



IRTC

INTERNATIONAL REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

Contextualization in Cross-cultural Theological Education

*I have become all things to all people,
that by all means I might save some.
I do it all for the sake of the gospel,
that I may share with them in its blessings.*
(1 Corinthians 9:22-23 ESV)

One of the courses the IRTC is offering this term, as part of our Master of Missiology (MMs) degree, is *AM 601 - Missionary Anthropology*. As a discipline that looks deeply into the study of humans across cultural and societal lines, anthropology can be a valuable tool in the mission field. It allows missionaries to engage with cultures in a manner that is both respectful and effective, bridging the gap between the timeless truths of the Gospel and the diverse cultural contexts in which they are communicated.

This process, known as *contextualization*, involves adapting the *delivery* of the Gospel to maximize its comprehension within the cultural frameworks and social practices of different communities, *without altering*

its message. Anthropological methods enhance the mission worker's ability to understand and appreciate these cultural frameworks, allowing them to present the Gospel in ways that resonate with local communities.

At the IRTC, where we train students from a variety of cultural backgrounds, this principle is not only taught but also practically applied in our educational approach. Just as cross-cultural missionaries must navigate diverse cultural landscapes, so too must our instructors, as they teach students spread across multiple countries and continents, each with its own unique cultural nuances. Our students come from various continents, including Africa, Europe and South America, and parts of the Brazilian diaspora in Asia, the Middle East and North America. This diversity presents both challenges and opportunities.

Teaching across such varied cultural landscapes can be challenging because it requires our instructors to be highly attuned to the different ways students might interpret and



apply the material. For example, students from Brazil may come from urban environments with a strong Western influence, yet they bring with them a variety of subcultural experiences that affect how they perceive theology and its applications. In contrast, students from African nations such as Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique might navigate a blend of traditional and modern cultural and educational practices, which can influence their approach to learning and ministry. Cross-cultural missionary students and those from the Brazilian diaspora often face the added complexity of learning in Portuguese while having to apply their knowledge in entirely different cultural and linguistic settings.

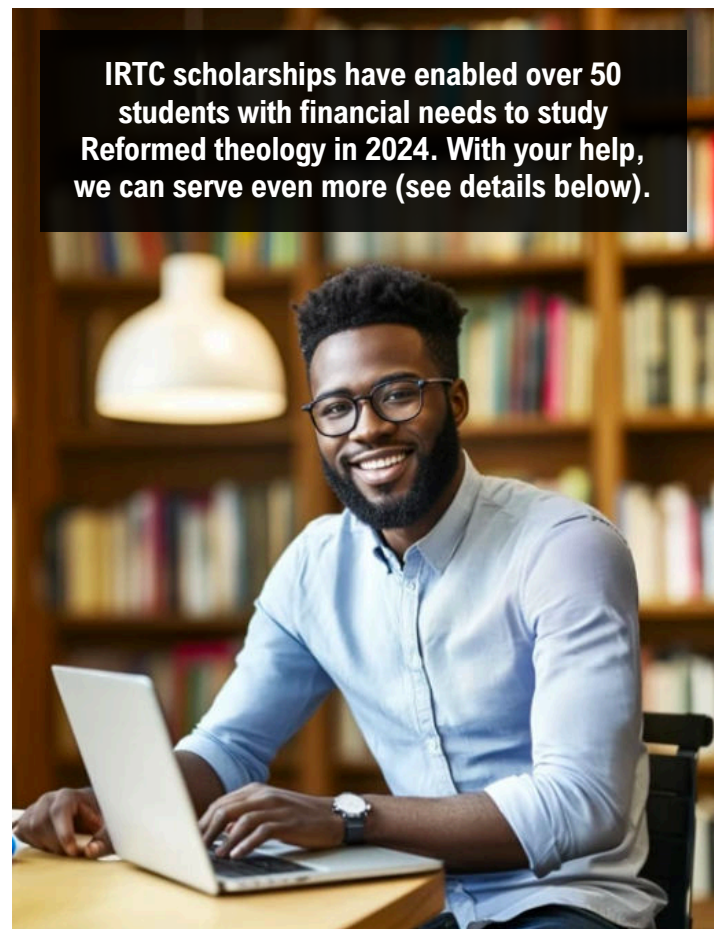
This cultural diversity also opens up unique opportunities. The different perspectives brought by our students enrich the learning environment, offering a broader, more nuanced understanding of how the Gospel can be communicated and lived out in different contexts. This diversity allows for a rich exchange of ideas in the classroom, where students can learn not only from the instructors but also from each other's experiences in cross-cultural ministry. It encourages the development of a more global perspective among students, helping them to see the universal relevance of the Gospel while appreciating the distinct ways it can be expressed in different cultural settings. Ultimately, this diversity strengthens our mission, as it pushes both students and instructors to think creatively and compassionately about how to bring the message of the Gospel to all nations.

To address these varied needs, the IRTC employs several strategies. First and foremost, our curriculum development is carefully crafted to be *supracultural*. While most of our instructors are Brazilian, we strive to teach in a way that remains faithful to the Reformed Confessions, avoiding the particularities of any specific Reformed denomination. This approach ensures that our teaching is as broadly applicable as possible, avoiding the imposition of any one cultural perspective over another.

In addition, we create space for meaningful interaction between students and instructors. Through forum posts and live Q&A sessions, students are encouraged to share the unique challenges they face in their local

contexts. This not only enriches the learning experience by exposing students to a wide range of perspectives but also allows instructors to provide tailored feedback that considers the cultural and contextual diversity of our student body. Different educational backgrounds and linguistic dialects can lead to miscommunication or misunderstanding, and anthropological insights help us to navigate these challenges with greater sensitivity and effectiveness.

As our students go forth to minister in their respective contexts, they carry with them both their training in the Reformed faith and the tools to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with the varied cultures they encounter. Please keep our instructors and our students in your prayers, as they call the lost from many nations into His Kingdom.



IRTC scholarships have enabled over 50 students with financial needs to study Reformed theology in 2024. With your help, we can serve even more (see details below).

\$203,879
2024 Budget

70%

\$143,166
Raised (July 31)



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