

**Principles and Criteria for Doing Contextual Theology in
Melanesia:
Part Two – Principles and Criteria for Doing and Assessing
Theology in Context**

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Abstract

The first part of this two part paper outlined Bloesch's theological method and his approach to scripture, while the second part critically interacts with his method with a view to determining principles and criteria for doing theology in context. In doing so, it proposes methodological principles and criteria, for doing and assessing the effective implementation of contextual theology in Melanesia.

Introduction

Building on the first of this two part paper which outlined Bloesch's theological method, part two

critiques Bloesch's theological method and approach to Scripture with a view determining principles and criteria for doing and assessing the effective implementation of theology in the Melanesian context. In doing so, the scope and interrelationship of key elements of theological method, namely, tradition, culture, social change and experience will be elaborated upon.

Implication One: Relational Revelationalism

Bloesch's theological method, of faith seeking understanding, rightfully recognises that theology presupposes faith. He calls this *fideistic or dynamic revelationalism*. While recognising that his method assumes a faith perspective, and that it is dynamic in character, I would suggest a better description would be "relational revelationalism." This is because the primary focus of his method is neither faith, nor the dynamic encounter, but God in Jesus Christ, who is the object of faith, and the subject of the dynamic encounter. It is this focus that is central to his whole methodology, which helps him in his attempt to avoid the problem of rationalism (Scholastic Orthodoxy) on the one hand, and experientialism (Liberalism) on the other. His whole epistemology is worked out in an effort to maintain a mediating position between these two poles.

I would suggest, therefore, that, rather than describing his method as “faith seeking understanding”, it would be better to describe it as “faith seeking understanding and relationship in the dynamic revelational encounter”, with the emphasis upon the “relationship” aspect. The focal point of Bloesch’s theology and method is God, who is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ. The focus is not on a rational or propositional understanding of Scripture, but on knowing the God of whom the Scriptures speak. Neither is it on the experience of faith, whether mystical or otherwise, but on encountering God in the revelational experience. This issue of knowing God is at the heart of contextualisation and the development of a contextual theology. Too often we have focused on the process of communicating the gospel and establishing the faith, before first dealing with the more fundamental issue of “the understanding of the ... knowledge of God in context.”¹ How God can be known and understood within the confines of culture and world view specific to particular human contexts is the foremost question of contextualisation.

Bloesch’s answer is of course faith - faith seeking understanding - and, I might add, relationship in the dynamic revelational encounter, which leaves us with a circular argument. While circular, I believe that this is the best way to approach this problem of contextualisation. The knowledge of God about which we speak is not primarily information about God but relationship with God in the biblical sense of a man knowing his wife and sharing intimate relationship with her.² Thus faith and God’s revelational self-disclosure of himself in dynamic encounter are the means by which God can be known.

Yet, in talking about God’s self-disclosure to human beings we are speaking about the paradox of God’s revealed-hiddenness, which makes the theory of contextualisation extremely difficult.³ Bloesch elaborates upon this, “Our knowledge of God and Christ is indirect, since it is mediated to us through a particular history”,⁴ he then goes on to state that:

Faith signifies an encounter with the Word of God, but this Word is enveloped in mystery. The person of faith is not, however, overwhelmed by mystery, for meaning shines through mystery. We have in the Christ revelation both the disclosure of meaning and the fulfilment of meaning (Reinhold Niebuhr), but this is a partial disclosure and a partial fulfillment. Faith has both mystical and rational elements. Faith consists in an experience that is at the time united with the word. The object of faith is not an ineffable presence but a spoken message or a living Subject who speaks a definite word concerning himself.⁵

¹ Charles Van Engen, “The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context” in *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, ed. D. S. Gilliland (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 75.

² Gen 4:1.

³ Van Engen, “The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context”, 75.

⁴ Donald G. Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), 205.

⁵ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 205-206.

While we know God through faith, the reality is that we only have a partial understanding. This is partly due to the fact that God's self-disclosure takes place within the context of human cultures; consequently, it is, as Charles Van Engen suggests, "like a square peg in a round hole."⁶

Before taking this further, I must make a few brief comments on Bloesch's attitude to philosophy and culture. First, he rejects philosophical reasoning in favour of a theology based upon faith which purports to be superrational. While agreeing with his emphasis of faith seeking understanding and the supernatural nature of the revelational encounter, I find myself at odds with Bloesch's statement that faith being superrational leads "to a truth that transcends human imagination and perception."⁷

In one sense, I must agree, because God is infinite and we are finite, and our knowledge is limited even when illuminated by the Holy Spirit. However, whatever understanding we have and how we express it is rationally organised within the world view and philosophical framework in which we function as human beings who belong to a particular cultural and historical context. There is, in fact, no other way of knowing, perceiving and understanding. Bloesch's statement, "Faith seeking understanding" is itself a philosophical propositional statement, every bit as much as Descartes, "I think therefore I am." We must recognise that even the non-rational elements of knowing are themselves conditioned by the same cultural, world view and philosophical framework from which we operate.⁸ There is no other kind of knowing. In the same vein Roger Haight writes that:

All knowledge of God is knowledge that is mediated through the world. There is no immediate knowledge of God precisely because God is transcendent and other than the world while all human knowledge, like freedom itself, is bound to and mediated through the world. Even what appears to be "direct" experience or knowledge of God is really a mediated immediacy because it cannot be had apart from the existence of human freedom in the world and its determination by the world and society ... Revelation has always been considered by Christians as the word of God. But that word of God must "appear" in human consciousness to be heard.⁹

The illuminating work of the Spirit, which produces within us the certainty of faith, does not bypass our normal human framework of knowing and experiencing, but communicates within the constraints that it presents. The incarnation itself would seem to prove God's commitment

⁶ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 75.

