

# Contextualization in theological Formation – One German’s Perspective

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## 1. Introduction

Since I am speaking about contextualization at a conference in India, it goes without saying that my perspective will be a very limited one. It’s a German perspective and I will focus on formation, assuming that formation is (has to be) holistic (as opposed to a content-based theological instruction, whereby one learns solely through hearing).

In addition to my own research and experiences I will be referring to a survey on the ministry of foreign priests in Germany. The Survey was commissioned by the German Bishops Conference in 2007 and was published in 2011.<sup>1</sup> It indicated that issues such as language capability, psychological training, adaptability and sensibility to cultural and religious issues are crucial for this kind of contextualization.

## 2. Context: Cultures and subcultures in the times of globalization

### 2.1 Analysis of the present with an understanding of the past

In order to understand the present, a solid knowledge of developments in the past is needed and must be accompanied by critical self-scrutiny as well as scrutiny of others and society. To achieve the necessary objectivity human sciences are helpful. Therefore contextual theology is interdisciplinary.

**Formation** must foster one’s ability to explore cultural backgrounds and to question preconceptions.

Principle: understanding before judgment and action.

### 2.2 Global and local

Modernity is shaped by an acceleration of all aspects of life. Globalization seems to cause a homogenization of world culture (some speak of a worldwide „McDonaldization“). It is because of that development that local traditions become important again. Some German scholars therefore call for “Glocalization”.

**Formation** is aimed to foster the competence of thinking and acting in both directions: global and local („Think global, act local“).

### 2.3 Beyond the boundaries of oneself

Contextual teaching is always by example. Therefore for **formation** evoking and fostering competencies and models of thinking is much more important than transmitting encyclopedic recall.

## 3. Theology

With regard to **formation** a theology is demanded which reveals its developments and its cultural dependencies. By that it enables students on the basis of a deep knowledge (of theological content) to merge into other models of thinking and understanding with benevolence and respect.

## 4. Person (Student and Formator)

In addition to the competences mentioned above **formation** is aimed at leading students to realistic self-evaluation. This calls for teachers experienced in intercultural enterprises, willing to share their experiences with others and to be questioned by them.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Gabriel/ Stefan Leibold/ Reiner Achtermann, Die Situation ausländischer Priester in Deutschland (Forum Weltkirche – Entwicklung und Frieden 13), Mainz 2011.

For online abstracts in German see:

- <http://www.dbk-shop.de/de/DBK/Die-Situation-auslaendischer-Priester-in-Deutschland-2011.html> (23.8.2013);

- [http://www.christ-in-der-gegenwart.de/aktuell/artikel\\_angebote\\_detail?k\\_beitrag=2647626](http://www.christ-in-der-gegenwart.de/aktuell/artikel_angebote_detail?k_beitrag=2647626) (23.8.2013).