

A Strategy for Engaging Youth In Cross-Cultural, Tentmaking Ministry In The Evangelical Church Winning All, Nigeria

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Abstract

This article proposes cross-cultural tentmaking as a missiological strategy that can help engage lay professional youth in modern missions. In its introduction, the article articulates the need for an effective mission strategy that can help the Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria to more fully realize its goal of reaching the nations of the world with the gospel through evangelism and church planting. The cross-cultural tentmaking ministry approach of the apostle Paul serves as the biblical model. Ephesians 4:11–12 establishes the biblical basis and theological task of preparing all believers, including lay professionals, for works of service. Church history is also reviewed, exploring examples of professionals in various fields who have served as tentmakers and student movements which have contributed to the mission task of the church at various times. The important necessity of contextualization of the gospel is explored biblically and practically. Ephesians 4:11–12 builds a base for the biblical and theological task of

preparing people for works of service from the perspective of the social sciences. The article draws its conclusions and prescribes a cross-cultural tentmaking ministry strategy for the twenty-first century church and specifically for the Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria.

Keywords

cross-cultural, tentmaking, church planting, contextualization, missions, strategy

1. Introduction

Cross-cultural tentmaking is not a new concept in the arena of the global mission of the church. Through this means, ex-patriots carry out mission work in a cross-cultural setting, gaining access to their target country or context and earning their livelihood through the labor of their hands as a mission strategy. It has become useful and necessary in a world where the number of career missionaries continues to ebb, as many are denied entry into an increasing number of creative access countries (countries closed to traditional missionaries or gospel outreach). Added to this challenge is the disproportionate and limited access to global resources and weak economies, particularly in developing countries.

2. Apostle Paul: The Biblical Model of a Cross-cultural Tentmaker

2.1 Paul's call to ministry

At the onset, Paul knew that he was called to be a servant of the gospel to the Gentiles. His Roman citizenship and vast learning helped contribute to

his preparation for this God-ordained ministry calling. No reason is given in the NT to suggest that the apostle had any doubt as to what he had been called and commissioned to do. His life after his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) is a testimony to his sincere and total lifelong commitment to fulfil this calling. The NT is a witness to Paul's impact as a cross-cultural tentmaking church planter.

2.2 What Paul received as financial gifts

As we examine his life, it is apparent that in most cases, Paul provided for his own needs through tentmaking (Acts 18:3). But when he was on his journeys and in prison, Paul received "aid again and again" (Phil 4:15-19; 2 Cor 8:1-5).

Paul's language in 2 Corinthians 11:7-12 appears to undermine the fact that he did ministry while working to make his living. Very puzzling is the statement, "I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you" (v. 8). What is the idea here? Is Paul contradicting himself? The word "robbed" is to be understood as hyperbole, which Paul employs to challenge the Corinthians to accept the validity of his love and ministry to them in contrast to the false apostles that were attacking his credibility as a minister.

2.3 Paul's strategy

Paul's early ministry strategy was that he worked to support himself in ministry as depending on supporters during that initial period would have given the impression that he was after making money for himself. From his work environment, Paul presented his message to people and identified with them in their local contexts. He visited the Jewish synagogue in every

city he went and reasoned with the Jews. He met with Gentiles in his workplace and other places like the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus (Acts 19:9). In effect, Paul's ministry strategy was that he became all things to all men that by all means he might save some (1 Cor 9:22).

2.4 The value of Paul's strategy today

First, Paul's strategy is potent, adaptable and implementable. It gives an example through which lay professionals can be mobilized without negating or changing their profession and identity or turning them into clergy as some traditional missionary agencies seem bent on doing with their candidates. Second, Paul's strategy provides a biblical and theological basis for a tentmaking ministry. When tentmakers can see from Scripture the example of a tentmaker like Paul, they know that their ministry strategy has biblical support. Third, Paul's strategy helps define the nomenclature, 'tentmaker.' 'Tentmaker' is a term with varying definitions. The lack of a consensus definition presents a big challenge. Fourth, Paul's strategy of tentmaking significantly mitigates the challenge of raising funding and support personnel.

