When the Bible Meets the Black Stuff: A Contextual Bible Study Experiment


Abstract

The original contribution to knowledge that this Biblical Studies research project offers is the experimental analysis of the claim that the Bible reading methodology Contextual Bible Study (CBS) should be grounded in ethnography, not only in practice, but also in writing. This project not only critically evaluates this argument, but it also demonstrates the efficacy of its claims by putting the argument presented into practice. This was done by implementing the suggested methodological refinements of CBS via the design and facilitation of a CBS programme that was grounded in ethnography. This took the form of ethnographically researching coal mining culture in South Derbyshire and conducting a CBS programme with a group of contemporary South Derbyshire coal miners. The findings of this project are significant for the discipline of Biblical Studies as thus far CBS has been used in a manner that fails to recognise the need for ethnographic contextualisation – a need which is twofold. First, it has yet to be widely acknowledged that the processes, methods, and goals of CBS are products of the context that gave birth to it (South Africa) and that in order for CBS to be used appropriately and effectively, it should be contextualised in light of its origins. Secondly, ethnographic contextualisation is also needed to ensure the following: that the researcher using CBS understands as fully as possible the context in which they intend to use CBS; that the CBS programme being developed resonates deeply with those participating in it; and that the final audience of any readings produced via CBS are equally knowledgeable about the context of those participating in the process. This thesis therefore examines critically both ethnography and CBS, and through the employment of reflexivity, incorporates ethnography into CBS not only as its formal prerequisite stage, but in a manner whereby its results are then used to shape and inform the entirety of the CBS research.

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- **Assumption that the bible plays a very central role in communities of faith**
- **The bible can and must be used to discuss issues which are not just spiritual but which affects our societies.**
- **CBS is only a tool –it helps open up the process to discuss issues. How can Contextual Bible Study, which was developed in South Africa and which seeks to affirm expressions of local liberation through a process of community Bible interpretation, be re-contextualized in a different postcolonial context without operating in neocolonial modes? In Ghana the “public transcript” between the Bikin miners and outside entities entails local groups affirming what the outside entity is proposing while looking for ways to glean from the interaction. This paper recounts an attempt to circumvent the typical scenario by attempting to create safe spaces through Contextual B...**

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