ENGLISH PURITANS AND GERMAN PIETISTS: A RE-EXAMINATION OF PRECRITICAL INTERPRETATION IN LIGHT OF THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC TURN IN HERMENEUTICS

by

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B.A. The University of British Columbia, 1992
M.A. The University of British Columbia, 1993

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Comparative Literature)

We accepted this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

December 1996

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to integrate the hermeneutics of English Puritanism and German Pietism into the current hermeneutical debate. Opposing a pre-critical worldview to Charles Taylor's concept of a "silent" universe, this study argues that pre-critical hermeneutics derives from its biblical framework a moral strength and confidence which is lacking in modern philosophical hermeneutics. By analyzing the writings of Matthias Flacius (Illycrius), William Perkins, John Owen, Philipp Jacob Spener, August Hermann Francke, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Charles Taylor, this study sketches an increasing slide into subjectivism within the field of hermeneutics. This anthropocentric turn is accompanied by an increasingly secular reinterpretation of pre-critical concepts. Philosophical hermeneutics tries to overcome radical subjectivism, but does so by appealing to secularized versions of pre-critical assumptions whose foundations it no longer acknowledges. This development lies at the root of philosophical hermeneutics' unsuccessful effort to overcome subjectivism and derive an applicatory ethical dimension from a non-theistic hermeneutic.

This study also aims to expose common misconceptions about pre-critical hermeneutics. One common claim is that precritical hermeneutics did not problematize understanding itself, an insight attributed to Schleiermacher and Heideggerian ontological hermeneutics. Yet a close reading of Puritan and Pietist works shows that precritical hermeneutics went beyond merely devising technical rules for the removal of lexical and grammatical difficulties. Contrary to the claims of philosophical hermeneutics the Puritans and Pietists did perceive the difficulty of understanding ontologically. Their hermeneutics makes a claim to universal validity on the basis of a created universe and human depravity. Secondly, an assessment of the Puritan faith conceived as trust in a credible testimony dispels the common misconception of faith as irrational. The pre-critical idea of
experiential knowledge as relational allows for a balance between propositional
(‘objective’) and experiential (subjective) epistemological elements which is lacking in
modern hermeneutics.

Finally, the study shows that pre-critical hermeneuts were as aware of the
perspectivism of all human knowledge, and of its conditioning by tradition, as the current
hermeneutics of facticity. By re-admitting a neglected and misrepresented group of
precritical writers this study attempts to renew the dialogue between theological and
philosophical hermeneutics.
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Acknowledgment

This project and the completion of my Ph.D. requirements could have never been accomplished without the continuous financial and moral support provided by my parents Dr. med. Peter Zimmermann and Christa Zimmermann. I also owe a great debt of gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Dennis Danielson, whose patient guidance during the research process, and whose corrections of my persistent Germanisms in the various drafts were much needed and appreciated. Dr. Steven Taubeneck was equally helpful, especially in the initial phase of the work. It is fair to say that without his help, this project would not have made the transition from a mere idea to its present written form.

There were so many contributing factors and persons to this work that it is impossible to acknowledge them all. However, the strong backing from the successive chairs of comparative literature Dr. Kröller and especially Dr. Salumets (in cooperation with Dr. Peter Stenberg of the German Department) need to be mentioned for their willingness to provide the funding in the form of Scholarships and teaching positions during my research. Last, but not least, I want to acknowledge the help and insightful comments provided by the other members of the supervisory committee, Dr. Neufeld and Dr. Mark Vessey, and the helpful criticisms of the university readers Dr. Gernot Wieland and Dr. Olav Slaymaker.
English Puritanism and German Pietism: A Re-Examination of Precritical Hermeneutics in Light of the Anthropocentric Turn in Hermeneutics

I. Introduction

"Hermeneutics," a term which used to denote the domain of biblical interpretation, has developed to encompass a much broader field. Since the German philosopher Martin Heidegger posited hermeneutics as the very form of human existence, hermeneutics has been extended to the interpretation not only of texts, but also of art, history, indeed of human existence itself. Gerald Bruns in his work *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* describes the task and scope of hermeneutics as follows: "hermeneutics is a tradition of thinking or of philosophical reflection that tries to clarify the concept of understanding. What is it to make sense of anything, whether a poem, a legal text, a human action, a language, an alien culture, or oneself?" (1).

The development of hermeneutics in recent decades may also be expressed in terms of a shift from philology to ontology. Rather than reading texts and other objects as detached entities which are to yield their secrets through the application of scientific method, interpretation takes account of the relationship between text and interpreter. The object to be interpreted, whether it be a text, an object of art or our own self, is read in light of its as well as the reader's own ontological embeddedness in history, tradition and culture. In other words, the subject-object relation between text and interpreter has been put into question. Associated with this attempt is a movement called the New Hermeneutic. Its goal is to overcome the subjectivity of modernist interpretation and examine the authority that the object, like a text or piece of art, has over the interpreter. We are asked to listen to the text, rather than dominate it.

The roots of the general trend in hermeneutics to overcome subjectivism are hard to pinpoint. Usually Heidegger is credited with undermining Cartesian subjectivism, and his insights are seen as the basis for the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, a secular philosopher and participant in the New Hermeneutic. However, Karl Barth's *Commentary*
on Romans, whose first edition appeared in 1919, seven years prior to Heidegger’s work
Sein und Zeit (1926), already contains a critique of objective interpretation. In his
preface, Barth criticizes the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation for its
failure to recognize that understanding is not detached from history: “The critical historical
method of Biblical research has its validity. It points to the preparation for understanding
that is never superfluous. But if I had to choose between it and the old doctrine of
inspiration, I would decidedly lay hold of the latter. It has greater, deeper, more important
validity, for it points to the actual work of understanding, without which all preparation is
useless.” After pointing out the central role that the problem of understanding occupied in
pre-critical hermeneutics, Barth also points to the historicity of understanding: “But my
whole attention was directed to looking through the historical to the spirit of the Bible,
which is the eternal Spirit....The understanding of history is a continuous, increasingly
open and urgent discussion between the wisdom of yesterday and the wisdom of
tomorrow, which are one and the same” (Der Römerbrief iv).

