

CONTEXTUALIZATION: A PARADIGM-SHIFT? ¹

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Abstract

Meaning is determined from the context of history and 'language', i e understood as the totality of human expression. The latter allegation is in keeping with phenomenological existential anthropology, namely the view of the human person as 'becoming' or Dasein. In the absence of timeless language or existence on earth, the human person lives in a continual 'becoming' of the present moment, which is partly determined by the past. The future direction can only be determined by the given, namely the past and present. Meaning thus changes from person to person, from generation to generation even within the same linguistic tradition. Communication is a primary factor in the Umwelt (or world) of Dasein, and this can be achieved through the process of understanding, by which one can consciously move from one context of existence to another. Up till recently exegesis confidently operated from a customary presupposition of the existence of immutable truths (or tenets) and (abstract?) universal language which speaks eternally, notwithstanding Dasein's developmental, cultural and intellectual limitations. In fact, the latter were denied by the view of the human person as fixed and static. Now we know that truth is relative to the cumulative progression of knowledge in space and time (i e history), acquired through research. Today we can understand a text by carefully relating it to its context and then translating its message to our context - a movement from one context to another i e contextualization. The latter, as 'translation' or 're-incarnation' would go deeper than mere interpretation or application of message which, because of their largely speculative or sometimes arbitrary nature, led to unbridled proliferation of publications precipitating a sad cul-de-sac in many fields of biblical research.

1. The title of this paper was initially formulated in response to the fastidious concerns of some of my colleagues regarding the role of the newly found interfaculty project for teaching the Bible at Unisa.

1. Definition of concepts and pertinent philosophical presuppositions

The phrase textual context can denote relations between parts of sentences, relations between sentences or relations between a text and other available literary material (Deist & Burden 1980:3). These conceptual relations take place on the level of one's understanding (Deist & Burden 1980:33), which may appear subjective, if intersubjective, where context now refers to life in general as shared experiences, whether personal or communal.

If the function of textual context is that of fixing meaning by taking into account the parts that precede or follow a passage, the function of life context is also that of determining meaning, since a text can be judged through the author's conceptual frame of reference or mentality. It is a measure of the relativity of objectivity to speak of the context of the speaker or writer, the context of the audience, or the context of the exegete. Certain problems have the tendency of eliciting as many opinions as there are exegetes, while others cut along schools of thought or denominational lines. Some approaches have been developed in specific places, e.g. German idealism and mysticism, etc. Theological trends, whether classical or novel, were based on a certain outlook on life, at some place in history. For example, the tenth century saw the church at its most prophetic when, in response to the signs of the times, it assumed a humanising role.

By paradigm is generally understood a pattern by which reality may be abstracted or conceived. Yet reality itself is not only multifaceted but an integral whole which could be approached from many points of view. This means that the whole of scientific endeavour expires once reality is known wholly and completely.

The foregoing assumption that reality is an integral whole (cf Plato's *materia prima*) ironically draws its support from several disciplines which apparently reduce reality to some basic (e.g. atoms and molecules in physics or chemistry, cells in biology, or the fundamental meaning of language in culture and human existence). It is our contention that given the fantastic complexity of things - whether animate or inanimate - no single discipline, let alone method, can provide exhaustive focus on reality, since the strength of science lies precisely in its reductionism or the narrowing of the field of investigation to one aspect, as a condition for the possibility of accuracy in analysis. It is this limitation of the scientific method which constitutes the basis for our discussion on the concept paradigm-shift, as expounded in the thesis of Kuhn (1970). The following is an oversimplified presentation of Kuhn's thesis.

Whereas scientific progress is commonly thought of as smooth and gradual, with one step leading to another in which an hypothesis leads to experiments which in turn yield new data that become the basis for a new, if more adequate hypothesis, Kuhn came with something different. He postulates that science progresses in discreet stages marked by major overarching theories in which the purpose of experimentation is not only to support the theory, but primarily to discover counter-evidence. The contrary evidence, it is true, at first leads to theory adaptation or

modification in order to accommodate counter-evidence. But with the progress of experimentation and the ensuing sophistication, the weight of counter-evidence eventually exceeds the capacity of the theory to adjust. When this happens, a critical stage in the particular science is reached.

