Taking God Out of Context: Bevans' Typological Models of Religious Life

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Abstract

Beginning with a brief historical sketch founded upon the seminal work of Coe and then Bevans, this essay attempts to provide an exploratory biblical critique of contextual theology mainly as applied to missiology. This brief historical review is followed by an outline and critique of the essential components of Bevans' typological model of contextual theology as well as general theological views, focusing mainly on underlying assumptions contained in his methodology. Serious questions are then raised about the appropriateness of applying a 'typological model' methodology to theology, an approach originally developed in the natural sciences to study physical phenomena in a laboratory setting. The essay argues that the belief or claim there is nothing but 'contextual theology' as an imperative is profoundly unbiblical. To claim or to imply that everything is only 'contextual' means that everything is dependently material and physical. In turn, this denies the independent existence and input of divine providence and Holy Spirit and/or reduces them strictly to material interactions.

Keywords: theology, contextual theology, sociopolitical context, worship, inculturation, indigenization, three-self principle of mission, theological method and orientation, typological models, methodological, regulative principle, normative principle.

Introduction

Before providing a general description of the seminal theological work of Stephen B. Bevans, "Models of Contextual Theology", we need to outline a brief historical sketch of the author himself and the concept of "contextual theology". With this information in hand, we can hopefully better understand the key role that this concept plays in contemporary theological methodology and Christian missiology. Ultimately, Bevans' methodological approach helps us better understand the Christian tradition or Christian faith system both in relation to itself and in relation to culture over time.

After this brief historical review and background information, we will discuss what it means to assert that contextual theology is a theological imperative and what are some of the central issues and questions dealt with in contextual theology as compared to classical theology. Lastly, we will conclude by pointing out some of the costs and benefits of employing a typological "models" approach to assess and evaluate different ministries, pastoral activities, liturgical styles, and religious life.

Contextual Theology

When we review the history of the concept "contextual theology", the name Shoki Coe inevitably pops up as the primary reference point especially in relation to its employment in missiology. Coe was a minister of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, principal of Tainan Theological Seminary, and director of the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches (Wheeler, 2002). Through his position in the latter, he became widely known for coining the idea of "contextualizing theology", meaning that theology needed to respond to sociopolitical factors operating within the local context within which Christianity was being introduced (Coe, 1973, 1974).[1]

Coe used this notion of contextualizing theology in a concerted attempt to counter the highly abstract and psychologistic

[1] A Short time later, this concept came to be better known by its short-hand as a distinctive type of theology, namely, "contextual theology". Over time, it was also broadened in meaning to refer to theology which has responded to the dynamics of a particular context. Since individuals may derive from a variety of different cultural worldviews, such as Western, European, Slavic, Oriental, Asian, Arabic, or Hebraic, or any combination thereof, for that matter, they may be facing a complex mix of sociopolitical influences both unique to their cultural situation while at the same time sharing some features with other cultures. The result would be contextualized theologies like Latin American theology, Indian Dali theology, and African theology.

notion of "three-self principle" which had been previously developed by high-ranking officials in the Church Missionary Society (Henry Venn) and in the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (Rufus Anderson) from 1841 to 1873, and it was still being used at the time that Coe was involved in missionary work.

As it later came to be known, the Venn-Anderson three-self-principles formula had been initially developed as a plan to provide a stable focus and organizing principle for conducting missionary work by establishing indigenous churches. Indigenization simply referred to missionary activities aimed at bringing church activities under the control or influence of people native to the area in which they are being introduced, not necessarily sharing administrative power.[2]

The three-self-principles approach to Christian missionary was known as self-governance, self-support (financial independence from foreigners), and self-propagation (indigenous missionary work). Coe argued that the three-self-principles approach to missionary work was inadequate for addressing the historical sociopolitical context of native Taiwan. As such, Coe's

[2] In Christianity, inculturation can be viewed as the adaptation of the way church teachings are presented to other, mostly non-Christian, cultures and, in turn, the influence of those cultures on the evolution of these teachings. It is a term generally used by Catholics, the WCC, and some Protestants; other Protestants prefer to use the term "contextual theology".

missionary approach was viewed at the time as a strictly liberal theological approach to understanding missions although it soon became widespread among conservative evangelicals and Roman Catholics (Wu, 2015; Bevans, 2002).

