

STEP



Strategic Theological Education Partnerships

First STEP Seminar on International Theological Education

by Bruce Burkholder

Several years ago, I attended a conference on international theological education with another BMM missionary. The keynote speaker for the conference was a curriculum and faculty development consultant for seminaries and educational ministries throughout the Middle East. He was also a published author of several influential books on international theological education. The room was filled with dozens of missionary theological educators serving in most every part of the globe who were instructed, challenged, encouraged, and inspired by the conference. During one particularly challenging session, I remember looking at the other BMM missionary as we asked each other, “Why don’t we do this? Why can’t we hold a similar gathering for BMM theological educators?”

Last month, during the 2024 BMM Family Conference, STEP celebrated its first, of what we hope will be many, Seminar on International Theological Education. The seminar was held on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, followed by a fellowship breakfast and workshop on Friday morning. Some twenty missionaries, who serve in theological educational ministries in eight countries around the world, attended. It was a great time of ministry camaraderie and instruction.

The theme of the seminar was “Theological Education that Crosses Cultures.” Michael Carlyle, the Scripture Engagement Manager for Bible’s International, was the instructor of the seminar. The sessions were so instructive, challenging, and powerful that we want to share them with you. In this edition you will find a synopsis of the two sessions as well as a development of one point of application. You can also find the PowerPoint slides of the conference on the STEP website at bmmstep.org. Please make plans now to join us at next year’s seminar!

First STEP Annual Conference

by Mark Swedberg

I must make a confession: I never had much use for the topic of contextualization. I am a missionary kid who returned to the field he grew up on. While I have always recognized cultural differences between my birth country and my ministry country, the formal study of how different cultures function always seemed overblown. Don't get me wrong: I have studied the dos and don'ts of my host country very intently, but that was as far as it went. Cultural differences could be summed up as merely the differences in customs and ways of seeing things as epitomized in their different senses of humor. What changed my mind was STEP's conference on "The Importance of Understanding Culture in a Theological Education Ministry." The lecturer was Michael Carlyle.

What is culture?

Michael began by defining "culture." It is more than a collection of a people's customs. Although it has to do with worldviews, it is not an individual's personal worldview. It is the deeper values and beliefs shared by groups of people living in community, which shape the thought and behavior of the community and determine meaning in it. A culture is communicated and perpetuated through language and other outward forms, but the greater part of cultural values lies below the surface and are assumed or implied, rather than explicitly stated.

To be sure, some of the issues he raised were obvious to anyone who has lived in a different culture. For example, he listed some obstacles to communicating across cultures and then shared suggestions on gaining intercultural competence. These include things like being curious and open to new ways of viewing the world, a willingness to look through the eyes of others, a study of the invisible values, beliefs, and cultural conceptions behind the words of others, and becoming conscious of one's own culture.

Cultural categories

On the other hand, many topics were new to me or were presented in new categories. I expected to see lists of possible cultural differences which stand alone. Instead, Michael suggested that there are two primary cultural categories, but that these are best viewed as a continuum. Below are the two categories as Michael sees them.

<i>Modern West</i>	<i>Ancient and Majority-world</i>
Individualism	Collectivism
Democracy	Oligarchy
Literacy	Orality
Science & naturalism	Spiritism or animism
Industrial-technological economy	Peasant subsistence economy

Of these differences it is suggested that the first one (individualism v. collectivism) is the most important, with the other differences flowing from these. In an individualistic society, everything is viewed through the eyes of each individual, including what is the fundamental unit of society, what is most important society, how one views him or herself, and what is distinct. In a collectivist society, the fundamental unity is the group (family, clan, tribe), and the individual always thinks in terms of the group, not himself. He views himself as embedded in the group.

This collectivist view usually leads to a hierarchical society dominated by an oligarchy or even an individual who has the right to speak for the group. A collectivist society tends to orality instead of literacy, even if almost everyone can actually read.

A failure to bridge cultural gaps can cause many difficulties for the spread of the gospel. It generates miscommunication and misunderstanding, unnecessary cultural offences, additional obstacles to the belief, and weak or ineffectual Christians. An example of this is what has happened in Thailand. After approximately two hundred years of protestant missions, only about 1.2% of Thailand is Christian, and many of those who have become Christians have also become strangers to their own culture. While this slow growth cannot all be laid at the feet of the missionaries' failures to appreciate cultural differences, much of it can.

