East Millennials	13%	13%	25%	...	...	38%	13%
Other Church Millennials	22%	...	11%	...	...	22%	44%
Unchurched Millennials	46%	8%	15%	...	...	8%	23%

Table A17. Economic group

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Low income</i>	<i>Middle income</i>	<i>Upper middle income</i>	<i>High income</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	100%	...	...
Calvary East Boomers	5%	62%	29%	5%
Calvary East Gen X	13%	69%	13%	6%
Calvary East Millennials	50%	50%	...	...
Other Church Millennials	56%	44%	...	...
Unchurched Millennials	38%	54%	8%	...

Table A18. Highest level of education

<i>Generation</i>	<i>No diploma</i>	<i>High school diploma or GED</i>	<i>Trade School</i>	<i>Some college</i>	<i>Under-graduate degree</i>	<i>Graduate degree</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	22%	...	44%	11%	22%
Calvary East Boomers	...	14%	10%	24%	29%	24%
Calvary East Gen X	...	6%	...	19%	63%	13%
Calvary East Millennials	...	13%	13%	13%	50%	13%
Other Church Millennials	11%	22%	...	33%	33%	...
Unchurched Millennials	8%	15%	8%	38%	31%	...

Table A19. Media most likely to consult for personal advice

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Books</i>	<i>Maga- zines</i>	<i>Radio</i>	<i>Tele- vision</i>	<i>Inter- net</i>	<i>You Tube</i>	<i>Social Media</i>	<i>Other</i>
Calvary East Silents	56%	...	...	...	...	...	...	44%
Calvary East Boomers	67%	...	...	...	22%	...	...	11%
Calvary East Gen X	44%	...	...	...	38%	...	13%	6%
Calvary East Millennials	25%	...	...	...	75%	...	...	...
Other Church Millennials	11%	...	...	...	89%	...	...	...
Unchurched Millennials	15%	...	8%	...	54%	8%	8%	8%

Table A20. Media that has most influenced spiritual beliefs

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Books</i>	<i>Maga- zines</i>	<i>Radio</i>	<i>Tele- vision</i>	<i>Inter- net</i>	<i>You Tube</i>	<i>Social Media</i>	<i>Other</i>
Calvary East Silents	67%	...	...	...	...	...	...	33%
Calvary East Boomers	90%	...	5%	...	...	...	...	5%
Calvary East Gen X	67%	...	...	7%	7%	...	...	13%
Calvary East Millennials	75%	...	...	...	25%	...	...	...
Other Church Millennials	56%	...	...	11%	22%	...	...	11%
Unchurched Millennials	38%	8%	...	8%	15%	...	15%	15%

Table A21. Openness about personal matters

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Very private</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Very open</i> <i>5</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	11%	89%	...	...
Calvary East Boomers	...	19%	24%	52%	5%
Calvary East Gen X	...	19%	44%	19%	19%
Calvary East Millennials	...	13%	13%	38%	38%
Other Church Millennials	...	22%	22%	44%	11%
Unchurched Millennials	8%	15%	31%	31%	15%

Table A22. Importance of other people's opinions in decision making

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Unim- portant</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Very important</i> <i>5</i>
Calvary East Silents	11%	11%	33%	33%	11%
Calvary East Boomers	5%	38%	29%	29%	...
Calvary East Gen X	...	13%	38%	38%	13%
Calvary East Millennials	...	13%	50%	38%	...
Other Church Millennials	...	...	89%	...	11%
Unchurched Millennials	8%	31%	15%	38%	8%

Table A23. Speed of decision making

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Very Slow</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>Very Fast</i> <i>5</i>
Calvary East Silents	11%	11%	44%	22%	11%
Calvary East Boomers	10%	38%	43%	10%	...
Calvary East Gen X	6%	56%	25%	13%	...
Calvary East Millennials	13%	38%	38%	13%	...
Other Church Millennials	22%	44%	11%	22%	...
Unchurched Millennials	15%	46%	31%	8%	...