Many scholars and theologians view contextual theology as incorporating all the principal features of both indigenization and inculturation, and much more. [3] Most contextual theological writings explicitly or at least implicitly incorporate consideration of some essential aspects and trends of contemporary society such as the adverse impacts of technology on human labor, the relationship between economic activity and ecological degradation, and the struggle for human justice.[4]

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[3] For example, see what the systematic theologian Regunt Yesurathnam has to say about the nature of contextual theology (C.E. Van Engen, 2005, p. 194).

[4] Many well-known scholars and theologians would at least include serious consideration of secularization in this list of distinctive features characterizing modern societies. Generally speaking, secularization is the process by which all the institutions of a society, country, or culture move away from orienting conduct and decision-making primarily on the basis of religion or religious values or spirituality in general over time. For example, in the U.S. many colleges were initially established as religious institutions such as Harvard University, for example, until the control and influence of religion was removed from all aspects of university life. So, then, when something in a society or country or culture changes from being influenced or controlled by religion to operating without being influenced or controlled by religion, this change can be understood as a

This is where the American missiologist and professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Stephen Bevans, fits into the historical picture of the emergence and development of contextual theology. Along these same lines of thinking, Bevans draws out what he considers to be an essential implication partially deriving from Coe's central concept, namely, that there is no such thing as normative theology.

Enter Bevans Theology

To adequately comprehend Bevans' theological point of view, we need to take into consideration the historical principles of worship generally observed under Christianity prior to the advent of contextual theology and Bevans' theological work. The central tenet of the normative principle of worship propounds that it can entail elements not explicitly prohibited by Scripture. As an everyday operating principle for missionary work, that means that such worship must be in agreement with general

process called secularization. The fuel that appears to motor the secularization process forward is the gradual replacement of religious values (whatever religion it may be) with nonreligious values in peoples' everyday life. Most scholars agree that Max Weber's treatment of the sociology of the law represents the germ of the secularization thesis which argues that modern society is becoming progressively 'disenchanted' due largely to advances in science, technology, law, economy, government, and education. Probably the best contemporary representative of this secularization thesis is Peter Berger, but there are many notable others.

Church practice AND must contain no explicit prohibition from Scripture in any part of the worship from beginning to end. In other words, whatever is not prohibited in the Bible is permitted in worship, as long as the peace and unity of the Church is maintained and supported.

The normative principle of worship is often contrasted with the much stricter regulative principle of worship in Christianity. This latter worship principle argues that only those Christian practices or elements are allowable in Christian worship which are explicitly commanded or modelled in the Bible. A simple example of announcing notices in church (i.e. upcoming events, church news, and so forth) will suffice to demonstrate the essential difference between these two very different forms of Christian worship and why they are crucial considerations in discussions about Christian missionary work.

Since this activity is not explicitly prohibited in the Bible, and since such announcements may benefit involvement in Church activities and the congregation in general, the normative principle of worship would permit this practice. It is a form of worship that makes possible the entrance of worship elements foreign to or outside of the Christian faith and the Christian worship format so long as not expressly prohibited by neither Bible nor general Church practices. This is the generally accepted approach to worship which is practiced by Anglicans, Lutherans, Evangelicals, and Methodists, among others (Barber, 2006; Maxwell, 1936; Marshall, 2004; Driscoll, 2009).

Contrariwise, the regulative principle of worship would expressly forbid such activity from taking place because no explicit example of announcing notices can be found in the Bible. The latter is a Christian doctrine of worship initially held by some Calvinists and Anabaptists who believed that God commands churches to conduct public services of worship employing ONLY certain distinct elements affirmatively found in the Bible AND that God prohibits any and all other practices in public worship.

It is clear, therefore, that the regulative principle of worship views worship as obedience to God, recognizes specific integral elements in the Bible that make up this obedient worship, and excludes other practices as being fundamentally disobedient in nature. It is a worship principle upheld, practiced, and steadfastly supported by conservative Reformed churches, the Restoration Movement, and other conservative Protestant denominations (Beker, 1992; Davies, 1997; Smith, 2011).

When Bevans claims that there is no such thing as normative theology, it becomes very clear on which side of the fence he sits in terms of worship principles, with all its necessary logical implications for other explicit biblically founded Christian teachings and principles. In the opening paragraph of his book, he states categorically that doing contextual theology is “not an option” because it is a human activity which can only take place within a “particular context” (Bevans, 2002, p. 15).

"Theology" as such not only can never exist but, more profoundly, never existed. What existed, and what exists now, are different types of contextual theology such as black theology, feminist theology, queer theology, African theology, and so forth. Scripture and tradition move over, we have a new theological horse in town called "present human experience – or context" as another "valid source for theological expression" (Bevans, ibid.).

Bevans notes that the previous missionary language of indigenization to describe the local social situation and particular human culture within which Christianity is introduced incorporates a narrow conception of culture. The concept of contextualization is a much better term for theological purposes, he says, because it contains a broader understanding of culture "to include social, political, and economic questions", while indigenization severely restricts the focus to purely cultural aspects of human experience (Ibid.). Further, Bevans claims that indigenization tends to view both the domestic culture and the foreign culture as essentially good, while the contextualization approach tends to treat both cultures more critically.

Lastly, and most importantly for our purposes here, the contextualization concept strongly suggests the imperative requirement of theology to interact and dialogue with social factors, processes, and pressures endemic to contemporary society, not only with traditional cultural values.

Understandably, these social factors are many, varied, and complex, altogether influencing the environment within which theology takes place. To name just a few: rapidly occurring social change, newly emerging ethnic and other identities, general dissatisfaction with classical or traditional theological and missionary approaches, the oppressive nature of older theological approaches, growing demands by local cultures for their own truly contextual theology, contemporary social scientific empirical understandings of culture rooted in human experiences within that particular culture as opposed to classical understandings of culture as universal and monolithic, globalization, and more.

All of these social factors and more are vigorously present in the contemporary theological environment, and these "external" modern societal features directly confront the great variety of peoples of the world (ibid., pp 15-24). These external pressures towards a contextual theology are complimented by "internal factors" within Christianity itself that also underscore "contextualization as a theological imperative" such as the incarnational nature of Christianity, the sacramental nature of reality (God being revealed in concrete reality), and divine revelation working within contextual theology, the catholicity or all-embracing, all-inclusive nature of Christian community (unity through diversity, universality through diversity), and the trinitarian doctrine understood as God working for salvation in the midst of the diversity of the human context. O

Ostensibly, this is why Bevans proclaims that contextual theology is a "theological imperative" in order to truly understand modern theology as opposed to classical or traditional theology. Again, Scripture, tradition, and present-day human experience (context) has always been and is still the theological order of the day. However, now there's a new theological sheriff in town, so to speak.

Contextual Theology: Some Issues and Questions

Because contextual theology is a radically new way of doing theology and, by extension, the Christian mission, at least as compared with its classical counterpart, the theologian is faced with resolving several issues and problems that weren't really debatable under the previous traditional Christian model. Bevans states that these issues or problems cluster into four fundamental categories: questions involving theological method; questions related to basic theological orientation; issues associated with the criteria employed to characterize orthodoxy; and issues concerning local versus dominant cultural identity in the context of social change.

In regard to theological method, the question which contextual theology brings forward applies to what should be the most appropriate form theology should take in a given local context. Whereas theology was previously a formal discursive effort related mainly to the university or seminary, largely the product

of a Western literate culture. But theology need not only be done in this form in order to qualify as theology.

Great theology of the past has also been expressed in hymns or poems, sermons or homilies, embodied in ritual, even in non-verbal art works like Michelangelo's sculpture and paintings on catacomb walls. The point that Bevans wants to emphasize is that theology as conceived here is a bit wider than Western academic scholarship although scholarship is a crucially important theological consideration. Different cultures have different ways of articulating faith quite beyond the expressive mode of scholarship.

Who does the theologizing is just as important as the form it takes. In the past, it was mainly the academic scholar who theologized because it required tremendous reflection on a complex array of bewildering documents which required a great deal of background knowledge and skill to adequately comprehend. But when contextual theology shifts the focus from complex ancient documents to contemporary human subjective experience of one's faith, it becomes the cultural subjects who speak rather than the professional theologians.

A related question which arises on this issue is to what extent are people in everyday life within their own cultures the real theologians? Is theology done by "experts" in formal academic settings to be trickled down to local people for their consumption. Contextual theology views it the opposite way, as

something formulated and articulated at the ground level by subjects of local culture, bottom-up theologizing, if you will.

Another related methodological issue which emerges here is the question of whether a nonparticipant in a particular context can make a contextual theological contribution. For example, can a white male contribute to Black theology? Can a Black male contribute to a feminist theology? Can an American contribute to an East Asian theology? Can a heterosexual theologian contribute to a queer theology? and so forth.

From one point of view, Bevans argues, the unequivocal answer is no. This is believed to be because the contributor is foreign to the particular context of that theology. So therefore, they do not share the life experiences of members of that theological or contextual community. Of course, non-contextual participants can sympathize or empathize with the life experiences of contextual participants. However, inevitably, they must import into that context to some degree their own feelings, perceptions, experiences, and political-economic privileges which could operate or function unintentionally to distort the particular local contextual theology.

However, people not fully sharing the life experiences of the contextual participant can contribute significantly to a higher-level understanding of that local theology. They can provide a fresher broader perspective than members mired in the everyday muck of that theological culture. In doing so, the

nonparticipant may stimulate participants of a local theological culture to do their own thinking for themselves rather than simply robotically repeat the theological programs of the local culture.

In terms of basic theological orientation, two of them appear to have particular relevance to contextual theology: a creation-centered versus a fundamentally redemption-centered theological perspective. The creation-centered theological orientation basically views human experience as good, meaning that 'context' is good as well. Human nature is good, and everything created by God is good.

As such, then, the world or creation is sacramental because it was created by God. Therefore, the created world is the place where God is revealed. Revelation does not happen in strange holy places set apart from the world in some kind of otherworldly dimension of time and space. Rather, it happens inside the world, in daily life and ordinary words of ordinary people. Yes, there is sin, but sin is an aberration from the good of God's creation.

By contrast, a redemption-centered theological orientation believes that culture and human experience need to be radically transformed or totally replaced. Why? Because human nature is sinful or corrupt, and that means that God's grace cannot build upon it something better. Corrupt human nature distorts God and rebels against Him. Here culture is not already holy

containing the presence of God. On the contrary, God must be brought into the culture to transform it, to save it. God and humanity are separate due to corrupted human nature. God can only reach the world by breaking into it.

In terms of problems surrounding the criteria for determining orthodoxy, Bevans sees a real danger of compromising or betraying Christianity. The basic point here is that a Christianity that takes culture too seriously as a driving theological motivating principle in both theory and praxis can easily because internally syncretized without its participants even understanding how that organic process takes place.

All faith systems, let alone Christianity, do not wish to have the content of their faith impaired or mutilated or otherwise compromised by theological expressions emanating from differential cultural, social, ethnic, or political-economic realities. Yes, liberal-democratic philosophical trends of pluralism and diversity are modern realities. But the fact that they are realities does not necessarily make them genuinely Christian in essence.

How do we decide when a contextual theological expression is authentically Christian or not? By the same token, how can we be sure that our understanding of our own Christian faith is faithful to the Judeo-Christian tradition? One criterion we could look at is if the particular theological expression un-Christian behavioral practices. Another criterion that could also be used

is if the particular theological expression is well-received by faithful Christians. Yet another criterion to look at is if the particular theological expression is internally consistent with existing beliefs and values within Christianity. Again, these criteria all relate to preventive measures that could be taken to ensure the continued organic integrity of the Christian faith system.

A second criterion that could be used to determine if a particular contextual theological expression is genuinely Christian in nature is its applicability in worship practices. Can it be translated into worship? The belief here is that the way we ray reflects what we believe. What happens to the praying community when foreign forms of prayer are introduced into it? We can also ask to what extent an emerging contextual theological expression is open to criticism from other theological systems.

If a theology is consistently open to any and all criticisms from other theologies, does this mean that that particular contextual theology is authentically Christian? On the other hand, if a theology tends to be defensive and closed in on itself in protective fashion, does that automatically mean it is not an authentic expression of Christianity? Lastly, should the literal strength of a particular theology to challenge other theological expressions within a positive dialogue also be an important criterion used to decide the authenticity of Christian faith?

Lastly, according to Bevans, the emergence and development of contextual theologies has also forced upon the center stage of consideration central issues concerning cultural identity and social change. In the past, the narrowness of formal theology and the culturally insensitive implementation of colonial political-economic structures have operated to suppress or ignore local cultural identities in the quest for dominant cultural theological superiority. Today, however, local cultural identity has emerged to determine the contours of a local contextual theology. Culture as a theological source is a valid way of doing theology, to be sure, says Bevans.

One of the main dangers here is to base a local culture's theology on romantic notions of a culture that existed prior to colonialism, for example, rather than as it exists now at present. If a theology is to be truly contextual, then, it must reflect a culture as it exists in the present. Yes, there has been contact with other parts of the world, but that doesn't mean by definition that other-cultural contact precludes a contextual theology from developing.

Another danger that could arise for a theology that places too much emphasis on cultural identity is potential conflict with popular forms of religiosity. For example, the Filipino are unlikely to feel comfortable in terms of cultural identity by substituting Filipino palm wine and rice cakes for the traditional Spanish introduction of bread and wine for the Eucharist celebration. It is possible that at least some of the

colonial and cultural structures of domination imposed by the Spanish over the Filipinos became so much an integral part of Filipino cultural identity that it would be virtually counter-culturally productive to remove them.

Perhaps from a modern point of view, it is foolish to think that all colonial structures of domination were 100% anti-cultural in nature and in function. Perhaps modern theologians shouldn't be so quick to demonize foreign power structures and yet so blind to power structures operating within their own local theological context. If we are as Christians truly believing the Christian faith system as a coherent organic system of ideas, values, principles, and practices, then perhaps we should admit that power structures are an inherent constitutive part of human existence.

The Notion and Use of Typological Methodology

Now that we have provided a brief historical sketch of contextual theology, identified some of the major reasons for its emergence, and surveyed several issues, problems, and questions it raises for so-called 'doing' theology, we are now in a much more propitious position to provide some critical reflections about the method of typology that Bevans uses to classify the different modes of contextual theologizing expressed over time than would have otherwise been the case. The notion of applying a specifically typological or 'model approach' to understand various aspects or features of religious life is not

entirely new, as Bevans makes clear. Several thinkers and scholars have previously engaged this type of methodology to make statements about models of contextual theologizing.

Schineller (1976) proposed four models of Christology and ecclesiology. O'Meara (1978) identified several models of philosophical thought employed to understand the Christian church. Tracy (1975) developed five models of theological reflection. McFague (1987) recognized three models of speaking to God. The Catholic Dulles (1975, 1983) developed five models of the church each of which he claimed revealed a different way of understanding the mystery of the church.

At the time, Dulles stated that the inspiration for his use of a typological methodological approach to understand Christian religious life derived from Niebuhr's book entitled, Christ and Culture, first published in 1951. Niebuhr, in turn, claimed to claimed to have been influenced in the use of typological methodology by many others before him including, very significantly, some well-known scholars using the model approach in the natural sciences from which it was, in fact, imported into theological discourse (Barbour, 1974; Ramsey, 1964; Black, 1962).

Bevans realizes that all methodological approaches have their weaknesses and strengths, regardless of where they are derived from and how they are applied. Rightfully so, he expresses these misgivings forthrightly in his book. He begins this exercise in

methodological reflexivity by stating that the most important point to remember about the use of models is that they are "constructions" (Bevans, ibid., p. 35); they are emphatically "not mirrors of reality" but, rather, "logically constructed theoretical positions" (Ibid.). It affirms something that is real, but it never really totally captures that reality. It participates in the

metaphorical nature of language. However, they are not fictional versions of reality either. They can and do reveal actual features of that reality under examination.

So, then, even though they are not the whole picture of that reality under examination, for example the reality of Christian religious life or contextual theological praxis, they do provide a vision of that reality from an angle, so to speak. They provide ways that we can know some part of the richness and complexity of a reality. But again, that knowledge is always partial and inadequate. In addition to this particular partial aspect or dimension of the 'models' approach, it possesses other features which demand scrupulous scholarly attention such as exclusivity (or systematic) versus complementarity (or descriptive).

If a typological model contains the feature of exclusivity, it likely means that it contains a paradigm or worldview, a way of seeing the world and a set of commitments or positions, that cannot be easily related to others nor easily discarded or muted. The theoretical position and claims of complementary or descriptive

typological models convey a much more tentative outlook than models oriented by exclusivity. Bevans emphasizes these features imply that certain typological models illuminate specific parts of the reality under examination, while other models illuminate other aspects of that particular reality.

Perhaps genuflecting to modern pluralism, this approach appear to imply that a variety of models must be applied to any particular reality to capture as much of the complexity of that reality as possible. No one particular model can account fully and completely for any particular reality under examination. All typological models need to be supplemented by others in order to capture as much of a particular reality under examination as possible. Curiously enough, though, as it applies to theological discourse this probably means that all typological models are equally valid in the sense that they are all limited or partial images or mirrors of reality. No one model can wholly, fully, and completely account for a theological position or doctrine or even a component contained within it, exactly how a typological model would be expected to operate in a scientific laboratory, incidentally.

At most, it is a simplistic but useful reflection of a complex reality. It does, however, “yield true knowledge” of that reality, asserts Bevans. It is evident that the assumption that is never critically examined here is to what extent it is appropriate to use a methodological approach in the study of theology that was initially developed and applied in the natural sciences to

understand varying aspects of the physical world, not the human world.

It is questionable to a large extent how far theologians can legitimately employ methodologies that were initially developed to identify and understand patterns in the behavior of physical phenomena such as the nature of light waves or the behavior of atoms, and then extended and applied to human behavior, in this case human theological or contextual theological behavior. Certainly, there are several problems associated with the uncritical use of such methodologies especially in the field of Theology, not the least of which are the philosophical and ideological assumptions it contains about human nature, culture, society and social structure, government, and other aspects of social reality.

Typological Models of Religious Life: Some Methodological Shortcomings

Despite the obvious benefits of using a typological 'model approach' to understand religious life in its various dimensions over time within the Christian faith system, there are some notable additional shortcomings. As Bevans himself makes clear about his approach to understanding religious life, faith and the expression of faith is a product of context, and nothing but context. Therefore, every religious belief and creed, every religious idea, every thought, everything must be placed in context.

Christian 'faith', like any other religious faith, and everything related to it, can only be seen and adequately understood through context. In other words, Bevans proclaims that all human beings are products of culture and context, So, then, the Bible is wholly and irremediably a cultural product having little or nothing to do with the Holy Spirit working through the medium of human beings, for example, even having less to do with acknowledging the independent existence of spirituality. It was written within a context, for a context or culture, and from a specific historical context. Surely, then, to call such an approach contextually deterministic would not be an over-statement.