The need for contextualization

Nevertheless, conservative evangelicals have been slow to accept the need for contextualization, even as they have bought into some of the main tenets of contextualization theory for hermeneutics and homiletics. Michael believes that both are unfortunate. Why have conservative evangelicals been slow to accept the need for contextualization? Michael lists several reasons: (1) These ideas originated in liberal and ecumenical circles, and conservatives are rightly afraid of heresy, cultural relativism, and syncretism (putting culture over Scripture). (2) Conservatives generally have a strong commitment to Scripture over culture, to the point that they ignore culture altogether. (3) Many do not see the need for this because of cultural blindness due to their unquestioned, or even unconscious, commitment to their native culture. (4) Finally, many were paralyzed because of the complex nature of the discipline.

Cross-cultural missionaries face a daunting task in which three different cultures are involved: the original culture of the biblical text, the missionary's own culture, and the receptor culture. If any of these cultures are dealt with improperly, the result can be either eisegesis (reading ideas from a foreign cultural context into the biblical text) or syncretism (reshaping Christian faith and practice by blending them with dissonant aspects of the receptor culture's context).

Michael illustrates this with a poignant example from Cambodian culture. If someone were to tell a Cambodian that Christ was crucified to save us from our sins, every key term of that statement could be misconstrued. First, they have no concept of Christ and are likely to think of him as a powerful spirit not unlike the Buddha. Second, they don't understand crucifixion. About the only crucifixions they have seen is the crucifixion of chickens to appease demons. Finally, their culture has no good word for "sin." The closest thing to it would be a word that refers to bad deeds which cause bad karma. In this context, salvation would mean to reverse the bad karma and bring good karma.

The goal of contextualization

With this in mind, Michael stated that the goal of contextualization is to bring the Bible's full message, meaning, and authority to bear on people within a cultural context other than its own, while avoiding eisegesis and syncretism. The goal is not to make the gospel easier to embrace by getting rid of the difficult parts. The goal is to make the gospel intelligible to the receptor culture. This may make the gospel harder to embrace. One of Michael's main emphases was a relief to me based on what little I knew of the contextualization movement. He stated over and over that our goal is to orient our listeners to the Scriptures (not to the missionary) and to present the whole meaning of the text in its context, laying the burden to respond to God's Word on our hearers. While some may use "contextualization" as an excuse to remove the offense of the gospel, Michael's approach is more likely to exacerbate the offense of the gospel.

Concluding thoughts on the seminar

The STEP seminar did two things that are very important for the STEP ministry. First, it showed the level of expertise we have available to us in Baptist Mid-Missions. Second, it helped us as a ministry team to better understand what our task is. We want our STEP conferences to be informative and useful for the ministry of cross-cultural theological education. Michael's lectures did that in spades.



First STEP Annual Conference on July 16-19, 2024

STEP Seminar Questions

by Michael Carlyle

Hermeneutics & Homiletics

- Are students taught to see what is relevant in the Bible from an American perspective? What about the perspectives of the Bible's ancient Mediterranean writers and people from their own cultures?
- Should we teach students only to focus on the explicit statements in the Bible (LCC) while overlooking what the biblical writers meant to imply by them (HCC)?
- Should interpretive methods emphasize dissecting, objectifying, and characterizing the words in the Bible or relate passages in the Bible to their contexts, to each other, and to the whole message?
- Should our pedagogy provide abstract methodologies or model concrete practices?
- Should we teach students to preach abstract "principles" derived from the text or to preach the whole text including its context, concrete details, and cultural aspects?
- Should we change their implicit epistemology from external and concrete to internal and rational?
- Are we teaching proper contextualization in hermeneutics and homiletics?

Evangelism & Discipleship

- Are we reshaping future pastors from collectivist communities into individualists through the critical method, rational processes, and our communication style?
- How will this affect their preaching and leadership in their churches at home?
- How will this affect the ability of the church to reach others in the culture?
- Are we shortcutting evangelism and discipleship by teaching abstract propositional truth but not engaging students in the concrete through mentoring relationships or apprenticeship?
- Are we teaching propositional, abstract knowledge but not concrete, practical know how?
- How will this affect their leadership in their churches in the areas of shepherding and discipling?