3. Cross-cultural Tentmaking Beyond Paul

Church history teaches that a wide range of professionals, such as artisans, businesspeople, cobblers, explorers, medical workers, and members of the military assigned to other countries, ventured into tentmaking ministry from the eleventh century to the present. By the privilege of their professions, these people served in foreign cross-cultural contexts that afforded them the opportunity to share the gospel. They did not require sending churches, financial supporters or missionary visas. Their professions negated the

need for all of these, though the need for a sending church is a recognized biblical necessity for any person headed into cross-cultural ministry (as was Antioch for the apostle Paul). In Paul's fashion, these 'professionals' in the history of the church made 'tents' that supported their cross-cultural ministry endeavors.

The Moravians used this strategy effectively in the eighteenth century. For example, in 1754, two Moravian tentmakers went to Surinam in Latin America and worked as tailors to support their ministry. Soon, others joined them, and a bakery and watchmaking industry were added to the business. The locals who came in search of jobs were not just hired but were also introduced to Jesus Christ. The industry was named, Christoph Kersten and Co.—meaning, “Christ-bearer Christian and Company.” The Moravians made a success of this business outfit that eventually established branches in other countries and cities such as New York, Hamburg, and Amsterdam. It continued to support the church both in carrying out the Great Commission and financially (Wilson 1980, 30).

The Moravians believed that donor support was inadequate for the carrying out of the Great Commission and therefore encouraged missionaries to be involved in business to augment their ministry funding and reach people through such initiatives. They were sturdy in their ministry approach and philosophy, believing that God has called every single Christian as a missionary and they should be seen to be doing this daily through their various vocations.

4. A Survey of Student Movements and their Impact on the Spread of the Gospel

4.1 Students' role in the pre-Reformation era

Before the advent of universities in any form, Pierre (also known as Peter) Abelard (1079–1142) was willing to be denied his inheritance rather than abandon the life of a student. While searching for knowledge, he wandered from one cathedral school to another in France, sharpening his reasoning and analyzing the presuppositions of his professors. In this quest, Abelard became what could be termed the originator of the method of inquiry that later birthed the university system (Hunt 1991, 22).

About 150 years later, notable students like Wycliffe, Huss, Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, Tyndale, and others from various campuses led student movements in missions that prepared the ground for the Protestant Reformation.

4.2 Students' role in the Protestant Reformation

The events that culminated in the Protestant Reformation were more than philosophical and religious as power structures were challenged and political alignments changed. Persecution came from all sides according to religious convictions. Violation of perceived orthodoxy was both a civil as well as a religious offense. Thousands died (Hunt 1991, 28). Nevertheless, this persecution yielded something positive for the Church—a revival. This is because Protestant students responded to missions and world evangelization.

A case in point was the work of Jacob Spener (1635–1705) in Germany who founded a university in Halle, which became the base for Christian outreach where, under the leadership of A. H. Francke (1663–1727), the first

Protestant students responded to missions and world evangelization. It has been said that the first Reformation rescued believers within the church; the second Reformation gave believers a missionary vision.

5. Preparing Tentmakers Following the Mandate of Ephesians 4:11–12

The challenge of preparing the saints for their ministry, in this case cross-cultural tentmaking church planters, must include Paul's injunction in Ephesians 4:11–12, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

An effective tentmaker comes about through deliberate and systematic coaching by gifted teachers and church leaders. For the purpose of this work, which specifically focuses on the youth, coaching is to be carried out on a three-phase approach: identifying, equipping, and engaging lay youth. The youth in question are those who have been or are being trained in a variety of professional disciplines. The goal is to train them as tentmakers to carry out cross-cultural ministry in consonance with Ephesians 4:11–12.

