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Hermeneutics, Faith and Relations between Cultures

Lectures in Qom, Iran

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Introduction

George F. McLean

The invitation to deliver these open lectures in the holy city of Qom, Iran, included the suggestion that the topic be hermeneutics. It was described as being a relatively new area, but one of great current interest.

On reading this, I began to feel at home. For it underlined the fact that the real reason that we are on this earth in general, and here in Qom in particular, is to give glory to God and that this is done above all in honoring the memory of God's prophets, Abraham, Jesus and Muhammad (May They Be Blessed!). All here are dedicated to proclaiming their Sacred Texts in our times. There can be no higher goal and none to which one can be more totally dedicated in body and soul. For it is above all in the proclamation of the sacred word that the eternal and immutable God is the living presence, not so much *to* us, as *in* which we live and breathe and have our hope. In the words of Augustine: it is not we who first loved God, but God who first loved us.

The major truth, agreed to by all the "Religions of the Book," is that the Scriptures are the word of God expressed in human language. From this it follows that all interpretation must be based thereupon. But in reading the text we face a major paradox, namely, that when we focus upon the eternal we are concerned with how to live this in time, and when we focus upon temporalities it is in order that they reflect their divine source. Hence decisions regarding the message or meaning of the text cannot be that of the individual reader, but must belong to the believing community, whether called Church or *umma*.

Here, I would like to investigate this precise point, i.e., what is the nature of the believing community as it lives through time and, more precisely, as it creates a living religious tradition. Here this tradition will be considered not so much in the older modern sense as a scientific object (over against) for hermeneutics or interpretation, but rather as our conscious ongoing engagement of the text on response to God. In this sense, more than a speculative method for reading the text as an object before us, hermeneutics is the community's living response in present circumstances making the sacred text and the eternal Word to live through time.

This suggests something of the drama of this moment. After many centuries of alienation or worse, for the first time a Christian clerical scholar has been invited to present lectures for the faculties of the seminaries and universities of Qom, the Shiite holy city with over 40,000 Islamic clerical students and scholars. What now binds us together in our holy quest, what can we share and learn, how can we move forward together in darkening times?

In exploration of these mysteries we shall look, in Chapters I and II, at the nature of hermeneutics and the history of its development from a science to a life process. Next, in Chapters III and IV we will attempt to see how an hermeneutic perspective can enable us better to understand the nature and formation of the religious tradition in which we stand and the role of that tradition in the reading of our sacred texts. Then, Chapter V and VI will reflect on how such an understanding can be transformative in contemporary social life, on the one hand, and engage in faithful dialogue with the many cultures and civilizations of our world.

In the actual delivery of these materials in the form of lectures the statement of the content of these chapters was made simpler and more direct fashion. Hence, the lectures are added here as Part II "Lectures: Hermeneutics and Religions in Global Interchange."

The extended appendix is the document of the Vatican's Pontifical Biblical Commission: "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church." This contrasts to Dilthey's celebration of what he

referred to as: the liberation of interpretation from dogma. "The Interpretation" is added here to illustrate the evaluation of the various hermeneutic methods by a religious body similar to Islam in its sensitivity to the roles of the faith tradition and of the believing community in the interpretation of the sacred texts which provide the foundation of their very identity.

Part I
Hermeneutics and Religious Traditions in Social Reconstruction

Chapter I
The Nature and Challenges of a Religious Hermeneutics

The Nature of Hermeneutics

The term 'hermeneutics' is derived from the son of Zeus, Hermes, messenger of the Olympian gods. This etymological root with its three elements—(1) a messenger, (2) from the gods and (3) to humankind—suggests three corresponding dimensions of our problem, namely, hermeneutics, values and historicity. In the Christian context this is expressed by the term *kerygma* in the Acts of the Apostles where it is used of the message brought by the Apostle in proclaiming the life and teaching of the Prophet Jesus.

Perhaps nowhere in religion is the sense of the messenger more alive than in Islam, focused as it is upon the Holy Prophet. Hermeneutics directs attention to his work of expressing or transmitting to human understanding what is beyond properly human intelligence. In so doing it heightens awareness of words not simply as letter codes, but as they emerge from the mind through a living voice. This is a matter not merely of transmitting data or information, but of proclamation or performance. Here the reader through demeanor of body, inflection of voice and even pauses helps the hearer to understand the meaning being conveyed by the text. The text must be read with understanding which is reflected in the reading itself.

The experience of preachers and teachers, as messengers of the word in continuation of the mission of the Prophet as Messenger of the Almighty, makes manifest the basic dilemma of hermeneutics and interpretation, which has come to be called the hermeneutic circle. This consists in the fact that any understanding of the parts of the message or of the sacred text itself requires an understanding of the whole, while the grasp of the whole depends upon some awareness of its parts. This appears in a number of ways.1

First, the preacher has not merely to pass on a written text, but to express or to proclaim it in speech. This could be done only by reading through all the parts of the message in sequence. But grasping these as parts requires some understanding of the whole message from the very beginning. That is why one who would proclaim the text wants to know the text of the day and to read it through not first in public, but ahead of time in private. Even in private, however, one begins with some sense of the whole.

Moreover, the message has to be conveyed in a particular historical time and place, and with specific intonation and inflection. This can convey only one particular sense from the many potentialities of the words of the text. Indeed, as I read a text at 70 I see that it has meaning I had not appreciated when 20 or 40. At each juncture then the reading depends upon parts, which for their meaning depend upon the whole.

Secondly, the teacher has not only to proclaim, but also to explain, literally to unfold the message and its ramifications or meanings. In contrast to *kerygma* this is termed *catechesis*. To use Aristotle's terms, this is not a matter of simple apprehension or intuition, but of judgement. It is not the message itself, but the operation of the intellect which tries to work out the meaning of the message. This requires a certain awareness of the broader context, that is, of the issue and of the language as the repository of the culture within which the message was composed. It depends as well upon some dialogue in order for the hearer to move from the known to the heretofore unknown. Here again, in order to interpret, convey, or receive a message, some sense of the whole

is required for assembling and interpreting its parts. But how can one understand the whole before knowing its parts, or the parts without knowing the whole?

Finally, the teacher must translate or bear the meaning of the text from the divine source to persons in their distinctive sets of circumstances and with their projects and preoccupations. Here the term "translation" is significant because it suggests a difference such as exists between two languages as two overarching senses of the world. Each is the reality in which we exist and which we see through a language taken as cumulatively sedimented cultural experience. This is an underlying sense of reality, a way of being in the world. As we shall see below, this leads inevitably to the ultimate metaphysical issues of the one and the many, the whole and the part.

The reading of our holy texts then must be a continuing and ongoing process of interpretation and mediation of their eternal meaning to each and every people in their own time and place. Indeed, when the Biblical commission of the Catholic Church set out to write the introduction to its document on "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church"2 it found in the Bible itself the warrant for its work of interpretation. It cited, how Daniel is described in the Scriptures as pondering at length over the meaning of some prophecies of Jeremiah (Dn. 9:2), and how the Eunich from Ethiopia called upon Philip to help him understand a passage from Isaiah (Isa 53:7-8; Acts 8:30-35).

Moreover, the Bible itself speaks of interpreting and even reinterpreting in new ways some earlier texts. For example, Psalm 2 takes on a Messic sense in Acts 13:33; the prophecy of Jeremiah regarding the 70 years of chastisement of Jerusalem (Jer. 25:11-12, 29:10) is recalled as fulfilled in 2 Chr. 25:20-23; while much later Daniel looks to it for light in his own day (Dn 9:24-27). The scriptures above all else then are storehouses from which are to be drawn treasures both old and new.

The Biblical Commission is quick to point out, however, that this work of interpretation must be ruled by the text itself and not vice versa. Hence, it is axiomatic in the document that interpretation must begin with the determination of the literal sense expressed directly by the authors and build thereupon in order to avoid substituting the human reader for the divine message. In this light it expresses some reserve regarding what would appears to be excesses in allegorical interpretation which, in earlier ages, were common among the Church Fathers. This reminds one of the reservation expressed by al-Ghazali in his *Munquid* regarding the use of such interpretation by philosophers regarding the spirituality of the individual soul and bodily resurrection.

What the commission insists upon as essential in all this, is that the Fathers teach us to read the Bible "within the heart of the living tradition with an authentic spirit."3 This reflects the importance rightly attributed to the believing community or *umma* for the effort to read the Scriptures with proper understanding. This is precisely the work of interpretation, that is, of hermeneutics.

The etymology of the term ‘interpret’ underlines this task for it combines *praesto*: to show, manifest or exhibit, with the prefix ‘inter’ to indicate the distinction of the one from whom and the one to whom the message is passed. This difference could be between past and present, as when an ancient text is being reread today; between one culture and another, as when a text in another language than one’s own is being interpreted; between persons, even in the same culture and time, provided full attention be paid to the uniqueness of each person; or between God and humanity. Given these differences, how is communication and its implied ‘community’ between the two contexts possible?

Challenges for a Religious Hermeneutics

In view of the seeming never-ending violent clashes between persons, classes and nations, how can the community, *umma* or Church be effective and even transformative, in time? Indeed it might suggest that communication and cooperation between God and man would be quite impossible. But, if, as the experience of our religions manifest, it is rather the contrary and the words of Sacred Scripture have always proven to be life-giving, then this must tell us something of the overwhelming love of God for creatures, and by implication about the life of religious communities as well.

Before going further then it seems important to identify a number of the key challenges faced by hermeneutics especially for a religious community or *umma*. These cluster around two relationships: the perennial transcendent horizon of *faith* vis a vis the changing this-worldly horizon of *history*, and the interaction between the search for scientific and religious truth and the realization of *human good*. Along these two axes the challenge of hermeneutics for a religious community finds its definition.

Transcendent Faith

Returning again to the term hermeneutics we saw that it implied a messenger who came from the divine and hence brings the message of faith.

The reference to the god, Hermes, in the term 'hermeneutics' suggests something of the exalted character of the meaning which is sought and its implication for the world of values. For the message borne by Hermes is not merely an abstract mathematical formula or a methodological prescription devoid of human meaning and value. Rather, it is the limitless wisdom regarding the source and hence the reality, and the goal and hence the value, of all.

Hesiod appealed for this knowledge of the source in the introduction to his *Theogony*: "Hail, children of Zeus! Grant lovely song and celebrate the holy race of the deathless gods who are forever. . . . Tell how at the first gods and earth came to be."4 Aristotle indicated this concern for values in describing his science of wisdom as "knowing to what end each thing must be done . . . ; and this end is the good of that thing, and in general the supreme good in the whole of nature." Such a science will be most divine, for: "(1) God is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle, and (2) such a science either God alone can have, or God above all others. All the sciences, indeed, are more necessary than this, but none is better."5

Hence, rather than considering things in a perspective that is only temporal and totally changing—with an implied total relativization of all—hermeneutics or interpretation is essentially concerned with a vision of what is most real in itself and most lasting through time, that is, with the perennial religious meaning regarding being and values.

This religious content of the ancient Greeks, whether at the stage of the myths in Hesiod or of philosophy in Aristotle, gives impressive testimony of the reach of humans toward God and of the love with which God cares for all those whom he has created. One stands in awe and reverence before all such testimony to the divine which in its variety and intensity has mobilized and dignified the many peoples.

But all this pales before the history of God's providence through the Prophets through whom he has communicated directly from His mind to ours. In some instances this provides us with more sure and universal knowledge of things not entirely beyond the range of human reason; in other instances it provides knowledge regarding His life — and hence ours — which the human mind by itself could not know.

It is in this light that the Islamic, Judaic and Christian peoples are, designated as peoples of the Book. For them the work of hermeneutics as understanding and interpretation is central because the revealed word is truly the divine with us, transforming all as teacher and guide.

But if only God were involved certainly all could easily be worked out. Hermeneutics is required because reading the Sacred Text involves not only God but man as well. Blaise Pascal in his *Pensées* has pointed out the drama this involves given both the greatness (Part VI) and the wretchedness (Part III) of the human condition.6

The challenge of participating as religious teachers in this task is great. Its exaltation has been stated classically by Lacordaire:

To live in the midst of the world,
Without wishing its pleasures;
To be a member of each family,
Yet belonging to none;
To share all sufferings;
To penetrate all secrets;
To go from men to God
And offer Him their Prayers;
To return from God to men
To bring pardon and hope;
To have a heart of fire for charity
And a heart of bronze for chastity;
To teach and to pardon, Console and bless always —
What a glorious life! And it is yours, man of God.

Yet all humans are weak, fallible and fallen. The very greatness of the task sheds special light upon the weaknesses of all who would take it up.

Accomplishing so sublime a task calls then for a daunting combination of activity in order to enlighten, and of spiritual growth in order to lead the *umma* toward its true spiritual home. At the same time it calls as well for immense humility before God who transcends all that we can say and do, and before people in order that the divine light shine through our poor words and acts. Only faith can bridge so immense a gap. Hence, it is essential to have a hermeneutic which does not reduce all to the human, but allows for faith and grace, that is, for God in our lives.

Human History

In tension with this transcendent faith is the last element entailed in the term hermeneutics, namely, the historical. In undertaking his search for unchanging and permanent guides for human action Socrates had directed the attention of the Greek tradition — which in turn inspired medieval Islamic and Christian thought — away from the temporal and changing. In redirecting attention back to this changing universe, the modern mind still echoed Socrates inasmuch as what it sought was the continuing structures of complex entities and the stable laws of change.

Beyond this hermeneutics attends to the essentially temporal and historical character of humankind and to the uniqueness of each decision, whether individual or corporate. As translation or interpretation it points to the one who receives the message in his or her concrete historical situation, to the historical character of human life as a whole, and to the many cultures this

generates. Human history sets the circumstances in which one perceives the values presented in the tradition and mobilizes one's own project toward the future. Hermeneutics must be able to take account above all of the work of human freedom; it cannot abstract therefrom.

Moreover, given the admixture of truth and error, of good and evil in human action the process of realizing the good in human history has always been complex and often compromised. Our historical situatedness must be deciphered or interpreted in order to identify its truths and values and to distinguish these from their negations. A tradition which cannot distinguish the two in order to winnow out what is bad will mislead and be a true "corruptor of youth". Looking inward, religious traditions are challenged to purify their own memory of fratricidal conflicts between themselves in order to be credible witnesses to God.

Scientific Truth

The enlightenment ideal focused upon ideas which are clear and distinct both in themselves and in their interconnection. As such they are divorced—often intentionally—from existential or temporal significance. Such an ideal of human knowledge, it is proposed, would be achieved either through an intellect working by itself from an Archemedian principle or through the senses drawing their ideas from experience and combining them in myriad tautological transformations.7 In either case the result is an a-temporal and consequently non-historical ideal of knowledge. This revolutionary modern view was adhered to by the Romantics even though they appeared to oppose it, for in turning to the past and to myths they too sought clear and distinct knowledge of human reality. Thinking that this could be attained if all was understood in its historical context and sequence, they simply harnessed historicity in the service of the rationalist ideal.

In the rationalist view any meaning not clearly and distinctly perceived was an idol to be smashed, an idea to be bracketed by doubt, or something to be wiped clean from the slate of the mind as irrational and coercive. Any type of judgment—even if provisional—made before all had been examined and its clarity and distinctness established would be essentially a pre-judgment or prejudice, and therefore a dangerous imposition by the will.

This raises a number of issues. First, absolute knowledge of oneself or of others, simply and without condition, seems not to be possible for the human knower, for one is always conditioned according to his or her position in time and space and in relation to others. But neither is such absolute knowledge of ultimate interest, for human knowledge, like being, develops in time and with others.8 This does not exclude projects of scientific knowledge, but it does identify these as limited and specialized tools for specific tasks: they make specific and important—but not all-controlling—contributions.

In view of the need of the sciences to follow their own methodology in order to reach certified conclusion religious traditions face a hermeneutic challenge. It is to recognize the proper autonomy of the scientific and technical knowledge on which humankind has come to depend for life, without loss of its own proper horizon from which even these autonomous sciences have their meaning.

Secondly, as technical reason is had by all and completely according to Descartes,9 in the Enlightenment horizon authority came to be seen as an entitlement of some to decide issues by an application of their will rather than according to an authentic understanding of the truth or justice of an issue. Further, the limited number of people in authority means that the vision of which they dispose would be limited first by their numbers and then by their restricted individual interests.

Finally, as one decision constitutes a precedent for those to follow, the administration of authority becomes fundamentally bankrupt and then corruptive.10

Hence hermeneutics is challenged to integrate scientific knowledge within the full range of human discovery, with its ever broader projects of peoples, cultures and cultural cooperation in a life-world now become truly global in scope.

The Human Good

In tension with scientific truth, the final problem area for hermeneutics concerns the good, for it is important to avoid the danger of attempting to take either the good or the bad—values or their negations—in isolation one from another. As with scientific truth, in considering only the good there is danger of abstracting from human life; one loses the sense of the struggle to realize the good and tends to supplant this with an idealistic simplicity and inhumane rigor. Ultimately, this can only discourage and then destroy authentic human efforts toward the realization of the good. Further, recognizing that the values we experience have been embodied in our traditions, by looking only at the values we are in danger of considering as an absolute norm a tradition which in human history can be only ambiguous. One could thereby continue its disvalues as well, or upon recognizing such disvalues reject tradition as a whole.

Hermeneutics therefore will be needed to interpret the tradition and to enable the efforts needed continually to purify it so that the divine love can continue its creative work through the religious community.

An opposite problematic derives from reducing the description of evil to the simply factual. In that case, it would be no more than a structure described by a value-free theory, without relation to the area of human freedom or responsibility. Evil as an antithesis without good as its thesis is either blind to, or devoid of, value concern. Where all, including evil, is a mere state of affairs, one cannot hope to generate a sense of the good or of value. When the horizon becomes one of mere sociological or psychological manipulation of the ego, the response can be only further manipulation, in which the ego dominates the self and thereby excludes human freedom.

These problems with attempts to do hermeneutics only in terms of the human sciences will be studied below with a view to understanding what they can contribute to the hermeneutic project if integrated with, rather than opposed to, religious traditions.

In sum, the problem of historicity becomes how to understand or interpret human values in a tradition, which, in its ambiguity, contains not only classical ideals, but historical contradictions; or, in the words of John Dewey, how to discover a "method of administering the unfinished processes of existence so that frail goods shall be substantiated, secure goods be extended and the precarious promises of good that haunt experienced things be more liberally fulfilled."11

The present consideration of hermeneutics is intended to assist religious traditions to walk in the footsteps of the Prophets as messengers of God, that is to be both open to the transcendent horizons of faith and able to apply these as transformative in the concrete historical circumstances of the holy community.

Subsequent chapters will follow a dialectical pattern. The third and fourth chapters will concern the construction of a religious tradition. The fifth chapter as critique or antithesis will look at the way ideologies and contradictions of value also are integral to human history and the problems this generates for deciphering the true values in one’s religious tradition. This in turn in chapter six will suggest a synthesis in which by sharing in the vision of other people it is possible to work together toward a future which more fully realizes the religious tradition.

The chapters which follow will look for the ways in which tradition and critique are mutually interdependent, working as thesis and antithesis toward the elaboration of a synthesis in which the faith traditions can cooperate in both deepening themselves and contributing to life in our times.

But first it is important to look to the history of hermeneutics in order to see how it corresponds to the special needs of religious traditions in our day and hence why it is now the center of great interest and hope. The key to this lies in the instability in the history of modern philosophy between object and subject, and the promise of hermeneutics to provide an integration of the two. Indeed, as we shall see, it may be more proper to say that the promise of hermeneutics as a response to present challenges is due most fundamentally to its having been developed precisely in, and of, the struggles of the modern mind to overcome an excessive scientific objectivism which left no room for what is properly human. It attempts to do this while avoiding a subjectivism which would leave people so self-enclosed as no longer to be open to the work of the divine in their lives.

Notes

1 Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 12-29.

2 Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Biblical Commissions's Document: The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church: Text and Commentory* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1995), pp. 15-18.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

4 Hesiod, *Theogony,* trans. H.G. Everland-White (Loeb Classical Lib.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p. 85.

5 Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* I, 2.

6 B. Pascal, *Pensées* (London: Harvill Press).

7 H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroads, 1975), 305-310.

8 R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method,* I.

9 Gadamer, pp. 240, 246-247.

10 John Dewey, *Existence as Precarious and Stable,* see J. Mann & G. Kreyche, *Perspectives on Reality* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), p. 379.

11 John Caputo, "A Phenomenology of Moral Sensibility: Moral Emotion," George F. McLean, Frederick Ellrod et al., eds., *Act and Agent: Philosophical Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy and The University Press of America, l986), pp. 199-222.

Chapter II

The Crisis of Reason and the Development of Hermeneutics

In the context of the crisis of reason now experienced at this point of transition between the millennia it is dangerous to raise the question of the role of philosophy. For if, with Aristotle, philosophy is something to be taken up when the basic needs of the times are cared for then philosophy is in danger of being shelved for this generation. On the other hand, philosophy may have to do with our nature and dignity — with what we are, and with what we are after — and hence the terms in which we live as person and peoples. If so then philosophy may be not the last, but the first consideration or at least the most determinative for life in our most trying circumstances.

It is the contention here that the role of philosophy today has shifted from being a work of deduction by specialists working in abstraction from the process of human life, to deep engagement under the pressure of life's challenges at the center of human concerns. What is this difference philosophically, and what difference does it make for work in philosophy?

The Crisis of Objective Reason

One way of approaching this is to begin from the philosophical divide we are crossing as we move on to the new millennium. For this we need to review the history of reason in this epoch. The first millennium is justly seen as one in which human attention was focused upon God. It was the time of Christ and the Prophet — Peace be upon them both! — and much of humanity was fully absorbed in the assimilation of their messages.

The second millennium is generally seen as shifting the focus to human beings. The first 500 years, till 1500, focused upon the reintegration of Aristotelian reason by such figures as Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd and Thomas Aquinas, as described above.

The second half of the millennium, from 1500, was marked by a radicalization of reason. Whereas from its beginning human reason always had attempted to draw upon the fullness of human experience, to reflect the highest human and religious aspirations, and to build upon the accomplishments of the predecessors "philosophers sensed themselves as standing on the shoulders of earlier philosophers" a certain Promethean hope now emerged. As with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, it was claimed that humankind would save itself, indeed that each person would do so by his or her power of reason.

For this, Francis Bacon1 directed that the idols which bore the content of the cultural tradition be smashed; John Locke2 would erase all prior content of the mind in order to reduce it to a blank tablet; René Descartes3 would put all under doubt. What was sought was a new body of knowledge consisting of clear and distinct ideas, strictly united on a mathematical model.

It is true that Descartes intended to reintroduce the various levels of human knowledge on a more certain basis. But what he restored was not the rich content of the breadth of human experience, but only what could be had with the requisite clarity and distinctness. Thus, of the content of the senses which had been bracketed by doubt in the first *Meditation*, in the sixth *Meditation* only the quantitative or measurable was allowed back into his system. All the rest was considered simply provisory and employed only to the degree that it proved useful in so navigating as to avoid physical harm in the world.

In this light the goal of knowledge and of properly human life was radically curtailed. For Aristotle, and no less for Christianity and Islam in the first 1500 years of this millennium, this had been contemplation of the magnificence and munificence of the highest being, God. For the enlightenment this was reduced to control of nature in the utilitarian service of humankind. And where the goals of human life were reduced to the material order, the service of humankind really became the service of machines in the exploitation of physical nature. This was the real enslavement of human freedom.

> (81) One of the most significant aspects of our current situation, it should be noted, is the "crisis of meaning". Perspectives on life and the world, often of a scientific temper, have so proliferated that we face an increasing fragmentation of knowledge. This makes the search for meaning difficult and often fruitless. Indeed, still more dramatically, in this maelstrom of data and facts in which we live and which seem to comprise the very fabric of life, many people wonder whether it still makes sense to ask about meaning. The array of theories which vie to give an answer, and the different ways of viewing and of interpreting the world and human life, serve only to aggravate this radical doubt, which can easily lead to skepticism, indifference or to various forms of nihilism.
>
> In consequence, the human spirit is often invaded by a kind of ambiguous thinking which leads it to an ever deepening introversion, locked within the confines of its own immanence without reference of any kind of the transcendent. A philosophy which no longer asks the question of the meaning of life would be in grave danger of reducing reason to merely accessory functions, with no real passion for the search for truth.4

First, with reason looking only to itself, religion was reduced to the service of the human rather than of the divine, and even then was given the status of a superstructure built parasitically upon the new reductively physical reality or even of a superstition.

