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## **Toward a Theological Understanding of Hermeneutics: In Dialogue with Schleiermacher and Barth on Hermeneutics**

**Abstract:** This article explores a constructive dialogue between Friedrich Schleiermacher's general hermeneutics and Karl Barth's theological exegesis, aiming to move beyond their perceived opposition. While Schleiermacher emphasizes human understanding through grammatical and psychological interpretation, Barth insists on the priority of divine revelation and the theological content of Scripture. This paper argues that a theologically informed theory of understanding can reconcile these positions. By engaging with hermeneutical theorists such as Gadamer and Ricoeur, and incorporating theological categories like the role of the Holy Spirit, the communal nature of reading, and the doctrine of human as sinner and saint, the article proposes a more integrated approach. This approach affirms both divine initiative and human participation in the interpretive process, suggesting that Schleiermacher's insights can enrich Barth's exegesis, and vice versa. In doing so, it advocates for a theological hermeneutics that is both faithful to the Scripture and attentive to the realities of human understanding.

**Keywords:** Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, hermeneutics, theological exegesis, human understanding, Holy Spirit

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Grace must find expression in life, otherwise  
it is not grace.

Karl Barth (1982, 174)

No God without a world, and no world  
without God.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1799)

## Introduction

“God can be known only through God” (Thiselton 2009, 190), not by human reason or experience, Karl Barth proclaims. In revolting against the Liberalism of his era, Barth refused to surrender his theology to anthropology. Insisting that revelation is beyond human understanding, his hermeneutics is *consistently* shaped and molded by the subject matter of his *theological exegesis*.<sup>1</sup> For Barth, the theological content of Scripture takes precedence over any theory of interpretation.

On the contrary Friedrich Schleiermacher argues that whatever the type of inspiration of Scripture, it does not affect the approach to hermeneutics. The Scripture must be read like any other book, at a purely human level, of what the author intended to communicate through the text. In the lecture notes of his student, Schleiermacher (2006, 79) makes the following remarks:

Given the great variety of ideas of inspiration, it is best, first of all, to test what sort of consequences the strictest idea leads to, i.e., the idea the power of the spirit extends from the inception of the thought to the act of writing itself. Due to the variants, this no longer helps us. These were, however, already present before the Scriptures were collected. Here, too, then, criticism is necessary. – But even the first reader of the apostles’ epistles would have had to abstract from their ideas to the author and from application of their knowledge of that, and would have

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<sup>1</sup> Some scholars would not agree that Barth has a consistent hermeneutical approach; for example, see Cunningham 1995. For a view that Barth’s hermeneutics is a more consistent one, see Jeanron 1988 and Burnett 2004.

completely confused... Therefore, this interpretation must be correct. The same point holds with respect to the grammatical side. But then *every element must be treated as purely human, and the action of the Spirit was only to produce the inner impulse.* (The emphasis is ours).

Schleiermacher firmly believes that the crucial matter in hermeneutics is isolated in the human *author's* thoughts and experiences, as these are understood through the *text*. The emphatic and logical attempts to reach understanding have no correspondence to the divine inspiration of the Scripture, in the sense that this divine origin, even if assumed, would have fully been 'incarnated' to the grammatical and psychological aspects of the writing. Thus, scriptural hermeneutics are necessarily limited to these human features.

Barth, on the other hand, argues that Scripture is *a witness to* and *a form of* the Word of God, and should be read as such that whatever theory of interpretation is employed, it will always be surrendered to its theological content. Hermeneutics is a servant in the house of the Logos. In a lecture delivered at University of Groningen, Winter Semester of 1923/1924, Barth (1982, 183) made following remarks about Schleiermacher's hermeneutics:

How remarkable that he does not seem to have considered the possibility that the thought which I understand in what is said by someone else, whether with or without his system or any other hermeneutics, might contingently, without any qualitative or quantitative possibilities of misunderstandings, the truth or Word of God, and I should then have good reason to treat this address more specifically and more seriously than any other as the bearer of *this* content, a reference to *this* subject. What if special NT hermeneutics, whether gratefully employing Schleiermacher's method or any other general method, were to consist quite simply of taking these texts more seriously in this specific sense? Why should not God have spoken to man in a way that is necessarily and compellingly understandable? And why should not human speech be necessarily and compellingly understandable as God makes it so? If God is God?

