

1. Think of "contexting" as concentric circles: *What kind of story is this in what kind of text in what kind of book from/to what kind of community-culture?* Now, "what kind of" is inherently comparative: answering requires reference to other actual or possible "kinds of." Of course it is possible to be aware that something is a "kind." Conceivably, an isolate plant or animal could occur somewhere in the universe; but our planet is a Noah's ark with everything "after its kind" (genus) and subkind (species).

2. In biblical interpretation and thus Christian life and mission, how important is this awareness--"consciousness-raising"--of the wider contexts? You must answer that from within your own life-context, but my governing criterion is this: anything that swims into the consciousness, yours and that of any you seek to influence, is "contextual" for your life and ministry and therefore worthy of some attention from you. Here I recommend the humility of openness: is something you are impatient with, and tempted to be arrogantly indifferent to, *really* foreign to you life and ministry? E.g., Islam, the religion contexting in #1002 ["Life-Contexting the Bible"] the response to the question *What kind of book is the Bible?* [In recent hermeneutics, "diachronic" and "synchronic" are used as sorters of dimensions of awareness-consciousness-mentality, helping us "get with" the biblical "mind" [Eph.3.14-19: "breadth, length, height, depth"] and "heart" [the intra-personal activities and processes of attention, imagination, ratiocination, and decision].

3. The payoff for patient contexting is that the discipline of hermeneutics exercised on the Bible becomes a tool for life-hermeneutic, i.e. for interpreting the world and human existence in light of the biblical "way of seeing and living in the world" [my definition of religion]. (This "comprehensive interpretive methodology" was the point of my 1943 ThD thesis, summarized diagrammatically as #27.) Instead of life controlled by literature [=the essence of scribism, which killed Jesus], life *then* speaks to life *now* through literature-spirit-Spirit. To put the point operationally, learning to be a contextual interpreter is at the same time learning to think-preach-teach-counsel-negotiate generally as a human being and specifically as a Christian. That's a hellava lot of payoff! [NB: "Context" has become an "in" word in numerous areas of concern: thus, "contextual education" and political and missional "contextualization."....For a comprehensive exposition of "Text/Context," see #655.]

4. Your occupational context is identical with that of those whose impulse, humanly speaking, produced the Bible: the persuasion-leader, who exists as p.-l. by eliciting the response "*That makes sense!*" Further, the sense-making must be within the sphere of the culture's, specifically the language's, meaning-potential; and the persuasive power is = in intensity to the intensity of the life-concern with what is being argued from (as sanction) and for (as motive). Middle-and-upper-class Americans, at the moment, are "into" selfism, so [e.g.] Walter Wink's group-Bible-study style is selling well (on which see Paul Vitz's brilliant PSYCHOLOGY AS RELIGION: THE CULT OF SELF-WORSHIP [Eerdmans/77]). As Christian leader you wrestle with the live question *How can I so tell the miracle tale of M.2.1-13 that it connects with my folk's experiences-hopes-expectations of miracle?* Tough, since I face the reversal effect: what then was a lift is now a load: the blessing of miracles surrounding Jesus and early Christianity has become a rhetorical burden, a hurdle for our heads and therefore for our hearts and communication efforts. [Peter Berger dealt solidly with this in his early books: the persuader can be effective only within the cultural limits of plausibility--and, at a culture's upper reaches and with the lower upwardly-mobile, respectability.] "Rhetorical criticism," especially as practiced by Boomershine, is a strategy for (1) recovering the life-feel of biblical story so that (2) head matters can be approached through the heart (the normal human procedure) rather than (as in the pathology of scientism) permitted

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to deny to the heart what, for reasons of rational plausibility, is unacceptable to the mind. NYTS, under Tom's leadership, is proving this approach effective at all cultural levels and with various ethnic groups. It is a crucially important *how* answer to the *what* I evidenced in 1943 as needed.

5. I'd like to be able to refer you to encyclopedias contexting the Bible in its culture, on biblical spine--so, e.g., you could look up 1Sam.1 and feel your way into everything now known to have been going on and coming up and down at the time. For OT, we've nothing like that [though four books of a former student of mine, Norman Gottwald, are rich on the cultural-social-political-religious context of OT]. For NT, we've nothing in English--but in German we've Strack/Billerbeck (now o.p.), a huge work called K.N.T.T.M. (commentary on the NT from Talmud and Midrash, meaning giving you computer signals, as it were, on rabbinical stories, roughly contemporary with NT, that came to mind as these scholars interpreted each passage, serially, of NT). And for the pagan context of NT, while we've nothing in Eng., in Ger. we've the 79-vol. Pauly/Wissowa (ency. of classical antiquity), which has two additional disadvantages: it's present cost is \$5,600, and it's arrangement is by subject rather than by NT sequence. [As our NYTS Library is space-and-function restricted against foreign languages other than Spanish, we've neither set above; but if you're Ger.-reading, take a look at them in the UTS Library.]

6. One earmark of a great commentary on a biblical book is that it does for you what, in the above paragraph, I've described as a need: it signals "what's ahappening" in the world-and-mind-and-heart from which a particular passage comes [in hermeneutical jargon, the *Sitz im Leben*, the life-situation, to recreate and represent which is at the intentional heart of the "religious-historical School"]. What's that commentary for M.? Find out [we're preparing a list], then use it on 2.1-13. [This thinksheet is an introduction to a process, rather than a demonstration of its product, though I'll finish this p. with some beginnings on the latter.]

7. You should own all 5 vols. of INTERPRETER'S DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE. What Bible-dictionary articles should you read to context M.2.1-13? "Miracles," of course. What else? An exercise: Read "Miracles" in the dozen Bible dictionaries in the NYTS Library; also in dictionary-form works on biblical theology, such as REF.DW14.D561. [Here, Alan Richardson's A THEOLOGICAL WORDBOOK OF THE BIBLE is a little gem.] Such simple research cannot fail to bring you the great correlative texts; e.g., on miracle, "nothing is impossible for God" (Gn.18.14 + L.1.37).

8. The genius within the origin of NYTS in 1900 was the question *What, using only, the English Bible, can I find out about a text's meaning then and now?* This was not nonthingistic, but an essential ascesis, harder than hitting reference works and commentaries. The question includes interior research into what you already know, and should include interrogation of the academic departments: as I face this text, what do I know from psychology...sociology...anthropology...art...history of religions...that can illumine text and context?...I underlined these as the nodal words, like cities on a map: telling, paralyzed, dug, forgiven, blaspheming, Get up, authority, dumfounded, praise, teaching. As you read the list fast, can you feel the whole story? Notice the envelop, the underlined initial and final words: are all miracles signs and slices of the Beyond come within and among, predisposing to faith? nonverbal teaching, more than words are verbal miracles? Jan Ehrenwald's "triadic" therapy [THE HISTORY OF PSYCHOTHERAPY (Jason Aronson/76)] of counselor's will-faith + counselee's hopes-expectations + culture's beliefs-hopes-expectations provides a model for productive question-raising about this story of the paralytic (on which see also, for the paralysis-sin connection, Menninger's WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?). The biblical-human yearning is for length of days and fullness of life in the good land: concentric circles of personal integrity, social integration, and cosmic location (how, in this story, are these three dimensions of "mental health" present?). ....What was their (and what's our) cultic competition? Contrast the sobriety of our story with pagan miracle tales [e.g., Apollonius of Tyana], apocryphal legends, even rabbinic stories, the thaumaturges of Asclepius and Hygeia, and the "highs" of the Mysteries...Therapies are (Ehrenwald, 573) "self-sealing systems." Is your faith?