Further, Kuhn points out that at such critical times, contrary to expectation, the scientific establishment holds on with tenacity to the regnant theory until contra-evidence becomes overwhelming. This state of affairs will continue until a new but significantly different overarching theory emerges to replace the old - and thus the 'revolutionary' aspect of this moment takes place in the history of the particular science. Pertinently, Kuhn speaks of 'paradigms', of 'paradigm-shifts' or 'paradigm-changes'.

In the field of theology, Walsh (1982:116-121) compares 'paradigms with 'models'. He characterizes 'shift' or 'change' as one from an attempt to 'speak truth' to one of attempt to 'speak about the truth'. But while for him this does not in itself in any way compromise the 'univocity of truth', it almost inevitably implies a multiplicity of ways of speaking about the truth. That is to say ways whose validity is a matter of degree rather than 'right' or 'wrong'.

The inter-disciplinary approach to reality, which is currently gaining impetus at many universities around the world, as well as the theory of paradigm-shift, both seem to point to one message, namely the complexity of reality and the concomitant inadequacy of the traditional tools of analysis. With regard to the cumulative progression of knowledge through research and experimentation, the creative demands of contextualization seem to consist in the dialectical presentation of originality within the main stream of orthodoxy in the practice of science, from which it draws support and insights. Scientific 'revolutions' in the history of any discipline are not uncommon to any historian of science; and since they are in the service of truth they call for sympathy and positive criticism.

Sociology has taught us that because of its power of legitimating values, whether 'good' or 'bad', religion is potentially the most dangerous institution at the disposal of a few. Christendom abounds with 'holy wars', ostensible 'crusades' and absolutised ideologies masquerading as truth. This places the onus of responsibility squarely on the teacher or theologian, that is to say within the context of education and practice, if at all the distinction between education and indoctrination is anything to go by.

2. Contextualization in the Bible

2.1 Contextualization in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament the historico-critical analysis, whether in the sense of document separation or document identification, implies the biblical 'author's' use of pre-existing material or sources. The current emphasis on redaction history (which seems to have reversed the order of traditional exegesis) puts the role of the final redactor in the limelight. His use of sources within his theological frame work or

context receives first attention as a basis for working backwards to the smallest oral unit.

Our thesis here is simply that the biblical 'author' proceeds to do his work by way of contextualizing his sources. This can be shown by the type of questions posed by exegesis: When was the story first told? What function could this kind of story have fulfilled at the time and in the kind of society suggested? Does the text form a unity? etc. Seen in this light, contextualization becomes synonymous with redactional activity. There will be no basic difference in approach between the Old Testament and New Testament in this regard, except where the exegetical question is designed to address a problem peculiar to either section.

2.2 Contextualization in the New Testament

Vorster (1982:2) defines contextualization as referring to 'situational context within a text and the world of reference of a literary unit (word, sentence, form)'. In this he tallies with the allegation of Deist and Burden (1980:28) that any given piece of literature has a 'mood' which may vary from one 'world' or 'narrative universe' to another. But Vorster further distinguishes between redaction and contextualization by linking the former word to redaction criticism which pre-occupied itself with the relationship between redaction and tradition. This does not, however, change the fact that the redactional activity of the biblical 'author' amounts to contextualization. In our opinion the latter concept, while partly coinciding with redactional activity, can have wider application as will be shown in the development of our study.

Contextualization or redaction does not only concern the use of *Jesu logia* or parables from the perspective of the evangelist's choice, but also the scriptures or Old Testament. Ironically the process is achieved through decontextualization, as it were, for words, sayings or traditions have to be lifted out of their original context. This brings us to yet another aspect of contextualization, namely change of meaning.

In our introduction we have hinted that the idea of context entails the fixing or determining of meaning. By transferring a concept, phrase or idea from its original context into that of the contemporary world of readers or audience, the 'author' is engaged in creating meaning or bridges of cross-cultural communication in the interest of fulfilment, whether personal, communal or religious. In practice this may mean that some words are put in Jesus' mouth or his attitude to certain practices, such as fasting, is probably represented in a way diametrically opposed to what actually happened. By interweaving myth with history the 'author' or evangelist is in effect preaching.

