

Exploring Biblical Theology as a Contextualization Method in Countries with a Semi-Established National Church

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Introduction and Thesis

The Protestant Church of Vietnam, just over 100 years old (Austin, Grey, and Lewis 2019, 153) exists primarily as the product of God's Spirit working through various dedicated missionaries from North America, Europe, and Asia. Unfortunately, the nascent missiology of these missionaries failed to consider the issue of contextualization. They believed that all the local community needed to establish and grow the church was a translation of the gospel message and some basic creedal works in Vietnamese. The theology of the works proved sound, but the philosophical construct and hermeneutical methodology did not fit the Vietnamese thought process. The Confucian-influenced educational mindset of Vietnam, which strongly discourages questioning teachers, buttressed the transfer of western theological ideas and approaches. Consequently, Vietnamese theologians have developed little credible theological work from their own cultural perspective and understanding of Scripture. In addition, the dominance of this western theological perspective has crippled the church in its mandate to relate the gospel to its culture in an organic way. This has impeded discipleship, as believers struggle to understand scriptural concepts taught through a western framework.

It seems that in order for the Vietnamese Church to more effectively evangelize and disciple, it needs a contextualized theology that addresses the real-life dimensions of the Vietnamese culture and Church. If the Vietnamese Church embraced a robust biblical theology, it could see more clearly, through its own worldview, how and what God has revealed about himself in Scripture (Mead 2007, 242). Once the Vietnamese Christian community understands biblical themes through its worldview, believers can develop a subset of systematics that will move them closer to a contextualized theology.

Sadly, much of the literature that addresses developing a contextual theology fails to adequately address the theological needs of Vietnam for