

Introduction

Until recently the field of study known as Contextualization has been the almost exclusive domain of Protestant and Roman Catholic missiology. Beginning in the mid 1960s both of these groups began intensive efforts to make their missionary presentation of the Gospel and the Church as culturally relevant as possible.¹ Their activity ranged from reworking of biblical translations for repressed minorities² to culturally driven modifications of the Roman Mass³ for use in sub-Saharan Africa; from Lutheran political theology in Germany⁴ to Catholic Liberation Theology in Latin America.⁵ One example is the following reworking of the Lord's Prayer by the African theologian Caanan Banana.

Our Father who art in the ghetto,
Degraded is your name.
Thy servitude abounds,
Thy will is mocked,
As pie in the sky.

Teach us to demand,
Our share of the gold,
Forgive us our docility,
As we demand our share of justice.

Lead us not into complicity,
Deliver us from our fears.

For ours is thy sovereignty,
The power and the liberation,
Forever and ever. Amen

¹ The degree to which this discipline has developed and spread can also be seen in the fact that every major Protestant and Catholic theological seminary now offers at least one course in contextualization.

² Caanan Banana "The Lord's Prayer - in the Ghetto" In: Mission Trends No. 3: Third World Theologies: Asian, African and Latin American Contributions to a Radical, Theological Realignment in the Church. Eds. Anderson, Gerald and Thomas F. Stransky. Anderson, Gerald and Thomas F. Stransky. (New York, Grand Rapids: Paulist, Eerdmans, 1976) 156-157.

³ *Theologie der Dritten Welt* Band 18 "Der neue Meßritus im Zaire" (Freiburg: Herder, 1993)

⁴ J. Moltmann. J-B Metz, *et al.*

⁵ Gutierrez, Bonnino, *et al.*

Unfortunately, there have been very few Orthodox efforts in this area. And surely we do not have the same freedom that some of our Protestant and Catholic counterparts enjoy. (e.g., Holy Scripture & Liturgy). Nevertheless, contextualization has been and is very much a part of our history. Consider the work done on language and catechesis by Ss. Cyril and Methodius,⁶ the work of the monastics who evangelized central Russia,⁷ and of course the adaptation of the Orthodox faith to the Alaskan native populations by the North American Saints.⁸ Perhaps it is time for us to rediscover and rearticulate our own rich heritage.

Working Definition

Before we proceed to an examination of the way in which contextualization might be developed within a North American Orthodox missions context, let me offer an initial working definition. This is, of course, just a point of departure and may need to be revised as we proceed.

Contextualization is an attempt to communicate the **message**...

- of the person, works, word and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's own revelation, especially as expressed in the Holy Scriptures, the Traditions of the Church, and the teachings of the Fathers (in short, the mind of the Church),
- in terms of the language and thought forms of a particular **culture**,
- in a way that allows that which has been communicated to be **understood** as it was intended to be understood.

⁶ Cf. Franz Grivec. Konstantin und Method Lehrer Der Sklaven. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1960).

⁷ Cf. Serge A. Zenkovsky. Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales. (New York: Meridian, 1963).

⁸ Michael Oleska. Alaskan Spirituality and Orthodox Alaska.

In order to unpack and apply this definition allow me to present 1) an overview of the task of Contextualization, 2) a few thoughts on the notion of culture and context, and then 3) several examples of possible application.

1. THE TASK OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

As one might imagine, within the life and work of the Church, there are literally thousands of opportunities for and forms of contextualization - redemptive analogies,⁹ teaching, worship, music, evangelism, terminology, etc. Depending on what aspect of the Church we need to contextualize, the latitude of legitimate activity as well as the methodology will vary. Given the nature of the Church and its mission there are two general fields of contextualization, one focused on **advancing** the Church, the other on **perfecting** the Saints.

1.1. ADVANCING THE CHURCH

In general terms this field of activity involves planting the Church and, as far as contextualization is concerned, it has two distinct aspects: the proclamation of the Gospel (the **kerygmatic** aspect) and the initial teaching of converts (the **didactic** aspect).

In this case, the object of contextualization is the message of the Church – the Gospel itself. Our primary concern here is the understanding and acceptance of the Gospel message. If we are going to communicate the Gospel to those who do not yet know it, we should naturally make every effort to assure that it is properly understood and hopefully accepted. If it is accepted, we will then need to instruct the converts,

⁹ Redemptive Analogy refers to an existing component of a particular culture, which is in some way analogous to the Christian message and thus provides a point of entrance for that message. One of the most well known examples was developed by Don Richardson in his book [The Peace Child](#), in which he describes how rival groups in New Guinea exchanged infants as a means of achieving peace.

providing them with a foundation built on the fundamentals of Orthodox doctrine, history, and spirituality.