It is clear from this remark that Barth takes the content of Scripture as the priority over hermeneutics, in which the subject matter stands as master while hermeneutical device serve, at best, as a tool to approach Scripture as such. In other words, discourse matter takes precedence over reading method; ontology over epistemology. But if, as Barth contends, the givenness of Scripture could ensure that there is no qualitative and quantitative misunderstanding,<sup>2</sup> then Anthony C. Thiselton (1998, 230–31) is right in stating that hermeneutics would not be needed, a logical dilemma indeed. Instead, we want to affirm not only the divine origin of Scripture but also the insights of human understanding. Here, at this point, there is a need to find a way how Schleiermacher's insights on hermeneutics may actually work hand in hand with Barth's emphasis on God's centered theological exegesis.

This paper is an attempt to answer this question and to move beyond the divergence between Schleiermacher's hermeneutics and Barth's theological exegesis. The thesis of this paper is that the theory of interpretation constructed under a more nuanced theological understanding of "understanding" may *reconcile* the emphasis on divine origin of Scripture with the theory of human understanding. We will attempt to show that the theory of human understanding in Schleiermacher in fact may supply some insights for Barth's theological exegesis, and Barth's theological exegesis while has constructed the main road of theological understanding but essentially in need of hermeneutical reflections.

This will be carried out by firstly showing that the insights of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical theory are not necessarily sterile to theological questions and that he, in the end, cannot avoid the inherent theological dimension of human understanding. Secondly, I will attempt to show that Barth's hermeneutics, while successful in establishing foundation for theological exegesis should not avoid reflections on hermeneutics, since the *theological content* assumed in his theological exegesis is necessarily caught up in

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<sup>2</sup> Qualitative and quantitative misunderstandings refer to Schleiermacher's category of misunderstandings, consecutively, misunderstanding of what is the point and misunderstanding of how important the point is.

the Hermeneutical Circle. It needs to be confirmed by the reading of the text and the reflection of those readings. Finally, in the last two parts of the paper, three aspects of Christian theology: divine agency of Holy Spirit, community shaped reading and theological understanding of man as sinner and saint will be brought into discussion in an attempt to clarify and resolve the problem. These theological categories will be engaged with insights from Gadamer, Ricoeur and proponents of theological hermeneutics. These theories of hermeneutics, we propose, are potentially correspondent to elements of theological understanding. Through this exercise we hope that we may highlight a way beyond the impasse and show that general hermeneutics pursued by Schleiermacher can actually work hand in hand with the theological exegesis of Scripture employed by Barth. In the following discussion, we will firstly consider Schleiermacher's reflections and contributions to hermeneutics, and its shortfalls in relation to theological understanding.

### **1. Insights and Limits of Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics**

Although Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is sometimes underrated, he actually shapes the foundation of modern hermeneutics and anticipates many dimensions of postmodern themes and insights on hermeneutics. For examples, some seed ideas of Saussure's distinction between *la langue* (language possibility) and *la parole* (language uses) were already present in his lecture on hermeneutics (Thiselton 1998, 232). Another example is his discussions on text, content and its effects has recognized elements of locution, illocution and perlocution in speech act theory (Thiselton 2006, 21). Thiselton argues that Schleiermacher's contribution to Hermeneutics is 'far reaching than is often supposed' (Thiselton 1998, 204).

Schleiermacher combines the questions 'how is a text to be understood?' and 'how does understanding itself occur?' because he believes that the first can only be answered in terms of the second (Schleiermacher and Kimmerle 1977, 1). He reflects on hermeneutics as an *art of understanding*, moving beyond a procedural manual of handling difficult texts, and provides us with penetrating insights to human understanding. His insights may be applied not only

to writings but also to oral, written or any linguistic statements.<sup>3</sup> Even an evangelical theologian-scholar like J.I. Packer can appreciate his insights, that hermeneutics is not only about ‘public facts but also the personal thoughts and feelings concerning them... and we may well applaud Schleiermacher for underlining them’ (1985, 336).

In one of his lectures on hermeneutics, Schleiermacher (2006, 83) set the goal of hermeneutics as follow:

The task is to be formulated...: ‘to understand the text at first as well as and then even better than its author.’ Since we have no direct knowledge of what was in the author’s mind, we must try to become aware of many things of which he himself may have been unconscious. Moreover, with respect to the objective aspects, the author had no data other than we have.

*Better* here is not in the sense we know the author better than he knows himself, but we may make our knowledge of language and history related to the text and the author more conscious than the author himself or herself who may just unconsciously know or assume them. The linguistic and authorial dimensions of a text are understood through grammatical and psychological interpretation by method of comparison and divination, so that interpreter can penetrate to the events and thoughts behind the text production in a dialogical fashion (Schleiermacher 2006, 225). This process occurs within a hermeneutical circle, where understanding of the whole and part are related dialectically, in back and forth movements.