The religiously contextualized philosophical traditions not built in terms of the modern enlightenment reductionism were not understandable within that more restricted horizon. Hence the great Hindu and Islamic traditions were dismissed as mystifications and, for reasons opposite to those of al-Ghazali, the medieval tradition of Scholastic philosophy was denigrated.

By the beginning of the 20th century humanity felt itself poised for the final push to create, by the power of science, a utopia not only by subduing and harnessing the physical powers of nature, but by genetic human engineering and social manipulation. Looking back from the present vantage point we find that history has proven to be quite different from these utopian goals.

Second, with reason looking only to itself, religion was reduced to the service of the human rather than the divine, and relegated to the status of a superstructure built parasitically upon the new reductively physical reality or even of superstition

Third, the power of science was diverted to two destructive World Wars and to the development of nuclear weapons capable of extinguishing the entire human race and then applied to the project of a new empire for the 21st century.

Fourth, Hegel’s and Josiah Royce’s ideals and idealism would give way to William James’s and John Dewey’s concrete, pragmatic goals which could be achieved by human effort.5 Or at least this would be so until it came to be recognized that in positive or empirical terms it was not possible to articulate such social goals, at which point positivism would succeed pragmatism. But after only two decades it would have to admit that its controlling "principle of verifiability" (and then of "falsifiability") was not intelligible in its own positivist terms.

Fifth, Marxism as a scientific history and organization of society, proved to be cruel and dehumanizing beyond belief, until it totally imploded from its own internal weakness. Suddenly, the ideology on which meaning was conceived and life was lived by half of humankind was extinguished. It was as if the sun went down never to rise again.

Sixth, on the other side of the Cold War the consumer society has shown itself incapable of generating meaning for life, but capable of exploiting everyone else, until at last it concludes that its ideology of a totally free market though destructive of the weak majority of the world is to be imposed by force.

In sum, this century has been marked by poverty that cannot be erased and exploitation ever more widespread, two World Wars, pogroms and holocausts, genocide and "ethnic cleansing," the emerging intolerance that is empire building, family collapse and anomie.

The situation recalls the great meteorite which hit the Yucatan Peninsula eons ago sending a cloud of dust around the world which obscured the sun for years, killed off the flora and thus broke the food chain. Life of all sorts was largely extinguished and had to begin to regenerate itself slowly once again.

In this light the present period is misnamed "postmodern," because it is really the final critical period of modernity as it progressively collapses. Having become conscious of its own deadly propensities, modern philosophy begins to attack these evils by the only tools it possesses: power and control, in a way that is not creative, but destructive. Knowing that it must arrest its inherent destructive urges reason destroys its own speculative foundations, all notions of structures and stages and, of course, all ethical norms. Everything must be trashed because the *hubris* of modern reason closes off any sense that it itself is the real root of its problem. In a paroxysm of despair, like a scorpion trapped in a circle of fire, it commits its own *auto de fe*.

Subjectivity: The New Agenda

To read this history negatively, as we have been doing, is, however, only part of the truth. It depicts a collapse of confidence in technical reason acting alone and as if self sufficient. But there may be more to human consciousness and hence to philosophy. If so in analogy to the replacement of a tooth in childhood the more important phenomenon is not the old tooth that is falling out, but the strength of the new tooth that is replacing it. A few philosophers did point to this other dimensions of human awareness. Shortly after Descartes Pascal's assertion "Que la raison a des raisons, que la raison ne comprend pas" would remain famous if unheeded, as would Vico's prediction that the new reason would give birth to a generation of brutes —intellectual brutes, but brutes nonetheless. Later Kiekegard would follow Hegel with a similar warning. None of these voice would have strong impact while the race was on to "conquer" the world by a supposed omni-sufficient scientific reason. But as human problems mounted the adequacy of reason to handle the deepest problems of human dignity and transcendent purpose came under sustained questioning and more attention was given to additional dimensions of human capabilities.

One might well ask which came first, the public sense of human challenge or the corresponding deepening of philosophical reflection. My own sense is that they are in fact one, the philosophical insight, being the reflective dimension of the human concern. In any case, one finds a striking parallel between social experience and philosophy in this century. From the extreme totalitarian and exploitative repression of the person by fascism, capitalist colonialism and communism in the 1930s there followed the progressive liberation from fascism in World War II,

from colonial exploitation in the 1950s and 60s, of minorities in the 1970s and from Marxism in the 1980s. Like a new tooth the emergence of the person has been consistent and persistent.

There has been a strikingly parallel development in philosophy. At the beginning of this century, it had appeared that the rationalist project of stating all in clear and distinct objective terms was close to completion. This was to be achieved in either the empirical terms of the positivist tradition of sense knowledge or in the formal and essentialist terms of the Kantian and Hegelian intellectual tradition. Whitehead wrote that at the turn of the century, when with Bertrand Russell he went to the First World Congress of Philosophy in Paris, it seemed that, except for some details of application, the work of physics had been essentially completed. To the contrary, however, the very attempt to finalize scientific knowledge with its most evolved concepts made manifest the radical insufficiency of the objectivist approach and led to renewed appreciation of the importance of subjectivity.

Similarly, Wittgenstein began by writing his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus6* on the Lockean supposition that significant knowledge consisted in constructing a mental map corresponding point to point to the external world as perceived by sense experience. In such a project the spiritual element of understanding, i.e., the grasp of the relations between the points on this mental map and the external world was relegated to the margin as simply "unutterable". Later experience in teaching children, however, led Wittgenstein to the conclusion that this empirical mental mapping was simply not what was going on in human knowledge. In his *Blue and Brown Books7* and his subsequent *Philosophical Investigations8* Wittgenstein shifted human consciousness or intentionality, which previously had been relegated to the periphery, to the very the center of concern. The focus of his philosophy was no longer the positivist, supposedly objective, replication of the external world, but the human construction of language and of worlds of meaning.9

A similar process was underway in the Kantian camp. There Husserl's attempt to bracket all elements, in order to isolate pure essences for scientific knowledge, forced attention to the limitations of a pure essentialism and opened the way for his understudy, Martin Heidegger, to rediscover the existential and historical dimensions of reality in his *Being and Time*.10 The religious implications of this new sensitivity would be articulated by Karl Rahner in his work, *Spirit in the World*, and by the Second Vatican Council in its Constitution, *The Church in the World*.11

For Heidegger the meaning of being and of life was unveiled and emerged "the two processes were identical" in conscious human life (*dasein*) lived through time and therefore through history. Thus human consciousness became the new focus of attention. The uncovering or bringing into light (the etymology of the term "phe-nomen-ology") of the unfolding patterns and interrelations of subjectivity would open a new era of human awareness. Epistemology and metaphysics would develop — and merge — in the very work of tracking the nature and direction of this process.

Thus, for Heidegger's successor, Hans-Georg Gadamer,12 the task becomes the uncovering of how human persons, emerging as family, neighborhood and people, by exercising their creative freedom weave their cultural tradition. This is not history as a mere compilation of whatever humankind does or makes, but culture as the fabric of the human consciousness and symbols by which a human group unveils being in its time.

The result is a dramatic inversion: where before all began from above and flowed downward "whether in structures of political power or of abstract reasoning" at the turn of the millennia attention focuses rather upon developing the exercise of the creative freedom of people in and as civil society as a new and responsible partner with government and business in the continuing

effort toward the realization of the common good. This is manifest in the shift in the agenda of the United Nations from the cold war debates between economic systems and their political powers to the great conferences of Rio on the environment, in Cairo on the family, in Beijing on women. The agenda is no longer reality as objectively quantifiable and conflictual, but the perhaps more difficult or at least more meaningful one of human life as lived consciously with its issues of human dignity, values and cultural interchange.

What does this mean for philosophy? In the 1970s the themes of the quinquennial World Congresses of Philosophy organized by the International Federation of Philosophical Societies had been on the philosophy of science; the *Philosopher's Index* for 1970 had only 32 items on culture. When it was proposed in 1980 that the next World Congress be on culture there was a veritable revolution in the ranks. It was said that culture was an issue for the elite and for anthropology, not philosophy, but that year the *Philosopher's Index* carried 120 listing on the subject. By 1998, however, there were 300 listing on culture and an additional 100 on values, with almost the same number on hermeneutics. If Marx spoke famously of standing Hegel on his head, in our lifetime the same has happened quite literally for the entire field of philosophy.

The more integral human horizon situates the objective issues of power and profit in a context of human value and subjectivity. This calls upon philosophy most urgently to develop the new ways of thinking and interpreting which can enable people to engage more consciously, freely and responsibly these new dimensions of life. Done well this can be an historic step ahead for humanity; done poorly it can produce a new round of human conflict and misery.

The Evolution of Modern Hermeneutics

The Enrichment of Objectivity by Subjectivity

The evolution of hermeneutics is a single thread in the complex fabric woven by the above interplay of subject and object, but can serve as a good illustration of its dynamic for our purpose and enable important insight into the development of hermeneutics as a way of advancing religious traditions, enabling them to unfold and promoting their work as ways of living God's grace in time.

Indeed, an investigation of the history of hermeneutics can enable one to see both how the scriptures can contribute to contemporary life and its aspirations, and, in turn, the way in which recent developments of human awareness can enable new and, at least in some respects, more rich appreciation of the Sacred Scriptures. Moreover it can protect the reading of the scriptures from ideological distortion and manipulation. The history — and drama — of hermeneutics can be seen to be located just there. For with the increasing systematization of theology upon the introduction of Aristotelianism in the high middle ages, biblical interpretation became increasingly subject to the theological systematization of the sacred teaching of the Church. Thus, from the point of view of hermeneutics the Reformation was an inversion of the greatest magnitude. Rather than the parts of the scriptures being read in terms of the overarching theological systematization of the teaching of the Church, the latter was made subordinate to scripture whose many parts were to be read in their own right. Biblical interpretation replaced the teaching authority of the Church. Moreover, the parts needed to be read in terms of the Bible itself as a whole. Thus Matthias Flacius articulated the hermeneutical circle: reading the parts in terms of the whole and the whole in terms of the parts.13

This "liberation of interpretation from dogma," as Wilhelm Dilthey would characterize it, paralleled the nominalism of Ockham, to whose school Luther proclaimed his adherence. According to this, reality was no longer primarily universal forms or ideas, but the single entities for which such universal terms stood. But here, too, unity remained necessary for the intelligibility of the world. So a scientific method was developed which was not a process of deduction from universal premises and principles but just the contrary, that is, a process in which abstract hypotheses were formed which could be made part of general theories provided they received empirical verification through sense knowledge and its objects. Here the process was inductive from singulars rather than deductive from universals, but the goal remained knowledge that was universal, objective and certain due to the absence of any subject or subjectivity.

As this method evolved and became ever more pervasive humans awareness became attuned to what was outward and exterior; it no longer took account of the interior life of the spirit. Rudolf Carnap and others stated this most bluntly in their positivist Vienna Manifesto in 1929.

It was the reaction to this tread that Schleiermacher and Dilthey sought to restore attention to human subjectivity in hermeneutics and in the so-called sciences of the spirit (*geisteswissenachaften*). But they did so in term of then operative ideal of knowledge, namely, that of an objective science as just described.

Despite their great accomplishment in renewing hermeneutics the direction of their work suffered from a fatal flaw. It was their attempt to develop this effort to take account of subjectivity through a science whose norm was objectivity. As Gabriel Marcel and other recent existentially oriented thinkers would point out the effort to turn the subject and its work into an object is essentially to lose its very subjectivity. This cannot be restored or discovered by stepping back, no many how many times, in order to reintroduce the subject, for such objectivist sciences must then treat all things as objects. Hence, their very efforts to take account of the self turn it into an object, thereby losing its subjectivity. In this light the effort to develop science of hermeneutics after the modern objectivist model of science suffers from an inherent self-destructive contradiction.

Gadamer shows this in his analysis of the pioneering work of Schleiermacher and Dilthey in developing modern hermeneutics. The story has notable similarities to other great human projects and reminds one of the history in the Old Testament of the people of God moving toward the new land God would give them. Their progress was halting and sometimes stumbling, but even, and perhaps especially, for this reason manifested the consistent Providence of God correcting, encouraging and directing them in the progress of their search. The biblical stories are those of vast cohorts, and today we are part of a global pilgrimage of all humankind; but some figures have marked out significant steps and stages in our awareness of the nature of this progress. Thus we shall look first at the work of Schleiermacher who sets out on the quest of modern hermeneutics to reflect human subjectivity as rooted in God, and next Wilhelm Dilthey who re-situated the search more externally in cultural artifacts and values, most specifically in written texts. This provided an objective and empirical entity for investigation, which nevertheless bespoke the life of the spirit or of human subjectivity, engaging thereby the whole of life, physical and spiritual. Both, however, sought to achieve their goal in terms of the objective sciences which obscured the way in which this was a personal search for lack of direct attention to the interior life of human subjectivity. Hence, it will be especially important to look at the development of phenomenology by which Husserl overcame this obstacle, and Heidegger's application of this to being. All of this card the grounds for Gadamer's full fledged hermeneutics which could be developed for use by a religious tradition.

In *Truth and Method* H.-G. Gadamer has surveyed the development of hermeneutics showing its progressive evolution from objectivity in Schleiermacher and Dilthey to its enrichment by the attention to subjectivity through the development of phenomenology by Husserl and Heidegger. I would like to adjust that history in view of our concern with the religious dimensions of human existence. Here I would like to point to the interior religious horizon of the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and its reemergence at least potentially in the context of Heidegger. This will be essential to the religious hermeneutics whose genesis we will see with Gadamer in Chapter III below.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) had a masterful vision based on the unity of God, which is at the heart of Islam and indeed of all great religion. It is, that God who is one has created many humans, who therefore are united one to another as brothers and sisters. Moreover, a prime way of returning to God is by deepening this union with other humans: that is, the more deeply we unite with others the more fully we achieve consciousness and appreciation of the initial divine unity, and unite therewith.

In this context hermeneutics can be seen to have a number of characteristics.

First it will become important when a shared faith is confused, weakened or lacking. In such circumstances it becomes necessary to do consciously and methodically what previously had been spontaneous and second nature. When suggested by Spinoza and Hegel, this had tended to reduce hermeneutics to external and practical technique. Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is much more for it evokes, shapes and helps to implement the reality of our conscious and spiritual relation to others and especially to God.

Second because the text is limited by the physical exigencies of language, Schleiermacher's intent of enabling the human to express the infinite moved beyond the text to reconstruct the inner intentional or mental process of the author. To approach God through man he pointed to the need to go beyond the grammatical issues of the structures of the text and to enter into the mind of the author. His concern was not simply what was written, nor the truth or validity of its content, but the inner processes of the faith experience of the author.

Still, Schleiermacher was extremely cautions here. Though he turned to the author as living and writing in the life world, he did so according to the characteristics of the science of his day, and hence sought objectively valid knowledge. Hence, he detached his hermeneutics from both the lived processes of the subject and the content of the text in search rather of laws and principles for understanding. For this reason he missed the existential factors which Gadamer would later find essential, namely, the historical and community structure of understanding and the importance of pre-understanding of the whole in order to enter into the hermeneutic circle with its parts.

Nevertheless, many miss the significance of Scheiermacher's contribution since they close their eyes to the religious dimension of his thought and consider it to be merely a matter of human psychology. As noted above, for Schleiermacher the horizontal reunion between non-conceptual human consciousness is most fundamentally a vertical deepening into the divine ground of being. This is the heart of the matter and all that follows will point to the need for this religious reconstruction of culture and tradition.

There were, however, it would seem a number of limitations. Previously, interpretation had been guided not only by the individual's act of faith, but by that of the believing community, called "the teaching" or dogma, which stated the identity of that community. At this point this belief of the community of the faithful was omitted and one was left alone with the individual interior faith:

"the liberation of interpretation from dogma". If all that was truly religious was reduced to this interior act of faith, as implied by Luther's reading of *sola fide* as the way of salvation, then the external sacred text is reduced to an object for scientific inspection, rather than a religious reality or a matter for belief. In interpreting the Qu'ran, for example, this would break the essential role of the continuous tradition coming from the community of the Companions of The Prophet, the life of the early Community of Believers, the Hadiths and the long experience of living as a people of God according to the Qu'ran. But without these how could one understand the Holy text? Gadamer, as we shall see, insists upon the essential role of one's tradition in interpreting any text.

Paul Tillich would come to regret bitterly this replacement of the sense of the sacred community by the text and by personal faith alone in Schleiermacher and Dilthey, for it left the reader of the text at the mercy of social forces, rather than as shaping society in the light of the Spirit as lived by the community of believers. For Tillich this came to a crisis in Germany in the early 1930s when, along with most others in philosophy and theology, he had thought that National Socialism would be the new manifestation of God, only to see it evolve into a new paganism with Hitler as its head. Tillich would write in some personal dismay "Neo-Protestantism is dead in Europe. All groups, whether Lutheran, Reformed, or Bartian, consider the last 200 years of Protestant Theology essentially erroneous. The year 1933 finished the period of theological liberalism stemming from Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Troeltsh."15

Entering into the realm of the intentional opens up a number of crucial issues which Gadamer illustrates from the work of two historian L. von Ranke and J.G. Droyson.16 Ranke focused upon freedom as the essential element in history. Hence rather than developing an Hegelian unity of all acts of the spirit in terms of a universal telos as a return of the Spirit to itself, he builds from the individual acts as free but connected in multiple concatenations. Hence, the meaning of history can be appreciated only in retrospect, for which there are multiple partial vantage points or perspectives.

Droyson would take this a step further and suggest that recreating the intention of the free agent is not enough as the effects of their actions interact and produce results which exceed their intention. History then is better understood as the human attempt to give expression to ethical ideals, an attempt which is realized only partially in any one community.

But here the project of attending to intention and freedom would see to encounter a check, for if the goal is to return from a later period or from other circumstances to the intention of the author then retrospection and recreation clash: the very need to recreate in new and different circumstances militates against the ability to see the original as it was; conversely, the attempt to return to the original intention militates against the effort to recreate it anew in, and for, fresh circumstances. The result is an isometric in which any success in a loss of appreciation of the meaning of the text either in itself or for our day.

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) Dilthey shifted attention from the inner regions of the heart to life as lived externally. This is not the realm of reflexive consciousness in which one is self-aware and reflective of one's own actions; it is rather immediate engagement in life. For this he developed such categories as value, meaning and relationships. These do not separate for purposes of analysis as do the sciences; rather they reflect the inner unity of knowing, willing and feeling. The process here is not about life, but is life itself as the living process of realizing meaning.

This is temporal in two senses. It depends upon materials from the past and lives in expectation of the future. But beyond the transition from past to future there is also a deepening of meaning.

Moreover, this is not a matter of private introspection, but of objective cultural expressions in lived experience of writing and ritual.

In this context hermeneutics goes far beyond the interpretation of a written text as a dead artifact to see it as a way in which life continues to express and disclose itself. It is in these terms that is to be found the significance of the hermeneutic circle taken in terms of meaning. In one sense meaning is a matter of the whole of life; thus while derived from the meaning of the parts nonetheless it also determines the meaning of those parts. Moveover, this is historical in the sense that the meaning can be seen from the many particular parts or standpoints, or any combination of these. The meaning then is not outside of the circle, but essentially is part of the historically defined circle.

In this sense life is lived and known from within prior to its division between object and subject. Though able to be properly understood only via its objectification, it is itself the interaction between the individual and the overall cultural tradition in which one lives as the objective spirit. There is then no principal standpoint from which to understand and judge, for understanding is always in a cultural context or horizon. Interpretation is a matter of searching out the interaction of horizons of the reader and the text.

Dilthey has done much in focusing on experience as lived externally in the artifacts of a culture. He thereby situated hermeneutics as temporal and historical. But in the end his goal remains that of achieving scientific knowledge for purposes of grasping and controlling. The fact that the subject is essentially included in an historical process of meaning leaves him in a relativism for which there is only a series of world views with no way of judging between them. Person and communities are inescapably historical and are best understood by interpreting their history from the past.

In effect Dilthey projected outward the relationship between human spirits which we saw in Schleiermacher, but finding these to be essentially temporal he is left with only a series of views and horizons lacking unity or direction. What he needed, but not sufficiently appreciated in Scheiermacher, was the vertical dimension in which these historical relations between people are points of manifestation of the divine which emerges ever more into human life. Like a boat without keel or compass Dilthey leaves understanding as a matter of reexperiencing the experience of the author, rather than as a truly progressive, forward and cumulative movement of the text living through time and engaging the modern dilemmas.

From Shleiermacher and Dilthey, however, we do have significant axes for living the faith: it is lived in a human community, but as making manifest the divine ground of a personal faith; it is centered on the meaning of life, which it sees reflected in all aspects of culture; thus it grows through history and is diversified in and by all peoples and their cultures.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Let us now resume our quest. We have seen how, along with the developments of objective and empirical sciences, there was an attempt to recognize also the non-objective realm of human subjectivity. The danger was that, in a time when science was objectivist, univocous and pervasive, the very attempt to recognize and protect the non-objective would be carried out by objectivist means and thereby itself become a process of reducing subjectivity to object. This marked the efforts from Schleiermacher through Dilthey, and left the question of whether subjectivity could ever be protected. On the one hand, the attempt of Schleiermacher illustrated that this could not be done if what was sought ultimately was simply objective scientific knowledge. On the other hand, Dilthey's effort illustrated that subjectivity

would be reduced to relativism if left to itself in an exclusively horizontal historical dimension moving simply from past to future.

In retrospect then it would appear that the only way is to take up the vertical dimension which inspired the thought of Schleiermacher but was ignored by those in search of a science of spirit or *geisteswissenschaft*. In order to access this a new mode of thinking, now called phenomenology, would be needed. This was initiated by Husserl, and surprisingly not in reaction against, but in the search for the foundations of, scientific knowledge at its most rigorous, namely, in mathematics.

As a student he had been introduced by Masaryk to Brentano in Vienna who opened for him the notion of intentionality. This had flowed through the channel of Catholic philosophy due to its openness to the work of the Spirit in the human heart. In this light, even mathematics needed to be set within the broader horizon of intentionality once it was seen as a way of organizing experience with a view to certain intentions or goals.

Thus, whereas Dilthey had attempted to render all such knowledge ultimately objective for scientific goals, Husserl situated science within a broader life world. He placed on one side the experience that is objective and hence available for anyone and everyone to see. Under this heading would come the genius of Aristotle in developing a process of abstraction whereby what differed would be omitted from attention so that only what was uniform across the field under investigation remained. Modern empiricism was also objectivist in insisting that the object of knowledge be repeatable at any time and by any one, and that the result of any given experiment be exactly the same.

But our experience of life manifests another dimension of experience characterized precisely by its temporal and historical character. What happens is succeeded by other events, in terms of which our prior experience can never again be seen in quite the same light. Hence, experience is not a set of unchanging blocks, but more a process of becoming experienced. It consists less in objects before us than in our total — including our emotional — response to the world. This personal outlook on life is shaped less by the things observed than by living though then. Moreover, these two processes of experience and understanding are not so much separated as interactive in a spiral manner: understanding is shaped by developing experience, which in turn is shaped by progress in understanding.

In this way Husserl succeeded in directing the mind to human subjectivity, and hence to the unique freedom and creativity of peoples. But he leaves unanswered question of the unity of this realm of human subjectivity. That there is a unity it seen from the fact of communication, the cooperative projects of science and the yet broader project which is the community, but how can this be grounded? Husserl appealed to a transcendental ego in a somewhat Kantian manner which ideally or formally states the entire realm of self-consciousness and of mutual awareness, but this would appear to lose touch with the life world he wanted to explore. At a later point he would seem to identify this with the entire historical realm of actual human interchange, but that would not confront the foundational question of the unity of this realm.