⁷ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 59.

⁸ Elmer M Colyer in "A Theology of Word and Spirit: Donald Bloesch's Theological Method", (http://apu.edu/~CTRF/articles/1996_articles/colyer.html, 1996), par. 84.

⁹ Roger Haight, *An Alternative Vision: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 8-9 and 56.

to communicating within our world, within the confines and limitations that are part of our finite humanity. Perhaps Bloesch is overreacting to the kind of rationalism from which he seeks to disassociate himself.

Second, Bloesch's position on culture seems to be inconsistent with his role as a mediating theologian and his dialectical approach to theology, for he advocates a "Christ-transforming-culture" or theology of confrontation position. This position focuses upon the discontinuity that exists between faith and culture and brings him very close to the fundamentalist camp. He chooses the transformational principle almost to the exclusion of the indigenising principle, focusing on crisis rather than process. Without dealing with this in-depth at this point, I would suggest that, apart from his reformed pessimism and hesitation concerning culture, he is reacting to a liberal position that falls into the danger of over-contextualisation of the gospel, thus making the gospel subservient to the cultural "interests and ideological predilections" of the group.¹⁰ I agree with Stanley J. Grenz, who argues that, "... if there is indeed both discontinuity and continuity between creation and new creation, then as theologians we must be open to finding traces of divine grace within our present situation, even in its depravity and fallenness."¹¹

In contradistinction to Bloesch, I would suggest that we need to engage in what Stott calls "double listening", bringing together both poles of theology in a mediating position. Stott writes:

How can we relate the Word to the world, understand the Word in the light of the world? We have to begin with a double refusal. We refuse to become either so absorbed in the Word, that we escape into it and fail to let it confront the world, or so absorbed in the world that we *conform* to it and fail to subject it to the judgement of the Word. Escapism and conformity are opposite mistakes, but neither is a Christian option.¹²

Following this "double refusal" he advocates a "double listening" to both the Word and the world. In listening to the Word, we do so humbly in order to understand and obey both the written and living Word, while in listening to the world we do so critically and sympathetically, desiring to understand and discover the grace of God at work within it.¹³

¹⁰ David J. Bosch 1983. "An Emerging Paradigm for Mission." *Missiology* 11/4 (1983): 501.

¹¹ Stanley J. Grenz, "'Fideistic Revelationalism' Donald Bloesch's Antirationalist Theological Method" in *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch*, ed. E. M. Colyer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 56.

¹² John R. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 27.

¹³ Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, 28.

Van Engen places the issue of knowing God in his revealed-hiddenness in multiple cultural and diverse contexts within the framework of the biblically revealed covenant,¹⁴ arguing that, "The covenant refers to the actions of God in history which reveal the eternal God's hiddenness in relationship with his people through time and space."¹⁵ He then elaborates upon this:

In the covenant we find a historically conditioned (or better, a historically contextualized relationship) between an eternally present God and a temporally specific humanity. The historicity of the covenant forms also means a tremendous variety of cultural, political, and social contexts in which the covenant may be found. Thus in the covenant we have essentially the same relationship at all times and in all places, and yet one which takes on radically different forms in each time and place.¹⁶

Van Engen recognises one covenant in many contextualised manifestations: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus Christ. Each represents the same relational meaning with a progressive increase in knowledge; the contextual form changes but the relational meaning remains substantially the same. The progressive nature of the covenant involves both continuity and discontinuity.¹⁷ He sees the contextualisation of the covenant relationship in each new Scriptural setting as analogous to the process of knowing God in every new cultural context to which the faith is extended.¹⁸

Van Engen advocates a narrative approach to the Scriptures, involving the "re-presentation" of the covenant message and relationship, so that the people of God, in the here and now, may participate "in both past and future events where God had broken into history in relationship with God's people."¹⁹ It is this participation in the covenant relationship, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people"²⁰, which brings continuity in the midst of a variety of outward expressions.²¹ He quotes Charles Taber with respect to the process:

As converts together study and obey the Scriptures, and as their testimony begins to penetrate the broader context, it is indeed the aim of contextualization to promote the transformation of human beings and their societies, cultures, and structures, not in the image of a western church or society, but into a locally appropriate, locally revolutionary representation of the Kingdom of God in embryo, as a sign of the Kingdom yet to come.²²

¹⁴ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 74-100.

¹⁵ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 78.

¹⁶ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 79.

¹⁷ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 80-81.

¹⁸ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 80-81.

¹⁹ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 79.

²⁰ Gen. 17 and 19; see also Ex. 19, 24, 29, 34; Lev. 26; Jos. 24; 1 Sam. 12; 2 Sam. 23:5; Ps. 89; Jer. 31; 2 Cor. 6; and Rev. 21.

²¹ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 78-81.

²² Charles Taber, "Contextualization, Indigenization and/or Transformation" in *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium (North American Conference on Muslim Evangelization, Colorado Springs, 1978)*, ed. D. M. McCurry (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, 1979), 150.

It is in the ever-changing cultural contexts of the church throughout history, in differing locations, that God is known through the Word and the Spirit, who ever-anew inspires, guides and teaches the covenant people of God as they build upon the knowledge of those who have gone before.²³

Van Engen then suggests that we must not reinvent the wheel for each new cultural setting. Melanesian contextual theology, for example, is not “an addition to nor a subtraction from, historical theology,” but the occasion of it in its latest manifestation.²⁴ Consequently, Melanesian contextual theology builds upon that which has gone before, while reflecting upon, deepening its understanding of, and extending “God’s unique covenantal self-revelation in Scripture, fulfilled in Jesus Christ” within its own unique context.” Therefore, we must acknowledge the unique character of “God’s self-disclosure in each new context.”²⁵ For it is as the knowledge of God is rooted in each new culture, and as the people of God “grow in their covenantal relationship” with God, that “a broader, fuller, and deeper understanding of God’s revelation” becomes available to the church worldwide.²⁶

Conclusions

I propose the following methodological principles for doing contextual theology from within the evangelical-reformed tradition in Melanesia.