All these processes are made possible by shared human experience in a shared world, communality in language and structure of meaning. Nevertheless, for Schleiermacher, understanding requires not only inquiry but also receptivity to enter into dialogue in and with the text, and this means, among others, realizing the presence of the ‘Other’, who is addressing the readers. Interpretation is more about to conform rather than to reshape the text (Watson 2010, 120). Thiselton (1998, 205) suggests that for Schleiermacher, understanding is mostly like the process of understanding a friend.

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<sup>3</sup> These ideas were later developed by Dilthey.

It does not solely master a collection of the data, but necessarily involves relational dimension to that data.

Nevertheless, understanding will be always a relative approximation to a total understanding, because total understanding would be only a theoretical construct that in reality can never be achieved. The result of all interpretation will be always *provisional*. Thus, hermeneutical constructs are understood essentially as regulative ideas. It is a way in which the author could be relatively approximated in our understanding (Thiselton 1998, 82–84).

What lies behind these penetrating insights? What was the background of Schleiermacher's project? If we attempt to frame Schleiermacher's hermeneutical project in term of contemporary philosophy, it would be a project to resolve a dilemma between structuralism and intentionalism extremes (Bowie 2005, 73–90). The first gives priority to the 'power' of language as the controller of subject matter which is subdued to the limit and possibility of meaning already present in language; the second gives priority to psychological dynamics of the author in writing in which language is no more than a tool for expression of inner life (Bowie 2005, 73). In other words, in structuralism, meaning is understood as *receptive*, because subject has been controlled by language (*receptively related*). While in intentionalism, meaning is seen as *spontaneous* in relation to language, in which subject uses language as medium for expressing itself (*spontaneously related*). In this way subject matter relation to language can be seen as *passive-receptive* (structuralism) or *active-spontaneous* (intentionalism) (Bowie 2005, 74).

With this view, it might be inaccurate to label Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as a hermeneutics of empathetic that merely tries to relieve the author's psychological state. As Bowie has suggested, his hermeneutics would be best understood in light of his writing on Dialectic (Bowie 2005, 75–76). While different to, and in a way modifying Kant, Schleiermacher tries to combine receptivity and spontaneity of language-subject in a more *shifting relationship* depending on the field of matter (for example, subject is more active in aesthetic, but more passive in science). He rejects correspondent theory of truth, as in realism, according to which, concept corresponds to a *real object*. But he believes, with Kant,

that a *concept* is only related to *other concept* of that *same object*. The object perceived is put into words by an author and becomes a *schema*, through which meaning is related to the object based on the claim and demand of the individual author. But because the input and process of this schematization are different for each author, the same locutional word(s) could be employed for different meanings. That is why interpretation is unavoidable, and Schleiermacher argues that divinization is the way forward to understand what a *schema* tries to describe, to approximate the full understanding when an author translates the object into a concept. Divinization supplies our comparative abilities with affective dimension to creatively penetrate words and to relive the process of writing.

Schleiermacher, clearly, stands under the shadow of Kant to emphasize the centrality of human subject. The limitation of this approach is the failure to give adequate attention to “factual or objective reference of theological statement” (Thiselton 2006, 455) This is also one of the reasons of his non-theological approach and his hermeneutical limitation that fails to appreciate that the “Other” may not necessarily be an object or a passive subject per se, but may also an *active subject* that inquires and stands at the central of the dialogues.

When it comes to discourses related to God, Schleiermacher refers to human experience as a window for the transcendental. At this point Schleiermacher romanticist attitude gives priority of experience over text, and he undervalues the ‘doctrine into a residue that results only from human creative experience’ (Thiselton 2006, 455). Schleiermacher attempts to provide a non-theological hermeneutics, but aspects of theological interpretation can never be avoided. We always read as human readers, and there is no non-theological conception of the human being. We always read in a context, as part of community, even a community of scholars is still a community, that this sense of being in a community with its existence in a stream of history and its struggle against social and cultural context would be best if brought out into awareness in interpretation.

Can we frame this process of understanding in a way that brings out consciously a robust theological understanding? Can we also

appeal to doctrinal aspects of Christian traditions, rather than human experience alone, in constructing hermeneutical process? We believe we can. And Barth has made distinctive contributions for this advancement. So, now to this unavoidable aspect of theological reading, especially as it is applied to Scripture, we now turn to discuss Barth's hermeneutical insights.