Barth laments the obsession with method and argues that the text needs to be
interpreted as authoritative: “Of course it is my private opinion that practicing the
repristination of a classic theological train of thought regarded as ‘theology’ in the
medieval period or during Protestant scholasticism would probably be more instructive
than the chaotic business of our faculties today, for whom the concept of an authoritative
object has become foreign and uncomfortable over against the pervasive normativeness of
method” (Theologische Fragen und Antworten 74; italics Barth’s). Thus Barth already
reverses the traditional relation between subject and object, in which the subject
interrogates the object, and, if he masters it, obtains from it his answer. This is exactly the
departure point of Gadamer’s project in Truth and Method. As I will show in the last
chapter of this thesis, Gadamer’s desire to overcome subjectivity may rest to a greater
extent on theological insights (albeit secularized ones) and assumptions than he realizes.
In fact, I will argue that Gadamer’s desire for a practical, applicatory dimension in
hermeneutics relies on theological assumptions which are at odds with his renunciation of theology.

In short, hermeneutics has become much more philosophical. I want to make use of this expansion in order to re-admit a group of thinkers into the hermeneutical discussion who have been unduly neglected in the accounts of hermeneutical theory so far. Such neglect is not surprising, since these accounts are written mostly by philosophers, whereas the neglected group consists of theologians. Not only are these thinkers theologians, but they also belong to the sixteenth and seventeenth century, a further liability since this is a period whose insights are often viewed as antiquated and outmoded.

Yet perhaps the most prominent historian and theoretician of hermeneutics today, Hans-Georg Gadamer, has pointed out the importance of the past. After all, we need to understand the past in order to understand our own tradition (TM 293). However, neither Gadamer nor his interpreter and fellow proponent of philosophical hermeneutics Jean Grondin seem to realize that the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries already grappled with many of the hermeneutical questions that philosophical hermeneutics wrestles with today. Even more importantly, practitioners of theological hermeneutics actually believed they had answers. Although some of the questions raised by post-Kantian hermeneutics did not explicitly occur to the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, their hermeneutical framework does contribute possible answers to problem areas of current hermeneutical theory.

My project, then, is to re-introduce sixteenth and seventeenth century Protestant theologians into the hermeneutical debate. In doing so I hope to interpret the history of hermeneutics in terms of a paradigm shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric hermeneutical framework. The aim of this endeavor is to show that the paradigm shift was accompanied with certain losses in vital areas of hermeneutical theory and praxis.

First, in the area of biblical interpretation the shift led to historical-critical reading of the Scriptures that modified or denied the Bible's own claim to be divine revelation and
abandoned the biblical text as a unity. As a result, especially through the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher, other texts gained more importance and hermeneutics came to be conceived more broadly, comprising secular literature as well. Secondly, the dialogical nature of hermeneutics was affected. Whereas the Puritans and Pietists conducted a dialogue with the divine through the text of the Bible, later hermeneutics rejected the divine and 'flattened' the dialogue to an inter-human conversation.

This change, in turn, resulted in the third loss, namely the loss of applicability. Perhaps no other hermeneutical tradition had such a close tie between interpretation and application as that of the Puritans and Pietists. Although these theologians were by no means infallible, their dialogue with the divine provided them with the moral incentive to social activism and resulted in social improvements of decisive importance. Current philosophical hermeneutics has lost, to a great degree, moral certainty, resulting in applicatory inertia. As we will observe in a brief look at Gadamer's efforts in this area, philosophical hermeneutics has great difficulty translating theory into practice, although it claims that hermeneutics must be tied to practice in order to be true to itself (Gadamer TM 312). Philosophical hermeneutics struggles hard to emerge from the subjectivity into which it was pushed by Descartes, Kant, and Schleiermacher to formulate an action program that can overcome the inherent problems of subjectivist ethics.

In the three areas of a) biblical hermeneutics, b) the dialogical element of interpretation, and c) the applicatory dimension of hermeneutics, theologians of the sixteenth - and seventeenth century provide a corrective to current hermeneutical practice that may not be well received because of its insistence on the dialogue with the divine as starting point. It should be considered as a serious alternative nonetheless. If I observe that someone has greater success in a task to which I am also devoted, I will naturally inquire about that person's "secret." In the same way it would be useful for modern hermeneutics to throw a backward glance at the Puritans and Pietists to learn why they showed strength in areas where philosophical interpretive theory is weak. To understand
and learn from one another through dialogue is, after all, a hallmark of the hermeneutical endeavor. Beside these concrete issues, the hermeneutical narrative told from a theological perspective will also shed light on the extent to which later non-Christian hermeneutics still borrow from the older tradition, albeit in a secularized form. As my depiction of hermeneutical development will show, many formerly spiritual principles of theologians were progressively secularized and re-interpreted by those wanting to maintain meaning in a framework stripped of the divine.

The methodological structure of my project will be chronological and the chapter-divisions will follow the prominent Protestant thinkers of specific stages in history. I will first briefly outline the differences between the two philosophical frameworks under discussion. Then, beginning with the Lutheran hermeneut Flacius in Germany, I will move on to his equally influential counterpart in England, William Perkins. Rather than switch back to German Pietism, originating with Jacob Philip Spener between 1665 -1685, I will continue with the tradition of Puritanism and its greatest theologian, John Owen, followed by a comparison between Puritanism and Pietism in the next chapter. The fork in the hermeneutical road that leads to philosophical hermeneutics undoubtedly coincides with the writings of Daniel Friedrich Schleiermacher. His work and its consequences, culminating in the hermeneutic of Hans-Georg Gadamer, will be the subject of the final two chapters.

One last word should be added about my choosing exclusively Protestant thinkers and theologians. The first reason is purely pragmatic. A Protestant myself, I have been reading the Puritans for a number of years, and one naturally chooses material one is most familiar with. (That is not to deny that there are a number of eminent sixteenth and seventeenth Roman Catholic theologians who could have been used to critique philosophical hermeneutics). The second reason is one of structure. Since it is a fairly ambitious undertaking to interact with thinkers over a range of over four hundred years, any natural connection or tradition which lends coherence to such a task, which acts as a
natural heuristic device, is precious indeed. In the case of hermeneutics, the Protestant tradition is such an aid, because Schleiermacher, Gadamer and to some extent even Charles Taylor either stand within, or heavily draw on, the Protestant tradition of theology. Thus Protestant tradition provides the necessary “glue” that connects thinkers otherwise divided by centuries.