By mythological thinking we understand 'a striving for a total world-view, for an interpretation or meaning of all that is significant ... a serious attempt at integration of reality and experience ...' (Barr 1959:3). And since such myth is neither necessarily unscientific nor illogical (Barr 1959:3), its mere presence in the New Testament literature necessitates the placement of the search for the historical Jesus at the centre of exegesis. The distinction between Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ who is worshipped as the risen Lord becomes not an opposition between science (i.e., historicity) and religion (i.e. myth) but, as Augustine formulated theological

endeavour: faith looking for understanding. For, the rediscovery of the classics during the Renaissance made of science the flowering of early learning whose seeds were sown during the founding of the universities in the eleventh century.

Contrary to what we have just said, Bultmann saw myth as a characteristic of primitive people and in opposition to science. Hence his exegetical task consisted in an attempt to make the Bible intelligible to modern man. He accordingly embarked on a process whereby fact and myth are disentangled, called demythologization. Secondly, he undertook in the same breath, to recast the biblical message in the language and idiom of contemporary society, borrowed from Heidegger's existentialism. While the presuppositions of Bultmann's theory of knowledge implicit in his work, may be soundly based on reference to a world of meaning, whether in the 'primitive' or modern societies, his reduction of epistemology to method generated a backlash in which his own students re-initiated the quest for the historical Jesus in research.²

On the face of it, one would have thought that redaction criticism should suffice. But it is precisely in this connection that Vorster pleads for a remotivation of research from redaction criticism to contextualization in which attention is focussed on the audience. Texts, he argues, were written to be read or heard (Vorster 1982:11). At this juncture, it is our submission that if contextualization directs attention on the addressees in the biblical text, it can and should focus attention also on the modern reader of the Bible, who ought to be rescued from the limitations of the historico-critical method, or the irrelevance of its exclusive concern with redaction and tradition. This leads us to the next point of discussion, namely contextualization in exegesis. While Bultmann's efforts do in fact amount to the practice of contextualization in exegesis, albeit in a somewhat unsatisfactory manner, our study will examine the aspect of approach and/or method in the process of contextualization. We have already reviewed Bultmann's contribution in this light.

3. Contextualization in exegesis

3.1 Introduction

In our review of Bultmann's demythologization and contextualization in terms of Heidegger's existentialism, a number of things came to light: the relativity of 'objectivity' in the process of modern man's understanding of an ancient text. This means that the world of a text (i.e., mythology) is observed unsympathetically from outside, is dismissed as primitive and its ideas are expressed again in a more civilized, Western philosophy. But, if the norm of interpretation is the intention of

2. Bultmann's sense of history seems to have revolved round *Religionsgeschichte* and in function of *Formgeschichte*. The presupposition here is probably that the textual form, once identified, could unlock the meaning of texts. What concerns us is simply the fact that a history of thought or abstract ideas is one thing, while 'history' as a methodical record of public events is quite another. Vorster (1987) has written an informal article on the activities of Bultmann in 'Rudolph Bultmann as historikus'.

the author as expressed in the text, will Bultmann's contextualization be faithful to the redactor's purpose in the biblical texts? This calls for a closer look into the nature of language, the written text, the question of method in exegesis, as well as the resultant paradigm-shift. At this stage it would appear that legitimate contextualization in exegesis takes place when a dialogue is forged between the modern reader on the one hand, and the author of a text on the other, whose ideas and their world are expressly or implicitly represented in the external as well as internal evidence. Dialogue takes place on the basis of hermeneutics, for it is the exegete who, from his/her own life context asks questions and channels discussion. Needless to say, the type of questions asked determine the nature of the conclusions arrived at. Contextualization is undertaken in the interests of relevancy and (faith) commitment. In Bultmann, however, there seems no dialogue since the author and his world are systematically effaced by demythologization. What remains are barren ideas recast in modern philosophy - with everything that word connotations entail. What we have before us then is not the result of historical analysis which could enable contextualization, but contextual application.