In any case, his interest is not in a Kantian form of consciousness superimposed upon the concrete acts of consciousness. Rather he is intent upon a process of phenomenological reduction by which all the particular empirical contents of the various experiences are put to one side or bracketed in order to make manifest what is essential to consciousness. His conclusion is that whereas other things are always what they are, what is proper or essential to consciousness is that it always is of, or about, something else, that is, it is relational, transcending itself and tending toward another; in a word, it is intentional.

Husserl's process of reductions by which he uncovers this is close to Descartes' inward process of discovering that doubting is basically thinking and the work of an ego as a thinking thing. For Husserl this brings him to the way the observer is progressively and selectively conscious of the different aspects of objects, and thereby constitutes the world for consciousness.

There is a yet further step to be taken, however, because, in addition to those many relations of the self to its objects in which awareness consists, there is also awareness of this awareness. In this we touch upon the deepest dimension of the self in relation to which everything else including reflection is an object. This he refers to as the transcendental ego, to which corresponds the world as a whole. In a provocative aside Robert Wood notes that "It is in this very direction that we might find the roots of traditional doctrines seemingly so foreign to minds conditioned to think in terms of sensorialy observable objects: doctrines like Plotinus' world-intelligence, Aristotle's agent intellect, Augustine's divine illumination, German Idealism's Absolute Spirit and somehow necessarily related."17

Yet there remains a gulf between the agent-intellects of the medieval philosophers and the atman-Brahman of the Hindu's, on the one hand, and Husserl's transcendental ego, on the other. For, where they were involved in reality or being, Husserl is looking for the essence or quintessence of consciousness. As this must be a consciousness of consciousness he is in danger of entering as it were a hall of mirrors and becoming trapped there in an idealism.

The integral complex of these conscious relations is what constitutes the pattern of a culture, in terms of which in turn life is encountered, interpreted and responded to. In the past culture was not seen as life, but rather as an outer garment by which life was adorned. It was as it were an afterthought, of varying degrees of value perhaps, but more an adornment than life itself. Husserl enables us to see that cultures are the forms of the life world of which we are part. Yet they remain for him additions, as it were, forming and structuring life, but not being itself.

If this be so then an important step awaits, namely, to review these matters in terms of being in order to be able to see intentionality as the very quintessence not merely of consciousness, but of life itself. In those terms cultures and civilizations — and the religions which are their roots — are revealed as the basic issue of life or death. This enables one to rediscover in a new way how religion is the heart of life, why it now returns to the center of the conflicts and promises of life in our day, and how addressing its challenges is the key to moving into the future.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).18 This step from consciousness to being was taken up in phenomenological terms by Husserl's successor, Martin Heidegger. In pursuit of the transcendental ego as the quintessence of conscious life Husserl had bracketed the concrete existential reality of engagement in the world with others. He thereby lost actual life in the search for the essence of life. To correct this Heidegger advanced the phenomenological project from the order of consciousness to that of being.

He focused concretely on the human being living in the flesh and through time who experiences. But this is twofold. In his earlier work which culminated in his *Being and Time* (1927) the perspective was not that of single things, or even of these as beings, but of the being of these beings. For this he turns to the being which is conscious of itself, that is, to the *dasein* or the human being who is not only given, but is aware of his givenness. Here the major point of insight which frees the mind and takes it beyond the isolated singularity of things is their temporal character. On the one hand, we are creatures of past decisions which create this world, which we do not make but in which we find ourselves thrown. On the other hand, we act in terms of a future toward which we project ourselves.

In this light the character of understanding is not primarily a speculative grasp of a fixed scientific object, but the practical engagement of one's being in the realization of its capacity for life. This reverses the direction of hermeneutics. It is no longer a search for necessary and objective, repeatable and universal truths for all. Rather, it is the conscious emergence of being in time.

Heidegger's *Being and Time* was only the first part of a project whose second part he never formally completed. But in his subsequent writings (the so-called "later Heidegger") his horizon shifts so that the perspective is no longer that of the temporal *dasein* and what was available or "at hand" for description and analysis. Rather it becomes Being which the *dasein* expresses in time, but which transcends this being and is characterized rather by hiddenness and mystery. This deepens the sense of truth which then becomes *aleitheia* or the unveiling of the inexhaustible and thus hidden being.

This difference is important for the work of hermeneutics. The earlier Heidegger provided rich insight into our temporal conditions and how this could be a mode of awareness of being and of its realization in our lives. Thus, the earlier Heidegger sees the special role of hermeneutics to be that of questioning being — almost calling it to account for itself in history. For the earlier Heidegger this is the essence of the human person. Only in questioning does one become truly oneself and correlatively only as answer does being disclose itself. Indeed, by this questioning being becomes history; in this sense Being depends upon man as the place of its manifestation.

The later Heidegger takes another look at this. Now it is not man which is and brings Being into time, though Being always depends on man as the place of being. Rather, man is seen precisely as the expression of Being itself; Being becomes the focus of attention, from which perspective all, including human physical and conscious life, is seen. In religious terms this has been termed seeing all *sub specie aternitatis* (in terms of the eternal). While not himself considering Being to be the Divine, Heidegger nonetheless elaborates horizons that sound religions or at least can be very helpful for religious thinkers.

A whole new terminology appears in his writings. Man does not summon Being at will by his questioning, but is himself more fundamentally gift. He must wait upon being to manifest itself, not only in the sense of awaiting the time of *kyros* or manifestation, but of responding to, waiting upon, and *shepherding* beings in time. Hence, the properly human attitude is not that of questioning, but of thanksgiving. This is what most deeply inspires and gives dynamism to human life. Thanksgiving is for the gift of one's very being, which gift of life can never be repaid in kind, but must be received and treasured, interpreted and shaped, and in turn creatively passed on to others. This itself is a hermeneutic process, indeed it is the essence of all hermeneutics.

Thus we come to what religious people have always known, namely, (a) that only in letting go of the grasping by which we hold to — really are held by — our possessions do we allow God to live in us, (b) that we live in Him, and hence (c) that to live is to serve God and neighbor in gratitude and generosity.

In the lecture which follows we shall attempt to see with Hans-Georg Gadamer how in hermeneutic terms this essentially religious vision can be relived in a newly conscious manner and thereby renewed, enriched and made fruitful in new ways for new times.

Before doing so however we might listen to the words of Descartes at the end of the third of his *Meditations on First Philosophy*

> Before I examine this matter with more care, and pass on to the consideration of other truths which may be derived from it, it seems to me right to pause for a while in order to

contemplate God Himself, to ponder at leisure His marvelous attributes, to consider, and admire, and adore, the beauty of this light so resplendent, at least as far as the strength of my mind, which is in some measurer dazzled by the sight, will allow me to do so. For just as faith teaches us that the supreme felicity of the other life consists only in this contemplation of the Divine Majesty, so we continue to learn by experience that a similar meditation, though incomparably less perfect, causes us to enjoy the greatest satisfaction of which we are capable in this life.19

Notes

1 Francis Bacon, *Novum Organon, De Sapientia Veterum* (New York, 1960).

2 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, 1690).

3 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), I.

4 John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father>, 1998.

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12 Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 5, 15.

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15 Paul Tillich, "The Present Theological Situation in the Light of Continental European Developments," *Theology Today*, 6 (1949), 299.

16 Descartes, *Meditation III* in *The Philosophical Work of Descartes*, trans. E. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 171.

17 For related texts G. McLean, ed., *Readings in the Philosophy of Existence* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2000), vol. I, pp. 216-316. See also the studies by Joseph Kockelmans, "The Founders of Phenomenology and Personalism" and Robert E. Wood, "The Phenomenologists" in G. McLean, ed., *Reading Philosophy for the XXIst Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1989), pp. 111-212. See also Gadamer, 2nd ed., pp. 242-261.

18 Robert Wood, pp. 140-141.

19 Descartes, *Meditation III*. See also Palmer 124-161.

Chapter III
The Genesis of a Cultural Tradition

Chapter II concerned not only the broad lines of the evolution of the horizons of human awareness, but, in this context, the development of hermeneutics as the ability to be self-aware of this development. But if what characterize humanity as such is precisely this ability to be aware of, and hence to direct and determine one's life, then hermeneutics is not only a tool for life or an understanding of life. More properly, it is the effort to live our life precisely as human.

Morever, our lives are lived with others in community. Most radically then the human community is not simply an enterprise for economic advantage or a state for political power. It is rather the *umma*, or community of the children of God concerned to live in fidelity to his message and to make this operative in all times and places. Hence, hermeneutics is central to sacred learning, but even more to religious practice understood as the fundamentally transforming religious action of the *umma* in each place and at each time.

In this light the present chapter will attempt first to follow the emergence and shaping of the personal consciousness of the community of the faithful as a culture and a tradition. The following chapter will concern how being faithful to this cultural tradition, evolved from faithful experience over the centuries, means applying it in an active, adapted and transforming manner. In this light hermeneutics emerges as a pious, reflective, understanding and implementation of the community's life of faith in a changing world.

In this we will reflect especially the hermeneutics developed by H.-G. Gadamer in continuation of the phenomenological tradition of Husserl and Heidegger, surveyed above in Chapter II.

Subsequent chapters will look at the critique of ideological forces which can distort this human effort to live the religious vision of a just and harmonious community of the faithful. It will consider how many cultures can be, not conflictual, but convergent ways of responding to the love of God in our many histories.

In another work, *Ways to God*,1 I have attempted to follow the emergence of the religious consciousness of the peoples genetically by studying the evolving stages of human consciousness: totemic, mythic, philosophical, scientific and personalist. Here I shall begin rather analytically, by looking first at the fundamental character of being first of all as the contrast to nonbeing, and then to follow this thrust of self realization at the human level as it unfolds in the formation of values, religious cultures and cultural traditions that constitute our present pluralistic global reality.

Culture

Values

The drama of the person's responsible self-determination in response to his or her creator is fundamentally the affirmation of one's being against non-being. The account of this and its first implications was the work of Parmenides, the first metaphysician. Identically this is the relation to the good in search of which we live, survive and thrive. The good is manifest in experience as the object of desire, namely, as that which is sought when absent, for basically it is what completes

life. It is the "per-fect", understood in its etymological sense as that which is completed or realized through and through. Hence, once achieved, it is no longer desired or sought, but enjoyed.

This is reflected in the manner in which each thing, even a stone, retains the being or reality it has and resists reduction to non-being or nothing. The most that we can do is to change or transform a thing into something else; we cannot annihilate it. Similarly, a plant or tree, given the right conditions, grows to full stature and fruition. Finally, an animal protects its life -- fiercely, if necessary -- and seeks out the food needed for its strength. Food, in turn, as capable of contributing to an animal's realization or perfection, is for the animal an auxiliary good or means.

In this manner, things as good, that is, as actually realizing some degree of perfection and able to contribute to the well-being, perfection or realization of others, are the bases for an interlocking set of relations. As these relations are based upon both the actual perfection things possess and the potential perfection to which they are thereby directed, the good is perfection both as attracting when it has not yet been attained and as constituting one's fulfillment upon its achievement. Goods, then, are not arbitrary or simply a matter of wishful thinking; they are rather the full development of things and all that contributes thereto. In this ontological or objective sense, all beings are good to the extent that they exist and can contribute to the perfection of others.

The moral good is a more narrow field, for it concerns only one's free and responsible actions. This has the objective reality of the ontological good noted above, for it concerns real actions which stand in distinctive relation to our own perfection and to that of others — and, indeed, to the physical universe and to God as well. Hence, many possible patterns of actions could be objectively right because they promote the good of those involved, while others, precisely as inconsistent with the real good of persons or things, are objectively disordered or misordered. This constitutes the objective basis for the ethical good or bad.

Nevertheless, because the realm of objective relations is almost numberless, whereas our actions are single, it is necessary not only to choose in general between the good and the bad, but in each case to choose which of the often innumerable possibilities one will render concrete.

However broad or limited the options, as responsible and moral an act is essentially dependent upon its being willed by a subject. Therefore, in order to follow the emergence of the field of concrete moral action, it is not sufficient to examine only the objective aspect, namely, the nature of the things involved. In addition, one must consider the action in relation to the subject, namely, to the person who, in the context of his/her society and culture, appreciates and values the good of this action, chooses it over its alternatives, and eventually wills its actualization.

The term 'value' here is of special note. It was derived from the economic sphere where it meant the amount of a commodity sufficient to attain a certain worth. This is reflected also in the term 'axiology' whose root means "weighing as much" or "worth as much." It requires an objective content -- the good must truly "weigh in" and make a real difference. But the term 'value' expresses this good especially as related to wills which actually acknowledge it as a good and as desirable.2 Thus, different individuals or groups of persons and at different periods have distinct sets of values. Each people or community establishes a distinctive ranking in the degree to which it is sensitive to and prizes various goods. By so doing, it delineates among limitless objective goods a certain pattern of values which in a more stable fashion over time mirrors the corporate free choices of that people.

This constitutes the prime pattern and gradation of goods or values which persons experience from their earliest years and in terms of which they interpret their developing relations. Young persons peer out at the world through lenses formed, as it were, by their family and culture and configured according to the pattern of choices made by that community throughout its history —

often in its most trying circumstances. Like a pair of glasses it does not create the object; but it focuses attention upon certain goods involved rather than upon others.

This, in turn, becomes the basic orienting factor for the affective and emotional life described by the Scotts, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, as the heart of civil society. Over time, it encourages and reinforces certain patterns of action which, in turn, reinforce the pattern of values in a cyclical interaction.

Through this process a group constitutes the concerns in terms of which it struggles to advance or at least to perdure, mourns its failures, and celebrates its successes. This is a person's or people's world of hopes and fears in terms of which, as Plato wrote in the *Laches*, their lives have moral meaning.3 It is varied according to the many concerns and the groups which coalesce around them. As these are interlocking and interdependent a pattern of social goals develops which guides action.

Martin Heidegger describes a process by which the self emerges as a person in the field of moral action. It consists in transcending oneself or breaking beyond mere self-concern and projecting outward as a being whose very nature is to share with others for whom one cares and about whose welfare one is concerned. In this process, one identifies new purposes or goals for the sake of which action is to be undertaken. In relation to these goals, certain combinations of possibilities, with their natures and norms, take on particular importance and begin thereby to enter into the makeup of one's world of meaning.4 Freedom then becomes more than mere spontaneity, more than choice, and more even than self-determination in the sense of determining oneself to act. It shapes--the phenomenologist would say even that it constitutes--one's world as the ambit of human decisions and dynamic action. This is the making of the complex ordering of social groups which constitutes a culture.

This process of deliberate choice and decision transcends the somatic and psychic dynamisms. Whereas the somatic dimension is extensively reactive, the psychic dynamisms of affectivity or appetite are fundamentally oriented to the good and positively attracted by a set of values. These, in turn, evoke an active response from the emotions in the context of responsible freedom. But it is in the dimension of responsibility that one encounters the properly moral and social dimension of life. For, in order to live with others, one must be able to know, to choose and finally to realize what is truly conducive to one's good and to that of others. Thus, persons and groups must be able to judge the true value of what is to be chosen, that is, its objective worth, both in itself and in relation to others. This is moral truth: the judgment regarding whether the act makes the person and society good in the sense of bringing authentic individual and social fulfillment, or the contrary.

In this, deliberation and voluntary choice are required in order to exercise proper self-awareness and self-governance. By determining to follow this judgment one is able to overcome determination by stimuli and even by culturally ingrained values and to turn these, instead, into openings for free action in concert with others in order to shape one's community as well as one's physical surroundings. This can be for good or for ill, depending on the character of one's actions. By definition, only morally good actions contribute to personal and social fulfillment, that is, to the development and perfection of persons with others in community.

Indeed, Aristotle takes this up at the very beginning of his ethics. In order to make sense of the practical dimension of our life and its virtues it is necessary to identify the good or value toward which one directs one's life or which one finds satisfying. This he terms happiness and then proceeds systematically to see which goal can be truly satisfying. His test is not passed by physical

goods or honors, but by that which corresponds to, and fulfills, our highest capacity, that is, contemplation of the highest being or divine life.5

But what is the relation of this approach to God through ethics from below, to religion as revelation through the messages of the Prophets and grace which makes possible the achievement of a more perfect goal and fulfillment through resurrection and life in God? Thomas Aquinas' effort in his *Summa contra Gentiles*, analyzed by G. Stanley,6 is to show the way in which this latter sense of religion is not a contradiction or substitution of the former, but rather its more perfect fulfillment than is possible by human powers alone. In eschatology the vision of God is not a negation of the contemplation of divine life of which Aristotle spoke, but its fulfillment in a way that exceeds human hopes.

Virtues

It is the function of conscience, as one's moral judgment, to identify this character of moral good in action. Hence, moral freedom consists in the ability to follow one's conscience. This work of conscience is not a merely theoretical judgment, but the exercise of self-possession and self-determination in one's actions. Here, reference to moral truth constitutes one's sense of duty, for the action that is judged to be truly good is experienced also as that which I ought to do.

When this is exercised or lived, patterns of action develop which are habitual in the sense of being repeated. These are the modes of activity with which we are familiar; in their exercise, along with the coordinated natural dynamisms they require, we are practiced; and with practice comes facility and spontaneity. Such patterns constitute the basic, continuing and pervasive shaping influence of our life. For this reason, they have been considered classically to be the basic indicators of what our life as a whole will add up to, or, as is often said, "amount to". Since Socrates, the technical term for these especially developed capabilities has been `virtues' or special strengths.

But, if the ability to follow one's conscience and, hence, to develop one's set of virtues must be established through the interior dynamisms of the person, it must be protected and promoted by the related physical and social realities. This is a basic right of the person--perhaps *the* basic human and social right--because only thus can one transcend one's conditions and strive for fulfillment. Its protection and promotion must be a basic concern of any order which would be democratic and directed to the good of its people.

This, however, is only a right to one's conscience; religion goes further in that it looks to divine grace for help. Some virtues are the result not only of human practice, but of divine grace of assistance. Here, the perspective shifts from the secondary causality of the human creature to the primary casualty of the divine existence itself. As we saw with the later Heidegger, the horizon is that of God as giver of life whose effect is the human mission of care for created existence in terms of truth, justice and faith. In this light love expresses the goodness of creation; and thanksgiving and even ecstasy responds to the sublime beauty of the divine.

Culture

Together, these values and virtues of a people set the pattern of social life through which freedom is developed and exercised. This is called a "culture". On the one hand, the term is derived from the Latin word for tilling or cultivating the land. Cicero and other Latin authors used it for the cultivation of the soul or mind (*cultura animi*), for just as even good land, when left without

cultivation, will produce only disordered vegetation of little value, so the human spirit will not achieve its proper results unless trained or educated.7 This sense of culture corresponds most closely to the Greek term for education (*paideia*) as the development of character, taste and judgment, and to the German term "formation" (*Bildung*).8

Here, the focus is upon the creative capacity of the spirit of a people and their ability to work as artists, not only in the restricted sense of producing purely aesthetic objects, but in the more involved sense of shaping all dimensions of life, material and spiritual, economic and political. The result is a whole life, characterized by unity and truth, goodness and beauty, and, thereby, sharing deeply in meaning and value. The capacity for this cannot be taught, although it may be enhanced by education. More recent phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiries suggest that, at its base, culture is a renewal, a reliving of origins in an attitude of profound appreciation.9 This leads us beyond self and other, beyond identity and diversity, in order to comprehend both.

On the other hand, "culture" can be traced to the term *civis* (citizen, civil society and civilization).10 This reflects the need for a person to belong to a social group or community in order for the human spirit to produce its proper results. By bringing to the person the resources of the tradition, the *tradita* or past wisdom produced by the human spirit, the community facilitates comprehension. By enriching the mind with examples of values which have been identified in the past, it teaches and inspires one to produce something analogous. For G.F. Klemm, this more objective sense of culture is composite in character.11 E.B. Tyler defined this classically for the social sciences as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits required by man as a member of society."12

In contrast, Clifford Geertz came to focus on the meaning of all this for a people and on how a people's intentional action went about shaping its world. Thus he contrasts the analysis of culture to an experimental science in search of laws, seeing it rather as an interpretative science in search of meaning.13 What is sought is the import of artifacts and actions, that is, whether "it is, ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that, in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said."14 For this there is need to be aware "of the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs."15 In this light, Geertz defines culture rather as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of intended conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."16

Each particular complex whole or culture is specific to a particular people; a person who shares in this is a *civis* or citizen and belongs to a civilization. For the more restricted Greek world in which this term was developed, others (aliens) were those who did not speak the Greek tongue; they were "barbaroi", for their speech sounded like mere babel. Though at first this meant simply non-Greek, its negative manner of expression easily lent itself to, perhaps reflected, and certainly favored, a negative axiological connotation; indeed, this soon became the primary meaning of the word `barbarian'. By reverse implication, it attached to the term `civilization' an exclusivist connotation, such that the cultural identity of peoples began to imply not only the pattern of gracious symbols by which one encounters and engages in shared life projects with other persons and peoples, but cultural alienation between peoples. Today, as communication increases and more widely differentiated peoples enter into ever greater interaction and mutual dependence, we reap a bitter harvest of this negative connotation. The development of a less exclusivist sense of culture and civilization must be a priority task and we shall turn to this at the conclusion of this work.

Community

Autogenesis is no more characteristic of the birth of knowledge than it is of persons. Just as a person is born into a family on which he or she depends absolutely for life, sustenance, protection and promotion, so one's understanding develops in community. It is from one's family and in one's earliest weeks and months that one does or does not develop the basic attitudes of trust and confidence which undergird or undermine capacities for subsequent social relations. There one learns care and concern for others independently of what they do for us, and acquires the language and symbol system in terms of which to conceptualize, communicate and understand.

Similarly, through the various steps of one's development, as one's circle of community expands through neighborhood, school, work and recreation one comes to learn and to share personally and passionately an interpretation of reality and a pattern of value responses. The phenomenologist sees this life in community as the new source for wisdom. Hence, rather than turning away from daily life in order to contemplate abstract and disembodied ideas, the place to discover meaning is life in the family and in the progressively wider circles into which one enters.

There could be no culture if man were but a solitary being. Hence we must begin from a sense of community. But what has this to do with knowledge or discovery? To answer this, John Caputo17 traces his phenomenological description of the actual experience of the person back even before birth when one's life was lived in, and with, the biological rhythms of the mother. From birth this expands into an ever broader sharing in the life of one's parents, siblings and neighbors. It is in this context that one is at peace — the condition for personal growth and discovery. From its beginning then, our life has been social; it has always been lived with other persons. This is particularly true of our learning process. While it is true that it is the individual who sees lightning and hears thunder, anthropological studies show that peoples react to the same phenomena with either fear or joy or sadness according to the tribe to which they belong: their representations and interpretation of phenomena have a collective character.

The strict bond of the knowledge had by animals to the conditions of space and time enables them to live in safe harmony with their physical world; human knowledge is not so bound, but can understand, question and create. There is an homology with the animal, nonetheless, for just as its knowledge is synchronized to nature, human understanding is synchronized with that of other men. One's life is with others in a society marked by the culture which that society has developed. From this Gadamer concludes that absolute knowledge simply and without condition, whether regarding oneself or others, is not possible: the knower is always conditioned according to his position in time and space. But then neither would knowledge that is absolute and abstract be of ultimate interest for one's life develops with others in this community with its culture, time and place.18

Tradition

In modern times the notion of tradition has been looked upon with great suspicion. It has been seen as out of date and hence unenlightened, as imposed by will rather than as stating the truth, and hence as oppressive of those who have not played a significant role in the social, economic and political life of society. It tends to be appealed to by those who are satisfied and to be appealed against by those who are not. Tradition in this sense would be rightly rejected. Hence the first task of H.-G. Gadamer was to refound the notions of tradition and heritage, to rediscover its real nature and foundation, in a word, to revive the sense of tradition. He did this in a series of investigations to rediscover: the roots of learning in community, the positive importance of time, and the sense in which these two can give a certain authority to tradition. Let us follow these steps.

Time and Discovery

If it were merely a matter of community, all might be limited to the present, with no place for tradition— literally, that which is "passed on" (*tradita*) from one generation to the next. The wisdom with which we are concerned, however, is a not a matter of mere tactical adjustments to temporary concerns; it concerns rather the meaning we are able to envision for life and which we desire to achieve through all such adjustments over a period of generations. Hence, contemporary interchange needs to be complemented by the historical depth of accumulated human insight, predicated upon the full wealth of human experience.