The third and last reason for choosing exclusively Protestant theologians is the former’s awareness of a need for an authority that transcends tradition. The Protestant critique of any hermeneutical approach that would concede the highest authority to the tradition of the church makes Protestant thought a better tool for the problematization of Gadamer’s insistence that understanding can occur only through human finitude and historico-traditional situatedness.
Chapter 1: The Two Frameworks

At one moment we understand our situation as one of high tragedy, alone in a silent universe without intrinsic meaning, condemned to create value. But at a later moment, the same doctrine, by its own inherent bent, yields a flattened world, in which there aren't very meaningful choices because there aren't any crucial issues. (Charles Taylor 1994)

But that some, in later days, whose more enlarged minds have by diligent search and artificial helps got clearer notices concerning the true frame and vastness of the universe... than the great part of learned men have ever dreamed of before: that, I say, any of these should have chosen it for the employment of their great intellects, to devise ways of excluding intellectual power from the contrivance of this frame of things, having so great advantages from the rest of mankind besides to contemplate and adore the great Author and Lord of all, is one of the greatest wonders that comes under our notice; and might tempt even a sober mind, to prefer vulgar and popular ignorance before their learned, philosophical deliration. (John Howe 1676)

1.1. Revelatory Hermeneutics And The Silent Universe

These two quotations show the two basic presuppositions for the enterprise of hermeneutics. The older framework is that of John Howe (1630-1705), a Puritan in the Calvinist tradition. The Calvinist interpretation of human existence was tied to two basic "texts," consisting of the "book" of nature and the super-natural\(^1\) revelation of the Scriptures. Both of these sources gave the reader access to knowledge about the divine without which true knowledge concerning human existence was impossible. John Calvin begins his *Institutes* with the famous epistemological remark that the knowledge of God and that of ourselves are connected: "Without knowledge of the self there is no knowledge of God...[and] without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self" (I, i,

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\(^1\) super-natural in the sense of additional to or going beyond natural revelation.
By knowledge Calvin does not mean scientific, empirical knowledge, but something that comes closer, in modern parlance, to "existential apprehension."

According to Calvin, we cannot understand ourselves and the human situation without reference to the divine other (ibid.). This is the basic hermeneutic circle of the theological tradition under discussion. Understanding of existence grows out of this circle, whose two halves are inseparably intertwined: "But while joined by many bonds, which [knowledge] precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern" (ibid.).

Calvin argues that even a brief glance at the universe and human beings demonstrates that the universe must have a designer. This notion is the entrance point, the whole, of the circle according to which the parts, the particulars of human existence and the divine nature, must be understood. But natural revelation can only serve as a poor source of knowledge about God, because even though the "divine wisdom" is "displayed for all to see" (I, v, 2) human interpretive ability is severely damaged by the effects of sin. Thus the Word of God is the better and more exact source of revelation, where "God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us" (I, vi, 1).

The Puritans adopted Calvin's epistemology and made it the basis for their practical piety. Right living, according to the Puritan mind, could be achieved only through a proper perception of human existence, which in turn is possible only through a relation with the divine creator and maker of all things. The most popular manual of practical piety in the seventeenth century was Louis Bayly's (1565-1631) The Practice of Piety (first edition ca. 1600). In the opening paragraphs Bayly instructs the reader that the practice of piety consists in "knowing the essence of God" and "[i]n knowing thy own

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2 As John T. McNeill, the editor of Calvin's Institutes in the Library of Christian Classics edition points out, this hermeneutical circle is not original with Calvin but is mentioned already in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas (page 36 n3). Augustine in his Soliloquies I.ii.7, states: "I desire to know God and the soul. Nothing more? Nothing whatever. "; and in II.ii.1 Augustine prays: "Let me know myself, let me know you."
self" (1). Bayly explains the connection of this hermeneutical circle with practical living thus:

Unless a man doth truly know God, he neither can nor will worship him aright; for how can a man love him whom he knoweth not? ....And how shall a man seek remedy by grace, who never understood his misery by nature? ....And forasmuch as there can be no true piety without the knowledge of God; nor any good practice without the knowledge of man's own self; we will therefore lay down the knowledge of God's majesty, and man's misery, as the first and chiefest grounds of the Practice of Piety. (ibid. 2)

Here we find Calvin's hermeneutical insight made the basis of practical living. Only in dialogue with the divine can we gain true knowledge about ourselves, and only then will we be able to direct our actions properly. Bayly also mentions the two important poles upon which the entire hermeneutical structure and its understanding of human existence rests: the holiness of God and the sinfulness of human beings. For the Puritans, as well as for the Pietists, true self-knowledge began with the realization that God exists, but it didn't end there. The content of belief was dependent on God's character and attributes. Self-knowledge also meant the interpretation of humanity in terms of God's sovereignty and holiness with all their consequences for sinful man. This theocentric view was the hermeneutical starting point for the Puritans and the early Pietists.

We also find Calvin's basic hermeneutical structure in the writings of perhaps the greatest Puritan theologian, John Owen (1616-1683). Owen writes that: "The sum of all true wisdom and knowledge may be reduced to these three heads: - I. The knowledge of God, his nature and his properties. II. The knowledge of ourselves in reference to the will of God concerning us. III. Skill to walk in communion with God" (On Communion with God, WJO 2: 80). Owen, however, further refines this thought by adding that all three components are attainable only through a relationship with Christ. "Not any of them is to any purpose to be obtained, or is manifested, but only in and by the Lord Jesus Christ" (ibid.).
We need to pause for a moment and summarize the several aspects of the theological framework of Puritanism. First, the binary opposition of man's sinfulness and God's holiness is an essential feature of an understanding of reality. It is from the presupposition that humanity is a fallen race, capable of the greatest evil and limited in its finite knowledge and apprehension of human existence, that the whole Calvinistic philosophy of life is constructed. In Puritan eyes, the sinful condition is a hindrance both for social justice and for the spiritual well-being of every person. The cause of this condition is a separation from God which resulted in a cessation of the human dialogue with the divine and precipitates the permanent human bent to egocentric behaviour. The only remedy is a reconciliation with God and a re-establishment of the dialogue through Christ. Since, according to the Puritans, humanity was created for communion with God, the loss of this relationship renders humans aimless and blindly groping for a purpose in life. In this state the interpretation of human existence becomes subjective, because without the divine object of conversation, the universe is "flattened" or "silent," as Charles Taylor expresses it in the citation above.