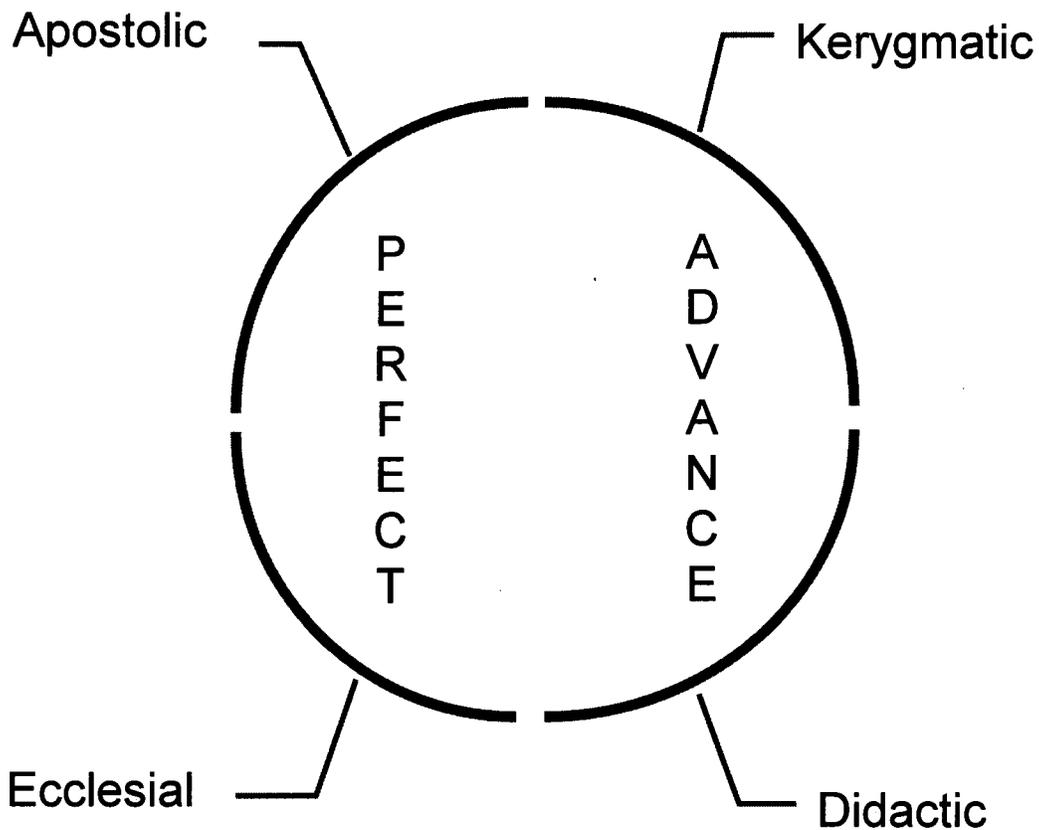
To do this we will try to make use of culturally specific/appropriate language, linguistic devices, and media. We will try to connect with and tap into existing cultural themes. But there are limits and dangers. The attempt to use a culture's existing themes as vehicles for communication of Christian content puts us at a certain degree of risk. On the one hand, North American cultural content could easily obscure the message. On the other hand cultural themes may overpower or mix with biblical content leading to various forms of syncretism.

1.2. PERFECTING THE SAINTS

In this case, the object of contextualization has to do with the “perfecting of the Saints,” (Cf. 2 Cor. 7:1, Eph. 4:12) i.e., the many aspects of our life in Christ. In this **ecclesial** field contextualization is required on both individuals and corporate levels. In the case of individuals, we are particularly concerned with our long-term didactic responsibility – continued catechesis and spiritual development. Once again, cultural relevancy demands that we do our teaching in terms of the language, themes, and media of the prevailing culture.

At the corporate or community level we are primarily interested in developing culturally appropriate forms of worship and service, i.e., worship and service that are understandable, encourage active participation, that meet needs evident in the culture, and that make use of elements of that culture to achieve those ends. As a given community matures, we will also want to encourage outreach, by teaching on and providing opportunities to pursue our evangelistic (**apostolic**) mandate.