This process of trial and error, of continual correction and addition in relation to a people's evolving sense of human dignity and purpose, constitutes a type of learning and testing laboratory for successive generations. In this laboratory of history the strengths of various insights and behavior patterns can be identified and reinforced, while deficiencies are progressively corrected or eliminated.

But even this language remains too abstract, too limited to method or technique. While this can be described in general and at a distance in terms of feed-back mechanisms, what is being spoken about are free acts, expressive of passionate human commitment and sacrifice in responding to concrete danger, building and rebuilding family alliances, and constructing and defending one's nation. The cumulative result of this extended process of learning and commitment constitutes the content of a tradition.19 The historical and prophetical books of the Bible are an extended, concrete account of one such process of a people's discovery of wisdom in interaction with the divine.

Moreover, this wisdom is not a matter of mere tactical adjustments to temporary concerns; it concerns rather the meaning we are able to envision for life and which we desire to achieve through all such adjustments over a period of generations. It is what is truly worth striving for and the pattern of social interaction in which this can be richly lived. The result of this extended process of learning and commitment constitutes our awareness of the bases for the decisions of which history is constituted.

This points us beyond the horizontal plane of the various ages of history and directs our attention vertically to its ground and, hence, to the bases of the values which humankind in its varied circumstances seeks to realize. It is here that one searches for the absolute ground of meaning and value of which Iqbal wrote. Without that all is ultimately relative to only an interlocking network of consumption, then dissatisfaction and finally ennui.

Thus our interpretation and understanding of data draws for its development and orientation upon the experience and insight of our predecessors, often elaborated over centuries of controlled scientific investigation and deduction. Above all, this holds true for metaphysical knowledge which is not available to the senses, which register only physical differences. Metaphysics concerns the common characteristics of all reality, the uniqueness of each act of freedom and the particular characteristics of the ultimate source of being, meaning and value.

The impact of the convergence of cumulative experience and reflection is heightened by its gradual elaboration in ritual and music, and its imaginative configuration in such epics as the *Mahabharata* or in dance. All conspire to constitute a culture which, like a giant telecommunications dish, shapes, intensifies and extends the range of our personal sensitivity, free decisions and mutual concerns.

Tradition then, is, not simply everything that ever happened, but rather what appears significant. It is what has been seen through time to be deeply true about human life. It contains the values to which our forebears freely gave their passionate commitment in specific historical circumstances and progressively over time. The content of a tradition is expressed in works of literature whose worth gradually becomes evident as something upon which character and community can be built. Tradition then constitutes a rich source from which multiple themes can be drawn, provided it be accepted and embraced, affirmed and cultivated.

Hence, it is not because of personal inertia on our part or arbitrary will on the part of our forbears that tradition serves as model and exemplar. On the contrary, the importance of tradition derives from both the cooperative character of the learning by which wisdom is drawn from experience and the cumulative free acts of commitment and sacrifice which have defined, defended and passed on through time the corporate life of the community.20

Authority

Perhaps the greatest point of tension between a sense of one's heritage and the enlightenment spirit relates to authority. Is it possible to recognize authority on the part of a tradition which perdures while still retaining freedom through time? Could it be that authority, rather than being the negation of freedom, is its cumulative expression, or even the positive condition for the discovery of its needed new realizations?

One of the most important characteristics of human persons is their capability for development and growth. One is born with open and unlimited powers for knowledge and for love. Life consists in developing, deploying and exercising these capabilities. Given the communitary character of human growth and learning, dependence upon others is not unnatural--quite the contrary. Within, as well as beyond, our social group we depend upon other persons according as they possess abilities we, as individuals and communities, need for our growth, self-realization and fulfillment.

This dependence is not primarily one of obedience to their will, but is based upon their comparative excellence in some dimension—whether this be the doctor's professional skill in healing, or the wise person's insight and judgment in matters where profound understanding is required. The preeminence of wise persons in the community is not something they usurp or with which they are arbitrarily endowed; it is based rather upon their abilities as these are reasonably and freely acknowledged by others.

It was an unfortunate byproduct of Descartes' disincarnation of clear and distinct ideas, especially as intensified by enlightenment egalitarianism, that authority came to be seen as based not upon understanding but upon strength of will, and hence as potentially subservient to a narrowness of vision. The effect has been to orient people toward anarchy as the sole response to the aberrations of arbitrary authority in modern totalitarian societies.

One of H.-G. Gadamer's major steps in the development of his hermeneutics has been to react against this and to identify the proper basis for authority in competency, and for the authority of tradition in the understanding upon which it is based. This indeed was the perspective of Plato's *Republic*, where for future leaders education is the prerequisite for the exercise of authority. While the leader who is wise but indecisive may be ineffective, the one who is decisive but foolish is bound upon his own destruction and that of his community.

All of these—the role of the community in learning, the contribution of extended historical experience, and the grounding of dependence in competency—combine to endow tradition with authority for subsequent ages.21

A Classical Religious Tradition

There are reasons to believe, moreover, that a religious tradition is not a passive storehouse of materials simply waiting upon the inquirer, but that its content of divinely authenticated wisdom plays a normative role for life in subsequent ages. On the one hand, without such a normative referent prudence would be as relativistic and ineffective as muscular action without a skeletal substructure. Life would be merely a matter of compromise and accommodation on any terms with no sense of the value either of what was being compromised or of that for which it was compromised. On the other hand, were the normative factor to reside simply in a transcendental or abstract vision the result would be devoid of existential content.

In history, however, one finds the religious vision of life which both transcends its own time and is directive for time that follows. The content of that vision is a set of values and of human and social goals which, by their fullness and harmony of measure, point the way to mature and perfect human formation and thereby orient the life of a person.22 Such a vision is historical because it arises both in life from revelation through the Prophets and from the life of the *umma* or religious people in time. Hence presents an appropriate way of preserving their life through time. It is also normative because it provides a basis upon which past historical ages, present options and future possibilities are judged.

The fact that people do not remain indifferent before the flow of events, but dispute—even bitterly—the direction of change appropriate for their community reflects the fact that every humanism is committed to the realization of some common—if general—model of perfection. Without this, even conflict would be impossible for there would be no intersection of divergent positions, and hence no debate or conflict.

One's religious heritage or tradition constitutes just such a classical model. As such it is not chronologically distant in the past and therefore in need of being drawn forward artificially. It lives and acts in the lives of all whom it inspires and judges; through time it is the timeless dimension of history. Hence, rather than reconstructing it, we belong to it—just as it belongs to us. Such a tradition is, in effect, the ultimate community of human striving, for human understanding is implemented, not by isolated individual acts of subjectivity, — which Gadamer describes as flickerings in the closed circuits of personal consciousness23 — but by our situatedness in a tradition. By fusing both past and present this enables us to determine the specific direction of our lives and to mobilize the consensus and commitment of which true community is built.24

Conversely, it is this sense of the good or of value, derived from the concrete lived experience of a people through its history and constituting its cultural heritage, which enables it in turn to assess and avoid what is socially destructive. In the absence of tradition, present events would be simply facts to be succeeded by counter-facts. The succeeding waves of such disjointed happenings would constitute a history written in terms of violence which could be restrained only by some Utopian abstraction built upon the reductivist limitations of modern rationalism. Eliminating all expressions of freedom, this is the archetypal modern nightmare, *1984*.

This stands in stark contrast to one's religious heritage or tradition as the rich cumulative vision based on the message of Prophets and evolved by a people in faith through the ages to a point of normative and classical perfection. This is exemplified architecturally in a Parthenon and a Taj Mahal; personally it is embodied in a Confucius and a Gandhi, a Mohammed and a Christ, a Martin Luther King and a Mother Theresa. Superseding mere historical facts, as concrete

universals they express that harmony of measure and fullness which is at once classical and historical, ideal and personal, uplifting and dynamizing, in a word, liberating.

The truly important battle at the present time, then, is less between, on the one hand, a chaotic liberalism in which the abstract laws of the marketplace dictate and tear at the lives of persons, peoples and nations and, on the other hand, a depersonalizing sense of community in which the dignity of the person is suppressed for an equally abstract utopia. A victory by either would have spelt disaster. The central battle now is rather to enable peoples to draw on their religious heritage, constituted of divine revelation, personal assessments and free responses. These have been elaborated through the ages by the various communities deliberating and working out their response to present circumstances. That these circumstances are often shifting and difficult in the extreme is important. But what is of definite importance is that this people's response be truly theirs. That is, that it not be simply the imposed effect of another's history; or—worst of all—of abstract and impersonal, depersonalizing and secularizing structures, slogans or utopias. Rather, it must be part of their history of free religious response to the good, and hence of their cultural tradition.

Notes

1 (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1999).

2 Ivor Leclerc, "The Metaphysics of the Good," *Review of Metaphysics*, 35 (1981), 3-5.

3 *Laches*, 198-201.

4 J.L. Mehta, *Martin Heidegger: The Way and the Vision* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), pp. 90-91.

5 Metaphysics XII, 7 and 9.

6 Gerald F. Stanley, "Contemplation as Fulfillment of the Human Person," in *Personalist Ethics and Human Subjectivity*, vol. II of *Ethics at the Crossroads*, George F. McLean, ed (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1996), pp. 365-420.

7 V. Mathieu, "Cultura" in *Enciclopedia Filosofica* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967), II, 207-210; and Raymond Williams, "Culture and Civilization," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), II, 273-276, and *Culture and Society* (London, 1958).

8 Tonnelat, "Kultur" in *Civilisation, le mot et l'idée* (Paris: Centre International de Synthese), II.

9 V. Mathieu, *ibid*.

10 V. Mathieu, "Civilta," *ibid*., I, 1437-1439.

11 G.F. Klemm, *Allgemein Culturgeschicht der Menschheit* (Leipzig, 1843-1852), x.

12 E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London, 1871), VII, p. 7.

13 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 5.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

17 John Caputo, "A Phenomenology of Moral Sensibility: Moral Emotion," in George F. McLean, Frederick Ellrod, eds., *Philosophical Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development: Act and Agent* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), pp. 199-222.

18 Gadamer, 305-310.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 245-58.

20 *Ibid*. Gadamer emphasizes knowledge as the basis of tradition in contrast to those who would see it pejoratively as the result of arbitrary will. It is important to add to knowledge the free acts which, e.g., give birth to a nation and shape the attitudes and values of successive generations. As an example one might cite the continuing impact had by the Magna Carta through the Declaration of Independence upon life in North America, or of the Declaration of the Rights of Man in the national life of many Latin American countries.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 245-253.

22 *Ibid*., pp. 253-258.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 245.

24 *Ibid*., p. 267-274.

Chapter IV
Hermeneutic Experience in a Religious Tradition

Tradition as Creative Source for an Evolving Life

Novelty and the Application of Tradition

In entering upon application we turn, as it were, from the whole to its parts, from our tradition to its particular meaning for each new time. We work to inspire and direct the present with the message of the Prophets and to construct on that basis a richer community and more holy future. This is matter, first of all, of taking time seriously, that is, of recognizing that reality includes authentic novelty. This contrasts to the perspective of Plato for whom the real is the ideal forms or ideas transcending matter and time, of which physical things and temporal events are but shadows. It also goes beyond rationalism's search for clear and distinct knowledge of eternal and simple natures and their relations. A fortiori, it goes beyond method alone without content.

In contrast to all these, Gadamer's notion of application1 means that tradition, with its inherent authority of normative force, achieves its perfection in the temporal unfolding of reality. Secondly, it shows human persons, not as detached intellects, but as inextricably enabled by, and formative of, their changing physical and social universe. Thirdly, in the area of moral values and human action it expresses directly the striving of persons to realize their lives, and the orientation of this striving into a fixed attitude (*hexis*). Hence, as distinct from the physical order, *ethos* is a situation neither of law or of lawlessness, but of human and therefore developing institutions and attitudes which regulate, but do not determine.2

There are certain broad guideline for the area of ethical knowledge which can serve in the application of tradition as a guide for historical practice. But the concrete and unique reality of human freedom when lived with others through time constitutes a distinctive and ever-changing process. This is historicity and means that our responses to the good are made always in concrete and ever changing circumstances. Hence, the general principles of ethics as a philosophical science of action must not be either purely theoretical or a simple accounting from the past. Instead, they must help people exercise their conscious freedom in concrete historical circumstances which as ever changing are ever new.

Here an important distinction must be made between science or *techné* and practical life or ethics. In *techné* action is governed by an idea as an exemplary cause which is fully determined and known by objective theoretical knowledge (*epistéme*). Skill consists in knowing how to act according to that idea or plan; and when it cannot be carried out perfectly some parts of it are simply omitted in the execution.

In ethics the situation, though similar in the possession of a practical guide and its application to a particular task, differs in importantly ways. First, in moral action subjects constitute themselves, as much they produce an object: agents are differentiated by their action. Hence, moral knowledge as an understanding of the appropriateness of human action cannot be fully determined independently of the subjects in their situation.

Secondly, adaptation by moral agents in their application of the law does not diminish, but rather corrects and perfects. In relation to a world which is less ordered, the law is imperfect, for it cannot contain in any explicit manner the responses to the concrete possitilities which arise in

history. It is precisely here that the freedom and creativity of the person is located. This does not consist in an arbitrary response, for Kant is right in saying that without law freedom has no meaning. Nor does it consist simply in an automatic response determined by the historical situation, for then determinism and relativism would compete for the crown in undermining human freedom. Human freedom consists rather in shaping the present according to a sense of what is just and good, and in a way which manifests and indeed creates for the first time more of what just and goodness mean.

Hence, the law is perfected by its application in the circumstances. Epoché and equity do not diminish, but perfect the law. Without them the law would be simply a mechanical replication doing the work not of justice, but of injustice. Ethics is not only knowledge of what is right in general, but the search for what is right in the situation and the choice of the right means for this situation. Knowledge about the means then is not a mere matter of expediency; it is the essence of the search for a more perfect application of the law in the given situation. It is the fulfillment of moral knowledge.3

Prudence and Love of Neighbor

It will be important to note here that the rule of the concrete (of what the situation is asking of us) is not known by sense knowledge, which simply registers a set of concrete facts. In order to know what is morally required, the situation must be understood in the light of what is right, that is, in the light of what has been discovered about appropriate human action through the tradition with its normative character. Only in this light can moral consciousness, as the work of intellect (*nous*) rather than of sensation, go about its job of choosing the right means.

Hence, to proceed simply in reaction to concrete injustices as present negations of the good, rather than in the light of one's tradition, is ultimately destructive. It inverts the order just mentioned and result in manipulation of our hopes for the good. Destructive or repressive structures would lead us to the use of correspondingly evil means, truly suited only to producing evil results. The true response to evil can be worked out only in terms of the good as discovered by whole peoples, passed on in tradition and applied by us in our times.

The importance of application manifests the central role played by the virtue of prudence (*prhonesis*) or thoughtful reflection which enables one to discover the appropriate means for the circumstances. This must include also the virtue of sagacity (*sunesis*), that is, of understanding or concern for the other. For what is required as a guide for the agent is not only technical knowledge of an abstract ideal, but knowledge that takes account of the agent in relation to other persons. One can assess the situation adequately only inasmuch as one, in a sense, undergoes the situation with the affected parties.

In sum, application is not a subsequent or accidental part of religious understanding and practice, but co-determines this understanding from the beginning. Moral consciousness must seek to understand divine Providence, not as an ideal to be known and then applied, but rather through discerning the good, that is, the love of God for concrete persons in their relations with others in the *umma*.

This can contribute to sorting out the human dilemma between an absolutism of a religious law applied to persons in their diverse concrete circumstances and a relativism which leaves the person subject to expediency in public and private life. Indeed, the very statement of the dilemma reflects the deleterious aspect of Platonic view of idea. He was right to ground changing and historical being in the unchanging and eternal. This had been Parmenides' first insight in

metaphysics and was richly developed in relation to human action through the medievals' notion of an eternal law in the divine mind. But it seems inappropriate to speak directly in these terms regarding human life. In all things individual human persons and humankind as a whole are subject to time, growth and development.

As we become increasingly conscious of this the human character of even our abstract ideals becomes manifest and their adapted application in time can be seen, not as their rejection, but as their perfection. In this, justice loses none of its force as an absolute requirement of human action. Rather, the concrete modes of its application in particular circumstances add to what can be articulated in merely abstract and universal terms. A hermeneutic approach directs attention precisely to these unfoldings of the meaning of abstract principles through time. This is not an abandonment of absolutes, but a recognition of the human condition and of the way in which it adds to, and enriches, our understanding of the principles for concrete human life.

What then should ewe conclude regarding this sense of the religion, in which we have been raised, which gives us dominion over our action, and what enables us to be free and creative? Does it come from God or from man, from eternity or from history? Chakravarti Rajagopalachari of Madras answered:

> Whether the epics and songs of a nation spring from the faith and ideas of the common folk, or whether a nation's faith and ideas are produced by its literature is a question which one is free to answer as one likes….Did clouds rise from the sea or was the sea filled by waters from the sky? All such inquiries take us to the feet of God transcending speech and thought.4

Hermeneutics and Religious Traditions

In the previous chapter we followed the genesis of a religious tradition from values and virtues to culture and community and saw its authority and fruitfulness. A religious tradition bears the long experience of persons interacting with this world and with other persons in terms of their relation with God as source and goal, *alpha* and *omega*. It is made up not only of chronological facts, but of insight regarding human perfection which have been received through the Prophets and forged by human efforts in concrete circumstances, e.g., the body of Islamic law, the Greek notion of democracy and the enlightenment notions of equality and freedom. By their internal value these stand as normative of the aspirations of a people.

In this chapter we have seen the implications of historicity for novelty in the context of tradition, the continually unfolding circumstances of historical development. These do not merely extend or repeat what went before, but constitute an emerging manifestation of the dynamic character of the vision articulated by the religion and art, the literature and political structures of a cultural tradition.

We shall look now for the implications of all this for hermeneutics. In the first chapter we had a first look at its evolution in response to the crisis of our times and the emergence of awareness of human subjectivity and intentionality. Here we shall be concerned with the way in which hermeneutics can help us to appreciate how earlier sources which express the great religious achievements of human awareness can be understood in a way that is relevant, indicative, and reactive of our life in present circumstances? In a word, how can we draw out the significance of our faith for present action; how can we truly live over faith tradition in our days?

Interpretation

First of all it is necessary to note that only a unity of meaning, that is, an identity, is intelligible.5 Just as it is not possible to understand a number three if we include but two units rather than three, no act of understanding is possible unless it is directed to an identity or whole of meaning. This brings us directly to the classic issue in the field of hermeneutic circle, in which knowledge of the whole depends upon knowledge of the parts, and vice versa. How can we make this work for, rather than against, the effort to live our religious tradition in our days?

Reflection on the experience of reading a text, including a sacred text, might help. As we read we construe the meaning of a sentence before grasping all its individual parts. What we construe is dependent upon our expectation of the meaning of the sentence, which we derive from its first words, the prior context, or more likely a combination of the two. In turn, our expectation or construal of the meaning of the text is adjusted according to the requirements of its various parts. As we proceed to read through the sentence, thee paragraph, etc., we reassess continually the whole in terms of the parts and the parts in terms of the whole. This basically circular movement continues until all appear to fit and be expressive.

Similarly, as we begin to look into our tradition we come with a prior conception of its content. This anticipation of meaning is not simply of the tradition as an objective or fixed content to which we come. It is rather what we reproduce uniquely in our hearts and minds as we participate in the evolution of the tradition, thereby further determining ourselves as a community of believers. This is a creative stance reflecting the content, not only of the past, but of the time in which I stand and of the overall life project in which I am engaged. In our religious traditions it is a creative unveiling of the content of the Revelation through the Prophets as this comes progressively and historically into the present and, through the present, passes into the future.

In this light time is not a barrier, a separation or an abyss, but rather a bridge and an opportunity for the process of understanding, it is a fertile ground filled with experience, custom and tradition. The importance of the historical distance it provides is not that it enables the subjective reality of persons to disappear so that the objectivity of the situation can emerge. On the contrary, it makes possible a more appreciative approach to our religious tradition, not only by removing falsifying factors, but by opening new sources of self-understanding and now perspectives. These reveal in the tradition unsuspected implications and even new dimensions of meaning of which heretofore we were unaware.6

Of course, not all our acts of understanding are correct, whether they be about the meaning of a text from another culture, a dimension of a shared tradition, set of goals or plan for future action. Hence, it becomes particularly important that they not be adhered to fixedly, but be put at risk in dialogue with others, as is the classical practice in centers of religious learning.

In this the basic elements of meaning remain the substances which Aristotle described in terms of their autonomy or standing in their own right, and, by implication, of their identity. Hermeneutics would expand this to reflect as well the historical and hermeneutic situation of each person in the dialogue, that is, their horizon or particular possibility for understanding. An horizon is all that can be seen from one's vantage point(s). In reading a text or in a dialogue with others it is necessary to be aware of our horizon as well as that of others. When our initial projection of the meaning of a text (which might be another's words, the content of a tradition or a sacred text) will not bear up in the progress of the reading or the dialogue our passion to hear the word of God in the sacred text or of the other in the conversation drives us to make needed adjustments in our projection of their meaning.

This enables us to adjust not only our prior understanding of the horizon of the text or of the other with whom we are in dialogue, but especially of our own horizon. Hence, one need not fear being trapped in the horizons of our culture, and ultimately of our religion. They are vantage points of a mind which in principle is open and mobile, capable of being aware of its own horizon and of reaching out to the message of the Prophet and to other's experience of God in their lives which constitute their horizons. The flow of history implies that our religious horizons are not limitations, but mountain tops from which we look in awe at the vast panorama of God's work with humankind. It is in making us aware of our horizons that hermeneutic awareness accomplishes or liberation.7

In this process it is important that we remain alert to the new implications of our religious tradition. We must not simply follow through with our previous ideas until a change is forced upon us, but must remain sensitive to new meanings in true openness. This is neither neutrality as regards the meaning of the tradition, nor an extinction of passionate concerns regarding action towards the future. Rather, we should be aware of our own biases or prejudices and adjust them in dialogue with a text or with others. (We do both of these together, when in our national community we debate the meaning of our constitution, or in our religious community we prayfully examine our sacred texts.) This implies rejecting what impedes our understanding of others and of our own sacred texts and traditions. Our attitude in approaching dialogue must be one of willingness continually to revise, renew and enrich our initial projection or expectation of meaning.

There is then a way out of the hermeneutic cycle. It is not by ignoring or denying our horizons and prejudices, but by recognizing them as inevitable and making them work for us. To do so we must direct our attention to the objective meaning of the text in order to draw out, not only its meaning for the author, but its application for the present. Through this process of application a religious teacher and preacher serves as midwife for the historicity of a text, a tradition or a culture, enabling it to give birth to the future.8

Method of Question and Answer

The effort to draw upon a text or a tradition and in dialogue to discover its meaning for the present supposes authentic openness. The logical structure of this openness is to be found in the exchange of question and answer. The question is required in order to determine just what issue we are engaging – whether it is this issue or that – in order to give direction to our attention. Without this no meaningful answer can be given or received. As a question, however, it requires that the answer not be settled or predetermined. In sum, progress or discovery requires an openness which is not simply indeterminacy, but a question which gives specific direction to our attention and enables us to consider significant evidence. (Note that we can proceed not only by means of positive evidence for one of two possible responses, but also through dissolving the counter arguments).

If discovery depends upon the question, then the art of discovery is the art of questioning. Consequently, whether working alone or in conjunction with others, our effort to find the answer should be directed less towards suppressing, than toward reinforcing and unfolding the question. To the degree that its probabilities are built up and intensified it can serve as a searchlight. This is the opposite of both opinion which tends to suppress questions, and of arguing which searches out the weakness in the other's argument. Instead, in conversation as dialogue one enters upon a mutual search to maximize the possibilities of the question, even by speaking at cross purposes. It is by mutually eliminating errors and working out a common meaning that we discover truth.9

Further, it should not be presupposed that the text holds the answer to but one question or horizon which must be identified by the reader. On the contrary, the full horizon of any author and above all of the transcendent source of revelation and the Prophets is never available to the reader. The sense of the text reaches beyond what any human author intended. Because of the dynamic character of being as it emerges in time, the horizon is never fixed, but is continually opening. This constitutes the effective historical element in understanding a text or a tradition. At each step new dimensions of its potentialities open to understanding; the meaning of a text or tradition lives with the consciousness and hence the horizons –not of its author, but of the many readers living with others through time and history. It is the broadening of their horizons, resulting from their fusion with the horizon of a text or a partner in dialogue, that makes it possible to receive answers which are ever new.10

In this one's personal attitudes and interests are, once again, highly important. If our interest in developing new horizons were simply the promotion of our own understanding then we could be interested solely in achieving knowledge, and thereby domination over others. This would lock one into an absoluteness of one's prejudices; being fixed or closed in the past they would disallow new life in the present. In this manner powerful new insights become with time deadening pre-judgements which suppress freedom.

In contrast, an attitude of authentic religious openness appreciates the nature of one's own finiteness. On this basis it both respects the past and is open to discerning the future. Such openness is a matter, not merely of new information, but of recognizing the historical nature of man. It enables one to escape from limitations which had limited vision in the past, and enables one to learn from new experiences. Thus, recognition of the limitations of our finite projects enables us to see that the future is still open.

This suggest that openness does not consist so much in surveying others objectivity or obeying them in a slavish and unquestioning manner, but is directed primarily to ourselves. It is an extension of our ability to listen to others, and to assimilate the implications of their answers for changes in our own positions. In other words, it is an acknowledgement that our religious and cultural heritage has something new to say to us. The characteristic hermeneutic attitude of effective historical consciousness is then not methodological sureness, but a devout listening, a readiness for experience.11 Seen in these terms our heritage is not closed, but the basis for a life that is ever new, more inclusive and more rich.

Beyond Question: Thanksgiving, Devotion and Service

We have come a long way in tracing the genesis of hermeneutic experiences – from value and virtue to culture and tradition, to hermeneutic awareness of classical prejudice and new applications, and finally to the hermeneutic method of question and answer. But here we come to the point at which the scholars and doctors of Islam seem called upon to make a distinctive contribution to the process.

To see this one might be recall the distinction made above between the earlier and the later Heidegger. What has just been said about the hermeneutic method being that of question and answer corresponds well to the vision or perspective of the earlier Heidegger. That is the situation of the *dasein* or conscious being as thrown into time and hence in a particular hermeneutic situation or perspective.

We saw also how "the later Heidegger" appears to have shifted his horizon to take greater account of the Being Itself as the source of the *dasein*. The implication of this was a shift from a

questioning attitude in which the person calls Being to account, to an attitude of thanksgiving, service and care. These are the more properly religious and potentially mystical perspectives.

If we are to find out what this attitude of devotion means for the reading of our sacred texts it must be experience of the faithful people, the *umma* and its saints who must attempt to communicate this.

We must not expect here conceptual language, that is, clear and distinct objective concepts after the manner of Descartes and the Enlightenment. As was seen in Chapter II above this is no longer the standard of meaningful speech. Rather a much broader range of rhetoric is required in order to reflect the religious experience of the text.

In this it is the text that must remain central for that is God speaking to us, but the reception of its meaning requires an attunement of heart and mind to the heart and mind of God. This is the reason for the long period of training that goes into the making of a cleric. This is a matter not only of information but of personal growth and formation (*bildung*) in order to be able to receive the message of the text and its meaning for the people of our time.

Moreover, this is not merely an individual matter though it is deeply personal. Rather, this city is a place where scholars can work together in prayer and prayerful dialogue to interpret the meaning of the sacred texts for our time. This is the task of hermeneutics; it is your task and it calls for saints as much as scholars, or, more exactly, it calls for saintly scholars.

Notes

1. Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* pp. 274-278, 281-286.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 267-274.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ramayana* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1976), p. 312.
5. Gadamer, pp. 261-262.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 263-265.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 267-274.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 235-242.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 325-341.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-274.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 319-325.

Chapter V
Hermeneutics and Social Critique

The Need for Social Critique

In these days of ever greater rational systematization of all areas of life it would seem that a critical dimension must be added. This is necessary if our project of enabling hermeneutic awareness to help unfold our religious traditions and relate them positively one to another is to be successful. If, as was seen in Chapter II-IV above, it is important not to be limited to, or by the search for objective scientific conceptual knowledge. It is important also to learn from them the structures which they have generated. This enables one both to see their contribution to authentic, if not definitive, human insight, and to understand the restrictive and reductive influences this can exercise.

This requirement is implied by Gadamer's identification of the need for historical distance and for new horizons of questioning in order to draw out of the heritage additional dimensions of meaning.1 Emancipating the 'text' from any reductivist psychological or sociological context is necessary so that it can live through all ages and speak to all time. Hence a psycho-cultural and socio-cultural decontextualization of the content of the heritage is a fundamental condition for hermeneutic interpretation. Conversely, this implies the importance of its recontextualization in the horizons of those who would draw upon this heritage in response to the needs of their own times. In turn, this requires opening and adjusting horizons through dialogue with others, for which two levels of critique are required: structural and existential.

On the structural level there is need to go beyond Gadamer's description of discourse simply as the spontaneous conversation of question and answer. One must take account also of discourse as work that is crafted by praxis from the smaller units of words, phrases and sentences. As meaning takes place in structures which mediate understanding,2 structural analysis of the depth-semantics of the text is important in grasping the sense of the work. This is the more true as the minds which reconstruct the texts are themselves ordered not only by scientific structures, but by controlling relations of social dependence. Such dependence needs to be made manifest in order that reflection on the tradition be truly free. Hence, the critical consciousness, which the linguistic, social and psychological sciences make possible, can make significant contributions to the effective implementation of the hermeneutic project. Further, where the actual social structures are unjust their clear analyses by the social sciences is important for emancipation from the effects of these injustices upon our internal pattern of interests.

On the existential level and beyond the internal organization of the text, there is also its reference or the way in which life as temporal and historical--as the existential power to be—unfolds in front, as it were, of the text. Here critique of any deadening repetition of the past must liberate from fixed ideologies which would freeze one in relationships or structures which, though perhaps well intentioned and creative in origin, have now become oppressive.

In this dialogue, a religious tradition enables the reader consciously to examine his own subjectivity and open new horizons which make possible the imaginative variations of one's ego.

The text thereby enables one to achieve the distance required for a first critique of one's own illusions and false consciousness, and of the ideologies in which one has been reared. The temporal character of being and humankind's projection toward an historical and transhistorical eternal future life make possible a critique of ideologies which would hold one in a repetitive stagnation. This is the basic religious liberation of the reader worked by sacred texts in, and through history.

Both levels of critique require and are required in the hermeneutic project. Gadamer's emphasis upon appropriating the tradition, identifying with it, acknowledging its pre-presence as fore-understanding in every question, and looking for its application in new ages, leaves him with reservations regarding the objectivating distance native to the social sciences. He has left the elaboration of the nature of these contributions to others. Among the most notable of these is Jurgen Habermas who turns to the notion of interests in order to unite both the driving existential thrust toward freedom and the multiple structuring which this undergoes in social relations.

To grasp what Habermas means by 'interest' it is important to distinguish two types of science. The first is empirical and analytic inquiry in which one proceeds by specifically designed scientific experiments carried out by *instrumental action* that is designed to manifest one particular facet of reality. This attains objectivity by the use of measurements. It aims at knowledge which gives control over the particular objectified processes of nature. Unfortunately, such activity is generally thought of without its more inclusive and indeed indispensable context of *communicative action*. There, the grammar of ordinary language links even the nonverbal elements of life with symbols, actions and expressions to provide schemata for interpreting the world and acting therein, namely, for a hermeneutics. This context includes not only the particular knowledge derived from the experiments one purposefully constructs, but the entire range of experience, past and present, as well as the depth of the unifying view that integrates one's culture.

In further contrast to empirical inquiry, the hermeneutic sciences are not neutral; they have an interest structure which consists of the basic orientations of human work and interaction, namely, toward the "specific fundamental conditions of the possible reproduction and self-constitution of the human species."3 These are not mere adaptations to the environment, but are located in the cultural milieu as a self-formative process of the species, and first of all of the subjects of that species. In particular, Habermas is concerned with interest in autonomy and responsibility achieved through the power of reflection in which the subject, by becoming transparent to himself, is freed from domination by external factors.4

This identifies both the need and the method for critique. Johann Fichte had pointed to interest as the basic constitutive element of reason itself. Interest in successful action directs us toward what is known to work. Thus, we expand our knowledge to "cumulative learning processes and permanent interpretations transmitted by tradition." "Interpretations" depend, in turn, upon the values and the interests of the past which have given shape to our culture; they not only are based upon, but are even constitutive of, knowledge. To say this in a different way, cognitive processes are embedded in and reflect life structures; since these in turn express our interest in preserving and promoting life through knowledge and action, interest is internal to knowledge.

Moreover a faith-centered life is not only or even primarily, a matter of theoretical theology. For Thomas Aquinas faith is formally an act of the intellect (*actus intellectus*) for it is our response to the revelation of the mind of God, but it is directed in this by the will (*imperata a voluntate*). We believe because we have first been loved and return to God, its source and goal, the life we have received from Him. It is this dynamic which is the center of our life and the prime mover of our acts of knowledge.

One can grasp this inner dynamic of this life, however, only by critically dissolving the objectivistic understanding of the sciences and entering into meditative self-reflection oriented toward mystical union with God. This is liberative for it enables one to break beyond the set structures in which all are enmeshed in order to look at the deeply religious interests from which these derive. This, in turn, enables one to make responsible fundamental choices regarding one's life and society. Thus, self-reflection constitutes a new stage of the species' self-formative process.

For Habermas, as for Gadamer, the basic issue here concerns not method, but being. This drew his attention to Fichte's notion of interest as the fundamental self-realizing thrust of the dynamism of being. Interest is the point of identity of conscious reflection with dynamic expression, of theory with practice, of faith with charity, and of knowledge with concern within the limiting confines of multiple social beings. It is the dynamic presence of Being Itself as it emerges ever more consciously and creatively in all the acts of our lives.

In acts of knowledge interest is the essential intentional thrust of self-affirmation in the form of self-dedication and self-giving. By this core of inner truth and light even small discoveries share in the plenitude of the religious meaning of life. By this inner goodness and joy the small events of our lives converge into moments of transcending happiness. Interest then is the power of being in which we share.

Fichte was concerned lest beings in their plurality become impediments one to another in the free affirmation of this interest or power of being. If being were fundamentally matter and extended, and therefore all beings were impervious one to another, the only way to protect freedom would be to reduce all philosophy to unity as did the idealists and the materialists. However, because existence is characterized as unity, truth and goodness, and human beings are characterized by reflective self-awareness, Habermas sees social unity as essentially open. It is a plurality of beings realized both in communication as knowing and being known, and in mutual love as social concern. Interest affirms itself by reaching out to others with whom it shares.

As a result individuals, who at first appear to be only different and contrary one to another can now be seen as united. Persons who had existed in limitation now advance in the direction of plenitude. This advance is the real sense of Habermas' project, whose strategy is now clear. It is not only conciliable with the religious mission, but promises to aid it by providing strategies which might help in its implementation. We should not, of course, expect of Habermas, Marx or Freud that they will articulate the religious sense of this work. But by listening carefully with ears attuned by faith we can be aided by them in discovering ways to implement the religious mission of the faith-filled community or *umma* in our times. Let us turn then to the tactical hermeneutic tools he fashions to analyze and overcome the structural impediments to a full reunion of peoples, and thus, to social peace.

Habermas and the Challenge of Critical Hermeneutics

As the intention of Habermas is to unite people in a divided world, he bases truth, not in correspondence to objects, but in the mind and its assent. "Truth belongs categorically to the world of thought (*Gedenken* in Frege's sense) and not to that of perceptions."5 This, however, is not a matter of assent on any basis, for that would confuse the rational with the arbitrary, the true with whatever is willed arbitrarily. If the truth of the statement is not defended by correspondence to what is beyond the act of the mind and yet not all acts of assent are truthful, then the truth of assent must depend upon some characteristic of that assent itself.

A religious people, and perhaps Islam most of all, sees this as a matter for the community as a whole to determine. Hence in a center of Islamic learning open and intensive discussion is essential in order to realize an authentic understanding of, and response to, God's message. Let us see what Habermas would contribute to that.

He stresses the requirement that assent be the result of at least potentially open rational argumentation. All issues of direct and indirect relevance--including those of cultural horizons as contexts, social meta-theory and epistemology--must be open at least potentially to rational argument. Conclusions should be delayed until this has been attended to — and any conclusion will be automatically suspect when this openness has been suppressed. This includes an implicit operational claim that everyone would come to the same conclusion if it were possible to think through all the evidence and be guided by the better argument; this is what is meant by saying that the conclusion must be fully rational.

In a religious society this must begin with the effort to be faithful to revelation in the teaching of the Prophets, which must be the special concern for the Doctors of the Law. But as we turn to the meaning of this for life in each particular culture and community the participation of which Habermas speaks becomes more salient. For, if the message of the Prophet is to pervade and shape all minds and hearts, they must engage themselves personally in responding thereto. Moreover, if the message of the Prophet is to shape even the thoughts, aspirations and responses of each person then it is essential that all of these dimensions of life be brought into conscious interaction with the text in the forum of the community of believers.

This has direct implications for development of social discourse. Basically it must be such as to enable and promote an open search for truth. Given the difference in interests between various persons and groups, this requires that all issues be open. Hence: (a) issues on all levels must be able to be raised and attended to in discussions of the matter, and (b) everyone must be able to assume any role in the dialogue, to present his or her questions and concerns of whatever type, and to assent or be opposed on any issue. That is, there must a symmetrical distribution of opportunities for all to speak and equal opportunity to assume diverse roles in the discussions.

As this notion of pure communicative interaction is central to the issue of truth as characteristically human, requirements of openness and symmetry apply not merely to the closed environments of a laboratory or seminar, but above all to social life. This requires a basic transformation of the modern outlook. Where the sciences looked for abstract, objective content that was universally true, here the universality is attached to interests and hence to the inclusion of all peoples as bearers of the many dimensions both of question and of answer.6 The resources lie in the consciousness of persons and groups as distinct and free; these are what must be promoted and brought forward.

Real dialogue and agreement, however, cannot be had where oppression and injustice reign. Truth can be obtained only with justice and freedom for "The truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the good and true life."7 Unfortunately, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that such an ideal situation is, and always has been, counterfactual, that it never has existed historically and that, given human weaknesses, it may never be actualized. Be that as it may, in at least three ways the ideal dialogical situation remains crucial, especially in our relationship with our heritage. First, it provides a basis for a critical attitude regarding the past through an assessment of the circumstances in which elements of the tradition were formulated. Secondly, it orients present constructive efforts towards the establishment of the just structures needed for dialogue that will be sufficiently authentic to generate a well founded consensus. Thirdly, it directs one's attention to the search for the external and internal circumstances which

impede a people from entering freely into the discussion. In such circumstances conclusions, even if objectively sound, would be counterproductive in principle because they would be open to the charge of being, not reasonable, but merely the effect of self-delusion. Hermeneutics must then assess the actual social structures in terms of how, within the particular cultures, these promote or impede social communication.

Hermeneutic efforts to reappropriate the heritage, especially as having normative and liberative value, must identify the dangers to open and symmetric dialogue and the way in which they operate. This has a number of dimensions. One regards our life as integrally related to its material context; another regards the internal dynamics of the psyche. For these Habermas turns to Marx and Freud. A third dimension is the crisis evolving from the overall rationalization of contemporary life. This is sometimes referred to as the process of modernization operative in all countries whether of the first, second or third worlds and the deeper basis for fears regarding globalization. We shall look at these step by step.

Marx

In order to identify and correct all that impedes the dialogical process in which the tradition is received and unpacked, Habermas draws upon the thought of Marx for its critical understanding of the external structures which condition the expression of human interest. While Hegel also integrated the material dimension of reality into his notion of the human, the social and the ethical, he lacked Marx's sense of the concrete reality of human beings. Especially, his dialectic lacked the ability to appreciate the way in which the antithesis might be, not merely a further complementary expression of the thesis, but its contradiction. Both of these are important to Habermas' effort to provide a way for identifying and removing conditions which impede liberating dialogue.

For Marx and Lenin the real is the material which, in turn, is that which can be observed by the senses. This is taken, however, not from the point of view of intuition and hence of Hegel's ideal content, but rather as sensuous human activity or praxis which is registered by the senses.

What is distinctive of humans is that they do not merely find, but produce the material sustenance for their life. In this activity humans enter into active interchange in the development of methods and tools for production. Social labor and its characteristics are the conditions, not only of action, but of apprehending the world, and for the evolution of the human species. Moreover, "as individuals express their life, so they are;" what they are coincides with their production: both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. "The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production."8 The same should be said for the history of mankind.

These conditions of production are worked out by the division of labor, which in effect is the different forms of ownership. In turn, this determines the conditions of their apprehension of their world and thereby the epistemological dimensions fundamental to any liberating dialogue. The place to look for an understanding of what impedes and what promotes liberation is then the system of labor. This is derived from the political economy or decisions regarding ownership and the division of labor; it is manifest in social life as a process of material production and appropriation.9

It is important to note that Marx has added here, not only the forces of production, but the relations of production which are developed between humans and base the structure of social life. This opens a number of crucial possibilities for critical hermeneutics as liberating dialogue by

making it possible in principle to consider: (a) not only the physical productive activity, but the ideologies that undergird the social decisions regarding the division of labor; (b) not only the instrumental action involved in the productive process, but changes in the relationships between the agents in this process, i.e., communicative action and revolutionary practice; and (c) not only the nature of the work, but the nature of the reflection which sets the conditions of this work.

These are points of potential contact with religious themes where religion would vastly enrich these horizons. On a more restrictive materialist basis this was the project of Habermas. It was central also to *perestroika* as a project for reconstructing the Marxist system in ways that would open more room for personal creativity and in that sense for the process of liberating reflection. Whatever be thought of its theoretical possibility, however, it was overtaken by events.

Habermas' assessment is that attention to the human relations in the production process did not really take place in the past. As the years passed Marx failed to follow up on the important possibilities he initially had opened by noting the social relations involved in the activity of production. Habermas sees this reflected in Marx's resolutions of the problem of repression. Marx saw the postponement of personal gratification as an objective necessity in periods of paucity when society must articulate the extent to which this is needed and the mode of its implementation. It should be reduced, however—but seldom is—with the development of man's control over natural processes objectified in work. In the short run this provides an explanation of revolution through the disproportion which arises between the diminishing socially necessary repression and continued repression that reflects the interests only of the dominant class. In the long run Marx looks to the development of abundance to eliminate all social need for suppression and thereby to lay the basis for atrophication of the state and realization of the perfect community.

For Habermas this direction in the development of Marx's thought is a disappointment, an opportunity lost. In fact, Marx had remarked two levels of reality, that of physical production or instrumental action and that of social or communicative interaction. Knowledge as *techné* pertains to the former; symbolic interaction pertains to the latter. In the end Marx turned to the former as the final articulation of both problem and solution. In so doing he missed the opportunity to pursue the personal or communicative interaction, where the issue of interests and of human freedom is centered. While his system points to this level of reflection, Marx himself remained with issues regarding structures and omitted attention to what is central—the issue of freedom, liberation and emancipation itself.

Undoubtedly, this reflects Marx's situation as reacting against the idealism of Hegel and Marx's important attempt to avoid a separation of spirit from matter in which the reality of the latter would be lost. At a more fundamental level it repeats the inability of Spinoza and Leibniz to open room for freedom in modern rationalism. In either case, it suggests that the problems of freedom in our day are rooted not simply in instrumental productive action, but in life at a deeper level of human meaning. They call therefore for more open and rich means of analysis and response.

Marx's attention became focused upon issues concerning the means of production as these are directed toward survival. In these terms he considered the related factors of cooperative organization, division of labor, and distribution of its product. In contrast Habermas notes that production has been organized in purely economic terms only in modern capitalism. He considers such factors, in any case, to be too low on the evolutionary ladder to take account of the reality of the human person. The basic institutional nucleus in terms of which production traditionally has been organized is rather knowledge and its language in community: social roles, rules, norms of

community action, and hence the political and economic orders. All these are properly intersubjective in meaning.

Thus, the place to look for evolutionary progress toward a new form of social integration is not in instrumental or strategic action, although these may serve a catalytic function. Habermas sees social evolution as a learning process similar to the sequence in developmental cognitive psychology. The organizational principles of society institutionalize these developmental levels of learning and establish the structural conditions for technical and practical learning processes at particular stages of development. These principles determine the range within which institutional systems can vary, productive forces can increase or be utilized, and system complexity can be intensified. They are embodied in institutional nuclei which function as forms of social integration, whether kinship for primitive societies, political order for traditional societies, or the economic system in liberal capitalist societies. In this light social evolution is bidimensional, that is, both cognitive-technical and moral-practical learning processes whose stages are structurally ordered according to a developmental logic.10

While such structures of symbolic interaction and the role of cultural traditions were not eliminated by Marx, neither were they part of his philosophical frame of reference, for they did not coincide with instrumental action. Yet only in these terms can power and ideology be comprehended and resolved through critical reflection.11 Where the instrumental action of production can respond only to external constraints, liberation from suppression by the institutional framework of labor and rewards requires communicative action. For only by reflection can we become conscious of the disruption of our moral totality by repressive institutional determination which serves, not the common good, but only the private interests of the class in power.

For this we must call upon the highest level of vision in our cultural heritage, its most exalted aspirations, and its most perfect sense of justice and love. These are found in our religious traditions. They far exceed common wisdom especially in our present conditioned weakened by sin. Hence God has blessed us with Prophets to bear witness to these deeper and richer truths. For it is in the Absolute that conflict is resolved in the harmony of justice, that the search for knowledge finds fulfillment in contemplation and truth, and that the striving of interest is quieted in the peace of self-realization. All of this is not merely future: it was our source and is our present strength. In the midst of our greatest difficulties it inspires and informs, moderates and guides all to their proper fulfillment.

Freud

Freud is interpreted by Habermas as focusing upon the tension between, on the one hand, one's internal libidinal and aggressive powers and, on the other hand, the needs for the preservation of the species through collective efforts in response to the constraints of our physical environment. The task of parents and society, incorporated within us as the superego, is to keep these two from self-destructive confrontation.

There is here a radical materialist, even physicalist, supposition from the earliest writings of Freud. Those who see much more to the human person, especially its spiritual and religious dimension could not be satisfied with this as an adequate horizon. Nonetheless this does not mean that the insights of a Freud or a Marx cannot be helpful as regards detailed questions, though not the ultimate meaning and response, in the specific areas upon which they focus.

In their materialist perspective the amount of resources available is crucial. When these are restricted Freud notes the need for society as superego to shift the energies of its members from

the libidinal and sexual to productive work. Thus, the weaker the control over external physical nature the greater the need for social institutions to compel relatively rigid uniform behavior and to remove this compulsion from criticism. In these circumstances libidinal energies are channeled into cultural traditions whose fantasies express, in the subliminal form of suspended gratification, socially repressed libidinal intentions. Similarly, social institutions provide interaction structures for directing rational action in a way that not only serves the functional needs cited by Marx, but stabilizes and protects the transcending social motives and handles needs which cannot be satisfied by redirection, transformation or suppression.12

From this notion of substitute gratification Freud elaborates a theory of illusions in which he situates the role of religion. These are not private contradictions of reality as are delusions, but public and consciously fixed forms which legitimate prevailing social norms deriving from the unconscious processes of substitute gratification or—the religious person would want to say—a true sense of the source, meaning and goal of human life. Freud sees such forms as the assets of a civilization and as including religious worldviews and rites, ideals and value systems, which together suggest utopias. When technical progress makes it possible to reduce or dispense with socially necessary institutional repression, the utopias can be freed from the ideological legitimation of authority and become able to base, in turn a critique of historically absolute power structures. This is an important lever in the struggle against the injustice which arises when those in social power burden others with a disproportionate share of privations. It is the poor and variously deprived who, against the established order, first invoke the utopian elements of a culture--its ideals, value system and religion.13 They must be heard.

Habermas considers this analysis—as well as the parallel one by Marx—to be crucially important steps toward the development of an adequate critical hermeneutics, but finds in them a basic metaphysical flaw. Their effort to direct attention to the reflection through which human liberation or emancipation must take place is undermined by an initial and basically materialist presupposition according to which personal reflective action and public cultural factors must ultimately be derivative. For Marx and Freud emancipation could not be the central reality of life itself, but only a propitious state for physical survival. Habermas not only disagrees with the arbitrariness of this presupposition, but proceeds to show how the structural elements Freud cites are essentially analytic dimensions of a situation of interpersonal--if deformed--communication between psychoanalyst and patient. Their meaning is derivative, not of physical forces, but of the reality of symbolic communication and its disruptions.

He finds a similar problem in Marx's ultimate solution of the social problematic through an increase in the means of production or instrumental action. This deflects attention from the properly intersubjective character of the basic institutional nucleus with its social roles, rules, and norms of community action, and hence of the political and economic orders. Liberation from the suppression of persons by the institutional framework of labor and rewards requires more than merely instrumental productive action, for this can respond only to external constraints. Communicative action is required in order to be aware: (a) of the moral totality of human dignity as this is reflected in the highest vision of a cultural heritage, (b) of its disruption by repressive institutional manipulation for the private interest of the class in power, and (c) of the types of changes which will be truly emancipative.

Nevertheless, Freud's analysis, like Marx's, does provide important insight into the dynamics of public life. Habermas draws upon this for scientific causal explanations of the dynamics of the process of emancipation. In this sense psychoanalysis can serve as a special form of interpretation theory inasmuch as it enables one to attend to the latent content of symbolic expression which is

otherwise inaccessible to conscious reflection. He refers to this as an internal foreign territory; we might even call it an internal foreign power.

In reality the problem is not merely that the inherent basic strivings of the person toward self-realization are suppressed temporarily, perhaps for acceptable social reasons. The danger is that even after these reasons have ceased to exist two factors might continue to operate. Externally, those in power might seek to extend this suppression of the strivings of the person toward self-realization. This appears to be the all too common situation as elites struggle to retain their privileges. Indeed, the very reality of privilege, by enabling some to provide their next generation with better education, has an internal mechanism for self-perpetuation. Internally, the striving toward self-realization might insist on remaining suppressed and hence positively disrupt the normal pattern of social observation and response.14 Freedom is the greatest human burden and taking it up, especially after a period of suppression and dormancy is not unambiguously inviting. This disorder in the expression of interests must be identified, brought to light and properly ordered in relation to new and evolving human situations. This is a precondition in order that the search for freedom itself be internally or intrapersonally responsible and free.

To help others interpersonally, on the other hand, it is important not to destroy the freedom of those who suffer these inhibitions. This requires great discretion regarding the hermeneutic process in order to avoid an elitist attitude in their regard—which would be but a new repression. For this, symmetrical relations are essential in assisting those who, due to their social circumstances, lack the necessary conditions of dialogue for comprehending their interests and real situation. Prudent discussion is required in any effort to change these conditions.15

Modernization

As characterized by a technical rationalization of life, modernization is seen by Habermas to be basically inimical to ethico-political emancipation. It directs attention not to the development of character and prudence, but to the identification of the laws of human nature and their use in achieving desired behavior through arranging the corresponding circumstances. With time these laws became quantified relations predicated upon operative definitions in terms of which the consideration of values is excluded because not seen to admit issues of truth or falsity.

As a result, in a series of steps described by Habermas in "Dogmatism, Reason, and Decision: On Theory and Practice to our Scientific Civilization,"16 the conception of practical life has changed radically. First, since values are not able to figure in the mathematical rationalization of life they could not be the subject of rational consultation and consensus, but only the basis for competition between rival interest groups. Here decision theory can provide the preference rules and decision procedures according to which the choice between alternate means is made. But this is merely formal; it leaves at the root of preference an area of values beyond rational justification and control.

This has three results. First, practical life becomes radically decisionistic so that irrationality lies at the very heart of the decision-making process. Secondly, the political process becomes increasingly technocratic as scientific competency is directed towards clarifying applications of the available resources and possible techniques.

Thirdly, for lack of a rational basis for values, attention shifts entirely to the formal element of control as strategies are developed for succeeding in situations of competing interests. The political process generates its own supreme value of self-assertion and requires an understanding of the way in which such a system can be self-maintaining and self-regulating. As the system has

stability as its goal and requires capabilities for its maintenance, all is manipulated in function of such stability and maintenance, rather than according to the traditional values and goals of the political process or even the Enlightenment value of emancipation.

Technocratic consciousness is the final step in the rationalization of modern life into a cybernetically self-stabilizing system. This lacks any sense of society as a cooperative unity of persons who freely, fairly and corporately organize their actions. In this circumstance the political development of the person becomes, not merely superfluous, but obstructive. Since major decisions must be made by a technocracy one's involvement in the political process is reduced simply to choosing a leader for the system.17 As a result of this political disenfranchisement interests begin to turn inward towards family and personal gain, thereby substituting individual and socially disintegrative self-interest for social concerns.

At this point there arises a new situation. The set of social values which were prescinded from in order to promote the rationalization of life, is now substituted by anti-social values pitting the private against the social. As the mechanisms of social stabilization react to suppress these anti-social elements, inexorably the process of social change takes the direction of increasing domination and suppression, rather than of emancipation and freedom.18 Were this process of privatization simply to direct one's attention to one's own family, from whose traditions might be drawn a value pattern for legitimate social action—as was the case in Central America in Post-Colonial days—it would not be so radically dangerous. Unfortunately, today the opposite is the case. For the pattern of rationalization in the public sphere suggests a model of rationalization in the private as well. This results in a sense of questioning and contingency regarding the contents and even the techniques of tradition. Respect for authority and the habit of cooperation are undermined by the pervasiveness of state activity, which depends upon the intensification of these very attitudes.19

In sum, the supremacy of the technocratic over the political consciousness produces a technocratic elite and suppresses the emancipatory interests, not only of one or another class, but of the entire human species.20 In this situation of need as identified by Marx and Freud, and of despair as identified by Habermas, where can one turn for the value resources required for work toward personal dignity and social peace?

Notes

1 Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" in J.B. Thompson, ed., *Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 82, 90-91.

2 *Ibid*., pp. 92-93.

3 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon, 1971), pp. 196-97.

4 *Ibid*., p. 211.

5 Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien," in *Wirklichkeit und Reflexion* (Pfulligen: Neske, 1973), p. 232: see McCarthy, p. 307.

6 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans., J. Viertel (Boston: Beacon, 1973), pp. 150-51.

7 Thomas A. McCarthy, *Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas* (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1978), p. 307.

8 Karl Marx, "Feuerbach" in *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), pp. 2-27.

9 Habermas, *Knowledge*, pp. 31-35.

10 Habermas, "Thisen zur Rekonstruktion des Historisches Materialismus" unpublished remarks at Hegel Conference, Stuttgart, 1976. Cf. McCarthy, pp. 244-47.

11 Habermas, *Knowledge*, p. 42.

12 *Ibid*., pp. 275-79

13 *Ibid*., pp. 280-81.

14 *Ibid*., pp. 196-201.

15 *Ibid*., pp. 208-209.

16 Habermas, *Theory and Practice.*

17 See Niklos Luhman's argument for nonparticipatory social planning, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie was Leistet die Systemforsehung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971): see McCarthy, *Critical Theory*, pp. 222-31.

18 *Ibid*., pp. 1-11 and 383.

19 J. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon, 1975), p. 72

20 *Ibid*., pp. 36982.

Chapter VI
Religious Traditions in Social Reconstruction and the Dialogue of Cultures

We are then in an essentially dialectical situation which reflects the hermeneutic circle. On the one hand, the human forms of tradition must continually be examined critically in order to avoid, by mechanical repetition, becoming an instrument of repression rather than liberation. On the other hand, the pattern of interests can be evaluated only in the context of a tradition and its sense of human life and meaning. As both the religious and cultural tradition and the critique of its human manifestations are required and both are interrelated, hermeneutics is required in order to mediate this dialectic.

Hermeneutic Critique and Social Reconstruction

The Role of Social Critique in the Hermeneutic Enterprise

There are two ways in which a religiously grounded tradition must draw upon critique if it is to retain the purity of its originating prophetic message and respond to what Habermas refers to as an "interest in (human) emancipation" which surpasses technical or instrumental and practical interests. First, Gadamer's hermeneutics concerns the application of our cultural heritage in the present by a reaffirmation and fresh reinterpretation of tradition in order to draw out its new implications. The means for this are especially the reading of the sacred texts and the humanities in which the tradition through literary texts, values and ideals is articulated. Here, the emphasis is upon appropriating the tradition, identifying with it, and acknowledging its presence as fore-understanding in our every question.

In social critique the sciences must not only describe regularities as do the merely empirical sciences, but must identify also the controlling relations of dependence at a deeper level which have become fixed ideologically. Self-reflection, governed by an interest in emancipation, subjects these to a critique which, in turn, allows more of the real implications of the tradition to emerge.

There are roots in Gadamer's thought for recognition of the importance of this critical element, for he sees historical distance and consequently new horizons for questioning as a prerequisite for drawing out new implications of the meaning of the text or tradition.

This, in turn, reflects the importance of distinguishing the text from the intention of its readers at any one time with their psychological and sociological context. This emancipation of the text – its psycho- and socio-cultural decontextualization – is a fundamental condition for hermeneutic interpretation. Paul Ricoeur remarks that "distanciation now belongs to the mediation itself."1 This is reflected both on the essential or structural level and on the existential level.

For the former it becomes necessary to go beyond Gadamer's description of discourse as a spontaneous conversation of question and answer and to begin to consider the reading of the text in the context of practical engagement with other people and above all with God. As this is crafted from smaller steps, Ricoeur states that "the *matter* of the text is not what naïve reading of the text reveals, but what the formal arrangement of the text mediate."2 Hence, structural analysis is required in order to understand the *depth semantics* of the text as a condition for grasping its matter.

If the sense of the work is its internal organization, the reference of the text is the way in which being unfolds *in front*, as it were, of the text. This is the existential reality of being emerging as

temporal and historical. In sharp contrast to a deadening repetition of the past frozen in a fixed ideology, the creative space opened by reference to the "power to be" critiques the ideologies.

This implies not merely a liberation from the structures of the social and other environments, but a liberation of the self as well. Hermeneutic understanding is not an imposition of the reader upon the text; rather, the text provides an interlocutor which enables the reader consciously to examine his or her own subjectivity. By making possible imaginative variations of one's ego, one can achieve the distance required for a first critique of his/her own illusions and false consciousness, and of the ideology in which he/she has been reared.3 This is the truth of the dictum that it is in reading the sacred text that we are made free.

Critical distance is then an essential element for hermeneutics. It requires an analysis of the historical social structures as a basis for liberation from internal determination by, and dependence upon, unjust interests. The relation between hermeneutics and social critique is dialectical, with the social sciences providing indispensable elements of awareness and hence of emancipation in the world of increasingly technical and convoluted structures.

The Role of Tradition in Hermeneutics

The cultural heritage borne by tradition must provide a broader but essential context and basic principles for the critique to which the social sciences contribute. Paul Ricoeur has attempted to codify some of the contributions of the tradition.4

First, critique is carried out within a context of interests which establish the frame of meaning. The sequence of technical, practical, and emancipatory interests reflects the emergence of humankind out of nature and corresponds to the developmental phase of moral sensitivity. Habermas studies Kohlberg closely on this and employs his work.5 To the question of the basis of these interests, however, no adequate answer is provided. They are not empirically justifiable or they would be found at the level of technical interests. Neither do they constitute a theory as a network of working hypotheses for then they would be regional and justified at most by the interest in emancipation, leaving them entrapped in a vicious circle.

The only proper description of these interests as truly all-embracing must be found in the direction of the religious recognition of all being as coming from and directed toward God as Being Itself with His unity, truth and goodness. His attributes are hidden only in being so present that they are in need of being unveiled by hermeneutic method. Thus, Gadamer's hermeneutic project on the clarification of fore-understanding or 'prejudices' is truly a deeper, yet not inconsistent, advance upon Habermas' critical work on interests and the social sciences. Though not identical they share common ground.

Secondly, in the end, social critique appears to share characteristics common to hermeneutics and may even be called a critical hermeneutics. Both focus upon the development of communicative action by free persons. Their common effort is to avoid a reduction of all human communication to instrumental action and institutionalization, for it is there that manipulation takes place. Success or failure in extending the critique of interests beyond instrumental action to communicative action determines whether the community will promote or destroy its members.

Such critique is unlikely ever to be successful, however, if we have no experience of communication with our own cultural heritage and its religious tradition. For in a dialogue distortions can be identified as such only if there is a basis for consensus and this must concern not only an empty ideal or regulative idea, but one that has been experienced, lived and shared. "He who is unable to interpret his past may also be incapable of projecting concretely his interest

in emancipation."6 Considered qualitatively this points to the need to be able to see life in terms of the justice and love of God if these qualities are to characterize the life of the *umma* in time.

Thirdly, today communicative action needs more than a model to suggest what otherwise might not occur to our minds, for the rationalization of human life has become such that all of its aspects are controlled pervasively in terms of instrumental action Whereas Marx could refer in his day to surplus value as the motive of production, this is true no longer. Instead, the system itself of technology has become the key to productivity and all is coordinated toward the support and promotion of this system: it is the ideology of our day. As a result the distinction between communicative action and instrumental action has been overridden and control no longer can be expected from communicative action.

This raises a new type of question, namely, how can the interest in emancipation be kept alive? Undoubtedly, communicative action must be reawakened and made to live if we are not to be simply objects – indeed 'slaves' – of the technological machine. But how is this to be done; whenever can this life be derived if the present situation is pervasively occupied and shaped by science and technology as the new, and now all-encompassing, master? It can be done only by drawing upon our heritage in the manner suggested by Heidegger and Gadamer. They point out that as a people progresses through history it chooses specific paths which is exploits, but that in so doing it omits alternate paths. The greatest progress lies then not in incremental steps along tried pathways, but in reaching or reach back into our religious heritage – now as never before – in order to find the radically new resources needed for emancipation in an increasingly technologically dominated world.

Finally, there is a still more fundamental sense in which critique, rather than being opposed to tradition or taking a questioning attitude thereto, is itself an appeal to tradition. Modern criticism appeals unabashedly to the heritage of emancipation it has received from the Enlightenment. But this tradition has long roots which stem from the liberating acts of Exodus and the Resurrection. "Perhaps" write Ricoeur "there would be no more interest in emancipation, no more anticipation of freedom, if the Exodus and Resurrection were effaced from the memory of man kind."7

According to the proper norms of communicative action, these historical acts should be taken also in their symbolic sense in which liberation and emancipation express the root interests basic to religious cultures. In this manner they point to fundamental dimensions of being: to Being Itself as the unique existent in whom the alienated can be reunited, to the logos which founds subjectivity without an estranging selfish subjectivism, and to the spirit through whom human freedom can be creative in history. Remembrance and celebration of this heritage provides needed inspiration and direction. It enables persons and peoples to reach out in mutual comprehension, reconciliation and concern in order to form social unity that is marked by emancipation and peace.

The Role of Religion in Hermeneutics

This irenic relation of tradition to social critique pointed out by Ricoeur, focuses on how resources of the social and psychological sciences can be of assistance to the hermeneutic process and, vice versa, how hermeneutic sciences bring indispensable resources to the scientific process. But Gadamer also advances defensively, on the one hand, that hermeneutics itself attends to the task of critical reflection for which Habermas turns to the sciences. It does so by showing the different aspects of the text, the complexities of meaning and the fact that due to the flow of time these must be seen from differing perspectives which reveal new assumptions and dimensions of

meaning not heretofore patent. Hence, Gadamer would see the task of unveiling ideologies as particularly hermeneutic.

On the other hand, offensively, he considers naïve the idea that the sciences, particularly the *geisteswissenschaften* or sciences of the spirit, are themselves free of all cultural context or "prejudice." Where Habermas would want to say that it is essential to identify the real social situation and not only the related prejudices in order to overcome oppression. Gadamer would question the claim of the social sciences to have access to such absolute knowledge. Indeed, Habermas himself asks "How could such a reference system be legitimated except, in turn, out of the appropriation of the tradition."8 Gadamer urges the question of how a critique of the conditions of social labor could avoid being an interpretation that is itself situated and dependent upon a particular set of assumptions, values and expectations. Hence, he sees it as at least presumptuous to set one's own view of appropriate human relations as the norm in terms of which one criticizes and rejects others. This is to ignore that differences can emerge not only from ideological commitment, but from differences in insight, values, and interests. Moreover, it impoverishes the human project by dismissing the positions of others without learning from them and thereby enriching and broadening one's horizons. "In contrast, hermeneutics still seems to me correct when it maintains that the real meaning of communication lies in the reciprocal testing of prejudices and when it holds to such reciprocity even in regard to the cultural transmission of texts."9

Where Habermas would claim that hermeneutics without the sciences leave one entrapped in a relativism, Gadamer would reply that this is "a dangerous relativism only from the standard of an absolute knowledge that is not ours."10

There may be in this debate something of special interest to those engaged in the effort to interpret our time religiously in the light of the absolute. When confronted with this criticism of sciences as overextending its claim to certainty Habermas moves in a formal direction, that is, not to the content of any specific knowledge claim, but to the form of open discourse as described above. It is interesting that the requirements asserted for such discourse, that is, its communicative ethics of open exchange of positions in which each tests the other, correspond to the laws of the market place in which all are to be equal, open and competitive. Here it is essentially a free market of ideas and market mechanisms in the form of rational discourse that constitutes a test of arguments and that is depended upon to exert whatever correctives and required.

This contains a number of suppositions, some explicit and others implicit. The explicit are that the interest here is solely in the truth or rightness of claims and that the intercommunication is free of any coercive dynamics. Habermas is willing to live with these and even to recognize that they reflect the Western tradition in which different kinds of validity claims and defenses thereof are distinguished. Obviously this is the heritage of Descartes' and the Enlightenment's search for clear and distinct ideas. Therefore Gadamer would insist that it is perspectival in turn. This is a criticism that Habermas accepts, but adds, using the developmental schemas of Jean Piaget and Lwarence Kohlberg, that knowledge does progress, and that the real accomplishment and capacity of the Western mind have proper claims which can be defended and need to be recognized.

But the Enlightenment project in turn is presently being subjected to increasingly critical reevaluation, as described above. First, its focus upon objectivity militates against the ability to take account of the subjectivity and intentionality which distinguishes persons from things, for which reason it is now seen as dehumanizing. Second, its determination to restrict all recognition to what is clear and distinct in conceptual terms, and even to what is empirical. Third, the two join together to restrict one's horizon to the secular, the temporal and relative, and to omit the eternal and the absolute. The claim of such restrictions to be an advance over other forms of knowledge

is increasingly seen as perspectively, particularly. This is especially so in view of the recent experience of humankind of the need for additional dimensions of knowledge, if only to project human dignity, promote social progress and build world peace. Religions must be in the forefront of such concerns.

But here a crucial question arises and it is one of perspective. Should the religiously oriented mind rejoice in the reluctant but emerging consensus regarding the weakness and limitation of the scientific knowledge as no longer certain, universal and objective? Should it recognize with Kuhn, Feyerabend and others the extent to which scientific knowledge reflects and is shaped by its cultural horizons? Should it join in the postmodern reduction of knowledge to the interplay of power?

Wanke would see Gadamer recoiling from this position as from a precipice in which all truly responsive, and hence responsible, human action is abandoned. Yet by accepting a skepticism regarding the possibility of the social science generating any truly reliable trans-historical principles she interprets him as abandoning all revolutionary practice.11

I would read Gadamer somewhat differently on this point. It is true that he relativizes the knowledge of the social sciences. But, because for the Enlightenment tradition, and hence for Habermas science is supreme and indeed the sole valid knowledge, to see science as essentially relative to one's needs and perspectives is to be submerged in relativism. Gadamer's position is quite different, for in the inheritance of Heidegger it is grounded metaphysically. Thus, far from holding that nothing is transhistorical, life and being are rooted in being that transcends times. This which renders relative any one human insight. It does so not in the sense that scientific knowledge is invalid, but rather in the sense that the mind must ever be open to new applications in the ongoing flow of tradition.

Hence his prejudice in favor of the authority of tradition and skepticism regarding revolutionary principles which would jettison this is incorrectly termed a conservatism, and this is especially true of a religiously grounded tradition. For its basis in the absolute does not reject, but rather calls for ever new steps to unfold more of the meaning of the tradition than is possible in any one human expression or even all combined. Thus, hermeneutics allows us to see any religious tradition founded in the Absolute and Eternal Being to be essentially developmental as persons strive, each in their own distinct time and circumstances, to live their faith.

Hermeneutics and the Meeting of Civilizations

Such a hermeneutic perspective has special importance in our day as new awareness of the person and hence of peoples generates new awareness of the significance of the patterns of life and the cultures which they have created. It suggests a notable shifts of goals beyond the Socratic search for clear principles for public life. The search today is not for a pattern of Platonic ideas or ideals separated from human life. It is not to develop a pattern of principles or virtues articulated prior to action, in relation to which all of life would be merely a subsequent and accidental part of understanding. The goal here is not to determine what is right in general, but what is good in the concrete, and hence in the situation. This is not a matter of mere expediency; by completing what the general law omits it constitutes the very perfection of the law.

In this Aristotle notes the importance of two virtues. One is prudence (*phronesis*) which, in the light of the normative discoveries about appropriate human action contained in the tradition, through thoughtful reflection discovers the appropriate means in the circumstances. What we are now more aware of than before, however, is that in most countries such circumstances include a

plurality of groups with which we must interact. Indeed, even our self-determination includes a sense of self which to a significant degree is constituted by positive and contrasting relations to other groups.

In this situation of coexistence with other cultural and religious communities another virtue identified by Aristotle, namely, sagacity (*sunesis*), takes on new importance. One can choose the proper means in today's pluri-ethnic circumstances only if one take account adequately of other groups. In turn, this can be done only if one puts oneself in their circumstances, share their concerns and undergoes with them their situation. In contrast, Aristotle describes as truly "terrible" the power of the one who is capable of understanding the situation of the other but lack of orientation to moral ends or concern for the good of the other.12 Perhaps Hobbes described too well such an attitude encoded in one major contemporary ideology when he wrote that man is wolf to man.

How can this be overcome, how can *sunesis* as a positive attitude of care and concern for the welfare of others be achieved? Would what has been said above about cultural identity preclude cross-cultural openness and mutual understanding and concern? Some say that it is time to turn away from the intensification of religious and cultural consciousness and to accept the homogenization of life implicit in its modernizing rationalization, not merely as the price of progress, but as the means of social peace?

On the other hand, if what was said in the second section above be valid, to reject one's religious heritage would be to close off one's human sensitivities – a spiritual mental lobotomy. Further, to sever the next generation from their tradition of meaning and value would produce a generation not merely alienated and empty. But manipulative, "terrible" and terrifying. Fortunately, the fact that ethnic sensibility has increased with, and perhaps in response to, modernization suggests that in any case there is little chance for an eventual disappearance of religious identity and cultural consciousness. Certainly, a different approach is needed.

This would begin from the notion of an horizon, especially a religious horizon, as all that can be seen from the vantage point of one's cultural tradition. The fact that we have been born and raised in this family, neighborhood, culture and religion, and that this shapes our vision and gives us our horizon needs to be recognized and accepted. However, an horizon is not a barrier or separation, for it consists of what has been discovered in the past about the goals and meaning of human life and action, as well as a sense of the time in which I stand and of the life project in which I am engaged. It is a fertile ground, filled with experience, custom and tradition, as this comes into the present and, through the present, passes into the future.13 It is then more bridge than barrier, more opportunity than interdiction. It might be compared to a telescopic lens ground by the assembled experience of all who have preceded us in the faith from our father Abraham. Through this, the person is enabled to see far and to interpret with refined sensibility.

Rather than destroy such a lens hermeneutics stresses that it is important to be as fully aware of it as possible, to take attentive account of its special characteristics, features and situatedness, and then to live it assiduously and with wise care. How is this to be done, how can it enable us to relate to other cultures if our horizon bespeaks rather all that can be seen from within our own cultural perspective?

First, it must be noted that the human mind is in principle transcendent. Though it recognizes realities, it is not captivated by them; instead it evaluates them as being good or less so, as being able to improve upon or not worth improving. In other words, the human person is not simply an animal possessed by its environment; the person possesses its knowledge in such wise as to be able to compare and evaluate objects. In brief, the person transcends particular objects, seeing them in terms of a broader sense of truth – one wants to know more – and of good – one wants to improve.

Second, as larger nation states are developed, as travel and immigration increase and as competition and communication intensify in a now global age, increasingly one is impacted by other groups who live, interpret and evaluate differently. It becomes progressively clearer that one's own culture is not the only one possible.

Third, this could lead to a rejection of others; and often it has resulted in considering them as inferior or even non persons. It is especially the religious sense within the various cultures that can help to free people from the feeling of being absolute. Understanding oneself as subordinate to God and only a partial manifestation of His truth and power opens in principle the possibility of recognizing that others too are reflections of the divine perfection and as such our brothers and sisters.

In all three of the above ways religion can contribute to a sense of our own situatedness as a first step toward openness, for if we can realize that we are not the sole bearers of truth then we can have a questioning attitude. Rather than simply following through with our previous ideas until a change is forced upon us, true openness or sensitivity to new meaning requires a willingness continually to revise our initial projection or expectation of meaning, our horizon, nor an abandonment of passionate concern regarding action towards the future. To be aware of our own horizon and to adjust it in dialogue with others is to make it work for us in discovering those ne implications of our tradition which are required for our times.

The logical structure of this process is to found in the dialectic of question and answer. A question of whether it is this or that is required in order to give the direction to our attention without which no meaningful answer could be given or received. This does not mean that nothing is known; indeed faith gives us the basis of all truth upon which to build authentic understanding. But progress or discovery requires openness to appreciating better what we have known and to reevaluating all in terms of this improved knowledge. This is not simple lack of determination, however, for it has specific direction that orients our attention and sensitizes us to significant evidence.

Because discovery depends upon the questions, the art of discovery is the art of questioning. Consequently, in working with other groups our efforts at finding the answers should be not to suppress their questions, but to reinforce and unfold them. To the degree that their probability is intensified they can serve as a searchlight to bring out new meaning. Thus, in contrast to opinion which suppresses questions, and to arguing which searches out the weakness of the others' argument, conversation as dialogue is a mutual and cooperative search for truth. Through eliminating errors and working out a common meaning truth is progressively unveiled.14

Because of the dynamic character of being emerging into time, the horizon is never definitively fixed. At each step a new dimension of the potentialities of a cultural and faith tradition are opened to understanding, for its meaning lives with the consciousness of the many members of the group living through history and with others. Through the dialectic of questioning between the horizons of various groups the ability of each is intensified for questioning its own heritage and receiving therefrom answers that are ever new.15

In all of this one's attitude requires close attention. If one's goal is simply to develop new horizons for the emergence of one's own mind, our goal could be to achieve absolute advance knowledge and thereby absolute dominion over other groups. This would look us into a prejudice that is fixed, closed in the past, and unable to allow for the life of the present or the horizons of others. In this way powerful new insights can become with time deadening ideologies, and prejudgements which suppress freedom and cooperation.

In contrast, an authentic attitude of openness appreciates the nature of our finiteness and on this basis is respectful of the past, open to others and thereby able to discern appropriate paths for the future. This openness consists not merely in receptivity to new information, but in a recognition of our historical, situated and hence limited vision. Escape from the limitations of vision which have deceived us and held us captive is to be found then, not through those who are well integrated into our culture and social structures, for dialogue with those of similar horizons opens one only to a limited degree. Real liberation from our most basic limitations and deceptions come only with a conscious effort to take account of the horizons of those who differ notably, whether as another ethnic group, as a distinct culture intermingled with our own, or – still more definitively – as living on the margins of all of these societies and integrated into none.

Such openness is directed primarily, not to others as persons who are to be surveyed objectively or obeyed unquestioningly, but to ourselves. It opens our horizons, extends our ability to listen to others, and assimilates the implications of their answers for changes in our position. In other words, it is an acknowledgement that our cultural and religious heritage has more to say to us. The characteristic hermeneutic attitude of effective historical consciousness is then not methodological sureness, but openness or readiness for experience.16 In this light a religious heritage is not closed; rather, it is the basis of a life that is ever new, more inclusive and more rich.

Notes

1. Ricour, "Hermeneutics as the Critique of Ideology," *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. J.B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge, 1981), p. 81.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-95.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-91.

5. Lawrence Kohlberg, "From Is to Ought," in T. Misbal, ed. *Cognitive Development and Epistemology* (New York, 1971), pp. 151-236.

6. Ricour, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," p. 97.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

8. Habermas, *Sur Logic der Sozialwissenschaften* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 285; "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," p. 358.

9. Gadamer, *Replik in Hermeutik und Ideologiekritik*, p. 307. K.-O. Apel, *et al* (Frankfurt: Luhrkanp, 1977), p. 30.

10. Gadamer, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy," in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1981), p. 110.

11. Warnke, pp. 136-138.

12. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 289.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 261-264.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 325-332.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 333-341.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 325-333.

Part II
Lectures: Hermeneutics and Religious Traditions in Global Interchange: Qom, Iran

Lecture I
Hermeneutics: Its Nature and Evolution

Introduction

It is a great honor, deeply appreciated, to be invited to lecture in Qom, the center of Shiite clerical and Islamic studies.

I come from Rome to Qom first as a fellow cleric from another of the world's great religions, Christianity, and indeed from its Catholic tradition: the home of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas and Descartes. I come also as a fellow scholar trained for seven years in Rome, the Christian center corresponding to Qom, and after having taught philosophy and metaphysics for 35 years at the Catholic University of America, corresponding in Washington, D.C. to Mofid University in Qom for Shiite Islam.

Hence I share your mission, which I understand to be to help people – not only some people but all people: Christians, Moslems, Buddhists and atheists. It is, to help them appreciate the truth about themselves, namely, first their dignity as having been created in the image of God; and second, their high mission as vicegerents of God on earth to transform this world in terms of that divine love by which they have been created.

The Contemporary Need for Hermeneutics

The Historic Juncture

Today, we begin this series of three lectures on hermeneutics in search of ways to understand and respond to this mission. We meet at a most momentous, indeed, historic juncture. Exteriorly, here in Iran as a result of your revolution against secularism you have restored the circumstances of the origin of Islam. For the last two decades, for the first time since the Caliphs were eclipsed by the Sultans, you have been ruled by an essentially religious regime. This weekend a new Parliament has been seated, not as a second revolution, but in the hope of continued reform.

Interiorly, this reflects and responds to the recent opening in the hearts of peoples everywhere in the world of a new postmodern space or dimension of freedom grounded in the interior life of the Spirit.

Boetius, himself consul of the Roman Empire along with his father and two sons, gave a sense of how God's rule and human freedom go together. He wrote that God ruled not by power imposed from without, but by the freedom in, and of, the human heart as directed to the good. Ultimately, this is to God, who rules suavely yet firmly because He rules according to the nature of man. In seeking happiness man implicitly and inevitably seeks God who is all-good, indeed Goodness Itself.

The Need

In response to this opening today to the new interior and exterior space of freedom, initiative and creativity, it is most urgent that we do three things which constitutes the core of the task of hermeneutics:

- *Speak or proclaim* this new interior and exterior space for God. We must be like the early Moslem, set on fire by the Holy Prophet, who in 70 years spread the crescent across Africa to the Atlantic ocean, and like Columbus who reached across that ocean to plant the cross in America. As religious teachers and leaders, we must proclaim the new existential dimension of the human heart and the human freedom that opens today: *This is God's land* – not Satan's – for truly all the world, North and South, East and West, outside and inside, is a mosque. God said to the Prophet Moses: Go tell my people to fear not, to go and dwell in the land that I shall give you today (which is the new interior dimension of human self-awareness).This is my land and you are my people. Be a holy people in the new land I am giving you! (Deut 10, 11; 26, 3; 31, 7.)

- *Explain or Teach*. It is not enough to claim or proclaim; we must also teach how entering into this new millennium is not to abandon the God we knew of old, but to unfold the meaning of the eternal word of God from our common Prophets, found in our Holy Scriptures. We must do so for this new time and for a region not so much of the world as of the heart.

- *Translate and Communicate*. If the revealed message is about God who is transcendent and almighty and about humankind in relation to God, then we need to communicate that message received from God in divine terms to humans in terms of their lives, from the eternal word of scripture to the humanity today, indeed to the people of Iran at this momentous juncture.

The stakes here are very high both for Islam and for all the people of God everywhere. To fail is to go once again into an ice age of the spirit, another round of secularism for centuries to come; to succeed is to show the way for people everywhere to live God's love as a holy people. This is not the small jihad of fratricidal combat, but the great jihad fought in our hearts and homes to form a holy community.

What means do we heave at our disposal for this great campaign; what tools have been crafted especially in, of and for the present circumstances of human consciousness? It is in terms of a response to this question that we turn now to hermeneutics. We would begin this lecture by looking into the general nature and meaning of the term "hermeneutics" and what it can tell us about interpretation. Beyond this we will examine the development of hermeneutics in modern times, especially in the last century in order to take account of the current openings and new sensibilities of human consciousness.

In the second lecture we shall look at the role of a religious tradition, culture, or civilization, such as Islam, in this work of interpretation. In the third lecture we shall examine its significance for cooperation and collaboration between the peoples of God – perhaps not quite as a dialogue of civilization, but certainly intimately related and even foundational thereto.

The Nature of Hermeneutics

The term "hermeneutics" comes either from the Greek and refers to either the priest at Delphi who interpreted its oracle, or from "Hermes" the messager God who is said to have invented the very instruments of writing.

It is reflected in Aristotle's work, *On Interpretation*, which was commented on by Thomas Aquinas, and in turn by Cajetan. All suggest three components of hermeneutics: that of being (a) a messenger, (b) from the gods, and (c) to humankind. These, in turn, entail the three challenges listed above: to say or proclaim, to explain or teach, and to translate and communicate from the gods to humankind. Here we shall return to these and attempt to thematise them in order to get a better sense of the task ahead.

Messenger

To say or to proclaim is expressed in the Christian tradition by the Greek term *kerygma*: the early preaching of the good news or "*evangelium*" about Christ to the people. This early proclamation is described in the *Acts of the Apostles*. In Islam this task focuses on the Holy Prophet as transmitting the word that is properly beyond human intelligence to the human understanding of the people.

As clerics we appreciate that this means not simply handing someone a text, but reading it, speaking it. As a human activity this is a performance in which the demeanor of the body, the unique inflection of the voice, and the pauses help the hearer to share the content of the text.

There is a problem here, classically called that of the whole and the parts. The reader must read though all the parts in sequence. But to grasp the sense of the parts, which is required in order properly to inflect, etc., in the proclamation, it is necessary from the very beginning to have some sense of the meaning of the whole. Yet to grasp the whole we need to be aware of its parts for we read it in a particular time and with a particular intonation and inflection of voice which convey only one of many possible and virtual meanings of the text. What is more the reading of the text even by the same person differs when 20, 40 or 70 years of age; even today this differs from yesterday and tomorrow.

We are then always involved in a hermeneutic circle, namely, to know the parts one must know the whole, while to know the whole one must know the parts.

To Explain. The teacher must not only express, that is, say, claim or proclaim, but must also ex-plain, or etymologically "un-fold" the meaning. This is not simply to present the message for direct or simple apprehension as with *kerygma*, but to clarify it in a way that leads to a judgment of the correctness of the content of the message. The shift here is to include not only the messenger, but the message and the concern for its meaning as this becomes available and is needed at any point.

To Translate. The messenger, teacher and reader must cooperate in translating the meaning of the message from its divine source to persons in their distinct circumstances and with their preoccupations. Languages are the repositories of the cultures within which the message is composed and received. Hence, translation presupposes two languages, and thus two overarching senses of the world and of meaning. We exist in our language as the sedimented cultural experiences of our people and of its way of being in the world. Hence we need a translation of any message from outside of this people, and especially for a message from a divine source.

In sum, the term "interpretation: consists of two factors: "*praesto*": to show or manifest, and "*inter*" which implies a distinction between the one from whom the message is received and the other to whom the message is passed. This difference can be between an ancient text and the present, one language and another and one generation and another. The special problems now are how there can be some community in being and communication in thought if the text is divine, if the new language is not oral or written but visual as with TV images, and if the new generation now lives in a world marked more by subjectivity and interiority.

Messenger of the Gods

The above problems may seem ensurmoutable, but the words of sacred scripture have always proven to be life-giving; they have been given not only for one people or time but for all peoples in all times. Hence, we can expect God’s grace and proceed in faith and hope. Indeed, we can be

more hopeful because hermeneutics is not only the work of the messenger, but of a messenger from the gods. This engages two other components of hermeneutics to which we shall now turn: (a) transcendent faith and the search for divine truth, and (b) human history and the search for the realization of human life both in time and in eternity.

We have seen that the etymology of the term hermeneutics included not only a messenger, but a messenger from the divine. Hence, it brings not clearly defined (de-limited) mathematical formulas devoid of human meaning, but limitless wisdom regarding the source and goal of life and hence the value and meaning of all.

Greek philosophy. We find this reflected in Hesiod's words in the introduction to his *Theogony*: "tell us how the gods and earth first came to be." Similarly the Proemium of Parmenides *Poem* depicts the Muses sending him off to the goddess, Justice, who opens the gates and instructs him to inquire after the truth of all things.

This will be the search for wisdom, which Aristotle would call first philosophy and even theology. He would note famously that all the sciences are more necessary than wisdom, but none is better. For wisdom is knowing to which end each thing must be done, which end is the good of that thing, and more generally the supreme goal of all. Such knowledge is most fitting for the gods who, not being jealous, share it with humankind.

From this it can be seen that from the beginning the Greeks appreciated that religious hermeneutics was about what was most real in itself and most lasting, that is, the perennial religious meaning about being and value. It is an impressive testimony to wisdom which in its variety and intensity has mobilized and given dignity to the many peoples.

Faith and the Religious Messenger. All of this pales, however, before the history of God's providence through the Prophets, who reveal directly the communication of God's mind to ours. This concern both things within the power of human reason, which knowledge it makes more sure and universal, and things beyond the range of human reason. It gives knowledge regarding God's life and hence about ours as his children. Thus the Holy Qu'ran calls Islamic, Jewish and Christian peoples "Peoples of the Book" (Qu'ran 3:113). For them the work of hermeneutics as understanding and interpreting must be central because the revealed word is the divine-with-us transforming all by its teaching and guidance.

What then does this entail for the religious messenger, that is, not only for the Prophets, but for those of us today who would follow in their footsteps. To be a messenger of God calls for a daunting combination of activity in order to proclaim his word, of spirituality in order to teach and explain in a way that leads people to their true spiritual home. It requires immense humility before both God who transcends all one can say or do in order that the message be so translated that it conveys not the human, but the divine meaning and light which must shine through.

Pascal's description of the dramatic dilemma of the intellectuals is vastly heightened for the messenger of God. It has the greatness he describes in his Pensées VI and which Lacordaire stated classically for the spiritual leader as

To live in the midst of the world,
Without wishing its pleasures;
To be a member of each family,
Yet belonging to none;
To share all sufferings;
To penetrate all secrets;
To go from men to God

And offer Him their Prayers;
To return from God to men
To bring pardon and hope;
To have a heart of fire for charity
And a heart of bronze for chastity;
To teach and to pardon, Console and bless always –
What a glorious life! And it is yours, man of God.

But life of the intellectual has also its wretchedness, which Pascal described in his *Pensées III*, namely the weak, fallible and fallen character of human beings.

Indeed, it is that greatness which sheds pitiless light upon the weakness of all who would take up this challenge and face, in Kierkegaard's words, "the fear and trembling" before so great and high a task. Yet how can the people know unless the word of God is proclaimed and explained, and how can this be done unless someone takes up this task.

If only by faith can one bridge so great a gap between human greatness and human wretchedness, then it is necessary to have a hermeneutics which does not reduce all to the human, but allows for faith and grace, that is, for God in our life – that is the wonder as well as the daunting challenge of a religious hermeneutics.

Messenger of the Gods to Humankind

This will be developed especially in the subsequent lectures, but two factors should be noted from the beginning, namely, the involvement of both subjectivity and historicity.

When Plato, after Socrates, sought stable guides or virtues for human life he pointed to a transcendent world of ideas. Today science still looks for immutable laws abstracted from the concrete, but philosophy begins to look especially into the human spirit and its processes for discovering such guides. Hence, if hermeneutics is to translate the principles of life to humankind, we must attend to human consciousness or to subjectivity.

Moreover, this human consciousness is lived in time. Hence, hermeneutics must take account of the ongoing flow of life and manage, as it were, to strike a moving target. Yet this motion, by enabling us to see a text from many points of view, enables us to unfold its meaning.

From this character of subjectivity comes the cultures which we generate as ways of living the divine message. Passed on through time these are called cultural traditions. It is in these terms that we are able to consider, learn and live the dynamism of the divine life which we live in time.

In conclusion, hermeneutics is the work of interpretation. It is not a work of merely objective measuring or messaging. Rather it concerns how truth, especially that of wisdom and revelation, is received and comprehended, and how this takes place in the very center of self understanding, self-determination and self-responsibility. This above all and in all our strivings is the matter we face both as persons and as peoples.

The Evolution of Hermeneutics in Modern Times

In view of the above we can expect that hermeneutics will always have been a concern where the sacred text has been the center of life; that various methods will have been developed there to enable hermeneutics to be most effective; and that the norm for legitimate and illegitimate interpretation will be the religious community, however this be structured.

In Christianity, when the Reformation questioned the authority of the Church it placed greater reliance on the direct reading of the text. Spinoza and Hegel (and later Dilthey) pointed out how when shared faith is confused and weakened there is need to do consciously what previously had been spontaneous and second nature. But this sees hermeneutics only as an external, practical and utilitarian technique. What would be especially useful would be to look for the way in which hermeneutics in modern times became more interior with the progressive recognition of human subjectivity. This will be the concern of the following notes on the evolution of hermeneutics in modern times, especially in the work of Shleiermacher, Dilthey and more especially through the recent phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)

Schleiermacher began, during 1805-1818 to examine the text for its literary structures and in terms of its grammatical essence. Gradually it became evident that the text was limited by the physical exigencies of language. Hence, if man was to express the infinite it would need to be rather by his inner intentional processes. This would be not only a matter of the text as written or of the truth and validity of its content, but of the inner processes in the intentional order of the faith experience of the author.

Though he was concerned with the author as writing in his life world, Schleiermacher as a man of his scientific times was concerned with achieving scientific knowledge in its regard. What he sought them were not the existential factors, but the laws and principles for understanding the text. In fact, however, there was much more here. Most scholars – themselves highly trained in sciences – have interpreted this in terms merely of human psychology, i.e., the working of the human mind in simply human terms. Schleiermacher had the richer ontological sense common to the great religions.

This is constructed on the insight that God who is one has created the many humans, who are then related as brothers and sisters. Hence the primary way of returning to God is by uniting with others. In this light the horizontal reunion between non conceptual human consciousnesses is more fundamentally a vertical deepening into, and uniting with, the divine ground of being.

Hermeneutics is then not only a technique, nor is it a secular pursuit. It is rather a way of living religiously. This presents us with an important challenge: if this be true, then how can democracy in its effort to find, develop and implement human freedom be not a departure from God's law but an opening thereto? And provided the exercise of human freedom be enlightened by a religious sense of life (as is the purpose of the religious effort of Qom and other centers of religious learning) then can we uncover the truth of Boetius proposition that God himself is the guide of his people and that He does so suavely but firmly from within?

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911)

Dilthey never was able to talk this over with Schleiermacher who died when Dilthey was only one year old. What he did, however, again under the influence of modern rationalism was to take Schleiermacher's attention to subjectivity and move this not inward to its source, but outward to cultural artefacts, including literature, in order to have a scientific object for study. He was clear that this must not mean a reduction to the context of the physical sciences. Instead he developed the*geisteswissenschaften* or "sciences of the spirit" and elaborated a corresponding set of

categories such as "value" and "meaning". These do not analyze or divide, but unite knowing, willing and feeling; they are not about life, but life itself as a process of realizing meaning.

For Dilthey this was not a process of private introspection, however, but an objective cultural or spiritual reality expressed in writing and ritual. Thus, he projected outward Schleiermacher's relationship between human spirits. However, as these are only temporal we have only a series of views without inner direction – a boat without a keel.

The contributions of Schleiermacher and Dilthey have been great in providing an axis for the living of faith. They made it possible to see: that faith is lived in a human community as making manifest the divine ground of meaning precisely through human comity; that faith is centered on the meaning of life which it sees as reflected in all aspects of culture; and that therefore it grows through history and is diversified in and by all peoples and cultures.

There were, however, it would seem a number of limitations. Previously interpretation had been guided not only by the individual's act of faith, but by that of the believing community called "the teaching" or dogma which stated the identity of that community. At this point this belief of the community of the faithful was omitted and one was left alone with the individual interior faith: the emancipation of interpretation from dogma. If all that was truly religious was reduced to this interior act of faith as implied by their reading of *sola fide*, then the external sacred text becomes an object for scientific inspection, rather than a religious reality, a matter for belief. In interpreting the Qu'ran, for example, this would break the essential role of the continuous tradition coming from the community of the Companions of the Prophet, the life of the early Community of Believers, the Hadiths and the long experience of living as a People of God according to the Qu'ran. But without these how could one understand a Holy text? Gadamer, as we shall see, insists upon the essential role of one's tradition in one's interpretation of any text.

Paul Tillich would come to regret bitterly this replacement of the sense of the sacred community by the text and personal faith alone. For it left the reader of the text at the mercy of social forces, rather than as shaping that society in the light of the Spirit lived by the community of believers. This came to a crisis in Germany in the early 1930s when Tillich, along with most others in philosophy and theology who had thought that National Socialism would be the new manifestation of God, saw it evolve into a new paganism with Hitler as its head. Tillich would write in some personal dismay "Neo-Protestantism is dead in Europe. All groups, whether Lutheran, Reformed, or Barthian, consider the last 200 years of Protestant Theology essentially erroneous. The year 1933 finished the period of theological liberalism stemming from Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Troeltsh."

In this light the work of Gadamer has been an important corrective, for he has brought forward the way in which a people approaches the sacred text from the experience or horizon of its long tradition of devotedly living of the text. It is not simply a meeting of the individual with the text, but its reading in the light of the rich spiritual experience of the community that makes possible an appreciation of the text's deep religious content.

Through his background in the thought of Heidegger, Gadamer appreciated the ontological basis of this process as the action of God in time, i.e., the reality of faith as a way of living religiously in a progressively historical manner. This corrects the limitation Tillich found in the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey which led to being trapped between an inner faith and an objective text, and thereby left at the mercy of the ongoing flow of the social ideologies of the secular city.

In brief the hermeneutic effort is concerned with the meaning of the sacred text, but for it to reveal its divine message it must be read with the religious experience of the believing community,

rather than through the secularising glasses of contemporary liberalism, Marxism, etc. As opaque to the divine these are unable to help perceive the divine message. Also the reading must be open ontologically to the creative work of God in time and in the human heart, rather than to merely human experience.

In the context of discussions between reformists and conservatives there could be a danger that in the tensions of the effort to move ahead the continuity of the religious tradition might be ruptured and then substituted by a secularism. This would, mean after the long battle to remain faithful, a capitulation to a secular fundamentalism, that is, to a fundamentalism not of God without man, but of man without God.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002)

The dilemma of the hermeneutic efforts of Schleiermacher and Dilthey was that they sought to protect and reveal the non objective and properly subjective realities of freedom and creativity by objective scientific means. This was considered necessary in rationalist times when all that was not available to, and certified by, objective reason was not only discounted, but sedulously rejected and rooted out. This was part of the effort to re-establish knowledge upon an objective scientific basis that would give man total control over this world. That, after all, had been the reason why Bacon would smash all the idols, why Locke insisted on a new beginning from a blank tablet, and Descartes began by putting all under doubt.