Secondly, knowledge for the Puritans is existential in that it is bound up with a personal relation to the divine object of knowledge. Owen believes that conventional notions of knowledge such as "civil wisdom and prudence, for the management of affairs" or "[a]bility of learning and literature", though important, are "of no use at all to the end and intent of true wisdom" (On Communion with God, WJO 2:80). Instead, the source of this wisdom is the divine. This is the important link to Scripture as revelation which makes Puritanism such a genuinely hermeneutical movement. Every area of human life is influenced by the reading, interpretation, and application of the biblical text.

Another corollary of Puritan epistemology is the realization that knowledge can never be objective in the sense of scientific rationalism. The knowing subject is always bound by its finitude, and its horizon does not extend beyond earthly existence. Richard Baxter in his treatise The Reasons of the Christian Religion (1666) laments the finitude of
human understanding: "...but alas! how poor and uncertain a thing is man's understanding! How many are deceived in things that seem as undeniable to them! How know I what one particular may be unseen by me which would change my judgment and better inform me in all the rest?" (PWRB 2:76). The human mind, argues Baxter, is much too bound up in this historical world to make deductions and to form a perspective that transcends its finite horizon. In order to make universally valid truth statements concerning human existence the mind would have to take into account all existent facts. One would need a god-like omnipotence which transcends time and historical boundaries, a position that is humanly impossible. He concludes: "This is not well; but it is a disease which sheweth the need of a physician, and of some other satisfying light" (ibid.). This "other satisfying light" is divine revelation. Without it, we are "stopped in our way by tediousness, difficulty, and a subjective uncertainty about the end and duty of man" (ibid.). To assume a position of knowledge which pretends to transcend the finite human horizon would be to assume the position of God. "Man would sit in the seat of God," says the Puritan Steven Charnock, and in John Milton's Paradise Lost Satan tempts Eve with the promise that she will become God-like by eating from the tree of knowledge (PL V II.75-80).

For the Puritans there was only one source of knowledge that transcended the human horizon: divine revelation. Every Puritan treatise on the question of revelation mentions two books, or texts that are to be interpreted, namely the book of nature, and the Bible. Both yield, in different ways and to a different degree, knowledge about the divine.

The Puritans lived in a hermeneutical universe that was endowed with meaning by its creator God. They commonly took as the basis for this claim statements like the apostle Paul's observation in his epistle to the Romans, chapter one: "Since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his divine nature and eternal power have been clearly seen, having been understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse." Or from Psalm 19:1: "The heavens declare the glory of God." The two important
components of this "book of nature" were the universe itself, with its natural laws, design and order, and also mankind itself. For all their talk about human depravity, Puritan treatises on the knowledge of God always celebrate the magnificent design of the human body and the astounding intellectual capacities of the mind. The Puritan Steven Charnock, for example, in his work *The Existence and Attributes of God* (n.d.), goes through most of the vital human organs to describe their purposeful design. He concludes that "the whole model of the body is grounded upon reason....The whole symmetry of the body is a ravishing object. Every member hath a signature and mark of God and his wisdom" (WSC 1:64-66).

The noblest faculty is the human mind with its capacity of understanding. For Charnock, the term "soul" comprises the entire inner life of the human being and is what sets man apart from the animal: "This soul hath a greater excellency; it can know itself, rejoice in itself, which other creatures in this world are not capable of. The soul is the greatest glory of this lower world" (ibid. 67). It also contains the conscience, another indicator for Charnock that there must be a divine creator.

Man in the first instant of the use of reason finds natural principles within himself; directing and choosing them, he finds a distinction between good and evil; how could this be if there were not some rule in him to try and distinguish good and evil....If man were a law unto himself, there could be no such thing as evil; whatsoever he willed, would be good and agreeable to the law, and no action could be accounted sinful; the worst act would be as commendable as the best....Common reason supposeth that there is some hand which hath fixed this distinction in [humankind]; how could it else be universally impressed? No law can be without a lawgiver. (*Existence and Attributes of God*, WSC 1:70)

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* Charnock's description of the ear is most interesting, for he adds that "it is the gate of knowledge, whereby we hear the oracles of God, and the instruction of men for arts. It is by this they are exposed to the mind of another man framed in our understandings" (*Works* I 65). It seems that generally the "ear-gate" to use Bunyan's term, was the most important of the senses for the Puritan, probably in connection with the passage from Romans: "Consequently faith comes by hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). But note also Charnock's realization that "the mind of another man" is "framed" in our "understanding through language heard through the ear"(1, 65). Through their training in rhetoric, the Puritans were well aware of the importance of language for the conveyance of ideas.
The evidences of this book of nature for the Puritans were clear; there must be a designer, a being of higher ontological order. Depending on the Puritan author and the occasion of the treatise, the natural revelation is given varying degrees of clarity. Some, like John Howe in his *Temple*, for example, painstakingly deduce feature after feature, divine attribute after divine attribute from the evidence in nature and mankind. Likewise Richard Baxter can exclaim: "except [for] his incarnate and his written word [Christ and the Bible], what glass revealeth [God] so clearly as the soul of man?" (PWRB 1:803). In other words, if we read ourselves closely enough, we must naturally conclude that there is a God: "man is both the beholder and the glass, the reader and the book: he is the index of the God-head to himself" (ibid., 804).