Germany

by Scott Kenson

THEOLOGISCHES TRAININGS ZENTRUM



“How do we protect pastoral candidates from the liberalism that is being taught in the established theological institutions?” This was the question that missionaries and national pastors in and around Nuremberg, Germany faced in the late 1980’s. While there were established theological seminaries and Bible institutes, they had all capitulated to liberal doctrine, teaching higher criticism and the documentary hypothesis, positions which undermine the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. This situation drove missionary Jeff Brown to start a training program for doctrinally conservative, Baptist ministries. He was joined by fellow missionary Burdette Bergen and German pastor Oliver Meyer. The initial training was non-formal—there was no institution and no degree. The training took place during the evenings in various fellowshiping churches.

In 2010, the program was formalized with the establishment of the Theologisches Trainings Zentrum. This institute now attracts students from all over Germany and even as far away as Austria. Jeff Brown and Burdette Bergen have both retired, and today the

training program is administered by two German nationals who are assisted by a team of missionaries from BMM and GFA.

When asked what degrees TTZ offered, BMM missionary Mark Boyd replied, “none.” Somewhat surprised, I asked him “then what is the draw for students? Why would students study at your institute instead of at an accredited seminary where they can earn a degree?” Mark explained that to obtain national accreditation in Germany, training institutes are required to teach higher criticism and liberal theology. The students that are coming to TTZ come from conservative Baptist churches, and they do not want to learn liberal theology. They simply want to study God’s Word. He then went on to explain three additional factors that distinguish TTZ and make it a desirable choice for Germans interested in studying God’s Word.

The first factor that distinguishes TTZ is the educational system in Germany. Like much of Europe, Germans must begin pursuing a specialization in their studies at a very early



age. Only those with very good academic ability are accepted into a university where they receive degrees. Most Germans do not attend University, but instead they attend a trade school where they receive certificates showing that they have completed training in a specific craft. This allows them to find jobs in their area of expertise. TTZ is organized as a vocational training center rather than an academic institution. It trains men and women in the practical aspects of ministry. This adaption to the German educational system attracts people who are interested in learning ministry through an apprenticeship program.

The second distinguishing factor is its focus on ministry in the local church. TTZ believes that the church is central in God's program, and that the local church is the local expression of God's work throughout the world. As a result, TTZ only accepts students that are members of and actively serving in a local church. The pastor of prospective students must vouch for their character and involvement in the church. The idea is that while TTZ can provide education and instructional discipleship, the

practical hands-on work of mentoring the students must take place in the local church under the tutelage of their pastor. This focus on the local church sets TTZ apart from most other theological training institutes in Germany and is attractive to students who desire more than an academic degree.

The third distinguishing factor is an emphasis on systematic theology. Missionary Mark Boyd pointed out that TTZ is the only pastoral training institution in Germany that is teaching a comprehensive systematic theology from a conservative viewpoint!

Over the years TTZ has continued to grow. Even during the Covid year, TTZ saw an increase in the number of students. Prior to the pandemic, TTZ averaged 8-9 students per location, and now each location matriculates between 15-30 students!

In keeping with trade school practice, TTZ teaches its classes on weekday evenings. The classes are held in four different churches in and around Nuremberg and are taught by two

German pastors and two missionaries. The courses are taught in two semesters of 12 weeks. In the last 5 years, more than one hundred students have taken classes.

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TTZ is set up to be financially self-sustaining. Students are charged a small fee (\$15/class), but since all of the teachers are volunteers and the classes take place in local church buildings, the cost to run the program is minimal. The small fee charged to students is more than enough to cover the administrative costs of the program.

Regarding the future of the training center, TTZ is evaluating whether it should pursue accreditation through ECTE. This would require significant changes to the program, but graduates are requesting additional training, and currently they are limited in

their options. TTZ is evaluating whether the pursuit of accreditation and expansion of their program is in line with their philosophy of ministry training. Mark Boyd also said that TTZ is in the process of rethinking its pedagogy to better connect with European teaching methods, thus enabling students to better grasp the material.

Mark praises the Lord for the work of the missionaries who went before, especially Jeff Brown, who were instrumental in founding TTZ. He praises the Lord for the many students who have taken training and are actively serving the Lord in their local churches. One recent graduate is serving as an associate pastor, and another is a bi-vocational church planter who will be launching a new church in the next few months. Mark asks that we pray that God would grant them wisdom to improve the training and discipleship of students that attend TTZ.



