

A Response to "The 'Khit-Pen' Theological Education Model: A New Methodology for
Contextualizing Theological Education in Thailand" authored by Daniel Saengwichai

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The author discusses the "Khit-Pen" theological education model which he adapted from the indigenous concept of adult learning originally developed by Dr. Kovit Vorapipatana who had worked for the Ministry of Education in Thailand. To put it another way, he develops a contextualized theological education model based on Dr. Vorapipatana's "adult education" program. In this sense, the "Khit-Pen" model would be a contextualized theological education model. Healthy contextualization calls for keeping the balance between the need to communicate the Gospel effectively and relevantly within a given culture and the need to maintain the integrity of the Gospel itself, so that the message received is both meaningful and convicting (Keith E. Eitel 1998:312). The author maintains well the balance between the Gospel and Thai culture in that as Darell L. Whiteman (1997:2) stressed "contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people's deepest needs and penetrates their world view, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture." The author affirms following Christ in Thai ways.

Literally the term "Khit-Pen" means "to think" or "to be able to think" to solve any problems confronting Thai people in various life situations. As the author implied, the model is problem-centered, namely, "problem-posing and problem-solving" so that the people can take proactive steps toward finding solutions for their own problems. The "Khit-Pen" model with that connotation is well applied to SEANBC's theological education in terms of "field education" by the author. Both the teachers and the students at SEANBC need to be able to think of some effective ways to solve their own teaching/learning problems in *Sitz im Leben*. The author is one of them who took into serious consideration the issue of contemporary education methodology in terms of a theological education model. As the author said, "[the model] is designed to be an interactive, dialogical approach to theological training which calls for active learners who are learning to think and takes into account the learners' unique and diversified need and potentials and the cultural relevance." He actually put the education model into practice inside and outside SEANBC. Based on the components of Wesley's Quadrilateral (Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience), the "Khit-Pen" model operates around the five stages as the figure 7 illustrates [However, there are actually no figure numbers from 1 to 6 in

this paper]. In this paper, he seems to discuss more descriptively rather than analytically the five stages: preparation, exploring the issues, integrating with the Scripture, interacting with the community, and implementation. At each stage, he deals with the issues through the Scripture and emphasizes implementation. Sometimes he illustrates what he experienced and reported.

At stage 1, he discusses "preparation" and stresses raising questions as an effective method of teaching/learning. It is a kind of "question and answer" method which has turned out to be effective especially when a seminar type of education is attempted in the classroom. It is effective when a teacher tries to attract students' attention concerning a specific unit. The author stresses the work of the Holy Spirit among the participants so that they can feel comfortable, welcome, equal, and empowered to participate in the educational process. He maintains that the Holy Spirit leads them into all truth (Jn 16:13).

At stage 2, he discusses "exploring the issues" in which he deals with the Buddhist event, *Songkran* day (Thai New Year). He holds that this day can be taken as the day to commemorate the Christian event of cleansing the spirit and refreshing the soul by performing foot washing. In addition, this ceremony signifies Christian servanthood to one another (Mk 10:45). Likewise, he wants the students to collect their traditional values, types, and practices to theologize them in their historical and cultural contexts. He quotes Darrell L. Whiteman's statement: "Until non-Western Christians learn how to exegete their own cultural context as well as they exegete the biblical text, [no amount of theological knowledge] will automatically enable and encourage church leaders to plant and grow indigenous, contextualized churches" (1997:5). Here, the concept of "critical contextualization" developed by Paul G. Hiebert (1987:109-110) can be applied in terms of developing local theology. The students need to listen to culture and bring Christ to the culture (Robert J. Schreiter 1985:28-29). The author understands clearly the importance of "listening to culture" so as to develop contextualized theologies by articulating the Gospel, church, and tradition. His discussion of stage 2 reflects careful research and reveals his consistent endeavor to explore the key issues related to constructing local theology.