## 2. Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis

Barth's hermeneutics has been described with different terms that might create confusion rather than clarification at first, for example: Werner G. Jeanrond's *Macro Hermeneutics* (1988, 81), George Hunsinger's *Hermeneutics of Realism* (2001, 210) or Eberhard Jüngel's *Hermeneutics of Metacriticism* (1986, 70). But lately, the term *Theological Exegesis* seem to be a more common, and might be a more suitable expression of Barth's hermeneutical approach.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless all these scholars equally see that for Barth, the subject matter will be always the foundation of hermeneutical approach. In Barth's own words, "the universal rule of interpretation is that a text can be read and understood and expounded only with reference to and in light of its theme" (Wallace 1988, 399).

Against liberal who interpret Scripture as expression of human religious experience, Barth uses hermeneutics that would be faithful to the subject matter (*sache*), and in the case of Scripture, it is neither religious expression nor objectified historical reconstruction, but revelation of God in the person and history of Jesus (Chung 2006, 46).

The concept of *sache* is difficult to translate, but necessarily contains "the concept of heavenly father in his earthly reign, as an *object* that also is a *subject*, as something *to explore* but yet *exploring us*" (Burnett 2019, 184–97). For Barth, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ takes *three forms* of the Revealed Word (Revelation), the Written Words (Scripture) and the Proclaimed Word (Proclamation). Thus, Barth sees hermeneutics not as the preliminary to theology, but as essential part of theology itself,

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<sup>4</sup> For example, by Burnett, Cunningham, and Jüngel.

as part of the exposition of the doctrine of the Word of God, in dogmatics (Jeanrond 1988, 84–85). This means also hermeneutics is basically a churchly activity, part of self-evaluation of church's identity and proclamation in light of Scripture as normative witness to the saving act of God in Jesus Christ (Wood 2002, 165–67). Hermeneutics for Barth is grounded in theological questions, and must be answered by theological answers (Wood 2002, 165–67).

Mark I. Wallace argues that Barth's hermeneutics may be said "a new model," in the sense that both historical and literary approaches of hermeneutics do not yet account for necessary "pneumatic moment" in the process of interpretation (Wallace 1988, 408). Barth sees Holy Spirit as the commander of God's revelation. The Scripture did not contain inherently the *sache*, but only by the work of Holy Spirit. But it does not mean that Holy Spirit will freely alter the meaning and the sense of the words (Vanhoozer 2005, 48). There is continuity between the words of Scripture and the revelation of God. Thus, Barth is not ignoring the historical studies of Scripture or its literary elements. But while many consider them as the essence of the exploration, Barth places them as *preparatory stage* for understanding the *sache* of Scripture.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer (2005, 40) compares the notion of the Word of God in Barth and among evangelical theologians. Among evangelical theologians, the word of God is more as an object of study, while for Barth it is more as a subject who is speaking. So, what is Scripture in relation to the Word of God? It is a participation of human word in God's word, *a witness*, as the biblical authors are not telling about their religious experience of God, but of the Word of God (Vanhoozer 2005, 40). While Barth insists that revelation is not Scripture, we have no direct access to revelation in itself, but only in and through the Scripture (Vanhoozer 2005, 40). Thus, Scripture as written testimony is *a form* of the Word of God (Vanhoozer 2005, 41). It is so because in Barth, the ontology of being is understood as *becoming* (McCormack 2009, 55–75). Scripture is being the Word of God because it is becoming the Word of God in the process of interpretation, as God choose to do so (McCormack 2009, 66). On the other hand, in case God choose not to do so, Scripture will not

become what it is. Bruce L. McCormack (2009, 66) contends that for Barth the meaning of becoming as “becoming what it is already is.”

These double notions of Scripture as *witness to* and *a form of* word of God shape Barth’s hermeneutical approach. By implication, the basic format of biblical interpretation is subordination. Barth’s hermeneutics is a passionate hermeneutics (Jeanron 1988, 88) or in Richard E. Burnett’s term, a hermeneutics of Love and Trust (2019, 184–220). This is so because the revelation of the Word of God is beyond the human inquiry into its linguistic and psychological dimensions (to use Schleiermacher’s terms). Hermeneutics is employed as a service for opening our ears to the voice of Scripture through which the living voice of God can be heard again. There is no hermeneutical key to open the understanding of the Scripture. It is a miraculous happening, through the grace of God, and the proper form of hermeneutical posture is in the form of prayer (Vanhoozer 2005, 165–71).<sup>5</sup>

There is a sense in which Barth’s philosophical understanding is different to Schleiermacher. We have explored that Schleiermacher’s rejection of correspondent theory of truth forms the foundation of his approach in hermeneutics. Similarly, Barth’s “philosophical” understanding shapes his hermeneutical approach. Hunsinger suggests that Barth’s approach to narrative construal is neither literal nor expressive (Hunsinger 2001, 210–25). By the first, he means literal correspondent to reality; and by the second, he means a non-referent understanding to reality, words are just self-referential to intratextual reality. For Barth, on the other hand, scriptural references are essentially “an intratextual category whose *extratextual force* is that of *analogy*” (Hunsinger 2001, 210–25).<sup>6</sup> So, “the relation between text and reference, far from being literal, was essentially a relation between a network on intratextual patterns and a real but ineffable subject matter, mediated by analogical predication” (Hunsinger 2001, 214). For example, the miracles narrative of Jesus in Gospel is neither literal nor expressive, but

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<sup>5</sup> Prayer is here understood not as mystical exercise alone, but as necessarily including intellectual life.

<sup>6</sup> Emphasis is ours.

sort of realistic witness of legendary events. Thus reference in Barth means exclusively referent to the living Jesus, not to isolated historical events, independent of God's testimony in the Scripture, which is open to the falsification and verification of historians (Vanhoozer 2005, 48).

Barth's emphasis on the *sache* of the text, which is capable of revealing itself, has been criticized by Jeanrond as lack of adequate self-critical evaluation (Jeanrond 1988, 89–91). The only way to evaluate Barth's universalization of his *particular* hermeneutical content is by reading the texts itself. There is no escape way from hermeneutical circle. It needs a continuous test as to whether the content suggested is in fact the *sache* he is proposing; here is where hermeneutical reflection helps to differentiate between the so called *sache* against plurality of interpretations (Jeanrond 1988, 89–91). Theology needs hermeneutics to question validity of the assumptions, and hermeneutics needs theology to form and direct the questions asked and contents pursued. They need each other. While Barth helps us to give appropriate space for theological message of Scripture, it does not mean, the role of Holy Spirit necessarily replaces a proper reflection of hermeneutical approach.

Thiselton explains that Barth's reluctant to have explicit discussion on hermeneutics is rooted in theological view that "no natural point of contact already exists between man and the Word of God" (1996, 88). This supposed discontinuity is a big gulf that separates between human understanding and God's (Thiselton 1996, 88). The event of Word of God is beyond human capacity and experience. However this has led Barth to an unnecessary emphasis that at times seem to imply that the revelation of the Word is somehow unrelated to natural process of human understanding (Thiselton 1996, 89). So Barth may say something like, "This Word of God can only confront and illuminate man as truth and reality if it is seen to run *counter to his whole natural capacity to understand*" (Thiselton 1996, 89). In the end, for Barth, 'God is God', and there is no natural bridge between man and God. This is a rather closed attitude that stem from discontinuity between human understanding and God's. Jüngel suggests that this is in fact an insight of Natural Theology, but used by Barth to emphasis the disjunction between

God's and man's understanding (Jüngel 1986, 74–80). We should not marginalize hermeneutics in favor of the subject matter; quite contrary hermeneutics may and should help to clarify the meaning of the subject matter, and subject matter help to construct the hermeneutical approach (Jüngel 1986, 74–80). Hermeneutics and theology rather than opposing each other actually need each other to develop not only a more *theologically sound hermeneutics*, but also a more *hermeneutically sound theology*.

Nicholas Wolterstorff provides an analysis that Barth's view of Scripture as divine speech is in need of revision and modification (Wolterstorff 1995, 63–74). While Barth speaks of three ways of Word of God, but *in actual it is only one*, the divine discourse in the person and history of Jesus. Wolterstorff criticizes that what Barth speaks of divine speech in the event Scripture becomes Word of God, is only *an action* to grab reader to the *sache* of the text, that in that sense, it is like *an act of causation* and not a proper speech (Wolterstorff 1995, 63–74). This act without speech is ironic since Barth himself is labeled as theologian of the Word of God. Barth's God strangely may turn up a silent God. Vanhoozer admits the force of Wolterstorff's argument that not only does this imply that Barth confuses revelation with illumination, but it also implies that the work of the Spirit could be termed as more of *causation* rather than *communication* (Vanhoozer 2005, 56). Wolterstorff points to deputized discourses which highlight the sense that human process of reasoning and understanding are involved in a fuller sense, as part of divine discourse.