- The primary goal of contextual theology is not the contextualisation or transmission of knowledge about God, but the development of relationship with God in Jesus Christ.
- Faith seeking understanding and relationship in dynamic encounter is foundational to the theological process.

I propose the following criteria for assessing the effective implementation of contextual theology from within the evangelical-reformed tradition in Melanesia.

- Contextual theology has been effectively implemented when those who are the receptors of the faith come to know God in Jesus Christ in an authentic and living way.
- Contextual theology has been effectively implemented when a vital relationship with Jesus Christ becomes foundational to faith in the new context.
- Contextual theology has been effectively implemented when this relationship is expressed in a culturally appropriate manner.

²³ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 92.

²⁴ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 93.

²⁵ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 93.

²⁶ Van Engen, "The New Covenant: Knowing God in Context", 95.

Implication Two: Point of Contact and Natural Theology

Bloesch asserts that there is no point of contact and rejects any prospect of natural theology. However under the influence of Calvin he does allow grudgingly for what I would describe as a pre-contact (or pre-relational) knowledge of God. The unconverted person may have an external knowledge of the gospel and an understanding of the general presence of God in nature and history, but he insists that this “does not become a revelation of his grace and mercy until it is perceived in the light of Jesus Christ.”²⁷

Part of Bloesch’s problem is that he assumes that humanity’s encounter with God involves crisis rather than process; therefore, he emphasises discontinuity at the expense of continuity. While I agree with him, that no person can come to God unless God reveals himself to them in Jesus Christ. I would suggest that often this comes about through a gradual process in which knowledge of God and commitment to God slowly increase over an extended period of time, until an authentic relationship is established. In such circumstances, the break with the past is less clearly defined, and continuity with the past is more obvious, than in the crisis kind of encounter. The pre-contact or pre-conversion knowledge of God may merge into the conversion and post-conversion knowledge of God.

Certainly, the pre-contact knowledge of God has a role to play both prior to and after conversion. Prior to conversion, according to Paul in Romans 1, the unbelievers (Gentile) are without excuse because they suppress the truth about God that is plain to them.²⁸ The force of Paul’s reasoning moves in a different direction to Calvin (Bloesch and Barth) who stresses the “noetic impairment” due to sin. Calvin differentiates between the knowledge of God revealed in nature and that, which is “perceived by sinful human reason.” Calvin’s position makes it difficult to argue that unbelievers (Gentiles) are morally responsible for suppression of their knowledge of God when they only perceive it dimly. What Paul is saying is not that they knew so little, but rather, considering their context, how much they knew “and how little use they made of” the knowledge available to them.²⁹ It is not simply that their sinful nature hindered them from perceiving the knowledge of God in nature; rather it caused them to reject and not act upon that knowledge, making them guilty before God. The problem was not primarily one of understanding but of obedience and lack of acknowledgement, as it always has been since the fall of Adam.³⁰ Consequently, in Rom. 1:21 Paul tells us that the result of

²⁷ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 164.

²⁸ Rom. 1:18-20.

²⁹ David Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 31 and also 25.

³⁰ See Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 23-39.

their failure to acknowledge and obey God was that “their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

However, we must not lose sight of the fact that for Bloesch, Calvin and Barth, knowledge of God is not so much knowledge about God but rather a personal relationship with God, resulting in a life of obedience. Knowing God involves loving God and obeying God. For them pre-contact or pre-relational knowledge of God is not salvific knowledge in that it does not result directly in a genuine relationship with God. Hence, Bloesch, and his mentors, are using the term ‘knowledge’ in the Hebrew sense of *yada* which carries the idea of concrete encounters, direct experience of and sharing in an objective event; thus, experience or revelation mediates knowledge.³¹ The Hebrew term also includes the idea of ‘reciprocity’ to know God is to participate in some kind of relationship with God.³² However, within Greek thought, the term ‘knowledge’ refers to intellectual knowledge or something possessed as a commodity by the mind.³³ It is this kind of knowledge which is in focus when Paul addresses the Athenians at the Areopagus in Acts 17:20-21. I would suggest that God’s special revelation of himself in Jesus Christ brings us into the Hebrew kind of knowing in the sense of intimate relationship,³⁴ whereas natural knowledge of God in nature and history is all about the Greek kind of knowing, which is intellectual and impersonal. Failure to make this distinction and to acknowledge both kinds of knowing is at the heart of the debate over natural theology and point of contact.

This pre-conversion knowledge means that conversion and encounter with God in Jesus Christ does not take place in a knowledge vacuum. The God, who is encountered as redeemer, becomes more fully known as creator as the latent and suppressed knowledge of God experienced in nature and history begins to flourish and bear fruit and as the image of God once defaced now begins the process of restoration under the tutelage of the Word and the Spirit. This is not so much a point of contact as the activation of that innate knowledge - the *sensus divinitatis* - that has lain dormant until activated upon by the Spirit.

Calvin, in commenting on the question: Has God then revealed himself to the Gentiles? Does not conclude that they are absolutely excluded. Rather he recognises that if he chooses, God may use an extra-biblical medium to bear witness to himself. However, Calvin does not fully admit the immediacy of the link in apprehending God through nature, history or religious experience. He asserts that “... no manifestation of God without Christ was ever made among

³¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1 (Chicago, MI: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 129.

³² J. J. von Allmen, *A Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 222.

³³ Rom. 1:18-23; 1 Cor. 1:21; and Gal. 4:8.