Theologisches Trainings Zentrum's Graduation

Literacy vs. Orality

Principles for contextualized teaching

by Scott Kenson

During the STEP seminar at the BMM family conference, Michael Carlyle spoke on how various cultural issues impact learning and theological education around the world. He primarily focused on the need for appropriately contextualizing the message, working through several examples of how this should be done. In this article I will briefly examine one cultural issue relevant to theological education — orality vs. literacy — and will use a class on hermeneutics as an example of how to make use of oral cultural traits.

When talking about orality and literacy, we must start by defining our terms. In this article, literacy does not refer to those who can read, but rather to a smaller sub-section of people who primarily gain information through reading. Around the world there are many people who have the ability to read, but who prefer to learn through oral means rather than by reading. Likewise, I am using the terms *oral* and *oral culture* in this article to refer to those people and cultures who may have the ability to read, but who prefer to learn and get information through non-reading methods. For oral learners reading is a tedious task as they find reading material difficult to process. According to the International Orality Network¹ (www.oralty.net), 80% of the world's population are oral learners, preferring to receive information in non-literate forms. Those who have taught in Bible colleges and seminaries overseas can attest to the fact that although their students can read and do value books, they actually read very little and have difficulty understanding what they read. This has a major impact on how they process information and thus should affect our pedagogy. The following is a brief list of characteristics of oral cultures. These characteristics are but a few and have been selected due to their poignancy to theological education.

1. Oral cultures prize and make use of memorization. While “rote memory” or “parroting” is often scoffed at in western education systems, oral cultures value the role of memory in learning. In Joshua 1:8, God commands Joshua to meditate on the Law day and night. Likewise, the Psalmist in Psalm 1 says that the blessed man is the one who meditates on God's Word. In a culture where writing was not common, and personal copies of God's Word did not exist except for the King's handwritten copy, the only way a person could meditate on God's Word was to memorize it. Memorization is a foundational step in oral culture education, providing the data from which discussion, meditation, and application take place.

Oral cultures tend to make use of mnemonic devices to aid memory. Alliteration, acrostics, formulaic sayings, doubling sounds, proverbs, rhyme, songs, chants,

¹ While we are not in favor of the excesses of the Orality movement, the anthropological research that spawned the movement is beneficial and worthy of our consideration.

and slogans are all types of mnemonic devices that aid memory and are used extensively by oral cultures. Hebrew parallelism in wisdom literature was a form of mnemonic device. A bulleted outline is difficult for an oral learner to follow, and even harder for them to create, but a catchy phrase, a proverb, or a poem is easier to remember.

2. Oral cultures tend to be aggregative rather than analytic. For example, instead of dissecting and analyzing the various parts of a subject, oral cultures consider situations similar to the subject under discussion. Then they compare or contrast that subject with the new situation, revealing additional points of consideration. Many proverbs use this method of subject development. Rather than analyzing the subject, they use metaphors, similes or contrasts to bring out its important character qualities.

3. Oral cultures tend to process information through discussion rather than by writing papers. Western education makes extensive use of essays, term papers, dissertations, and journal articles as the primary means of processing and interacting with information. On the other hand, oral culture people need to discuss the subject among themselves, listening to and interacting with the thoughts of others to more fully process information. However, it is important to note that this discussion is best done among one's peers. As most oral cultures are hierarchical, in a group discussion where both elders and younger people are present, the younger people will rarely venture an opinion for fear of crossing an elder. In my personal experience, breaking into groups of three in a classroom setting is the ideal composition for discussion and group work.

4. Oral cultures make use of apprenticeships rather than instruction manuals. In oral cultures, skills are learned "on the job" through apprenticeships. The master is observed "in action" often providing little explanation of what is being done. The apprentice then attempts to imitate the master, while the master observes and offers correction and instruction. Subsequently, the apprentice is given freedom to practice the task under the master's authority and oversight. Finally, the apprentice is released to practice in his own right. It is my humble opinion, when working in oral cultures, that this master-apprentice model should be the backbone of our ministry training models.

5. Oral cultures tend to be pattern oriented rather than principle oriented. Going hand-in-hand with the master-apprentice model is the idea that what is done should be repeatable. The Western focus on books and abstract thinking has emphasized abstract principles as the best means of communicating large amounts of information. This is possible as these principles are written down and can be referred to again and again. Not so in oral cultures. Oral cultures tend to be repetitive rather than informative, looking for patterns to emulate rather than principles to apply.