Keeping Bevans' previous reductionistic statements regarding the concepts 'context' and 'culture' firmly into consideration, it appears that contextual theology a la Bevans contains within it the philosophical foundational principle of materialism, that is, the doctrine which claims that all facts are causally the result of physical processes, or even reducible to them including mind, mental states, consciousness, and psychological states, let alone spiritual entities or spiritual thoughts and behaviors. Mind and consciousness, and all manifestations thereof, are fully direct by-products or epiphenomena of physical material processes without which they cannot exist. They are all just second-order, secondary realities resulting from physical matter, while material interactions are first-order realities. Obviously, the, as such it pointedly and expressly denies the

independent existence of the spiritual in all its forms, shapes, sizes, or manners of being.

Another major problem with Bevans' models of "contextual theology" as applied over wide expanses of time is that they themselves appear to be a-contextually constructed, that is, not constructed from within the particular theological context under examination but, rather, constructed from components selected from outside of that local context to form a new recontextualized but abstract theological context. In that sense, they can be considered thoroughly modern fabrications. The local and ordered set of models which Bevans constructs and systematizes from components selected from outside those theological contexts appears to contradict Bevans' own primary claim at the beginning of his book that all theology is contextual theology.

Since each of his contextual theological models was a methodological construction by a process of abstraction, they can be viewed as being decontextualized. Not only are they decontextualized methodologically from their original contexts, they are also decontextualized from the original motivations that gave rise to them (economic, political, religious, cultural, and so forth). In this way, the presuppositions contained within the abstract model then operate to provide the new 'context'.

Another serious methodological problem is Bevans' claim that his 'contextual theology' is something 'radically new' yet

traditional. In other words, theology has always been contextual. Idiot theologians are finally waking up to this fact in modern times, Bevans implies. However, to claim a priori that theology has always been contextual is to a priori formulate a theoretical construct which already contains within itself the principle of 'theological imperative'. If everything is 'contextual' and all theologies are 'contextual', then how can the concept of 'contextual theology' itself really be employed to help us identify distinctive theologies that only partially reflect actual specific realities and that can be evaluated according to independent criteria of any kind?

This problem is implied in Schreiter's Foreword when he refers to contextual theologies as "both those that are consciously contextual and those that are best understood from their contexts" (Ibid., p. 8). This is a much more profound methodological problem than what first appears to be the case. If everything is contextual theology, then what exactly is contextual theology? How do we know it, how can we understand it, unless we know what is NOT contextual theology?

This methodological vagueness leads to the much more serious question of how Bevans decided what specific theological models would be included in his typological system of contextual theologies and which ones wouldn't? So, then, do the examples Bevans provides for each of his models help us to explain the 'models', OR do the models help us to understand the examples? It very much seems like the 'examples'

themselves ARE the models, which lends a glaring aura of selectivity and artificiality to Bevans' typology of contextual theology.

Lastly, perhaps the most perplexing albeit damning methodological deficiency contained in Bevans' typology of contextual theologies is the fact that it doesn't appear to permit any independent divine role or God role in the contextualization process itself. Everything is contextual and employed methodologically to mean everything is dependently material and physical, while the independent existence and influence of spirit is denied and/or reduced to material interactions. On another related note, if that claim is not Marxist materialist determinism in another guise,, then the phrase is simply incomprehensible. Under Bevans, contextualization is completely a human business with no independent divine input whatsoever.

Even given these misgivings, remarkably Bevans goes on to develop five models of contextual theology originally and then actually adds yet another model later, providing a figure or sketch that supposedly functions like a map intended to aid our understanding of how Bevans approaches and intends to use these models: anthropological, praxis, synthetic, translation, countercultural, and transcendental. Surely, at this point it goes without saying that Bevans' 'contextual theology' is thoroughly secular and anything but biblically sound. It could very well be argued that what contextual theology permits is the

bit-by-bit importation of Marxian-socialist philosophical assumptions into the core body of Christian doctrine gradually but effectively converting it over time into its atheistic mirror image, namely, Marxianity.

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