6. Contextualization as a Missiological Strategy

The effectiveness of any cross-cultural worker seeking to communicate a message, in this case the gospel of Jesus Christ, demands the ability to frame the message so it is understood by the receptors. This process is identified with the word contextualization in current mission parlance.

The word "contextualization" is derived from the Latin word *contextus*, conveying the idea of "weaving together" (Sanchez 1998, 318).

Various writers give their take on its meaning. Stetzer (2014, 1) defines contextualization as an attempt to present the gospel in a culturally relevant way. Bevans (2005, 5) sees it as an attempt to understand how the process, interpretation, and experience of religion interplay through the overarching influence of culture. Ott and Strauss (2010, 266) opine contextualization as relating the never-changing truths of Scripture to ever-changing human contexts so that those truths are clear and compelling. Contextualization, then, is a platform for engagement between the gospel and culture, intended to create acceptable inroads to a target community of faith.

The enterprise and challenge of contextualization considers faith and context as indispensable and inseparable missiological allies. Bevans (2005, 3) opines that religion (faith) cannot exist in a vacuum of time and space. It cannot, therefore, effectively function outside any type of social (context) attachment. Concurring, Bergman (2003, 3) asserts that contextualization is an interface between the gospel and the reality of where the people are.

It is obvious how necessary and important contextualization is as a missiological strategy. It defines the broad spectrum of context, which includes the social, historical, cultural, religious, political, economic, and scientific identity of the host culture. These ingredients define people's ethos and identity. Successful evangelism, discipling, and church planting are not achieved until these areas are touched. So, training of cross-cultural tentmakers must include these elements and practice in the skill of contextualized communication of the gospel.

7. Biblical Basis for Contextualization

7.1 Contextualization in the OT

The OT is a product of contextualization, considering the way and manner God revealed himself and interacted with mankind, with his people, and with the nations.

- The fall—Engle (1983, 91) submits that the consequences of the fall came in the form of radical changes as they occur in the content, means, and forms of divine communication, due to the change in the receptors.
- The Tower of Babel—This encounter presents another contextualization dilemma in the Bible (Gen 11:1–9). The consequence of divine judgment leads invariably to the need for contextualization.
- Cultural and cultic engagements—The OT narrates the interface between the Hebrew culture and those that surrounded it in biblical antiquity. Yahweh modified and reinterpreted these cultural forms and religious rituals, which, as Davies (1997, 198) argues, were already in existence. Some of the key tenets that defined Israel’s peoplehood and their relationship to Yahweh were part of this reinterpreted corpus.

7.2 Contextualization in the NT

There can be no meaningful dialogue on the subject of biblical contextualization that does not begin with the divine purpose and mandate given by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20. This mandate is specifically that the gospel be preached to all nations. Contextualization is assumed as a strategy for communicating “all that Christ commanded” and “discipling the nations.”

In another example, Acts 17 narrates Paul's cross-cultural ministry in three different cities representing three different kinds of people and contexts. He contextualized his message based on the audience. Effective contextualization takes into account the uniqueness of the cultures and peoples being engaged and is demanded when doing cross-cultural tentmaking as modelled by the apostle Paul and the early church.

8. Conclusion

This article has attempted to show how the apostle Paul effectively modeled cross-cultural tentmaking ministry by working to meet his needs while in ministry. This is done with the aim of money not becoming a barrier to his ministry to people he is trying to reach with the gospel. Church history demonstrates that professionals in diverse fields have followed a strategy of cross-cultural tentmaking while working to make Christ known to the nations. Contextualization, which is essential in cross-cultural ministry, is seen to have been evident in the OT and NT. In conclusion, it is reasoned that cross-cultural tentmaking ministry is a call for today's church, which has been empowered through diverse spiritual gifts to mobilize its members for ministry. The Evangelical Church Winning All in Nigeria, with its large numbers of young people can effectively use this ministry strategy and realize its goal of reaching other nations of the world with the gospel. Churches that have similar passion can make this endeavor as well. Available lay professional young people need to be identified, equipped, and engaged.

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