In light of the cyclical nature of the missionary task we might do well to organize these initial observations as a cycle



2. ON THE NATURE OF CULTURE & CONTEXT

Obviously, if we are going to communicate the Christian message into specific cultural contexts using the language, themes, and media of that culture, we will have to have a very good idea of what we mean by *culture* and what we mean by a *context*. Oddly enough, there is little understanding of or agreement on the definition of these common terms. Culture is referenced so frequently, by so many people, in so many situations, that the only thing we can really be sure of is that we do not know what is

meant. Context is taken so for granted, that, although it is often used, it is almost never defined. In any case, we would do well to define the terms before proceeding.

2.1. CULTURE

One way of defining culture is to look at it as a body of knowledge shared by the members of a group. That knowledge is used to interpret and relate to one's immediate environment. This view is similar to the notion of *Cultural Literacy*,¹⁰ which suggests that, in order to understand a given message, a certain amount of "background knowledge is necessary. For example, the statement "he slid into third and was thrown out" is only interpreted correctly if the listener has some knowledge of baseball. By extension, statements made by the Christian communicator will only be understood if the listener is able to associate what is said with some aspect of a common pool of knowledge or, as we shall see later, if the association with something known allows for the creation of a new category of information.

When I say that such knowledge is shared, I mean that this is the type of information that can be learned – it is a collective pool of knowledge which can be transmitted from individual to individual and from generation to generation. Part of the enculturation process in every society is to equip each successive generation with the knowledge they need to participate in that society, as well as develop and preserve the character, content, i.e., language, religion, history, etc., of that society. Thus, the ability to utilize this information is an important indication that the individual belongs to the group sharing the information. Of course, this also means that, at least theoretically, individuals

¹⁰ E. D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. (Vintage Books, 1988).

coming from outside a given society can also acquire this knowledge and achieve a degree of belonging.

The importance of this shared knowledge lies in the fact that it holds the key to the way in which any culture functions on a day-to-day basis, for it is the concrete application of this knowledge which leads culturally specific forms of behavior, patterns of communication (not language per se), sets of values, and types of artifacts. It is on the basis of this learned set of rules that both the individual and the group are able to evaluate the appropriateness of behavior, patterns of communication, and even emotions. How, for example, does one know that a certain reaction is appropriate? Only by comparison with the existing catalog of guidelines.

For the purposes of this essay then, culture can be defined as a body of information, definitions, and rules, which governs the way in which the individual participants interpret, react to, and develop the situations, events, people, and objects they encounter.

2.2. CONTEXT

In spite of its importance for the process of contextualization, the idea of “context” is usually just assumed without any attempt to define it.¹¹ We tend to think of context as a self-evident set of cultural factors outside of and therefore influencing the

¹¹ This deficiency creates two major problems. One problem is that evaluation of an attempted contextualization becomes extremely difficult. If the meaning of a piece of information is tied to the context in which it was initially formulated, and if it may be modified to fit a second or third context, how will we know whether a message has survived transplantation unless we understand the nature, roll, and function of the contexts involved? The second difficulty is that the lack of a clear definition gives the contextualizer too much latitude in transculturating the message. It is reasonable to assume that the context of the source culture may modify a message in a way similar to an analogous context within the receiving culture. Thinking in terms of the contextualization of the gospel, unless care is taken to identify and match context levels and functions, syncretistic distortions will be touted and defended as authentic contextualizations of the gospel.

receptor. However, it would be far more accurate and useful to view context as a communicative environment defined by the complex interactions between, 1) a universal frame of conceptual reference, 2) the multiple layers of nested contexts to which the receptor's life belongs, and 3) an internal template within the receptor. All of these, taken together, determine how communication is interpreted.

2.2.1 A Universal Frame of Conceptual Reference

Recent research has contributed significantly to our understanding of the nature of language. One of the more interesting developments is the idea that human knowledge can be understood in terms of fields of lexical/semantic relationships. Having found the “same kinds of linguistic gadgets in language after language”¹² some linguists conclude, “The same symbol-making machinery, without exception, underlies the world’s languages. The basic assumption is that, although the lexical/semantic/phonetic units differ from language to language, the rules by which internal structure of every language is built are universal. Accordingly, all languages could be viewed as “composites of a finite number of more elementary factors.”¹³ Thus, different combinations of a relatively small number of linguistic building blocks governed by a universal set of grammatical rules could easily result in a large number of human languages.¹⁴

And therein lies the strength and potential of human language. The evidence seems to verify, at least the possibility of, some kind of universal conceptual frame of reference. If all languages make use of certain universal semantic relationships it seems

¹² Steven Pinker. The Language Instinct. How the Mind Creates Language. (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 237.