However, the problem is that human understanding is corrupted by the fall. And Baxter agrees in his writing with John Owen that "[t]hough men know God by the light of nature, yet they cannot come to God by that knowledge" (An Exposition of Psalm 130, WJO 6: 428). Detailed and intimate self-knowledge and knowledge of God is only possible through the Scriptures, the second and most important book of revelation. Man is ignorant of his sinful state before God and his need of communion with him. The way of regaining the personal dialogue with the divine is not written in the book of nature, but revealed, as Baxter put it, through the "incarnate and written word." Similarly, John Owen states: "The consideration of the works of God's creation will not help a man to this knowledge, that there is forgiveness with God" (Power of Indwelling Sin in Believers, WJO 6: 287). For the Puritan theologian, the noetic influence of sin and its morally destructive force make it impossible to assess human existence correctly. Even where the mind could avail itself of natural revelation to overcome a merely subjective judgment, the natural inclination of the human will is to oppose anything that has to do with the divine. Steven Charnock states that, "[w]e have naturally 1.no desire of remembrance of [God]"

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4 Full title: "The Nature, Power, Deceit, And Prevalency Of The Remainders Of Indwelling Sin In Believers" (1668).
2. Or converse with him, 3. Or a thorough return to him, 4. Or close imitation of him: as if there were not any such being as God in the world; or as if we wished there were none at all; so feeble and spiritless are our thoughts of the being of God" (Existence and Attributes, WSC I 159).

Because of human finitude and inability to rise above self-centered vision, a voice and perspective from outside the human horizon is needed. The Bible was believed to be this revelation. The Puritans believed it to be inspired by God. Their view of inspiration extends from statements about the inspiration of the content to what sometimes almost amounts to verbal dictation theory. George Swinnock (1627-1673), for example, claims that, "[n]ot only the notions but the very phrases and words were imprinted on [the biblical authors], and infused into them by God himself" (The Christian Man's Calling, Works of George Swinnock 2:431). However the process of inspiration was described by the various Puritan theologians, they univocally expressed that the Bible is "the word of God as it is contained in the Old and New Testament" (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q2). The Puritan theologian Thomas Watson (1620-1686) captures the general Puritan attitude toward the Bible with his characteristically earthy style: "The two Testaments are the two lips by which God has spoken to us" (Body of Divinity 26).

This brief sketch of the interpretive framework in which the Puritan hermeneutic operated will be developed in more detail in the following chapters, but it must suffice for the present as a contrast to the presuppositions of philosophical hermeneutics. In a nutshell, every person needs the personal dialogue with the divine and the instruction of the Scriptures for living a life pleasing to God and profitable to society. Divine revelation as given through the text of the Bible was central to this theological world-view, and its reading was inseparably tied to application. The Scriptures were, after all, the mind of God communicated through human language not for mere pleasure, but for the practical purpose of restoring the image of God in human beings. The Puritans called this process of restoration "sanctification," which was generally defined as "a work of God's grace
whereby we are renewed in the whole [being] according to the image of God..." (WSC Q.35).

One last important aspect must be mentioned which sets the Puritan (and Pietist) hermeneutic apart from other approaches based on human-divine dialogue. The Puritan/Pietist hermeneutic is above all Christological. Puritan commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews show their adoption of the author’s assumption that “God who at various times and in divers ways spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom he also he made the worlds” (Heb.1: 1-2).

The Puritans interpreted Christ’s coming to be the ultimate encounter between God and mankind. In distinction to many other forms of religion, Christ was to be regarded as God who reveals himself in word and deed. Christ was so central that Owen re-reads Calvin’s hermeneutical circle in terms of Christ: no knowledge of self or God is possible but through Christ and his word (On Communion with God, WJO 2:78 ff). This revelation was final so that the generations after Christ’s death were bound to the biblical text to the exclusion of fresh revelations: “It is the final, the finishing revelation, given forth in the last days of divine revelation, to which nothing is to be added, but the canon of scripture is to be settled and sealed; so the minds of men are no longer kept in suspense by the expectation of new discoveries” (Matthew Henry’s Commentary On The Whole Bible 6:717).

Christ was perceived as a living present reality, the mediator for communion with God. The content of this communion was determined by the written revelation. Their insistence on tying spiritual experience to the revealed written word sets the Puritan hermeneutic apart from other spiritual movements like Quakerism, Paracelcism, Böhmism and other forms of mysticism which relied on an inner light for new revelations. The Puritan framework, then, is one of a created universe in which hermeneutics was
conducted in form of a dialogue with the divine through Christ and by means of an 
authoritative written revelation.

The framework of philosophical hermeneutics is represented by the quotation from 
Charles Taylor. In contrast to the theological presuppositions I have just described, he 
conducts interpretation in a "silent universe." The "silent universe" of current philosophy 
and hermeneutical theory is a universe without the divine. It is silent because there is no 
referent outside the finite human horizon. As a result, a general shift takes place from a 
theocentric perspective to an anthropocentric hermeneutical stance. Whereas the Puritans 
needed knowledge of the divine and a relation with it in order to understand existence, 
philosophical hermeneutics operates, according to Gadamer, "unsupported by revelation" 
(Origins of Philosophical Hermeneutics 183). Thus self-knowledge can be gained only 
from the flow and contingency of human insights and history. Taylor describes the two 
frameworks thus: "The essential difference can perhaps be put in this way: the modern 
subject is self-defining, where on previous views the subject is defined in relation to a 
cosmic order" (Hegel 6). Taylor, I believe correctly, defines Descartes' rationalism as the 
pivotal moment of this paradigm shift. With Descartes, the human self becomes the 
measure of reliable knowledge.5 Taylor also makes the following very important 
statement:

Understanding the world in categories of meaning, as existing to embody or 
express an order of Ideas or archetypes, as manifesting the rhythm of divine life, or 
the foundational acts of the gods, or the will of God; seeing the world as a text, or

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5 Taylor's term of cosmic order is rather confusing, especially since he then argues that Calvinism 
contributed to the dismantling of this order (Hegel 5 ff). Taylor links Calvin's assertion of a cosmic 
order to the legitimization of a certain social structure. In this he may be correct, although Calvin 
himself, despite attacking its shortcomings relentlessly, was reluctant to induce actual structural change 
(Bouwsma 72-75; Graham 73 ff.). When, however, Taylor speaks of the general "readability" of the 
universe concerning God's existence and even his attributes (as his statement: "Calvin and his followers 
helped to destroy the sense that the creation was a locus of meaning in relation to which man had to 
define himself" seems to imply), then he is wrong. As my examination of Puritan writers shows, Calvinist 
theologians generally insisted that the universe bears in some way the image of God, and that the reading 
of the cosmos should induce the 'reader' to seek more information in the revelation of God in order to 
conform to the reality of the creationist framework.
the universe as a book (a notion which Galileo still makes use of) - this kind of interpretive vision of things which in one form or another played such an important role in many pre-modern societies may appear to us as the paradigm of anthropomorphic projection onto the world, suitable to an age in which man was not fully adult (Hegel 5).

Taylor adequately describes how modernism with its scientific objectivism read its past. Hans-Georg Gadamer also mistrusts such simplifications: "The customary Enlightenment formula, according to which the process of the demagicification of the world leads necessarily from myth to logos, seems to me to be a modern prejudice" (On The Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection, PhH 51). I want to join Gadamer and Taylor in their plea to move away from such an analysis of the past, because it is in itself an illusionary construct based on the premise that humanity is on an ever progressing path to intellectual and moral maturity. Taylor, whose work deals with the conceptions of the human self, asks for a correction of such a self-righteous attitude toward the past: "Instead of seeing the issue between Galileo and the Paduan philosophers, between modern science and medieval metaphysics, as a struggle between two tendencies in the self, one deploying comforting illusions, the other facing stern realities, we might see it as a revolution in the basic categories in which we understand self" (ibid.). In principle, the same caution is needed in comparing philosophical hermeneutics with theological interpretation. It is important to realize that the basic world-view of the Puritans, based on a Judeo-Christian world view, is not less plausible because it lies in the past. To judge it inferior on this ground alone would mean to follow uncritically the Enlightenment view of the past. For any genuine dialogue it is important to let the other horizon present itself as a truly alternative viewpoint before judgment is passed.

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6 Gadamer's unshakable belief in the good-will and inherent goodness of humankind, which governs the practical application of his hermeneutics, is itself a remnant of Enlightenment philosophy, although it is most likely that Gadamer received this belief from the original sources (Plato, Aristotle) in Greek philosophy.
My project is itself a hermeneutical enterprise, because it tries to mediate between the past and the present. For such a project it is important to remain open to the past; thus the modernist attitude of superiority to earlier thinkers, especially when they are theologians, must be overcome if a genuine dialogue is to occur. The framework of philosophical hermeneutics and modernist biblical criticism has no more intrinsic claim to validity than do the basic principles outlined by the theological hermeneutical framework.

There is, of course, no doubt that much scientific data was unknown to the thinkers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. However, when it comes to theoretical hermeneutics, including the interpretation of human existence and moral action, the Puritan writers have to be approached as equals, or perhaps even as superiors, since they lived at a time when tough physical conditions automatically weeded out impractical theories. Let us not forget that the two thinkers who most profoundly influenced hermeneutics, Kant and Schleiermacher, lived quiet and uneventful lives in comparison to many Puritan theologians. In his later years the most exciting activity of Kant was his daily stroll in Königsberg (Copleston 6:180), and Schleiermacher's social work consisted mostly in seeking the company of cultured dialogue-partners in Berlin's Cafés. The Puritans, by contrast, worked in the trenches of human misery and doubt, facing civil war, the plague and persecution. The point is that we should regard these thinkers as equal partners in a dialogue with philosophical hermeneutics, and not as inferior by default, merely because they held a different world view, or lived at an earlier time. It is in fact the difference of their hermeneutical presupposition which may help to show the weaknesses of philosophical hermeneutics.

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7 Biblical criticism is here meant to denote not the grammatical historical efforts necessary for exegesis and interpretation, but the assumed objective interpretative stance that approaches texts with the modernist attitude of superiority described by Taylor.

8 Copleston describes Kant's life as "comparatively uneventful." Only once "did Kant come into collision with political authority," in connection with his Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone. However, even then he was not in danger of his life or deprivation of livelihood (ibid. 183).
1.2. Does It Matter Who Tells The Story?

The principal purpose of this project is from a theological perspective to re-tell the change from pre-critical (theological) to philosophical hermeneutics in an effort to complement current accounts of hermeneutical history. In this short section I want to substantiate the usefulness of such a work by briefly looking at some recent examples that demonstrate the need for a different bias. Jean Grondin, in the introduction to his hermeneutical survey, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*,\(^9\) tries to show the uniqueness of philosophical hermeneutics. He states that

> until the end of the nineteenth-century [hermeneutics] usually took the form of a theory that promised to lay out the rules governing the discipline of interpretation. Its purpose was predominantly normative, even technical. Hermeneutics limited itself to giving methodological directions to the specifically interpretative sciences, with the end of avoiding arbitrariness in interpretation as far as possible. (1)

Grondin goes on to say that the formulation of specific ancillary hermeneutics during the Renaissance such as *hermeneutica sacra, hermeneutica profana* and *hermeneutica juris* shows the "auxiliary" nature of hermeneutics at that time. Philosophical hermeneutics, by contrast, is universal. This universality means that, "hardly limited to such purely interpretative sciences as scriptural exegesis, classical philology, and law, the horizon of interpretation comprehends all the sciences and modes of orienting one's life" (24).

Grondin summarizes the contrast between philosophical hermeneutic theory and earlier approaches as follows:

> We will take interpretation as referring to what occurs when a really or apparently unfamiliar meaning is made intelligible. Hermeneutic theory concerns itself with just this process of interpretation. This seems unimportant enough if interpretation were taken to be merely a tiny fraction of human experience. It assumes universal relevance, however, as soon as we become aware that all human behaviour is based on making sense of things, even if only consciously; and ultimately this is the

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\(^9\) All further references to this work will be abbreviated as PhH.
best evidence for the universal claim of hermeneutics. Beginning in the twentieth century this universality penetrated philosophical consciousness, whereas earlier, apart from a few exceptions, the process of interpretation was treated as a special and local problem, governed by auxiliary normative disciplines within the individual interpretative sciences. (19)

