

## Third International Training Consultation

Dubuque 27 – 31 May 2014

Theme: “Hermeneutics for the heart...and mind”

Plenary Sessions: *A Contextualized Gospel that is True to the Faith – Theological Challenges*

Presented by John Hitchen

### Outline/ Overview of Plenary Sessions

The overall aim of the four Conference Plenary sessions is to stimulate thought and discussion on the theme of *contextualization* and how it relates to our Christian Brethren bible teaching and theological education tasks around the world today. Hence the overall title for the Plenary Sessions:

From the Programme you will note that subheadings of that major Theme are listed for each plenary. This overview gives a little more explanation of what is planned (DV).

Outlines of the four Plenary presentations will be posted to your *Dropbox* from the beginning of the week, Monday 19 May 2014. They will give reasonably full outlines of the expected content of each session. The full text of each presentation will be available by the night before each presentation- through you *Dropbox*, or in hard copy if necessary.

To help in your general orientation and prayerful preparation, the following summaries may be helpful:

#### Plenary Session One: Wednesday 28 May 2014 [2.1 on Programme]

Title: *What Do You Mean - Contextualize the Gospel?*

Sub-Theme: **A Hermeneutic for all: Penetrating hearts and minds globally.**

This study addresses the question in the title by commencing with a definition of what we mean by evangelical contextualization, and giving biblical reasons for contextualizing. It then offers, not so much a model of contextualization, but principles for understanding culture and biblical truth, and how these inter-relate in appropriate contextualization. We particularly note the way the trans-cultural biblical metaphors, which convey the meaning of theological terms and biblical truth, play a crucial role in any contextualization. The principles highlighted, we suggest, can help ensure the living word of the Gospel penetrates hearts and minds globally.

#### Plenary Session Two: Thursday 29 May 2014 [3.1 on Programme]

Title: *The Good News of Christ's Uniqueness*

Sub-Theme: **A Hermeneutic shield: Protecting hearts and minds globally**

The second session studies Paul's Letter to Colossians as an example of contextualization in action. First we explore the background to the Letter to identify what was pressurizing the Colossian Christians to turn to other beliefs and rituals to supplement what they had received in the Gospel. We then work through the letter to discover the steps or strategy by which Paul responded to these

syncretistic challenges. In this way we seek to identify the aspects of Christ's fullness the Apostle saw as essential to reinforce commitment to the uniqueness and total sufficiency of our Lord Jesus Christ over against these cancerous alternative teachings threatening the Colossian believers. The problem the Colossians faced, we suggest, combined the challenges of a dominant (foreign) religion, mixed with pressures from previous traditional belief systems, and an all pervading, globalizing, surrounding culture. Since directly comparable challenges face our churches, this study addresses ways we can uphold the uniqueness and all-sufficiency of Christ in our churches today to help protect hearts and minds of believers globally. Since Paul also used songs to convey his strategy to the Colossians, we shall punctuate the study with some songs of our own.

### **Plenary Session Three: Friday 30 May 2014 [4.1 on Programme]**

**Title: *When the Gospel Confronts and Crosses Cultural Frontiers***

**Sub-Theme: A Hermeneutic key: Reaching hearts and minds across cultures**

Our third plenary turns to Paul's Letter to the Galatians for another exemplar for contextualization. If attacks on the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ, as at Colosse, represent the major *theological* threats facing our churches today, then Galatians addresses the major *mission, or missiological* challenge: Must one dominant culture's way of expressing the Gospel be embraced and copied without change in every other culture in today's world? Paul confronts those imposing Jewish religious and cultural expectations on the newly converted Galatian believers, and declares firmly that faith alone brings a believer into a right relationship with God through Christ Jesus. Therefore the norms or expectations of other cultures do not need to be added to faith for a full experience of salvation. So, circumcision and Jewish food laws and rituals were no longer necessary for peoples of other cultures to enter and enjoy new life in Christ. Paul builds up a carefully developed argument throughout the letter to show why this is true. We explore the range of teachings the Holy Spirit presents as components of that argument, and suggest they are all equally necessary today, particularly in cross-cultural mission settings, or in churches with an overseas missionary heritage. The letter's clarion call for faith, grace and their resulting freedom has not always been heeded in recent mission and church relationships globally. Lack of appreciation of these realities still hinders the Gospel from reaching hearts and minds across cultures today.

### **Plenary Session Four: Friday 30 May 2014 [4.2 on Programme]**

**Title: *Training for Transition: Contextualization and transitioning to a new generation of local leadership.***

**Sub-Theme: Ensuring the Personnel for Ongoing Contextualization**

Our final study turns to a major personnel issues in contemporary church life – the widespread need for transitioning to the next generation of younger leaders in our churches and mission outreach. Focussing on 2 Timothy 1-2, we draw out relevant biblical principles, again noting the depth and breadth of concepts the Apostle brings to bear for addressing such a practical subject. With the help of insights from the writings and practice of our pioneer Christian Brethren missionary, Anthony Norris Groves, we add some historical perspectives for considering the importance of and our approach to succession planning and transition in our church and training networks today.