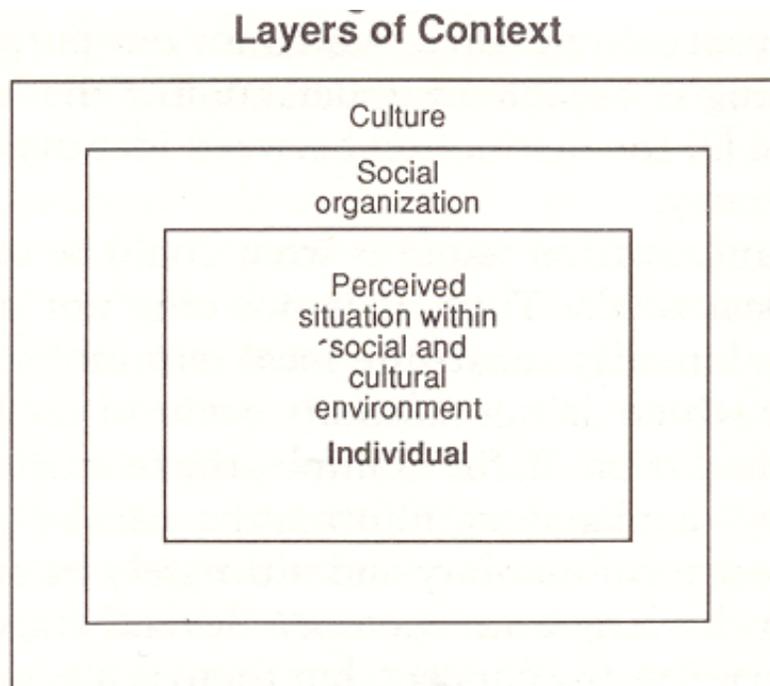
¹³ Mark C. Baker. The Atoms of Language. The Mind’s Hidden Rules of Grammar. (New York Basic Books, 2001), 22.

¹⁴ Based on two principles (1) the arbitrariness of sign (Saussure) and (ii) infinite use of finite media (von Humboldt, Chomsky) one can offer a functional definition.

appropriate to assume that certain basic categories 'of meaning exist. Each language has within it the basic structures which make communication (translation) possible. In other words, all languages share a sufficient number of semantic relationships to allow for the same semantic/lexical meaning to be expressed even though the units or expression remain different. If two different languages are built from the same basic components, “with only the proportions and arrangements being different,”¹⁵ then we can easily posit algorithms for transforming one into the other, which would facilitate the effective transfer of thought from one created being to another.

2.2.2 Nested Layers Of Context: On the Use of Knowledge

Anthropologists often refer to several kinds or layers of context --cultural, social, and situational.



¹⁵Baker, p. 24.

Context of Culture. "Contexts are nested within contexts, each one a function of the bigger context, and all. . . finding a place in the context of culture."¹⁶ Our understanding of context at this level assumes an integrating body' of knowledge and language behavior shared by a number of groups or communities. It embodies the total system of cultural principles, inter-community communication patterns, and forms of acceptable behavior of that culture. Thus, one can speak about Mexican, Japanese, or even North American contexts.

Although we should never overlook this wider dimension, the problem is its scope, at least in the relationship between context and the process of contextualization. At this level the number of variables required for adequate description and understanding has been multiplied until only general phenomena can be predicted and described.

Imagine, for example, a description of "the typical American." Such a composite sketch might serve usefully as an orientation, only as long as we keep in mind that the person thus described likely does not exist. Any such generalization will require considerable fine tuning if it is to be applied to specific recipients of the Christian message.