To illustrate how these traits affect the training of national pastors, allow me to use the example of teaching hermeneutics to non-western, oral culture learners. In the West, hermeneutics is taught in principles, starting with principles on word analysis, grammar, and syntax. This is followed by lectures on the importance of a passage's literary context and historical background. Written exercises are given that require the students to analyze, dissect, and identify the minutiae of a given passage; however, the final exam will focus on an explanation of hermeneutical principles, assuming that Western learners are able to convert abstract theory into practice. To oral culture students this method is ineffective. While they may be able to ace a memory exam on the hermeneutical principles, they will not have the foggiest notion of how to actually do exegesis as they struggle to move from abstract to concrete practice. This was the actual experience of a national pastor who today is an excellent exegete of God's Word. He confessed that while he aced his hermeneutics exam in seminary, simply regurgitating the principles learned in class, the methods of instruction did not effectively show him how to exegete a passage or prepare a lesson from his exegesis. He would have been better served by learning hermeneutics through a master-apprentice model.

In an oral learning model, the master (professor/teacher) creates a repeatable pattern of how to do exegesis, starting from how to select a passage, through the application of hermeneutical principles, all the way to the completion of a lesson from that passage. (As part of the pattern, he should encourage/require memorization of the passage, provided it isn't too long.) He then models that pattern multiple times for the students until they learn how it works. He could then have the class as a whole work through a passage, while he guides the discussion. This could be done 2-3 times to allow the pattern to solidify in their minds, and to help them process what they are doing. Then he could break the class into groups of three, and have each group work on a passage, following the pattern demonstrated, while he monitors their progress, going from group to group to help them work through the pattern. Rather than write an academic paper, the groups could teach a lesson to the whole class. This group work can be done several times, with grades given collectively to each group. Mixing the groups after each round allows the more skillful students to help the less skillful students. This aggregative, discussion based, apprenticeship, and repetitive model will be much more effective to oral learners than the abstract, information-based model of many Western theological education institutions.

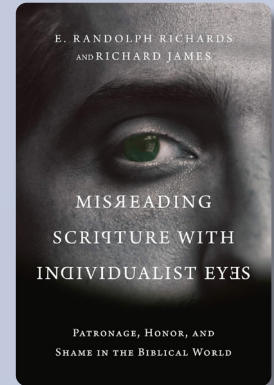
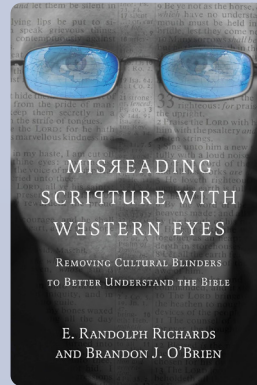
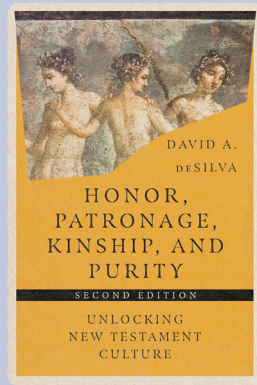
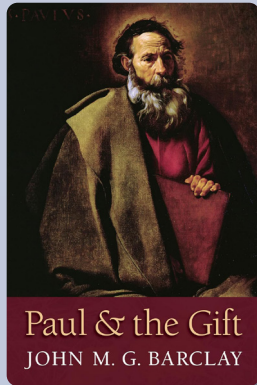
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If the International Orality Network is correct in their estimate that 80% of the world population are oral learners, then it is vital that we who train national pastors and leaders for ministry among their own people should adapt our pedagogy to aid them, rather than requiring them to adapt to our pedagogy to understand us.

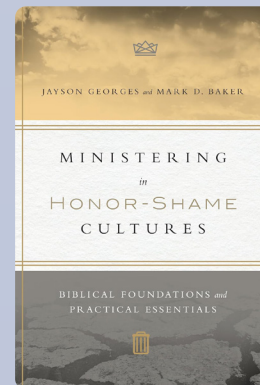
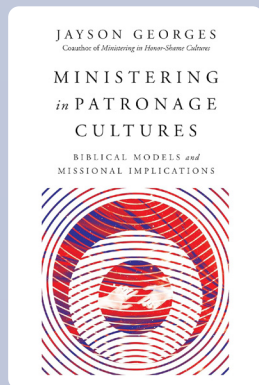
STEP Seminar Book Recommendations

by Michael Carlyle

- Cultures of the Bible:



- Contemporary majority-world cultures:



- Contextualization:

