

One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization

Jackson Wu

William Carey Library, 2015, \$19.99.

—**Reviewed by Nathan Hart**, pastor, Stanwich Church in Greenwich, Connecticut; MDiv, Princeton Theological Seminary.

I grew up in the American Midwest, in a small town where most people spoke English with the same accent. I didn't think we spoke with an accent. I thought Southerners and Long Islanders and British people did. Later, I learned that all English speakers have an accent of one kind or another. Language contextualizes wherever it is spoken in community.

The gospel, too, contextualizes wherever it is taught and believed. Jackson Wu, with his book *One Gospel for All Nations*, has endeavored to "simplify something so inherently complex as contextualization" (Introduction, xxi). Wu states that the Bible transcends all human cultures and is also relevant for each one. The goal of any missionary is to take this transcendent truth and speak it in the unique accents of local contexts.

After showing, in section one, that contextualization must begin with biblical interpretation, Wu develops a mission model in section two which he suggests is suitable for fluctuating cultures. Fluctuating cultures are all living cultures, which are always changing. In this section, Wu describes three themes in which the Bible presents the gospel, namely Kingdom, Covenant, and Creation. Each of these can be communicated contextually in various human cultures.

Throughout the book, Wu offers practical approaches for teaching, preaching, and applying the gospel in various cultural settings, most frequently those in China and the United States. In section four, Wu clearly proposes several practical steps necessary for any missionary who seeks to contextualize the Bible. He reminds the reader that missionaries need more training in biblical theology, not just systematic theology, and that they need to better understand biblical interpretation. This section crystalizes Wu's main themes, which center the idea of contextualization on the Bible itself instead of on the varieties of human culture. In this sense, Wu accomplishes his goal of simplifying the idea of contextualization.

However, in chapter six ("Process: How Do We Move From Biblical Text To Cultural Context?"), Wu complicates, rather than simplifies, his main idea. With many charts, graphs, and metaphors, Wu leaves the reader overburdened with too many words and concepts. It would have been more helpful, and simplifying, if he had stuck with a single metaphor and extrapolated it in various ways.

Overall, Wu's book is a helpful contribution to the field of missions and gospel communication worldwide. It should help missionaries learn to speak truth with any accent.

Check these titles:

Livermore, David A. 2009. *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic.

Nieman, James R. and Rogers, Thomas G. 2001. *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Tisdale, Leonora Tubbs. 1997. *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

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