Social Context. The concept of social context is complicated by the various ways in which it can be used. Generally it refers to the individual's membership in a community. It implies familiarity, often unconscious, with cultural values and beliefs, institutions and forms, roles and personalities, and the history and ecology of the community. When applied to communicative events and social situations, this knowledge enables the individual to behave in a socially appropriate manner. This can be viewed as

¹⁶ J.R. Firth, "On Sociological Linguistics," in Language in Culture and Society, ed. Dell H. Hymnes (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 70.

the effect of a regulatory matrix in which certain variables limit the behavioral options open to the individual in any given situation. These sociological variables include differences in sex, status, and relatedness to a group. They are constantly being updated by the process of social change, which itself is subject to rules that define what changes can occur under what conditions. The variables also determine the structure or organization of society. Accordingly, social organization can be described as "a network of partial or complete understandings between members of organizational units of every size and complexity . . . which is being re-animated every day by particular acts of a communicative nature.,¹⁷ It can be seen that speech is the primary means by which an awareness of social structure becomes part of the individual's experience.

Although an understanding of the dynamics of this contextual layer ties much together and helps put such experiences as conversion into perspective, it still lacks the power to adequately describe individual behavior in a given situation.

Context of Situation. The most specific layer of context is the individual's relationship to the immediate situation in which he is involved. It has been suggested that "a statement in real life is never detached from the situation in which it is uttered."¹⁸ In that case, context functions as a mechanism of reference, that is, the participants learn a given situation and reuse its major components by recalling from memory the physiological, intellectual, and emotional experiences of that situation. Here the focus of contextual function begins to shift from the general dynamics of the cultural matrix to the deliberate and conscious action of the individual. Obviously "one cannot speak of any

¹⁷ Edward Sapir, "Communication," in The Psychology of Language, Thought, and Instruction, ed. J. De Cecco (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 75-78.

¹⁸ B. Malinowski, "The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages," in The meaning of Meaning, ed. Charles K. Ogden and Ivor A. Richards (London: Kegan Paul, Tranch, Trubney, 1923), 450-451.

aspect of human behavior without talking about culture, social organization, etc. Context, to be operative, must pervade all levels. "¹⁹ But it is this lowest level-the individual's internal view of his own cultural context, both past and present-which is the ultimate key to cross-cultural understanding, communication, and contextualization.

2.2.3 An Internal Template: On the Partitioning of Knowledge

Based on the concepts of lexical/semantic fields and nested layers, context could be defined as an internal template in the mind of a human being. Such a network contains everything the individual knows about his world, and is best conceived of as memory. The long- term memory is almost limitlessly expandable and is, therefore, never applied in its entirety to any given situation. That is, no context is broad enough to require all of a person's permanent memory. However, in order to interpret and respond to a situation properly, the short-term memory, which processes that information, has to find the correct long- term memory partition. The intermediate memory processes, partitions and integrates the components of the long-range memory and functions as a restricting mechanism, which interprets language and behavior. Therefore, "contextualization means recognizing the criteria for the application of a particular rule of context by measuring perception against a template in memory."²⁰

In the case of becoming Orthodox, for example, information has to be introduced into the permanent memory of the listener, which in turn is integrated into the intermediate memory's template for the purpose of future reference and application. The communication that precedes such individual integration of new information assumes

¹⁹ Oswald Werner and Gladys Levis-Pilz, "Memory and Context: Toward a Theory of Context in Ethnoscience," in Language and Logic in Personality and Society, ed. Harwood Fisher (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 65.

²⁰ Oswald Werner and G. Mark Scheopfle. Systematic Fieldwork. Vol. I (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1987), 118.

(1) a universal paradigm of conceptual reference, i.e., the assumption that every human being is capable of understanding the basic concepts involved in the message of the Church, (2) a universal set of semantic fields and relationships making basic communication possible and, (3) the distinction between identity and equivalence or referential identity,²¹ which enables the effective translation of lexical units from one context into another.

Effective communication, then, begins with what could be called a matching of semantic/lexical fields. The listener has to actually understand what we are saying in the way we intend it to be understood. Depending on the context, this can be quite a challenge. For example, if our listeners are not familiar with the "Lamb,"²² it will be difficult to communicate the idea of Christ's saving death. In such a case, explanatory information will have to be provided and received by the short-term memory and ultimately be added to a knowledge partition in the long-term memory. Several stages of instruction may be needed to refine the concept. While we are not likely to encounter that particular difficulty in North America, it may not be any less of a challenge to communicate such key concepts as sin, repentance, and the need for forgiveness into this secularized context.

²¹ Given the underlying commensurability of all languages, it is not difficult to translate a word from one language into a word in another successfully – we can almost always find two corresponding terms, which refer to the same object, event etc. Many of the words, originally Greek or Slavonic, needed for a presentation of the Church's message have common English equivalents, e.g., faith, God, prayer, etc. However, this correspondence, sometimes called referential identity, does not guarantee effective communication. The mind, being so much more capable than spoken language can easily associate multiple meanings with a given word. Moreover, those meanings are usually part of a whole network or taxonomy of meaning. Consider the possibilities in the case of the word lamb depending on whether it is embedded in a taxonomy of biological or of theological meanings.