From this distance it is now patent that this cannot be the proper approach to the documents or the life of faith, for which it is necessary to identify and protect what is unique to intentionality and, to its realm of subjectivity. Gabriel Marcel proceeded to show how every attempt to grasp subjectivity by objective knowledge which placed the object over against the subject, turned the subjective into an object, no matter how many times the process was repeated. Progress was possible only where and to the degree that the subject was recognized to be, not thrown over against (ob-ject), but within the knowing process.

(It is interesting to note that this seems to have been sensed instinctively by Jan Masaryk, friend of President Wilson who redrew the map of Europe at the end of World War I, and was himself the founder of Czechoslovakia. He sent off Edmund Husserl as a student to Vienna with an introduction to Franz Brentano who had articulated the significance of this interiority or intentionality of the spirit in the work of Aristotle and its flowering in his Catholic tradition of medieval saints and scholars. Later, Masaryk would sponsor the publication of a posthumous collection of some of Brentano's papers.)

Eventually, in his search for the roots of arithematic Husserl came to discover the essential role of subjectivity in a way not dissimilar to that of Schleiermacher. Husserl, however, would be clear not to allow this to be reduced to a psychological or epistemological object. As a result he founded the method of "phenomenology" – etymologically, "bringing into the light (*phe*)" or to human self-awareness.

The danger at his initial step, however, was that it all would be reduced thereto so that that consciousness would be an awareness of consciousness itself. This would trap the human mind in a hall of mirror, one reflecting the other in endless repetition that left the knower in an idealism. Seeing this, Martin Heidegger took the essential second step, namely, of grounding this in being. Human consciousness was not a reflection of itself; what the mind brought to the light was not

itself, but being. Truth then was the unveiling of being; the conscious human being was the dasein, the place where being emerged into the light or exploded into time.

This was not formally religious, as Heidegger considered the Being thus unveiled not as God, but in the Hindi manner as beyond God. Nevertheless, the structure of his thought was potentially religious and many have employed it in this manner. The perspective of his relatively earlier, *Being and Time*, was from within time; man questioned being, almost forcing it to reveal itself. The so-called "later Heidegger" shifted the horizon from man to Being. For this he used capital letters and kept breaking away from any terms which might in time seem to lay hold of Being and reduce it to human horizons. The attitude he suggested was not then that of command or demand, but of thanksgiving for the gift of self received; an attitude of care for the world in which one lives. Later this would be spread through the environmental sensibilities of the turn at the millennia.

The successor of Heidegger in phenomenology at Heidelberg was Hans-Georg Gadamer to which the next lecture, regarding tradition as religious belief in today's world, will be devoted. The final lecture as concerned with the relation between culture and religion may be considered a return to Schleiermacher's project enabling it now to be more adequately engaged and socially implemented.

Lecture II
Hermeneutics or Religious Traditions

Introduction

The pattern of the written questions submitted after the first lecture indicated that it had been well balanced. Most agreed with its main thrust, while a few on either side found it either too religious or too political for a philosophical lecture.

Personally I found those who considered it too religious to be the most encouraging, for to be considered too religious in the holy city of Qom must be a veritable passport to all seven gates of Paradise. Hence, I took these notes as warranty that my intent has been recognized, namely, in all that I say to join you in our common and shared religious pilgrimage in time. In this conviction let us proceed together.

Others, however, did not consider the first part of the lecture to be adequately focused on hermeneutics, but diversely either as too ethical and even political, or as too moral and moralizing – even to the point of preaching to the preachers of Islam. In this there could be some truth for I do feel that metaphysics has been wrongly conceived and even more poorly practiced as remote from the human struggle to live Being in time. Yet, I am convinced as well that metaphysics, perhaps especially in this effort to enlighten the path of men in this world, cannot be thought through without the freedom of the heart that enables the mind to respond with sensitivity to the divine Unity and Truth, Goodness and Beauty. The adjectives "saints" and "scholars" cannot be disjunctives for those who would take up the burden of guiding the people of God. The most difficult, yet necessary, part of the task for those in search of the wisdom needed to lead may be the challenge to combine both holiness and learning as "saintly scholars."

Hence, I tried to convey in the first lecture something of the amazement I experienced while writing the lecture to find the following correspondence.

Contemporary Needs	Philosophical Components	Etymology of Hermeneutics
to proclaim to teach to communicate	to say to explain to translate	messenger of the gods to humankind

Philosophical hermeneutics is understood as interpretation and thus as bearing or presenting (*praesto*) meaning between one speaker and another, or between a text and the reader. Hence, it can be described as the uncovering and presentation of the deep meaning of a written or oral text, or of a cultural tradition. The deepest meaning of being is to be found in the message of God to man; nothing could be more urgent for life in his world, at all times and in all circumstances. As stated classically by Lacordaire, the one who would interpret must then be sufficiently engaged in the world to be able to bear its question to God, and yet sufficiently open to the Spirit and religiously sensitive to receive the divine insight in order to share this with man.

This has always been the special concern of the peoples of the Book, and nowhere more than in Qom with its 40,000 religious scholars in search of the divine light and guidance to share with humankind in the midst of its dark and confusing world. Your long years of study began from the most careful work in grammar and logic, and was carried on through the medieval trivium and quadrivium in which I too studied and taught. In your study of the sacred text and formation in the

holy law this has been brought to a paragon of perfection which I approach with respect and even awe. My intent then has not been to add some new rule or principle to those you have so elaborated evolved, but rather to share a somewhat different history and horizon in this work in the light of which your efforts in hermeneutics may shine forth in new ways.

The second part of the first lecture on the evolution of hermeneutics was restricted necessarily to two crucial junctures. The first was the work of Shleiermacher and Dilthey in recognizing the distinctively conscious spiritual reality operative in the text and its interpretation. For this they developed new sciences of the spirit or *geisteswissenschaften*. Yet, they remained controlled by the goals and methods of the objective sciences whose development was the great human campaign of their times.

In the providence of God the sciences prepared the way for the provisioning and protection of the great expansion of humankind that was to follow. Nevertheless, this attitude of objective science had its limitation for the work of hermeneutics. It saw the text as a determined and static object before us; it dissected the text into parts in order to subject it to exhaustive analysis which was thought to reveal its full meaning; it then reassembled these parts into a whole much as the chemical analysis of a DNA molecule or the anatomic dissection of a body. This led to a set of hermeneutic methods: historico-critical, literary, narrative and semiotic, as well as the human psychological and socio-cultural sciences. Each would help, but also threatened to be reductivisit for lack of appreciation of the properly conscious and intentional reality involved.

In Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer we found not only their more recent recognition of this distinctive spiritual content, but the development of a method for relating thereto (Husserl). Heidegger provided a metaphysics not only for grounding limited beings which could be manipulated, but of Being itself to be drawn upon without end.

On this basis the text is not just a thing complete in itself and subject to exhaustive analysis, description and measurement, but a conscious expression which invites one to think (Ricoeur) and to enter into being as a limitless source of meaning (Gadamer). This is the sense of being truthful, of parables as evocative, and of symbols as connoting and expressing more than themselves.

It would be possible to go into the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger, Ricoeur and Gadamer, in ordre to unfold this speculatively; I would encourage you to do so. Here, however, I would like to follow Hans-Georg Gadamer as heir to Husserl and Heidegger. He applied their phenomenology to hermeneutics in order to study a matter of passionate interest to us all in this concrete place, namely, how a religious understanding of life developed in the past could have meaning for us today. This is the heart of the issue of religious belief in today's world. In this we face two charges made against religious traditions, namely, that they lock one in the past, and that they suppress human creativity and freedom.

In order to respond to this we will need to develop a number of definitions. However, in order to achieve new insight we will not begin with definitions from the past, but will try to develop new insight into this area of meaning from which can come definitions and descriptions.

Our procedure here will be, first, to respond to the objection that religious traditions are against human freedom by developing the nature of a religious tradition as a cumulative exercise of freedom; second, to respond to the objection that a religious tradition locks us in the past by showing how a religious tradition is rightly seen as a progressive work of application generating new life; and thirdly, to draw upon hermeneutics in order to see how the above can be not only said in principle, but lived in the practices of a religious community.

Here Iqbal's distinction between philosophy and religion can be helpful. He sees philosophy as theory, an intellectual view of things which sees reality from a distance. Religion in contrast is

a personal assimilation of life and power in which the individual achieves a free personality not by releasing himself from the fetters of a law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depth of one's consciousness.

Religious Tradition as a Cumulative Exercise of Freedom: The Relation of Freedom to Tradition

Existential Freedom. Parmenides, the first metaphysician, depicts himself as having been brought up to the goddess, Justice, whose message to him was that the only way to think and to live is in terms of being as distinct from nonbeing: for being is, nonbeing is not. One can observe this in a rock which humans cannot annihilate: no matter how much it is crushed there are always some remains. The active character of being is seen better in plants which, given the circumstances, will grow, flower and bear fruit. For a living being, to be is to live. Animals as conscious can seek out their own food, and even defend themselves fiercely when endangered. For a conscious being to live is to live in an aware and responsive manner.

Finally, for the human person as self aware and self determining, to live is to live responsibly or freely in this world. Mortimer Adler and his team at the Philosophical Research Institute, by reviewing the writings of Western thinkers, found that freedom had been considered to be of three types: (1) to choose as one wills (e.g., Locke); (2) to will as one ought (e.g., Kant); (3) to act responsibly in a way that contributes to, and shapes, one's self-realization. This is a freedom not only of self-determination, but of self constitution. Freedom then can be defined as the self-conscious and responsible participation in being as good. It is not the arbitrariness of the first mode of freedom: to choose as I will, but the basic responsibility I have for myself and others in this world. That I need then to act for the good corresponds the Islamic sense of man as the vicegerent of God.

Values. The good can be realized to various degrees; perfect is a full realization of, or participation in, the good according to one's nature (etymologically: *facere* or to make, *per* through and through or completely). The human imagination enables the person to see many ways of striving to realize the good. Hence, it is necessary to prioritise these means, that is, to give more weight to some (etymologically, *valere*, to weigh more on a scale). Value then may be defined as the goods, both objective and subjective, to which I freely give greater importance. This is determined neither automatically nor arbitrarily. They must really count, and often in desperate circumstances, but the priority I attribute to some goods over others is free in the sense that in my circumstances it is I who must choose and determine how to respond. Like a set of glasses I do not create the object, but set the focus and hence give greater importance and priority to some rather than to others.

Virtue. The exercise of life according to these values leads to the practice of certain ways of responding to specific challenges and opportunities. Over time, repetition develops special capacities or strengths (*virtus*) for it is in these ways that I am practiced. Virtues then are special capabilities to exercise my freedom according to my values.

Culture. Living according to this set of values and virtues constitutes a way of cultivating (*cultura*) the soul, of perfecting a person's or a people's life. This is not an individual but a community matter, however, for one lives with others on whom one depends, first for sustenance

and protection and then for language and communication. Culture then is the pattern of values and virtues according to which a people exercises its freedom in search of self realization; it is the integrated synchronic pattern of the exercise of freedom as the search for self-realization or perfection.

Civilization is culture with emphasis upon the public life of a society (*civis*) and the institutions it has created for this. Samuel P. Huntington notes that it welds together blood, soil and mode of life to constitute the largest identities, "the largest we." He notes well that each great civilization is founded in a great religion and that conversely each great religion has its own civilization (with the exception of Buddhism which he seeks to explain). Religion then is the key to civilization.

Tradition comes from "*trader*" or to pass on. Each generation must evaluate its culture as a way of living, adapt it to its times, and pass on to its offsprings what is important for their exercise of freedom, for their way of living or seeking the good as that which promotes life. It is distinct from history which is all that has happened whether good and constructive, or bad and destructive. Tradition is rather what is seen as life giving. It can be defined then as the cumulative wisdom or practices of a people from their experience and exercise of freedom; it is their cumulative freedom. Its authority is based on the combined need to realize one's potentialities and the resources of tradition to fulfil those needs. Thus it constitutes the ultimate community of human striving.

Religion. All the above is grounded in, inspired by, and/or oriented toward, the divine in various ways according to the culture of a people and their models of revelation/

We can conclude then that tradition is not against freedom. It is the key to freedom understood as self-realization by persons and peoples; it is indeed the cumulative freedom of a people over the ages.

Religious Tradition as Progressive: Novelty and Application

Here the question arises whether tradition as heritage, that is, as coming from the past locks us into the past, or can it be a creative source for an evolving life? The application of a tradition is not tradition as a whole or synchronic as discussed above, but its meaning for each new time, that is, diachronic. Time here is to be taken seriously as authentic novelty. It is neither Plato's unchanging realm of ideas, nor is it rationalism's clear and distinct, simple and eternal natures. Human freedom as the striving to realize one's life is not a detached intellection; rather, it is inextricably enabled by, and formative of, the changing physical and social universe. This effort is a matter neither of law nor of lawlessness, but of developing principle, attitudes and institutions that do not predetermined but regulate the exercise of freedom. Hence tradition achieves its perfection in its temporal unfolding or application.

Concrete human freedom is lived with others in an ever changing life process in which tradition plays a helping role. Hence it is not a matter of science or techné, that is, of action according to a fully predetermined, theoretical knowledge. In the changing flow of life the fixed and abstract law must be imperfect. Moral action as completing and perfecting the law, cannot be known independently of the subjects in their acts, that is, in the application of the law.

Human freedom shapes the present according to the tradition and its sense of what is just and good; but it does so in a way that manifests and creates more of what these are. Application then is not subsequent or accidental to religious understanding, but is part of it and codetermines it from

the beginning. Providence is not first known in an abstract or ideal way and then applied; this would not be love. Rather, providence is known by discerning the good in, and as the love of God for concrete persons in time in their relations to others. This is between absolutism that is abstract and the same for all, and relativism which would be only man as changing and without God; it is rather the constant role of goodness through all change. In this way application enriches our understanding of the principles of concrete life.

Lecture III

Hermeneutics and Cooperation between Cultures

Introduction

Speaking on hermeneutics in Qom is a special challenge, for this city could be considered a huge hermeneutic machine. Its 40,000 scholars are heirs to well over a millennium of concentrated efforts by the Islamic peoples to understand their sacred text and God's message through the Prophet. Yet it does not consider this task to be complete. I met a great scholar carrying a 500 page book by my old teacher Hans-Georg Gadamer. It was well written over showing the signs of intense present study.

Lecture I above was a general introduction to the task of hermeneutics, namely, "to interpret" or to bring deep wisdom from the gods, indeed from God Himself, to humankind. We saw that to be an urgent contemporary need and nowhere more so than in Iran today. Its effort is to be both fully faithful to God and to the tradition of Islam, and to engage and enable the people in being more active and responsible in shaping and reshaping their life according to their Islamic identity in our days. We saw also the modern shift in hermeneutics from treating the text us on object of scientific manipulation to taking more account of this as a project characterized by, and implemented through, the human and divine Spirits.

The second lecture considered tradition as the object of the hermeneutic project. This was hopeful and exciting. The hope came from looking at the great and perennial religious tradition of wisdom in which we share. This is inspired by, and based upon, revelation through the holy prophets Jesus and Mohammad and their sacred texts. It has been evolved through long life experience both horizontally in learning how to live through time, and vertically in learning what to live for. This has been handed on or *tradita* (tradition) through succeeding generations. We are rightly proud of, devoted to, and confident in, our traditions.

That investigation was exciting as well for it found the application of the tradition to the present to be not a compromise of tradition, but its fulfilment. As law cannot take account of all the concrete details of a changing world it must be perfected by, and in, application. Note that this is not a matter of expediency, but of a more perfect realization of the tradition. Correspondingly, the present situation must be understood in terms of the tradition and as its unfolding. For application, as we saw, is not a subsequent addition to a perfectly formed and understood ideal, but the codetermination of this from the beginning; it is a living tradition and it is about living. Thus the practices of the Companions of the Prophet are not simple or external additions to the Prophet, but illustrate the real meaning of his words and actions.

Devotion to tradition then is not its preservation as a dead museum artifact, but its application through the living of it. Here then our question is how to do that, how to live the tradition? What can hermeneutics tell us about this and what are its implications?

The Practice of Hermeneutics

The practice of hermeneutics involves a number of factors which we might group together under four headings: (1) the subject: who is involved; (2) the object: what is sought; (3) method: how is this pursued; and (4) attitude: with what set of mind and heart?

Subject and Horizon. We come together here as a community of students and of teachers who came originally as students, in search of the meaning of our traditions as ways of living reality today.

Whence do we come? As real people we come not from Mars, but from such places as Qom, Isfahan, Tehran or, in my case, Lowell, Massachusetts. And we come from families: we are born into, raised in, and are part of a family; we share a language, an outlook and a culture.

Moreover, we come to the text not with empty minds or hearts, but with a fore understanding of the tradition in which we have been raised and which we have richly experienced. Against the supposition of Descartes that is fundamental to rationalism, namely, that we should first empty our minds in order to begin, Gadamer would stress the need for this human and humanizing prelude to judgement, and thus for prejudgement (or prejudice) in order to understand.

This family experience, language and culture, in turn, constitute an horizon, that is, all that can be seen from this point. It is not a fixed view, for we come to learn; it is rather a vantage point, a mountain top from which we are able to see perceive and gradually to comprehend. It is also creative in as much as it reflects not only the past, but my life project and concerns.

Also it unveils new content of the tradition as it passes through me from past to future. This content heretofore was not available, but now has become so. Moreover, the content may not be available to others who have not shared my background experience. The democratic responsibility is to bring this forward, articulate it, and apply this. When done by the solitary poet it can truly speaks for, and to, a people; when done with others on a local basis it is now called "civil society" – the very life of the people itself.

As an horizon, a tradition then is not a limitation, but a vantage point which assembles all the prior experience and reflection upon the message from God. Like a giant telecommunication disk it intensifies, coordinates and makes vivid the divine teaching and all that man has been able to do with it thusfar.

Object: What Do We Seek? It is characteristic of H-.G. Gadamer that what is sought is not the intention of the author. That is a thing of the past and shares the limitations of that time and place. Some, such as Hirsch, would hold that a supreme or high court in deciding a case about satellite communication should know what Jefferson as author of the constitution had in mind. This, of course, would be not about modern communications media, but about the implication for modern media of the founding father's ideas regarding freedom of speech in a democracy, etc.

Gadamer would see this differently. He would see the object of hermeneutics not as the intention of the author, but the text itself as it appears in the tradition. In the manner of hermeneutics this, in turn, is understood as the experience of living that text, for the text lives through time with the evolving horizons and issues of its successive readers. This includes its unfolding, and articulation for the present, namely, it application.

Method of Question and Answer. This is the way in which this object is to be pursued. The question is needed in order to direct our attention. It serves as a spot light in that it does not create the meaning it reveals, but enables what was there to come to light. This is the etymology of "phenomenology" where *phe* is the light into which the object is brought and by which it is made visible.

Hermeneutics is the very act of questioning. It is not opinion which suppresses the position of the other, nor is it argument which looks for the weaknesses of the other's position. Quite the opposite, it promotes the questioning in order to draw out possible new implications, even arguing

at cross purposes in order to enable the text to unfold. This enables the intentional being of the text to come into our times by varying and broadening our horizon, which is done through interchange with partners in dialogue who bring new and different horizons.

This is also the key to communication between cultures. Communication is not merely the fact of a global economic system or the new communications technology. Especially it is the development of hermeneutic awareness. How does this work? We have looked closely above at the importance of the tradition as enabling us to see and understand. But here the questioning and being questioned needs to be not only from within our own culture. As we have heard often and solely the stories of our tradition, they could trap us within itself. To avoid this the questioning needs to be also from other and radically different cultures. We need to hear other stories and discover other ways of seeing and matrices for interpretation. By encountering other horizons, we can adjust our own and thereby be enabled to delve more deeply into the meaning of our own text and tradition, and to draw out new and needed insight. Note that this is not to add an alien elements from without, but to enable and facilitate our own growth in our own identity and from our own cultural heritage.

The Attitude or set of mind and heart from which hermeneutics is to be approached. From what has been said above the needed attitude certainly is not the desire to dominate others, for that would leave us trapped in our own prejudice. These would become not vantage points from which to see, but ideologies which blind. Hence, our attitude must be built upon respect for our partners in dialogue.

Hermeneutics then is not a methodological self-assuredness which closes the mind, but rather the recognition of our finitude *vis a vis* the limitless riches of our tradition as founded in the divine wisdom of the holy text and the cumulative experience and striving of our people. Our attitude of mind must be open, rather than closed.

Moreover, this openness should be not so much outward to objects, for this would add strange and alien things, resulting in the way some describe a camel: a horse made a committee. Instead, the openness, while stimulated by dialogue with others, should be especially inward. That is, the ability to listen to our own tradition, the sense that our tradition has more to say to us and that it can enable me and my people to grow organically.

This is true fidelity to a faith tradition. It means devout listening to our heritage, readiness for new experience, and eagerness to move with the experience of the people as God would guide them.

We must then be more eager to learn than to suppose; more adventurous in opening new and adapted pathways than merely to repeat the past; and more confident in the untouched riches of our tradition than fearful of losing something already assimilated.

Implication for the Hermeneutic Project: Unfolding Tradition for Life in Our Day

In conclusion, I would suggest a spirit of venture, a spirit of confidence, and a spirit of cooperation between cultures.

A Spirit of Venture. The title of Hodgson's work *The Venture of Islam* catches the deep spirit of Islam and that of its hermeneutics as well. It is concerned to protect the tradition precisely in order to put it to work in our time. This means putting it at risk with confidence in its truth and power to transform lives.

Jesus told a parable about a man who was about to travel. He called his servants together and gave each 10 drachmas. Upon his return one came to say that he had invested the 10 and made an extra 10, another reported that he had made 5. Both were highly praised. When, however, the third servant reported that he had buried his 10 so that they would not be lost they were taken from him for lack of courage and initiative.

We too may be in danger of trying so hard to protect our text and tradition that we bury it and suffocate its voice. Hermeneutics would urge us rather to give to our people the living word of God as inspiration for their life.

A Spirit of Confidence. All this is done not that in dialogue with others my tradition will dominate; that would be a spirit of pride. Nor should I worry that my vision will be dominated by others; that would be a spirit of fear. My confidence is that the truth in my tradition will manifest itself to others and especially that their response will enable my tradition to manifest more of itself to me. This is hope founded in confidence that neither my ancestors nor I have exhausted the meaning of my tradition which is founded in the infinite truth of God, but rather that my tradition has more to say to me. This is faith and it is the basis of "confidence."

A spirit of cooperation between cultures is not just a matter of sharing what we already know; it is a condition of possibility for understanding ourselves and the meaning of our own cultural heritage for our life in changing times.

This is a matter for our day. What it calls us to realize is that if there is a true multiplicity, if each differs one from the other their convergence in the One implies that they are complementary. While one is distant from the goal and/or looks upon self and others separately then they are seen as contrasting. However as one moves closer to the holy center in time but especially in awareness – that is, in the wisdom with which philosophy is concerned – these others are seen not only as sharing in the same origins and hence analogous, indeed brothers in being, but as sharing in common goal and hence companions in convergent pilgrimages.

This can have far reaching importance of *finis specificat opera* because then to learn more of the goal that is God transforms and enriches human life and strivings in all its aspects. This is often noted in relation to negative theology. That is, if our human consciousness and imagination begin to overly codify the sense of the divine goal it begins to lose its infinity and absoluteness. A negative phase is necessary to free the notion of the divine from such delimitations. In the study of Hindu philosophy Dreussen has traced (and perhaps overly traced) the revolving sequence of this dymanic from positive or affirmative statements of the absolute to negative statements, i.e., what the absolute is not and back to positive once again. Much has been written on the significance of such negative theology and its particularly appropriate character for the modern more restricted mind. Today observing other peoples' positive realizations on their separate pilgrimages can help one in a more positive manner to free one's awareness of the divine from delimiting characteristics and draw forth more of the resources of one's tradition.

Conclusion. All the above is the task of Qom, just as it is the task of Rome. They are not to be burial grounds for tradition or baskets under which we protect faint sparks of fire. Rather they must be beacons on which the flame passed to us by the messenger-prophets bursts into new brilliance to help illumine the path of humankind in a global world in search for the path ahead. This is the great jihad. I thank God for this opportunity to join with you in our common campaign.

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