At stage 3, he discusses "integrating with the Scripture" which includes also interpreting the biblical texts within their own unique historical and cultural contexts. This stage involves "a careful study of the biblical message within its own historic and cultural contexts" while recognizing the authority of the Scriptures and a thorough knowledge of their teachings. Here he stresses the Scripture as the standard to judge the historic and cultural contexts. This emphasis demonstrates his theological position, that is, the evangelical theology of mission. He asks the students to study the Scriptures in light of ancestral and traditional practices ("realities of one's own circumstances") in Thai society. He stresses students-oriented education, that is, audience-oriented communication in terms of cross-cultural missions. In addition, he suggests the employment of Wesley's theological interpretation model based on "tradition, reason, and experience" to study the Scriptures. Further, he affirms that it is appropriate to interpret the

Scriptures not only individually but also communally. In other words, a canonical approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures is needed.

At stage 4, he discusses "interacting with the community" while introducing the teaching curriculum of SEANBC which maintains "the continuous mingling of cognitive and behavioral activities--the relationship between knowing and doing, rhetoric and behavior, reflection and action, theory and practice, cognitive and psychomotor, truth and experience, witness and life" (Duane H. Elmer 1984:226-243). According to the author, SEANBC operates "Supervised Ministries" in each semester. By means of this system, the students can meet with the people in the community and build up their "street credibility" rather than their "library credibility." It is one of the ways for them to have dialogues with the people in the community outside SEANBC. The author describes vividly the picture of cooperation between the students and the people, as they are involved in evangelism and community development work. Here, also he points out "experience" the fourth ingredient of Wesley's Quadrilateral which plays a crucial role in Wesley's theology, to explain the stage of "interacting with the community." For example, during the semester break, he made a trip with his students to the Leoy province. As a result, they not only shared the Gospel message with the people, but also learned from the people in the community. According to the students' evaluative reports, such an involvement results in lifting up both social concern and social service.

At stage 5, he discusses "implementation" in which the students are "equipped to think, reflect, and act upon issues from a biblical perspective and from the perspective of world views, cultures, values, and social and historical situations." For him, "implementation" refers to the students' ability to integrate, to re-invent, or to reproduce the truth they have learned and to incorporate it into their personal as well as their communal lives. They practice the insights which they learned from biblical interpretation and interaction with the community. At this stage, flexibility, as opposed to rigidity, permeates the whole process of the contextualized theological education model. The "Khit-Pen" theological education model is flexible and adaptable to respond in new varied and contextual ways. The author experimented with the model in the course of "Church Planting in the Thai Context." The results turned out to be great in that his students discovered a great potential for starting a new church among the people they had visited frequently. They implemented what they had learned theoretically in the classroom. This philosophy of education is reflected in the mission statement of the SEANBC as follows: "SEANBC emphasizes the integration of theory and practice. The academic study of theology, Bible, and ministry must be applied to the life and work setting of the minister."

Meanwhile, the author observes that the "Khit-Pen" education model was not widely accepted and applied by the Thai people. He presents several reasons for such refusal in Thai society, although these reasons are not discussed in details. Why was the "Khit-Pen" model not accepted and applied largely in Thailand while it was adapted to meet the needs of developing countries like the Philippines, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Ghana? The author would need to

investigate more accurate reasons for resistance and reluctance to the "Khit-Pen" model in Thai society in order to make the "Khit-Pen" theological education model more adaptable and appropriate at least in Thailand. He projects what he wants to be done in the future through the "Khit-Pen" model. He says, "When successful, the "Khit-Pen" theological model will increase the effectiveness of Thai pastors in relating the Gospel to the realities of life, and the problem will be solved. . . . the "Khit-Pen" theological education model will help students to know the Scripture and their people, and to be able to blend text with the context."

However, the author summarizes some features of the "Khit-Pen" theological education model. "It sets out to answer specific questions and issues that have been raised for leaders in Thai context. It helps the leaders to think through the issues and problems in light of the scriptural truth. Through this model Thai church leaders are equipped to exercise their intellectual ability and creativity, thereby formulating their own thinking pattern in applying biblical truths in the light of the issues and questions within their life context."

As reviewed, this paper has greatly contributed to developing a contextualized theological education model which can be applied in Thai cultural context. Still, it needs to be time-tested to be applicable in a different cultural context. The "Khit-Pen" theological education model is very worthy in terms of contextualization. This model strikes the balance between the Gospel and culture. As a result, it maintains the identity of the Gospel itself and the flexibility of communication methods. This is an excellent paper which deals with theological education models in terms of contextualization.

Works Cited

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