³⁴ Human knowledge of Christ is actualised in both belief and obedience, and confirmed by the action of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:23-24; Acts 2:36; Rom. 6:6-11; 1 Cor. 2:15; Phil. 3:10).

the Gentiles, any more than among the Jews.”³⁵ Wilhem Niesel elaborates on Calvin’s position, stating that if the Gentiles are to recognise God without the “witness of the Bible” then they must do so:

... through the Word which became flesh in order to overcome our alienation from God and remove from us the divine curse. Although such heathen do not hear the message of Holy Scripture, yet they attain to the knowledge of God only through the essence of it.... namely, Jesus Christ.³⁶

Unfortunately, neither Calvin nor Niesel elaborate upon the means by which Christ may manifest himself to the Gentiles. However, Calvin hints that it is in a similar manner to which he revealed himself to the Jews in the Old Testament period. Certainly, with respect to his teaching on how God and Christ are revealed in the Old Testament, he makes it clear that God accommodates “to the capacity of [human beings].”³⁷ He also writes, “... under symbols which were adapted to the capacity of the flesh, he enabled them to taste in part what could not be fully apprehended.”³⁸ Commenting upon Calvin’s teaching on revelation mediated through signs and symbols in the Old Testament, Ronald S. Wallace writes:

The ceremonies ordained for the temple, too, are forms in which God wraps Himself up in order that He may reveal Himself.... The symbol by which God signifies His presence need not be a concrete earthly object. God can symbolise His presence equally well by means of a vision or a dream.... All these phenomena are for Calvin the forms in which God veils Himself in order to reveal Himself.... The symbolic form which God most frequently assumes throughout the course of Old Testament revelation is, however, the form of the angel of the Lord who appears as the one to convey God’s message to represent His person at certain critical moments in the history of the patriarchs, prophets and people.³⁹

Calvin states that Christ was “always the bond of connection between God and man”⁴⁰ and “the wellspring of all [revelations].”⁴¹

While Calvin recognises that God manifests himself to those outside the people of God, he is careful not to identify them with the people of God in terms of their standing with God (e.g. Abimelech, Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, etc). In commenting on Gen. 41:1, he writes:

... that God sometimes designs to present his oracles even to unbelieving and profane men. It was certainly a singular honor to be instructed concerning an

³⁵ Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), Eph. 2:12; see also Wilhem Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 51-52.

³⁶ Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 52.

³⁷ Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), Ex. 24:9.

³⁸ Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), Matt. 17:2.

³⁹ Ronald S. Wallace, 1982. *The Word and Sacrament* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1982), 5-6.

⁴⁰ Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), Gen. 48:16.

⁴¹ Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), I/13:7.

event yet fourteen years future; for truly the will of God was manifest to Pharaoh, just as if he had been taught by the word, except that the interpretation of it was to be sought elsewhere. And although God designs his word especially for the Church, yet it ought not to be deemed absurd that he sometimes admits even aliens into his school, though for an inferior end. The doctrine which leads to the hope of eternal life belongs to the Church, while the children of the world are only taught, incidentally, concerning the state of the present life.⁴²

I would temper Calvin's somewhat over spiritualising of the passage by suggesting that it should be read in the light of Gen. 12:3 and God's promise to Abram that all the nations will be blessed through him and his progeny. We must also bear in mind that God's intention was not simply the saving of what was to be the future nation of Israel, but also the saving of Egypt and the surrounding nations from the worst effects of the famine.⁴³ Thus God is showing his concern for the nations.

Commenting upon Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2, Calvin writes:

God reveals his will even to unbelievers, but not clearly ... as Isaiah says, - God speaks to unbelievers in broken accents and with a stammering tongue (Isaiah 28:11 and Isaiah 29:11)... As mankind are accustomed to neglect the dreams which they do not remember, God inwardly fastened such a sting in the mind of this unbeliever, as I have already said, that he could not rest, but was always wakeful in the midst of his dreaming, because God was drawing him to himself by secret chains. This is the true reason why God denied him the immediate explanation of his dream and blotted out the remembrance of it from his mind, until he should receive both from Daniel.⁴⁴

Later, in the story of Nebuchadnezzar after he had spent seven years in the fields chastised and humbled by God, Calvin writes, "... he was also humbled for another reason, as if he had been a son of God."⁴⁵ Yet after detailed exposition of Nebuchadnezzar's contrite humility before God, he comes to the conclusion, somewhat unexpectedly in the light of all he has written, that "Nebuchadnezzar does not here embrace the grace of God."⁴⁶ Certainly, there is in Calvin, despite his ambivalence and unwillingness to recognise the full extent of God's grace operating among the nations, an indication that God is revealing himself beyond the confines of his chosen people within the context of the Old Testament.

An unusual and somewhat difficult example of this is seen in the case of Melchizedek. Calvin comments concerning him that:

It was doubtless no common thing that in a country abounding in the corruptions of so many superstitions, a man was found who preserved the

⁴² Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), Gen. 41:1.

⁴³ Gen. 41:57 and 50:19-21.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), Dan. 2:2.

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), Dan. 4:37.

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), Dan. 4:37.

pure worship of God ... Besides, the whole world was so fallen into impiety, that it is very probable that God was nowhere faithfully worshipped except in the family of Abraham; for his father and his grandfather, who ought to have retained true religion, had long before degenerated into idolatry. It was therefore a memorable fact, that there was still a king who not only retained true religion, but also performed himself the office of a priest.⁴⁷

Calvin goes on to say:

Melchizedek deems it sufficient to declare that, by the title of Creator, He whom Abram worshipped, is the true and only God. And although Melchizedek himself maintained the sincere worship of the true God, he yet calls Abram blessed of God, in respect of the eternal covenant: as if he would say, that, by a kind of hereditary right, the grace of God resided in one family and nation, because Abram alone had been chosen out of the whole world.⁴⁸

What we see in this encounter is that, while Abram and his progeny are God's instrument of blessing for the nations⁴⁹ and those in whom God's grace is abundantly evident, yet God in his sovereignty is not confined in his operation to his chosen people. God may, if he chooses, maintain a witness and reveal himself beyond the confines of his chosen people. Grenz, in critiquing Bloesch's view of revelation, writes:

... [In] his concern to uphold the Christocentric focus of divine revelation, does Bloesch pay adequate attention to the universal activity of divine grace? Special revelation is, of course, crucial for human salvation as Bloesch so faithfully upholds. At the same time, the Bible seems to indicate the presence of divine activity directed towards all humankind. While not operative apart from Christ, this "true light that gives light to everyone" (Jn. 1:9) does appear to be active apart from the specifically salvific message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this sense we might speak of a general revelation at work prior to or beyond the pale of the church's proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, even if this work is not adequate for human salvation.⁵⁰

Grenz suggests that the recognition of such prevenient grace⁵¹ might indicate "a point of contact for the gospel", stemming from God's gracious working in the lives of people prior to their recognition of "God's name" rather than from some inherited holding within human beings.⁵²

God's sovereignty means that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. According to Scripture, God rules over the world, humankind and all creation. God's sovereignty is all encompassing and eternal. The psalmist in Ps. 8:1-2 writes, "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of

⁴⁷ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), Heb. 7:1.

⁴⁸ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection, Ages Software, Inc., 2000), Gen. 14:19.

⁴⁹ Gen. 12:3.

⁵⁰ Grenz, Stanley J. "Fideistic Revelationalism", 56.

⁵¹ Grenz, Stanley J. "Fideistic Revelationalism", 56.

⁵² Grenz, Stanley J. "Fideistic Revelationalism", 56.

children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.” In Ps. 19:1-6, the psalmist declares, “The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech.... There is no language where their voice is not heard.... It (the sun) rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other.” This passage upholds Paul’s claim in Rom. 1:21 that all human beings are responsible before God because they can and do know from God’s creation enough to be held responsible.⁵³ Other passages such as Ps. 113:3, Is. 24:15-16, 41:4-6 and 59:19, speak of God’s universal, effectual sovereignty. If this is the case one should expect signs and expressions of God’s sovereignty within the life, culture and history of all the peoples of the earth. While these signs and expressions may be corrupted and defaced, they also contain elements of truth, which point towards the one who is sovereign over all. Certainly, this is the experience of many missionaries, who discovered that God was already at work among the people before their arrival on the field.

Bloesch’s rejection of natural theology is strongly influenced by Barth’s rejection of it in the light of National Socialism, the German Christians and the Barman Declaration.⁵⁴ Whenever Bloesch seeks to illustrate the failure of natural theology, he does so with respect to the German conflict. It seems at times as if he cannot move beyond this historical moment. He writes:

The Barmen Declaration rejected “the false doctrine that the church could and should acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events and powers, figures and truths, as God’s revelation.” It also repudiated “the false doctrine that the church could have permission to abandon the form of its message” in order to bring it into accord with “currently reigning ideological and political convictions.” Barman speaks directly to the theological situation today, when the language of the Bible is being replaced by language informed by ideological movements in the culture and when appeal is made to new revelations in our national history or in universal human history that supersede or correct the biblical revelation.⁵⁵

Bloesch sees all natural theology as a movement away from God, yet could not the pre-contact or pre-relational knowledge of God, in some cases, be part of a movement towards God? Could it not be an indication that God in his sovereignty is initiating a movement, among a people or a culture, towards himself under the influence of the Holy Spirit? Barth’s response to the context of Germany in the 1930s is a contextual response at a particular moment in time; might not another response be possible for a different context? Certainly, the history of mission would seem to indicate that this is more than possible.

⁵³ See also Ps. 24:1 and 67:4.

⁵⁴ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 86-87, 151-153, 268 and 271.

⁵⁵ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 87.

Conclusions

I propose the following methodological principle for doing contextual theology from within the evangelical-reformed tradition in Melanesia.

- Theologising does not take place in a knowledge vacuum, therefore pre-conversion knowledge of God should be identified and taken into account in the theological process.

I propose the following criterion for assessing the effective implementation of contextual theology from within the evangelical-reformed tradition in Melanesia.

- Contextual theology has been effectively implemented when the recipients possess a Hebrew kind of knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, involving intimate relationship and concrete revelational encounters.

Implication Three: Culture as a Source of Theology

Bloesch's theology of confrontation rejects the idea of culture as a normative source of theology, and is reluctant (and at times refuses) to categorise it alongside Scripture and tradition as a legitimate source.⁵⁶ He does, however, recognise the fact that theology involves both the biblical and contextual as its field of operation.⁵⁷ This ambivalence to culture is a major weakness of his theological method. He fluctuates between the acceptance and rejection of culture. This is just part of the unfortunate love-hate relationship that evangelicals, and even more so reformed scholars, have with culture. Rohrer sums up Bloesch's ambivalent relationship with culture:

Although he assigns to culture a positive role in human life, when we survey the sweep of Bloesch's theological writings, the negative dimension of culture clearly emerges as the dominant theme. Despite his conviction that the gospel must be addressed to people in their concrete cultural milieu, he does not develop the point in any specificity nor explain the implications of this insight for the church's missionary mandate. At the same time, however, he frequently launches into strident criticism of those who seek to accommodate the gospel to culture. Thus Bloesch leaves his readers with the vague and perhaps unintended impression that the effort to contextualize the Christian message is a dangerous game, an undertaking that almost inevitably compromises biblical faith.⁵⁸

I, like Grenz, am open to speaking of "culture as a source" of "theology ... not in the sense of being the normative standard", which determines the character of our theology, "but as a conversation partner" that "we take seriously" in the construction of a meaningful theology.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 229.

⁵⁷ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 114.

⁵⁸ James R. Rohrer, "Donald Bloesch as a Social Prophet" in *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch*, ed. E. M. Colyer (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 180.

⁵⁹ Grenz, "Fideistic Revelationalism", 57.

While Bloesch rejects theological points of contact, reasoning that “. . .divine revelation signifies a structure of meaning that overturns rather than crowns or completes the human quest for meaning and purpose in life,” he does, however, grant that we are obligated to pursue “sociological and psychological points of contact” in order to communicate effectively to the people in their culture context.⁶⁰ Newbigin is clear that the gospel or theological truth is only meaningful if it speaks clearly to the hearts and minds of the people it is meant to address, asserting that:

Human beings only exist as members of communities which share a common language, customs, ways of ordering economic and social life, ways of understanding and coping with their world. If the gospel [or theology] is to be understood . . . it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them.⁶¹

In regarding culture as a source of theology, we must acknowledge that a pure theology does not exist, because it is always embodied within a cultural matrix. Indeed, every theological interpretation is organised within some cultural framework.⁶² Consequently, while we assert the primacy of Scripture as the norming norm of theology, we must appreciate that the need to communicate our theology within the confines of a particular cultural context necessitates that we use its world view framework, “thought-forms and mindset” to do so.⁶³ Culture is both a source of theology and the milieu in which the biblical message is communicated.

Conclusion

I propose the following methodological principle for doing contextual theology from within the evangelical-reformed tradition in Melanesia.

- While Scripture is the norming norm, culture is both a source of theology, alongside church tradition and experience, and the milieu in which the biblical message is communicated.

Implication Four: Communal Nature of Theology

Closely related to this issue, of culture as a source of theology, is the fact that Bloesch's theological methodology appears on the surface to be somewhat individualistic.⁶⁴ In response to this criticism, Bloesch points to his earlier works and replies:

I see the basis of revelation not in human community but in the external decision of God to communicate his will and purpose to his people. When God

⁶⁰ Bloesch, "Donald Bloesch Responds" in *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch*, edited by E. M. Colyer. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 185.

⁶¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 141.

⁶² Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 144.

⁶³ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 15.

⁶⁴ Grenz, "Fideistic Revelationalism", 57.

speaks community is created, not only between God and the individual human subject but also among believers. Community is a sign of the reality of the presence of God with his people. Faith gives rise to community, and community is the seedbed in which faith flourishes.⁶⁵

Yet an intimate relationship does exist between the community of faith and the record of revelation in the Scriptures. In the encounter between the Word of God and culture, the authority of Scripture hangs upon "the relationship between the [Scriptures] and this community determined by it."⁶⁶ Neither can be fully understood apart from the reciprocal and hermeneutical relationship each has with the other. The community moulded by its traditions is an important factor in determining the way it hears and understands the Scriptures. The Scriptures have played a significant role in moulding the community's traditions. There is a "hermeneutical circle" in operation within the community of faith.⁶⁷

A crucial link in the development of theology is the intersection of the historical divine encounter in which God reveals himself and a socially patterned humanity for whom all communication is culturally conditioned.⁶⁸ Vital to this encounter and the process of knowing is the world view framework, which is transmitted to the individual by the community through the socialisation process.⁶⁹ It is this framework which provides the epistemological filters through which we perceive and understand all that we know, including God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The world view categories, themes, paradigms and motifs, common to the community, are the epistemological channels through which truth is conveyed. It is in the community's stories, rituals and laws, shaped by this world view framework, that communal truth is stored. It is in the context of the community that the individual's identity is formed and lived out.⁷⁰ Therefore, theology must be more than reflection on the individual encounter with God, or an individual's reflection on God. Rather it is, according to Grenz:

... the task of the faith community; it is a community act. Theology is the Christian community reflecting on and articulating the faith of the people who have encountered God in God's activity as focused in the history of Jesus of Nazareth and who therefore seek to live as the people of God in the contemporary world.... [It is done] on behalf of a community, a tradition, a world.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Bloesch, "Donald Bloesch Responds", 186.

⁶⁶ George R. Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 256.

⁶⁷ Newbigin, *The Foolishness of the Greeks*, 55-56 and 58.

⁶⁸ George R. Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 265.

⁶⁹ Grenz, "Fideistic Revelationalism", 57.

⁷⁰ Grenz, "Fideistic Revelationalism", 58.

⁷¹ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 8.

Part of the difficulty of communal theologising is that often the epistemological context is complex. For example, in Melanesia the theological process may take place at the convergence of three vying epistemologies. The first is that of the traditional religion out of which the community is emerging. The second is associated with the faith tradition (e.g. Evangelical, Reformed, Lutheran, etc.) to which the community now belongs. The third is the emerging contemporary culture of which the community is a part, resulting from its interaction with technological societies and a globalised world. Each of these epistemological orientations will affect the way theological truth is received and theology developed. Similarly, Newbigin suggests that contextualisation involves, “the placing of the gospel [or theological truth] in the total context of a culture at a particular moment, a moment that is shaped by the past and looks to the future.”⁷²

Conclusions

I propose the following methodological principles for doing contextual theology in Melanesia from within the evangelical–reformed tradition.

- A community’s traditions, world view and the stories, rituals and laws shaped by it are a source of contextual theology, playing a significant role in determining the way the community hears and understands the Scriptures.
- Theologising is a communal enterprise in which the community articulates its faith and encounters God in the context in which it dwells.

Implication Five: Challenging Relevance

Theological methods tend to focus on one side or the other of the dualistic divide. They focus on either: continuity or discontinuity, transcendence or imminence, crisis or process, Christ or culture, God or humanity, and divine event or human achievement.⁷³ As we have seen, Bloesch advocates strongly a theology of confrontation against any form of correlation,⁷⁴ yet we must ask, Are they mutually exclusive? Newbigin picks up on A. G. Hogg’s expression “challenging relevance” which Hogg used in his dialogue with Hindus.⁷⁵ In the context of theological method this expression conveys the idea that, in the process of dialogue, theological truth addresses the hearers from within the cultural and world view framework through which they understand their world (relevance), while allowing Jesus Christ to burst

⁷² Newbigin, *The Foolishness of the Greeks*, 2.

⁷³ Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 46.

⁷⁴ At the heart of this debate is how one interprets Genesis 10-11 and the stories of the table of the nations and the tower of Babel. How one interprets these chapters with regard to God’s attitude towards culture will seriously affect one’s theological stance. For an extensive discussion of the various positions see Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit*, 244-255.

⁷⁵ A. G. Hogg, *Karma and Redemption: An Essay Towards the Interpretation of Hinduism and the Re-statement of Christianity* (London, Madras, Colombo: Christian Literature Society, 1909).

into their world in transforming power (challenge). This “challenging relevance” is preserved by acknowledging that such theology declines “to be either too ‘fitted’ or too ‘foreign’ to the culture taken as a present whole.”⁷⁶ I maintain that the idea of a ‘relevance-challenge’ dialogue, or to put it in the terminology of contextual theology, an ‘indigenising-transformational’ dialogue, which facilitates interaction between and reflection upon the various sources of theology, is a better way to proceed rather than either a confrontational or correlational approach to the development of theology in context.

It is possible to read Bloesch’s definitions of theology as missiologically orientated and very much in line with this approach. The first definition elucidates the need of relevance:

. . .the faithful interpretation of the biblical message to the time in which we live. It must struggle to elucidate the relevance of the cross and resurrection victory of Jesus Christ for our time and place in history, not simply reaffirm past interpretations or repeat credal formulas of another era.⁷⁷

The second definition shows the interaction required between the main sources of theology:

... the systematic reflection within a particular culture on the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ as attested to in Holy Scripture and witnessed to in the tradition of the catholic church ... Its norm is Scripture, but its field or arena of action is the cultural context in which we find ourselves.⁷⁸

It seems that, in these definitions, Bloesch proposes that which he rejects by advocating a theology of confrontation without any leeway for some form of correlation. Later Bloesch writes:

A theology centered in the Word and Spirit will not simply strive to expose the idolatrous pretensions of human culture and religion but will try to ascertain what is genuinely good and uplifting in culture and religious enterprise. Christian revelation constitutes both the abolition and elevation of human religion.⁷⁹

That, however, is the tension and inconsistency of his theological method.

Conclusion

I propose the following methodological principle for doing contextual theology from within the evangelical-reformed tradition in Melanesia.

- In the process of dialogue, contextual theology addresses the recipients from within their cultural and world view framework in order to bring transformation to that framework in a way consistent with Christ’s lordship.

⁷⁶ Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit*, 240.

⁷⁷ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 115.

⁷⁸ Bloesch, *A Theology of Word and Spirit*, 114.

⁷⁹ Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000), 29.

Implication Six: Paradox of the Word and Spirit Methodology

Bloesch's evangelical critics often assert that his theological method lacks an "objective standard"; it evades the problem of "conceptual truth" and excludes the potentiality of real "knowledge of God."⁸⁰ Colyer submits that Bloesch fails to clarify sufficiently the relationship between Scripture (the sign) and revelation (the thing) so that they are in danger of drifting apart.⁸¹

The question becomes how to mediate between the purely creaturely and historical character of human condition (and by implication the biblical witness) and a Word of God from beyond; Yet a Word that must be actualized within the creaturely conditions of space and time if there is to be genuine human knowledge of God.⁸²

Colyer recognises that Bloesch places the Spirit in the mediating role of fashioning a union "between the very human and historical words of the Bible (the sign) and divine revelation" which is "never at our disposal (thing)". For "only the Spirit of God can speak the Word of God anew and make it efficacious within our creaturely conditions."⁸³ Colyer also observes a "counter-melody" and quotes Bloesch to the effect that:

The word of the prophets and apostles in the Bible correspond to the Word of God ... In the Bible we have an echo or reverberation of what God has declared in his redeeming word and act in Jesus Christ.⁸⁴

Revelation focuses on Jesus Christ, but this decisive event was not isolated. It presupposes a revelatory history, which was a preparation for it and in which it was received. This is the "sacred history" that the Bible mirrors. It is possible therefore to speak of cumulative revelation and levels of revelation.⁸⁵

Colyer asserts that Bloesch must elaborate on what he means by "reverberation of the Word" which is "rooted in a revelatory history" and demonstrate more clearly the relationship "between the sign and the thing", if his method is to be recognised as moving beyond a simple restatement of Barth's approach.⁸⁶

This represents something of the tension and paradox in Bloesch's work, for he differs from Barth in that he desires to preserve a connection between "divine revelation and the

⁸⁰ David Parker, "Donal G. Bloesch, Evangelical Theologian of Word and Spirit" in *From East to West: Essays in Honor of Donal G. Bloesch*, ed. S.J. Adams (Lanhan, New York and Oxford: University Press of America, Inc., 1997), 6 and 12.

⁸¹ Colyer, "A Theology of Word and Spirit: Donald Bloesch's Theological Method", par. 79 and 85.

⁸² Colyer, "A Theology of Word and Spirit: Donald Bloesch's Theological Method", par. 80.