These analyses, so far, if they may be said accurate enough, point to the need of hermeneutical insights to theological interpretation. Schleiermacher has much to say to Barth, as much as Barth has to say to Schleiermacher. If we want to move beyond Schleiermacher and Barth, there are many aspects of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics that need to be seen in light of theological understanding. At the same time Barth's insights need the supplement of hermeneutical approach to shape his theological emphasis in a more nuanced fashion. To use Vanhoozer's axiom: "we must read Scripture like other book, but every other book should be read from the norm derived from Scripture" (Vanhoozer 2002, 208). These we argue could be done

through a healthier construction of theological understanding by taking in insights of hermeneutical theories. We will venture in the next section to highlight the need of theologically conscious and robust pre-understanding for hermeneutical theory. Three locus of Christian theology namely Holy Spirit, doctrine of man and church will be considered from the insights of hermeneutical theorist such as Gadamer, Ricoeur, as well as proponents of Theological Interpretation of Scripture.

### **3. Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics and Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis in Dialogue with Gadamer's and Ricoeur's Theological Interpretation**

Gadamer has rightly pointed to the problem of historicity of our being, an insight of Heidegger that brings dimensions of the *reader* to the aspects of interpretation. But while in Heidegger, understanding turns into *self*-understanding, as clearly seen in Bultmann, Gadamer brings aspects of text and reader as two horizons that fused in a truth-disclosure of reading experience (Gadamer 2006, 258–60). This truth disclosure is not an event of isolated self (contra Descartes), nor is it *merely* a subjective personal understanding (contra Schleiermacher), but rather part of collective human being who is embedded in streams of tradition shaped by the text and also shapes the reading of the text (Effective-History). In this context, as part of community reading and rereading of the text, understanding as truth disclosure may interact with contemporary social and cultural struggle of the community.

Thiselton also has pointed out that Schleiermacher's transcendental critique is lacking adequate resources for self-criticism (Thiselton 2006, 30). As a pre-Gadamerian search for universal hermeneutics, it is understandable that it has not considered the problem of contextual understanding, in which our pre-understanding is part of the continuous traditioning process. Instead of moving along transcendental critique, hermeneutics must move along, either with a contextual awareness or with a transcontextual quest. Schleiermacher's transcendental pretense is unavoidably a contextual hermeneutical construct.

Gadamer has suggested that understanding involves moments of creative fusion of horizons. This we propose potentially corresponds to eventfulness of revelation in Barth and the idea of illumination in Christian theology. Gadamer argues that no method can guarantee the ‘revelation’ of the truth and that only truth itself can make itself known to those who are open to the theme of the text. Fusion of horizons describes the process whereby limited horizons of reader and text fuse into a single horizon in which truth may be projected freshly (Gadamer 2006, 256–91). It is creative rather than reproductive, it is a moment of truth disclosure rather than truth reconstruction. Vanhoozer argues that this moment of understanding is a description of the miracle of understanding that essentially implies a dependence on *grace* (Vanhoozer 2002, 31–32).

Is this process arbitrary? Gadamer provides us with insights of effective-history whereby text is involved in shaping of traditions and communal understanding, and at the same being shaped by history of tradition and communal understanding (Gadamer 2006, 267–73). “In the process of understanding there are takes place a real fusing horizons, which means that as the historical horizons is projected, it is simultaneously removed” (Gadamer 2006, 273). While Gadamer helps us to realize and appreciate traditions, nonetheless traditions are not solely a source of insights from and for the text; they may also constitute a “willful disregard for the text” (Watson 2010, 135–36). They may distort Scripture as we may see from the history of the reformation (Watson 2010, 135–36).

In this regard Ricoeur provides a hermeneutics of suspicion to highlight the process in which our own illusions distort the reading of the text (whether it is personal or embedded within the traditions). Ricoeur has rightly suggested that our experience alone does not necessarily point to transcendental realities, but may describe a reality distorted by illusory projection of human will. Ricoeur suggests that human fallibility is part of the essential element to be considered in an authentic interpretation (*hermeneutics of suspicion*) before arriving at second *naïveté* of post-critical understanding (*hermeneutics of retrieval*). For this reason, readers need a practical wisdom to apply general insights to specific reading of the text (*phronesis*).

In our opinion, and sufficient for the purpose of this paper, that what entails in these theories are a search for a more comprehensive understanding that cross the boundaries of particular inquiries; a search beyond boundaries of philosophy and theology. Thus we risk to propose here that what Gadamer speaks of fusion of horizons would shed some light on the illumination of the Holy Spirit, but the doctrine of illumination may also indicate what kind of fusion (understanding) that fit the criteria of theological understanding; what effective history plays in community understanding may highlight some contextual origin of our understanding, but the truth of Scripture should be able to cross the boundaries of place and time in transcontextual dialogue; and what suspicion and retrieval in essence are compatible with doctrinal categories of man as both sinner and saint, and may serve better as a format for theological hermeneutics of suspecting and retrieving.