APPENDIX 4

SUMMARY OF FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

Table A24. Number of follow-up questionnaire participants

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
Calvary East Silents	8	16%
Calvary East Boomers	20	41%
Calvary East Gen X	14	29%
Calvary East Millennials	7	14%
Total	49	

Table A25. Agreement with Calvary East beliefs

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i> <i>7</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	...	25%	25%	50%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	...	...	20%	80%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	...	7%	50%	43%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	...	...	43%	57%

Table A26. Relevance of Calvary East teaching topics

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Very irrelevant 1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Very relevant 7</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	...	38%	38%	25%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	...	15%	20%	65%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	7%	29%	7%	57%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	...	29%	43%	29%

Table A27. Clarity of logic in Calvary East teaching

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Difficult to follow 1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Easy to follow 7</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	...	25%	13%	63%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	...	5%	35%	60%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	7%	14%	21%	57%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	...	...	29%	71%

Table A28. Familiarity of words in Calvary East teaching

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Very unfamiliar 1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Very familiar 7</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	13%	13%	...	75%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	...	5%	5%	90%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	...	7%	14%	79%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	...	...	14%	86%

Table A29. Impression of speaker's body language and tone

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Very negative</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Very positive</i> <i>7</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	...	13%	38%	50%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	...	...	25%	75%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	21%	7%	14%	57%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	...	...	57%	43%

Table A30. Impression of Calvary East meeting place

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Very negative</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Very positive</i> <i>7</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	...	25%	13%	63%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	5%	15%	35%	45%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	21%	21%	21%	36%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	14%	57%	...	29%

Table A31. Comfort level with how people at Calvary East relate

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Very uncom- fortable</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Very com- fortable</i> <i>7</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	...	24%	13%	63%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	10%	15%	35%	40%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	...	...	21%	29%	50%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	...	14%	29%	57%

Table A32. Impression of Calvary East music style

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Very negative</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Very positive</i> <i>7</i>
Calvary East Silents	0%	0%	0%	0%	25%	50%	25%
Calvary East Boomers	0%	5%	0%	10%	20%	25%	40%
Calvary East Gen X	7%	0%	0%	0%	29%	29%	36%
Calvary East Millennials	0%	0%	0%	0%	29%	43%	29%

Table A33. Impression of Calvary East communication aids

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Very negative</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Very positive</i> <i>7</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	...	...	50%	50%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	5%	...	55%	40%
Calvary East Gen X	7%	...	...	...	7%	43%	43%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	14%	14%	43%	29%

Table A34. Impression of ways people are asked to respond to Calvary East teaching

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Very negative</i> <i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>Very positive</i> <i>7</i>
Calvary East Silents	...	...	...	...	25%	25%	50%
Calvary East Boomers	...	...	...	...	25%	45%	30%
Calvary East Gen X	...	...	14%	...	14%	29%	43%
Calvary East Millennials	...	...	...	...	...	57%	43%

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR CALVARY BIBLE CHURCH EAST OF COMSTOCK, MICHIGAN, TO CONTEXTUALIZE THE GOSPEL FOR UNCHURCHED YOUNG ADULTS

Bryan Patrick Craddock, D.Min.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Travis S. Kerns

This project addresses the development of a contextualization strategy for local church ministry. Chapter 1 explains the purpose, goals, context, and rationale for the case study. Chapter 2 examines the beginnings of culture, national identity and mission in Genesis 10-12, the contextual requirements of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20, and the example set by Paul in Athens in Acts 17:16-34 to conclude that contextualization in ministry is a biblical requirement. Chapter 3 examines the contextualization spectrums of Travis and Allison, builds upon work by Hesselgrave to propose a new method for assessing contextualization strategies, and applies that assessment to the ministries of MacArthur, Keller, Driscoll, Kimball, and the case study ministry. Chapter 4 chronicles a 15 week research project during which church members were trained in contextualization and enlisted to study the culture of local young adults. Chapter 5 evaluates the project and presents concluding thoughts.

## VITA

Bryan Patrick Craddock

### EDUCATIONAL

Diploma, Crescenta Valley High School, La Crescenta, California, 1991  
B.A., The Master's College, 1995  
M.Div., The Master's Seminary, 1999

### MINISTERIAL

Youth Ministry Intern, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California,  
1995-1997  
Pastor of College and Singles Ministries, Calvary Bible Church, Kalamazoo,  
Michigan, 1999-2002  
Pastor of Missions and Evangelism, Calvary Bible Church, Kalamazoo,  
Michigan, 2002-2005  
Associate Pastor, Calvary Bible Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2005-2010  
Pastor, Calvary Bible Church East, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2010-