²² There are, in fact, parts of the world in which sheep do not naturally occur. It has been suggested that in such cases we simply substitute that which does occur. That could lead to such problematic formulations as "the pig of God."

Once the information is transmitted (and explained) the information will be acted upon – the listener may, for example, decided to become Orthodox. This action is concretized within the framework of the recipient's own culture. Thus, it is the confluence of the newly expanded memory (now focused on God's offer of new life) and the listener's own inner template, which becomes the actual context of the response.

3. APPLICATION: ORTHODOX CONTEXTUALIZATION POTENTIAL

It is well beyond the scope of this essay to provide full descriptions of examples of Orthodox contextualization. However, using the frameworks described above, it is possible to provide an indication of the potential for contextualization of the Church's message into the North American context. Setting up a matrix using the four fields of contextualization (kerygmatic, didactic, ecclesial, apostolic) and the three aspects of context (semantic fields, context levels, and internal template) we should be able to identify opportunities for contextualization, as well as initial indications of how that contextualization might be achieved.²³ What we are looking for are ways of presenting the Church's message in terms of existing cultural themes and using culturally specific/appropriate language, linguistic devices, and media.

Matrix of Orthodox Contextualization Potential

Fields of Contextualization		Contexts of Culture		
<i>Stage of Growth</i>	<i>Aspect of Message</i> ²⁴	<i>Semantic Fields</i>	<i>Context Levels</i>	<i>Internal Template</i>
<i>Kerygmatic</i>	Christ's Death	Available	Folklore	Various Media
<i>Didactic</i>	Language	Liturgical English	Religious History	Instruction
<i>Ecclesial</i>	Worship	Available	Religious History	Accessibility
<i>Apostolic</i>	Diversity	Available	Ethnic Pluralism	Ethnic Markers

²³ The assumption here is that the reader will study a particular ministry situation, will recognize the opportunities therein and develop mechanisms of contextualization appropriate to those needs and that situation.

²⁴ Here just a few of many possible examples.

3.1. Using the Matrix: Four Steps in the Process of Contextualization

- *Identify Stage of Church Growth and Message Component:* We begin the process by choosing a particular stage in the development of the Church and identify some aspect of the Church's message important to that stage of growth, e.g., taking the first field of contextualization, the **kerygmatic**, we might choose as one aspect of the message the saving death and resurrection of our Lord.
- *Identify and/or establish needed Semantic/Lexical Fields:* The second step is to establish the existence of the basic terminology necessary for the communication of that message. In the case of this example, we can conclude that most people in the North American context are familiar with the general concepts of death and even substitutionary death.²⁵ If the vocabulary needed is not generally available we will have to devise strategies for introducing it into the target context.
- *Identify a point of entry at some Context Level:* The third step involves finding a "point of entry," some cultural theme with which we can connect the part of the Church's message we seek to communicate. Recent events in North America have led to a growing body of "folklore" honoring civil servants such as firefighters who gave their lives in an effort to save others during some catastrophe. Such stories might well provide a context (a redemptive analogy?) for a presentation of Christ's sacrifice.
- *Develop a specific means of introducing this information into the Internal Template of the Listener:* This final step involves using the language and media of the culture to actually make the connection anticipated in the previous step – what books, fliers, films, videos, testimonials, lectures, music, discussions groups, etc., could be used to present the message?

The Church offers the North American context a genuine alternative to many of the culture's apparent needs. The very notion of an alternative presupposes some degree of connection. What then are some of these points of contact between the Christian message and the North American culture? Consider, the remaining three fields of contextualization.

²⁵ This is not to say that they are understood in the same way, but the general concepts are at least available for use by the communicator.

3.2. Didactic Field: The English Language²⁶

One of the most important aspects of the Church's teaching ministry is the language or vocabulary used to communicate that content. I have indicated that the North American context appears to provide us with adequate lexical and semantic fields for this task. That being the case, effective contextualization of our teaching will require use of existing English religious language whenever possible. It is important to keep in mind that just as Greek, Slavic, and Roman Christians developed their respective liturgical languages, English-speaking Christians also developed a beautiful and usable liturgical language.