#### **4. Application: The Spirit, the Text and the Readers**

In dialogue with Gadamer, Ricoeur and other insights, we hope to bring to light that: 1. God's grace and illuminations of Holy Spirit, 2. Church and communality of reading, and 3. theological understandings of man as sinner and saint, are factors that may help rather than hindrance the process of understanding as part of theory of general hermeneutics.

The illumination of the Holy Spirit, as Barth indicates, does not mean an arbitrary relationship between text and meaning. Using Vanhoozer's insights on speech-act theory, we may employ authorial intention in a more nuanced way (2002, 224–27). Others have located the Spirit of Understanding in historical criticism, community understanding or human imagination (Vanhoozer 2002, 224–27). Vanhoozer discusses and compares Jowett's critical spirit, Tracy's spirit of the age, Lindbeck's community spirit, and rebellious spirit of Derrida's deconstruction. None of these approaches are found adequate. Their ways of locating the Holy Spirit's role turn out to be replacing the Holy Spirit with unholy spirits of the age that absorbs the text into our world (Vanhoozer 2002, 224–27). The content of text is blurred by the concern of the reader.

The proper way to construct Spirit of Understanding is by a Trinitarian appropriation of speech-act theory (Vanhoozer 2002, 227). A Trinitarian model is based on the notion revelation as communicative action that we can only understand if God enables us (Barth's insight). However, Spirit of understanding is related closely to what the human author of the text *intended* to communicate (Schleiermacher's insight), as God our Father has revealed to them the truth of Jesus Christ. Thus, Scripture as divine speech-act may be categorized as Spoken Son (*locutionary* statement) by Speaking Father (*illocutionary* act) through Illuminating Spirit (*perlocutionary* meaning) (Vanhoozer 2002, 224–27).

As Barth has asserted, the Spirit is the Lord of Understanding, not in the sense altering the meaning of literal sense of the text, but in the *effectual impact* of the word within community, when they listen to the God who speak through the Scripture (Vanhoozer 2002, 224–27). This understanding of speaking Spirit may resolve Barth's arbitrary relation between Scripture and revelation (eventfulness of the Word), following the suggestion of McCormack mentioned earlier, that the ontology of Scripture is understood in term of being as becoming (2009, 66). Barth emphasizes the *illocution* and *perlocution* aspects of the Scripture. The Spirit absorbs our world into the text, or since hermeneutics includes application, we may borrow the concept of *filioque*, Spirit out from Son and Father, as *perlocution* out of locution as well as illocution (Vanhoozer 2002, 227–28). As long as we are not isolating the Word of God in perlocution alone, insights of Schleiermacher into the human process may be employed as God's deputized locutionary and illocutionary acts. But since Spirit of Understanding is not merely spirit of understanding in historical and literary sense, it goes beyond Schleiermacher into a Barthian sense as Spirit of obedience, in both personal and communal context (Vanhoozer 2002, 227–28). Scripture projects a new world that resembles our historical understanding but also fused it with new possibilities in a Gadamerian sense.

With this insight, understanding may also be framed in its relation to contextual understanding of community. By this we mean traditions of Christian communities that may serve as source of insights and dialogue partner in reading of Scripture. While community

should not be located as the locus of Spirit of Understanding, there is a valuable dialogue between text and community that may serve fruitfully for understanding. We should avoid an approach that sees interpretation as more about “precise account of our interpretive aims, interest and practices” of communal reading. This approach avoids any claims of textual meaning in favor of communal self-confirmation hermeneutics that implies a dichotomy between text and its readers (Watson 2010, 135). In this way of reading, meaning may collapse into Feuerbach’s verdict where it tells more about the community and less about the Scripture. Community and tradition may not always be a wise ally to Scripture, instead, they may pose a threat to Scripture, as history of reformation has shown. Nevertheless, there is no need to be entirely suspicious to community and tradition (Watson 2010, 135). Community and traditions may serve as different angles of seeing the same truth in insightful ways. On the other hand, once we see community as the image of Trinity, in the sense of a participation in the divine life, then we may see understanding as “a relational affair involving an intimate connection between knowledge and love” (Treier 2006, 195). This gives strong reasons for Theological Interpretation of Scripture to appreciate the rich resources of dogmas, confessions, contextual understanding and the so the called pre-critical readings. In understanding we relate to the other, learn from the other and are enriched by the other (Treier 2006, 196).