The statement that "all human behaviour is based on making sense of things" is usually accredited to Heidegger and his work Sein und Zeit. It is wrong for Grondin to assume, however, that earlier hermeneutics were less universal because they were not conscious of this principle. Rather than there being "a few exceptions," the general outlook of the reading culture that involved biblical literature realized very well that human behavior must be based on understanding one's existence. To mention only one example, in the biblical wisdom literature it is constantly pointed out that how one understands the world will deeply influence one's behavior. The book of Proverbs, for instance, opens with the lines: "...to know wisdom and instruction/to discern the sayings of understanding/to receive instruction in wise behavior, doing what is right, just, and fair...let the wise listen and increase in learning, /And the discerning will acquire wise counsel (1:1-5)." As we have already seen, the practical piety of the Puritans also directly connects knowledge of the truth with moral conduct. Likewise, Augustine makes clear in his Confessions that the universal hermeneutical project of humankind is to find happiness and "true happiness is to rejoice in the truth." 10 The realization that "all human behaviour is based on making sense of things" is not a new feature brought in by modern consciousness but has been the premise of theological thinking all along.

More specifically, biblical exegesis, at least in pre-critical theological hermeneutics, was never only a technical exercise where a detached observer dissected the text without any considerations of his/her own bias. As we have already seen and as we will learn further from the works of hermeneuts like Flacius, Perkins and Owen, theological

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10 According to Augustine, the desire for truth is universal: "This is the happiness that all desire. All desire this, the only state of happiness. All desire to rejoice in truth. I have known many men who wished to deceive, but none who wished to be deceived" (X, 23/229).
hermeneutics made as sweeping a claim to universality as did post-Heideggerian interpretation. All knowledge and understanding were predicated on the assumption of a created universe. But it was especially in the understanding of moral and spiritual things that understanding was regarded as a gift from God existing in a conversion, or change of perspective. Since the whole human race was regarded as contaminated by sin, every human being required regenerating grace in order to gain access to God's perspective. And even then, knowledge was seen as a continuous growth universally dependent on God's grace. Baxter puts it this way: "Moreover, it is most certain that when God calls us at first to the knowledge of his truth, he findeth us in darkness; and though he bring us thence into a marvellous light (Acts xxvi. 18; 1 Pet. ii. 9) yet he doth this by degrees, and not into the fullest light or measure of knowledge at the first" (PWRB 2:387).

Related to the misconception that precritical hermeneutics is less universal than philosophical hermeneutics, is Grondin's distinction of theological and philosophical hermeneutics. He implies that the latter is more concerned with universality than the former: "What is correct in the classical representation of hermeneutic history, is the idea that early hermeneutics resembled a technical theory, and as a rule such theory was of much less universal application than present-day philosophical hermeneutics"(3). Contrary to Grondin's claim, however, theological hermeneutics is not merely technical but clearly universal in application, since application is its primary motivation. If a revelation from the divine creator of all things exists, then its teachings are to be read because they concern the reader in every sphere of life. Certainly, the rules for interpretation that were comprised under the category of hermeneutics prior to "philosophical hermeneutics" are technical, but only in the sense that the pre-philosophical hermeneutic recognized a certain

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11 Baxter goes on to say that "we are in the beginning but babes of knowledge. It cannot be expected, that a man that was born blind, with an indiposition of understanding to spiritual things, and that hath lived in blindness long, should presently know all things as soon as he is converted. They do not come so to knowledge in earthly things, which they are more disposed to know, and which are nearer to them, much less in heavenly things. The dispositive blindness of the best convert, is cured but in part, much less his actual blindness" (ibid.).
written text as the source of God's revelation and therefore concentrated its efforts on the correct reading of that text. Yet this reading was, as Gadamer himself admits, always performed with an eye to application. And each reading affected the complete horizon of the reader (TM 307-340).

The real difference between the philosophical hermeneutic and the pre-philosophical approaches lies in their respective theistic and atheistic/agnostic presuppositions, not in their differing degree of universality. What exactly Grondin means by the term "universalist hermeneutic" is not entirely clear, and this ambiguity is caused by Grondin's neglect of the strong theological background according to which his proto-universalists such as, for example, Jacob Spener's teacher Johann Dannhauer (1603-1666) have to be understood. For one, Dannhauer did not come up with anything innovative when he used rhetoric and logic for scriptural interpretation, as well as for other texts (IPH 19). The majority of academically trained theologians in both Germany and England did exactly the same.12 Dannhauer can hardly be described as a forerunner of philosophical hermeneutics, but, like many Lutheran and Reformed orthodox theologians, he opposed rationalism and unbelief by standing on God's word as the ultimate authority in matters of faith and salvation. As recent scholarship has shown (cf. Mueller and Preus), these men used philosophical terms to defend a biblical world view (Leube Orthodoxie und Pietismus, AGP 13:48).

Another problem with Grondin's approach is that on the one hand he wants to draw a distinction between universal (philosophical) and local (pre-philosophical i.e. theological) hermeneutics, while on the other hand he takes the central element in his approach, the *verbum interius*, from Gadamer, who in turn claims to have learned this concept from Augustine (xiv), a theologian who based the inner word on the image of

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12 John Morgan, in his study on Puritan education, *Godly Learning*, provides evidence for this claim and quotes one Puritan Bernard as saying: "Rhetorick is an Art sanctified by God's Spirit, and may be lawfully used in the handling of God's word" (108).
God in man. The problem becomes especially apparent when Grondin refers at the end of his book to the *verbum interius* as reason ("...the inner logos, the most basic theme of hermeneutics, which has long since promised and been called, reason"; IPH 144). If the *verbum interius* is indeed to be equated with reason, and reason is what "liberates us for the possibility of being human; is the realm of free and measured reflection," then not only have we returned to the unfounded Enlightenment trust in human reason (despite its now recognized finite perspective), but we also do violence to Augustine, who formulated the notion of the inner word in the context of human depravity. This notion includes the fallenness of man's rational faculty, so that to take recourse to that faculty for a better self-understanding and "possibility of being human" would, at least in Augustine's view, lead to self-delusion, because the sin-affected human mind is in need of illumination from the divine light (*On the Position of the Pelagians* 3,7).