3.2 The nature of language

Language may be regarded as a means of communication. Man, (generically understood) realizes himself in and through others. Human existence may be conceived as a form of self-realization or active self-identification which can only take place in a process of encounter with others. But, if relations with others are constitutively important for the growth of our personality, then language promotes the solidarity which structures a human community. Apart from its practical use in day-to-day living, language as a whole entails a vision of the universe, a specific perspective and orientation of thought, which characterizes the cultural tenor of intellectual refinement - whether one thinks of it in terms of rhetorics, poetry or prose.

Language implies especially the fundamental, mostly unconscious, basic orientation of a given culture, what J H Newman called 'the first principles', Ortega Y Gasset the 'creencias', the basic beliefs of a certain culture, what the Germans call the *Vor-Entscheidung*, the basic choices of every culture even before any explicit thought, or the basic assumptions of any culture (Fransen 1978:11).

It would appear then, that language is a world, whether seen from the perspective of the interpreter of a text or the text itself. In a word, the relationship between mind and world is reducible to language. But, one cannot with Gadamer conclude that reality is therefore simply language³, for not only is it relational, but can also both generate and mediate one's perception or experience of reality.

3. Gadamer seems to have argued cogently that understanding is not one of several attitudes of a human subject but the mode of being, or *Dasein*. Understanding, therefore, represents the basic movement of existence. See in this connection his 'Truth and Method'(1975:397-447). See also Hirsch (1967:245-264) for a critique of Gadamer's hermeneutic. Weatjen (1982) has also written a lucid analysis of Gadamer's hermeneutic.

3.3 The nature of a written text

The concept written text can be understood in many, perhaps different ways. For example, by the very fact of being written a text is said to be set free by its author. As opposed to the spoken word, the written text assumes independent existence and can be addressed without recourse to the author. But, how is a written text understood and interpreted without the author's corrections and/or clarifications?

According to Gadamer it is the sharability of the subject matter through linguisticity that makes understanding or the 'melting of horizons' possible. For it is the commonality of the interpreter's belongingness to language and the text's belongingness to language that facilitates the communication of the sense which the words of a text convey (Waetjen 1982:3). Consequently, the author's intention cannot be a measure of the meaning of the words of a text. Rather, what is decisive comes to expression in the historical encounters which the text subsequently has with its interpreters. For language has a being of its own (Hirsch 1967:3) which through the subject matter encounters and interrogates the interpreter.

Perhaps we should grant Gadamer that language has a being of its own. But such a language as classical Hebrew or Koin Greek is divorced from its living world and culture whose experiences it attempts to objectify, and which contain the precise sense of the words used. What we have in ancient texts is thus not only a problem of inter-cultural interpretation such as confronted Bible translators, but also the possibility of hidden 'finite provinces of meaning', which may sometimes hold the key to interpretation:

... The reality of everyday life retains its paramount status even as such 'leaps' (into finite provinces of meaning) take place. If nothing else, language makes sure of this. The common language available ... for the objectification of ... experiences is grounded in everyday life and keeps pointing back to it even as it is employed to interpret experiences in finite provinces of meaning. Typically, therefore, I 'distort' the reality of the latter as soon as I begin to use the common language in interpreting them, that is, I 'translate' the non-everyday experiences back into the paramount reality of everyday life (Berger & Luckman 1966:25).

Along with Eagleton (1978:64), Waetjen (1982:10) submits that if understanding is as Hirsch (1976:34) maintains, namely 'a validating, self-correcting process, an active positing of corrigible schemata we test and modify in the very process of coming to understand an utterance', it can operate validly only by including the cognitive as well as heuristic instrumentalities of sociological and anthropological theory. For, he argues, although texts may be individual productions, their producers lived in a generic society, belonged to distinctive social formations and to some degree shared the ideologies of the classes which they represented. Such ideologies found expression subtly or overtly in their texts. By and large, the ideas which they formulated or the subject matter which they conveyed through their text arose out of a particular socio-cultural milieu, rather than a transcendent realm of knowledge

that is universally accessible to the mind, as it were. In sum, the foregoing arguments seem to say that context is born of and limited to history; context has a situational element to it and life context is co-extensive with *Sitz im Leben*.