We propose, nevertheless, that a sound relationship between Scripture and community should give priority to the text of Scripture as the locus of understanding. Gadamer’s effective history offers insights that text has its inherent power to initiate a dialogue with the community. Text does not solely rest in a receptive position, but is able to generate meaning and understanding (Watson 2010, 135). Scripture may unleash a transformative power to the reader, but this power embodied in the text as the locus of God’s speech-act discourse. Community’s understanding is placed under scriptural text in recognition that the text is the ontological locus of the Word of God.

This brings us to the third aspect of hermeneutical understanding related to theological anthropology. Ricoeur’s interdisciplinary

approach employs masters of suspicion to locate our disillusion on power, sex and interest. Once these aspects of human existence are dispelled from our narrational thought-world, the text opens a possibility of more genuine existence in our temporality. Ricoeur gives us self-awareness and hope. This, we suggest, correlates to the basic pattern of human being in Christian Theology. Christian is both sinner and saint. Every hermeneutical construct is in need of sanctification.<sup>7</sup> Our sin makes us in need of divine grace and initiative to communicate with us, in which Scripture stands not as a passive object of inquiry but as an active subject of textual realization (Webster 2001, 95). Understanding may be termed as an involvement in God's communicative decision in redemptive act of salvation. This also means that not all reading will result in a relatively equal or true. There will be rooms for readings as the results of human rebellious response to the revelation of God. But there is also a place for a more insightful reading along with Christian maturity. Understanding is not simply about intelligent inquiries, but also about growing in good habits of reading the text as Scripture. Hermeneutical sensitivity is related to sanctification, to be wise and sensitive to the voice of God, to grow in *phronesis* as theological virtue.

This *phronesis* we believe takes its basic shape in the form of mind and faith that seek the grace of God (Wood 2002, 171). Or, as Barth puts it, 'critical, corrective, investigative work... in light of the divine verdict' (Wood 2002, 171). Thus, it turns up that a good hermeneutics is compatible to the growth and practice of prayer (Wood 2002, 171). It is related to Christian discernment and the virtue of humility to learn, to listen and to empathize (Treier 2006, 198). But at the same time *phronesis* also employs critical scholarship and academic conversation in the spirit of humility and intellectual discernment (Treier 2006, 198). Prayer and critical mind are not two opposing foes, but may be understood as a double response of faith to God communicative action.

In conclusion, we submit that understanding may be constructed within a dialogue between theological and hermeneutical theories,

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<sup>7</sup> Compare to "Exegesis is an aspect of sanctification" in Webster 2001, 95.

as represented by Barth and Schleiermacher. We also have tried to put this dialogue in a wider context of new hermeneutical theories and theological exegesis. This interaction is proven to be insightful for “understanding” as theologically understood. Theological understanding involves divine initiative in speech-act communication by Spirit, is enriched by dialogue with other and discerned with the gift of human understanding. It is only possible by the grace of God. It should express the otherness of other in the spirit of learning, humility and conversation. It should practice the harmony of mind and character, exemplified by Christian virtue that embraces academic, churchly and public lives. Through the discussion, we, hopefully, have made clear that general hermeneutics pursued by Schleiermacher actually can work hand in hand with theological exegesis of Scripture, employed by Barth.

### **Ku teologicznemu rozumieniu hermeneutyki. W dialogu ze Schleiermacherem i Barthem na polu hermeneutyki**

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł podejmuje próbę konstruktywnego dialogu między ogólną hermeneutyką Friedricha Schleiermachera a teologiczną egzegezą Karla Bartha, zmierzając do przewyciężenia opozycji między nimi. Podczas gdy Schleiermacher kładzie nacisk na ludzkie rozumienie poprzez interpretację gramatyczną i psychologiczną, Barth podkreśla prymat Bożego objawienia i teologiczny charakter Pisma Świętego. Artykuł argumentuje, że teologicznie ugruntowana teoria rozumienia może pogodzić te stanowiska. Poprzez dialog z hermeneutami takimi jak Gadamer i Ricoeur, a także przez uwzględnienie kategorii teologicznych, takich jak rola Ducha Świętego, wspólnotowy charakter lektury oraz doktryna o człowieku jako grzeszniku i świętym, artykuł proponuje bardziej kompleksowe podejście. Podejście to afirmuje zarówno Bożą inicjatywę, jak i ludzkie uczestnictwo w procesie interpretacji, sugerując, że poglądy Schleiermachera mogą wzbogacić egzegezę Bartha – i odwrotnie. W ten sposób artykuł opowiada się za hermeneutyką teologiczną, która pozostaje wierna Pismu Świętemu, a zarazem uwzględnia realia ludzkiego rozumienia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, hermeneutyka, egzegeza teologiczna, ludzkie rozumienie, Duch Święty

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