There are at least two reasons for using English liturgical language in North America. On the one hand, liturgical Greek or Slavonic function as an unmistakable ethnic markers and their frequent use gives the impression that the Church is not open to all people. On the other hand, many of the technical terms we habitually use at our services and in our classes are simply incomprehensible to the average North American visitor. Consider just a few: Matuschka (Khouria), Panakhida, Prokeimenon, Troparion. Why not use English equivalents, such as Mother, Memorial Service, Gradual, Hymn, and so on? While it may be true that not all of these English terms match the Greek equivalents exactly, neither do all Slavonic terms.²⁷ But, that is precisely the work of

²⁶ "A standardized English-language Orthodox terminology is necessary, if the Orthodox Church in this country and in the English-speaking world in general is to convey her message, her Truth, in a clear, precise, effective manner, and retain her identity." Constantine Cavarinos. Orthodox Christian Terminology. (Belmont: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1994), 9-10.

²⁷ There are, of course, several issues here. If there is simply no way for an English term to produce the required meaning, then we may indeed have to transliterate a Greek or Slavonic word and patiently teach its meaning. On the other hand, some immigrants to this country will not accept the equivalency of some English term simply because they do not yet possess adequate North American linguistic and cultural skills. That would indicate that contextualization may have yet another dimension.

contextualization – to find English equivalents that reasonably reflect the meaning needed for teaching.

3.3. Ecclesial: Accessible Worship

Most visitors to an Orthodox service want and need to see a congregation that sings the service well and enable the visitor to participate. In order to accomplish that, we may need to provide those who desire it some reasonable printed guide to the liturgy and some reasonable measure of musical score. In the case of mission plants, converts, inquirers and Orthodox from different ethnic musical backgrounds, it is particularly important to enable them without delay especially to begin singing the music successfully without delay, not only to avoid discouragement, but also to make a decent impression on visitors. American Christians are accustomed to singing, and they're not attracted to a church where they, and especially where the congregation, can't sing successfully.²⁸

One example of this type of contextualization is a booklet which contains everything (all the texts, necessary instructions, as well as the music) needed for the singing of Sunday Evening Vespers. It is currently being used in a small mission outpost. Although most of the regular participants are not yet Orthodox they are able to and obviously enjoy singing the service. Not surprisingly, the group is growing.

3.4 Apostolic: Diversity

One of the true treasures of North American culture is its ethnic diversity. People from all over the world have immigrated to this country without having to abandon their own ethnic, linguistic, and religious heritage. North Americans seem to be fascinated by

²⁸ I owe these observations to an exceptionally articulate and careful observer of an OCA mission effort. I have used some of his very words here.

and desirous of cultural plurality. This cultural theme is easily matched to the biblical injunction to preach the Gospel to all nations (Mt. 28: 19ff) and the obvious inclusion in the early Church of individuals from many ethnic backgrounds (Acts 2).

Yet, that does not seem to be the way in which our Church is known in this culture. Not long ago about a dozen parishioners and I were sitting around a table near the entrance to our building. Unexpectedly a stranger came in and asked what kind of church this was. Some one answered, “We are Orthodox.” To which the visitor replied, “Oh, Greek or Russian?” An uncomfortably long moment passed before another person said, “No, we are American.”

Indeed, that is what we should be trying to communicate, since that is not only one of the things our culture prizes, but also one of the things required of us – to be a Church for all peoples. One of the challenges we face is how to translate that into something understandable for our fellow Americans. On the one hand, we do a very good job of setting down the markers of our Slavonic tradition. Occasionally, our choir will spontaneously follow the English singing of “Many Years” with a Slavonic rendition. There can be nothing wrong with this, unless it is the only ethnic marker we set. If we are going to use Slavonic to honor individuals from that background, should we not also be in a position to so honor our Asian, Hispanic, French, German, or Scandinavian visitors and members?

Conclusion

What I have tried to do in this essay is to introduce the reader to a way of thinking – systematic and ordered way of looking at the challenge of communicating the Church’s message to listeners in a particular culture. Of course, there are those who would suggest

that all of this discipline is unnecessary, since we do (have been doing) all of this intuitively. Unfortunately, most of us cannot operate that way and the few and random successes of such desultory approaches to contextualization simply underscore the need for a more concentrated and disciplined approach. One of the greatest treasures of our history is the legacy left by thoughtful and disciplined contextualizers. God grant us the grace to emulate their example.