⁸³ Colyer, "A Theology of Word and Spirit: Donald Bloesch's Theological Method", par. 82.

⁸⁴ Colyer, "A Theology of Word and Spirit: Donald Bloesch's Theological Method", par. 82, and Bloesch's, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1994), 26.

⁸⁵ Colyer, "A Theology of Word and Spirit: Donald Bloesch's Theological Method", par. 82, and Bloesch's, *Holy Scripture*, 50.

⁸⁶ Colyer, "A Theology of Word and Spirit: Donald Bloesch's Theological Method", par. 86-88.

propositional content of Scripture," yet unlike many evangelicals he does "not identify them."⁸⁷ Olson points out that:

[Bloesch] uses the analogy of the light bulb and light to illustrate the connection between God's Word and the Bible. The Bible is the light bulb; God's Word is the light that shines through it. The Spirit is what makes the light bulb glow with God's Word. On the one hand, the light would have no focus and be of little help without the bulb. On the other hand, the bulb would only be glass and filament without the light. Nothing happens without the action of the Spirit of God.⁸⁸

Bloesch wishes to avoid magnifying the propositional character of the Bible to the extent that it is "reduced to conceptuality or logic."⁸⁹ He is prepared to risk the apparent "objectivity of the Word" rather than fail to give "credit to the Spirit."⁹⁰

For Foh this leaves Bloesch without "an objective standard" thus "The Bible is not the final authority but the Spirit in the believers."⁹¹ However, Bloesch's understanding of the role of the Spirit is in line with the Westminster Confession which states that:

... our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts [1:5].⁹²

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture [1:10].⁹³

Bloesch insists that faith eventuates in the presence of "the self-revealing God" rather than in propositions.⁹⁴

A theology of Word and Spirit will subordinate propositional knowledge to the knowledge of acquaintance rooted in the I-Thou encounter. Revelation consists essentially not in the transmission of propositions but in personal address by the living God, which involves the communication of information, yet only in the context of mystical participation in the spiritual reality that the propositions seek to express.⁹⁵

⁸⁷ Roger E. Olson, "Locating Donald G. Bloesch in the Evangelical Landscape" in *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch*, ed. E. M. Colyer (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), .28.

⁸⁸ Bloesch, "Donald Bloesch Responds", 29.

⁸⁹ Olson, "Locating Donald G. Bloesch in the Evangelical Landscape", 29.

⁹⁰ Clark H. Pinnock, "The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Donald G. Bloesch" in *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch*, ed. E. M. Colyer (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 124.

⁹¹ Susan Foh, "Review of *The Battle for the Trinity: The Debate Over Inclusive God-Language*, by Donald G. Bloesch." *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986):407-409.

⁹² John Macpherson, *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1958), 36.

⁹³ Macpherson, *The Confession of Faith*, 41.

⁹⁴ Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, 22.

⁹⁵ Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, 24.

Frank Hasel asks, how do we know that it is really the Spirit that is speaking, if there is no external “normative standard?”⁹⁶ However, for Bloesch, the only “ground of certainty” is the certainty of faith found in the promises of God “not as they exist objectively in Scripture but as they are sealed within us by the Spirit.”⁹⁷ In this Bloesch aligns himself with the Reformers who, he believes, also had primarily “an existential understanding of revelation.”⁹⁸ He agrees with Torrance, who contends that propositionalism “cuts off God’s revelation in the Bible from the living, dynamic being of God himself and his continual self-giving through Christ and in the Spirit.”⁹⁹

However, in his awareness of the dangers of propositionalism, Bloesch does not advocate a full-blown narrational perspective on revelation. He does not restrict revelation to either “propositions or narrations” but maintains that it recruits a variety of “linguistic and literary forms”. He recognises that it is more conducive to “symbolic than theoretical form”, because it conveys mysteries outside the realm of “human perception and conception”. Likewise, it can be explained “by concepts and propositions” as its substance is comprehensible and may be apprehended through the illumination of the Spirit.¹⁰⁰

Bloesch’s theological method is paradoxical in nature. Rather than advocating an objective standard, he bases it upon the supreme paradox, the incarnation through which God became a human being. He employs the notion of paradox to understand the unity of the Word and Spirit, thus, “the reception of the Word” involves both intelligent understanding “and a redeeming experience.”¹⁰¹ Consequently, his theological method is “gospel-centered, and therefore evangelical in the most basic sense.”¹⁰² In refusing to directly identify Scripture with the divine revelation, he avoids the straightjacket of a propositional theology, which is culturally conditioned and fixed in the historical context of its initial inception. He recognises that “our theological systems will forever be imperfect and rudimentary” and contextual in nature.¹⁰³

Conclusions

⁹⁶ Frank Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 253.

⁹⁷ Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, 32.

⁹⁸ Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, 36.

⁹⁹ Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, 37.

¹⁰⁰ Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, 40.

¹⁰¹ Bloesch, *The Holy Scripture*, 20.

¹⁰² Parker, “Donald G. Bloesch, Evangelical Theologian of Word and Spirit” in *From East to West: Essays in Honor of Donald G. Bloesch*, ed. D.J. Adams (Lanham, New York and Oxford: University Press of America, Inc., 1997), 12.

¹⁰³ Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology, 2 vols.* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1978-1979), 2/268.

I propose the following methodological principles for doing contextual theology from within the evangelical-reformed tradition in Melanesia.

- A theology of Word and Spirit prioritises the relational knowledge involved in encountering God in Jesus Christ in the process of contextual theologising, rather than propositional knowledge about him.
- Contextually appropriate forms should be used to convey the truths of Scripture in the process of contextual theologising.
- The process of contextual theologising is an approximate and contextual discipline, therefore, the truths conveyed are always approximations and contextualisation of the intended message.