In conclusion, suffice it to say that although it can be shown that at times the Egyptian civilization and culture changed very little in a period of ten thousand years, ancient cultures were not necessarily invariably static. Wars, national interests and/or security as well as the changing fortunes in the international scene of the Ancient Near East all ensured that there was political and social change. Moreover, Ortega Y Gasset has demonstrated that every generation can have its own cultural distinctives within the same language group. On the whole, the foregoing factors can have influence on the use of language whether on a radical level (e.g., the development of the Aramaic dialect or Koiné Greek on a national scale) or a subtle level (e.g., the finite provinces of meaning) for members of the in-group or class, etc. Hence, written texts must be seen in their own context and 'interpreted in relation to the systemic realities and interconnections of ecology, technology, demography, class, economics, politics and religion which macro-sociology analyzes and synthesizes' (Waetjen 1982:11).

3.4 The nature of method in exegesis

In our investigation into the nature of language and text, we have tried to show that not only may the interpreter and text often belong to different languages, but that even within the same language group interpretation can be an intercultural problem, given historical differences. Objective interpretation of a text is thus not only hindered by the structures of human pre-understanding (i.e. the psychological implications of their belongingness to a specific language and culture) but also by method which, by its nature, entails certain presuppositions presumably from the interpreter's prevailing cultural trends. The interpreter's 'distorted' view lies in the almost inevitable projection of his/her frame of reference into the text in an attempt to understand it, from whence comes interpretation. Of interest at this juncture is the reference to Gadamer's systematic formulation of Heidegger's conception of understanding:

Truth is not reached methodically but dialectically; the dialectical approach to truth is seen as the antithesis of method, indeed as a means of overcoming the tendency of method to pre-structure the individual's way of seeing. Strictly speaking, method is incapable of revealing new truth; it only renders explicit the kind of truth already implicit in method... In method the inquiring subject leads and controls and manipulates; in dialectic the matter encountered poses the question to which he responds. (Palmer 1969:165)

In our opinion, the question of method (in exegesis) seems always inherently related to the object of investigation. The latter (i.e., the nature of the object investigated) should determine the former (i.e., the kind of method used). In other words, the question of method can only be discussed effectively in conjunction with reality, conceived and approached by humans in terms of some paradigm. This leads us to the next point of discussion, namely paradigms.

3.5 Is biblical research going through a paradigm-shift?

The Bible can be approached from many angles: as a literary work, a historical source or Old Testament/New Testament theology. But, those for whom the Bible is a sacred book attach great importance to exegesis and hermeneutics. This can be done in a number of ways which in turn are based on conscious or unconscious models.

3.5.1 The natural science paradigm

On account of the tremendous success achieved in the natural sciences since the *Aufklärung*, their method became almost synonymous with the practice of science. This happened to such an extent that the humanities like the classics (i.e., Greek and Latin), history as an academic discipline, biblical studies, the positivistic approach to sociology, etc., adopted a technically orientated model of the interpretation of observable data, during the nineteenth century. Thus, in biblical scholarship text criticism, historical criticism, literary criticism including tools such as source, form and redaction criticism became the dominant method of exegesis up till the present day. The opposition between subject and object has prevailed as the fundamental hermeneutical presupposition. The interpreting subject utilizes the scientifically devised tools of interpretation to collect objective data like names of people, names of places, events and above all, ideas. All these were seemingly regarded as supra-historical entities. The interpreter then proceeds to reconstruct the history of the past as best he can. The results of exegesis were often analytical and fragmentary as though the text were blown into splinters - except for some synthetic speculations here and there. The discipline was a monopoly of a few initiated elite and their publications were not of much use to other theological disciplines, to say nothing of the general public. But, like any other science, exegesis has its own heroes, the truth of whose findings has stood the test of time. This lends some validity to the methods used, which should be measured more by their usefulness rather than in terms of 'right' or 'wrong'.

3.5.1.1 Evaluation of the natural science paradigm

The technically orientated model of interpretation of the Scriptures presupposed the autonomy of the written text and the concomitant indeterminacy of its meaning. The latter (i.e., meaning) was derived not from the intention of the author but his text. This means that the text meant whatever its interpreters made of it from the several possibilities offered by lexicons and as long as some coherence could be worked out⁴. Hence the proliferation of books, articles, dictionaries, commentaries and

4. Botha (1985:iii) pertinently argues as follows: 'An existing literature on the meaning of Greek words in the New Testament reveals that there is often no uniform and responsible approach to the study of the meaning of words. Frequently, tendentious exegetical and dogmatic conclusions are reached on the

dissertations on practically every verse in the Bible and the resultant *cul-de-sac* in many fields of investigation. According to this model, understanding was seen as objective in that:

- (a) it was based on the commonality of the interpreter's belongingness to language and the text's belongingness to language;
- (b) communication between the interpreter and text was allegedly forged through the sense which the words of a text conveyed;
- (c) the said sense was obtained through understanding or the sharability of the subject matter through linguisticity that makes *Horizontverschmelzung* between interpreter and text possible.

The problem with an analysis like the above is, as we have indicated, that language is elevated to the status of being by positivists and critical commentators like Gadamer, a status practically divorced from the living world and culture which produced it. And if by culture sociologists understand intersubjectivity, applicable to both interpreter and text, will translation not always be a subjective paraphrase?

Even where two languages may refer to the same so-called object like man (understood generically), the Greek and Hebrew had different anthropologies which determine the sense of the word. For example, in his exegesis of Matthew 1:23 which seems dependent on Isaiah 7:14, Young (ref Deist & Burden 1980:108) gets into difficulty by translating the Hebrew word *'almâ* (normally a word referring to a young woman, whether married or unmarried) by the Greek *parthenôn* (normally a word for virgin). Contrary to Young, Deist and Burden (1980:109) hold that the Hebrew word for virgin is *betûlâ*. Meanwhile, Young is presented as a representative of the historical-literal exegesis who believed that the text in Isaiah was a direct foreshadowing of the events in Matthew, relating to the birth of 'One who truly is God and King.'

Wildberger, (ref Deist & Burden 1980:108) who is presented as representing the historico-critical method, convincingly suggests, on the basis of Ugaritic usage, that *'alm'* may have referred to a newly married wife of king Ahaz, within the context of Isaiah's interview. In addition, Wildberger discusses concepts like Immanuel and the sign value of the birth foretold fairly reasonably. And yet a closer look will show that of the two authors, Young gets into difficulty precisely because he addresses the ultimate question in exegesis, namely how to account for the structural correspondence between Matthew 1:23 and Isaiah 7:14. Wildberger gets the better of Young, simply because the historico-critical method which he employs safely bypasses this problem. It is a kind of problem that may not be completely resolved by lengthy arguments relating to translation, as Young had attempted. An example will illustrate our point:

basis of the assumed meaning of words ... the traditional lexica are (...) not without problematical tendencies. Those who make use of such forces are, however, themselves often not capable of identifying or correcting such problems, with resultant ill effects for exegesis and theological deductions'.

Virginity in the Old Testament was basically negative (cf Jdg 11:37, 38), if only to enhance the marriage ideal by abstinence from premarital sexual relations. However, in the Hellenistic culture the reverse seems true. Virginity or celibacy appear to have enjoyed a positive status (cf Matthew 19:12a) from whence they were given religious significance (Matthew 19:12b). The origin of this tradition apparently lies in society's desire to stem the disruptive effects of prostitution at some earlier stage in history. Paul went so far as to elevate the religious profession of celibacy and virginity above Christian marriage (1 Cor 7:8), which he reduced to the status of mere safeguard for those incapable of absolute continence like himself (1 Cor 7:9). This negative view of marriage runs counter to the excellence accorded it in the Old Testament, whether one thinks of it in terms of its divine institution in Genesis 2:18-24, or prophecy where the relationship between Yahweh and his people is described in words or phrases borrowed from marriage symbolism like: 'I will betroth you to myself ... with integrity and justice, with tenderness and love' (Hosea 2:21-19, cf Jeremiah 31:22b, Ezekiel 16:8). The point we are trying to make is that the sense or connotations of words were buried with culture or lost through translation of for example *betûlâ* by *parthenón*, let alone *'almâ* by *parthenón*. By the same token one would be missing the point if one tackled the parable of the good Samaritan, without first establishing the Jews' attitude to Samaritans. With regard to the previous example, we would retain the verdict of discontinuity on the level of sense between Hebrew and Greek words. Hence Matthew resorted to contextualization, in practice, a reincarnation of, and fulfilment of the concept Immanuel, by applying it to the Christ.

Further, textual dependency, for example, of the New Testament texts on the Old Testament texts was explained by exegetes in the natural science model as (a) implying that the Old Testament was directly foreshadowing the New Testament - a presupposition which leads to an illicit interpretation of the Old Testament by the New Testament as did Young, or (b) as the New Testament use of the Old Testament, which was sometimes inaccurate because misuse would at times have been more appropriate. It would appear that contextualization can be an apt description of such dependency.

Lastly, exegetes in the natural science model often distinguished between exegesis and application. The latter was characterised by the following:

- (a) To be 'objective' or free from what they believed to be subjective illusions, application was theoretical, and imposingly dry.
- (b) It relied on memory of instances from the text comparable to those in the world of the interpreter.
- (c) Intellectual demands and linguistic prerequisites, traditionally ensured that only those clever or with a well above average aptitude gained entry into the profession of exegetes.
- (d) Application is usually found in sermons, whether by word of mouth or published. It may also take the form of subtle apology in news papers, books, etcetera.

3.5.2 The human science paradigm

The human science model is essentially a nuancing rather than a negation of the natural science model. Its posture and stance has already been hinted in our evaluation of the natural science model. In other words the human science model agrees with the natural sciences that a human being is a mass of chemistry in one respect, as it were. But, it will hasten to add that a human being is also a subject. In the interest of fairness, therefore, science should take into account man's consciousness, rationality, psychological and cultural ability for self-determination. As an object of study, his behaviour can be observed and meticulously recorded. But the recorded data cannot be adequately interpreted without the observer's entry into his personal world as a subject, on a par with the scientist or observer. This is the lesson positivist sociologists and behaviourist psychologists had to learn. But the lesson which exegetes had to learn was that of refraining from treating names of people, places and above all ideas as though they were mere inanimate objects or supra-historical entities, from which history could be reconstructed from an arm-chair, as it were. This means that the rehabilitation of the conditions of a text becomes imperative for understanding and interpretation.

3.5.2.1 Contextualization as interpretation

We have already noted that biblical authors contextualized central messages in traditions, parables, narratives etc. This applies not only to the several representations of the resurrection, but also the words and deeds of Jesus in the very composition of the gospels. This does not mean that allegories here and there (which would be equivalent to application) were excluded. But these fulfilled a different function of a more didactic nature. The following hints may help us to distinguish contextualization from mere application:

- (a) The whole person, rather than just the intellect or theory is involved, both on the cognitive and affective level.
- (b) Wisdom rather than mere cleverness seems essential. One can therefore speak of intelligence.
- (c) Contextualization does not rely on coercion, the external authority of the Bible or inspiration, but on the authority of existential truth (witness) or credibility. This may engender assent or rejection.
- (d) Contextualization is essentially a reincarnation of the message: Jesus is reborn, as it were, not a Jew but a member of the race of those among whom he is contextualized. (Hence it is possible that what we do for each other, or to each other we do for him or to him; cf Mt 25:40-45).
- (e) Contextualization becomes identical with mission if we cease to define mission in a geographical sense, but as areas in our life which are foreign to the gospel imperatives (Comblin 1979).

3.6 Conclusion

The twentieth century, especially the second half of it has seen the emergence of many so-called theologies in many parts of the world, which share a common genus or subject matter of liberation. Each in their own way, constitute contextualization, with varying degrees of success or failure. Their humble beginnings are no different from the feeble origins of the christian movement, for there were many messiahs even in Jesus' day. The public reaction will perhaps take a form similar to that in Jesus' day too, namely a rejection without further ado; a searching and listening; enthusiasm; apathy....

During the seventies, Schillebeeckx (1974) epitomised the Christian faith by suggesting that it is our turn to write the fifth gospel, with the help of the same Spirit which inspired the freedom of the evangelists. Should this be our baptismal calling, then contextualization, rather than application, appears to be the way bequeathed to us by our predecessors in the faith. For writing a gospel means facing the needs and challenges of our age head-on, even as did the communities for which the gospels were written.

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