In other words, Gadamer's and Grondin's use of the Augustinian logos-doctrine in their approach to hermeneutics is based on a certain assumption about human nature and ability that seriously stretches, if not distorts, Augustine's teaching. We shall return to this point when describing Gadamer's use of the dialogical in hermeneutic endeavours, but suffice it to say for now that their use of Augustine's "inner word" secularizes a concept which is firmly grounded in a biblical framework. Augustine could claim that understanding was possible, because God has endowed humans with a structure of rationality patterned after the divine ideas in his own mind so that we can know truth, because God has made us like himself. A harmony or correlation exists therefore between the mind of God, the human mind, and the rational structure of the word (Nash 81). Therefore the inner word exists for Augustine only because there is a creator God. Moreover, for Augustine the whole idea of the inner reason is imbedded in a context of

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13 The reference is in book XIV of *De trinitate*, mainly paragraph 9 and following, where Augustine speaks about the production of the inner word as the memory of the image of God: "Here then is the mind, remembering itself, understanding itself, loving itself. Perceiving this, we perceive a trinity - a trinity still less than God, but already an image of God" (§ 11).
eternal ideas and absolute, timeless truths and is thus contrary to the relativizing truth-concept of philosophical hermeneutics.

This short examination of the two interpretive frameworks shows that the perspective from which hermeneutics is described is very important. It matters "who tells the story." The secularization and transference of theological concepts into the non-theistic paradigm of philosophical hermeneutics is highly problematic. Grondin's assessment lacks the theological context within which ideas such as Augustine's "inner word" must be understood.14 The same is true for an assessment of pre-critical hermeneutics. Rather than proving the usefulness of separating theological from philosophical hermeneutics according to their degrees of universality, Grondin demonstrates the difficulty of such an approach. Also, one cannot so easily dismiss pre-philosophical hermeneutics as mere technical views, as Grondin does in his work. Upon close examination we will find that not only did philological and narrative criticism play a role in their exegesis, but the exegetes of the Bible also dealt in great depth with the problem of understanding. Hermeneutics, even long before the philosophical hermeneutic, has always been concerned with self-understanding. John Calvin summarized this position well when he stated that "without knowledge of self there is no knowledge of God" (I, i, 1). Conversely, true self-knowledge can be derived only from reading the Bible: "we

14 Grondin's very clear and highly readable presentation of the material makes this lack especially noticeable. In chapter seven of his Sources of Hermeneutics entitled "Gadamer and Augustine: On the Origins of the Hermeneutical Claim to Universality", one finds the best description to date of Gadamer's debt to a secularized Augustine. Despite Grondin's claim to the contrary, it becomes strikingly clear that Gadamer's language theory needs a theological grounding both in respect of the dialogical aspect of hermeneutics and the concept of "the inner word." Grondin states: "The Augustinian theory turns out, in fact, to be very graphic in that the words we use cannot, just because they occur to us, exhaust what we have 'in mind' (i.e. the dialogue that we are). The inner word 'behind' the expressed word is nothing other than this dialogue or this intimate connection of language with our inquiring and self-inquiring existence." Just like Heidegger, though, neither Gadamer nor Grondin can account for the human urge to inquire. Augustine could. It was the natural urge of a creature created in the image of God. Furthermore, Augustine saw the ultimate use of inner reason in conversing with the greatest rational mind, God, while maintaining also the experiential side of hermeneutics. Philosophical hermeneutics, by contrast, has lost this goal. Here language is only the medium "for the (inner) dialogue that we are for ourselves and for each other" (Sources of Hermeneutics 109).
must come, I say, to the Word, where God is truly and vividly described to us from his works" (I, vi, 4). Both the theologian and the philosopher, at least in hermeneutics, desire a universal application of their theory. They "merely" differ in their sources and assumptions.

Given the theological roots of hermeneutics, it would be helpful to examine the history of hermeneutics through a theological lens for two reasons. First, the history of hermeneutics and its universality grows out of the reading and application of the Bible, or of other religious literature that had authoritative status as it popularized biblical teaching and therefore demanded life-application. Secondly, in Western thought even those approaches which rejected the theological roots of hermeneutics are secularized versions of theological interpretation and can be better understood if seen as a derivation rather than something new and different.

My thesis project lies within the framework of such a reading of hermeneutical history. This work attempts to counterbalance the deficiency which is so apparent in Grondin's hermeneutical survey by examining the roots of modern hermeneutics and perhaps also by showing, as a byproduct of their investigation, that pre-critical hermeneutics were as philosophical (in the widest sense of the word) and universal as post-modernist hermeneutics. The main focus will be the period of the seventeenth century, notably the phenomenon of Pietism in England and Germany. The hermeneutics of Pietism are of special interest for several reasons. First, they exhibit a text-to-action model which is unrivaled in the history of the church except for its beginnings. As a continuation of the Reformation, the Pietist movements involved not, as is often supposed, a quiet self-absorbed asceticism but rather a vital revival movement of great social impact and eschatological vision. Perhaps never before in Protestantism was textual application practiced so radically as among the English Puritans and the early German Pietists.

Secondly, as a fulfillment of the comparative requirements of this thesis, a comparison between German Pietism and English Puritanism will show that the two are
essentially identical in their outlook even though the Puritans are theologically more rigorous and stand in a Calvinist rather than a Lutheran tradition. Thirdly, it is the practical theology exhibited by the Puritan and Pietist writers which may yield valid insights for present day theology and philosophy, as both struggle with postmodern loss of center, values and tradition.

The occupation with hermeneutic history and development by theorists such as Gadamer and Jean Grondin have set an important precedent by bringing men like Flacius and Dannhauer to our attention again, but their accounts lack depth when it comes to the early modern period of hermeneutical history, tending to ignore the theological context in which these earlier writers conducted their hermeneutics. It is my aim, then, to complement Grondin's effort at a hermeneutical survey, but I would also like to do more than that by considering seriously the hermeneutical consequences of both the "silent universe" and the created one, where the dialogue with the divine creator makes genuine and purpose-oriented dialogical hermeneutics possible. I hope to show that hermeneutics conducted in a silent universe is greatly weakened in the area of moral application, whereas moral confidence is a strength in the theological framework of pre-critical hermeneutics.

Having delineated my main goal, I now begin my survey with an individual in hermeneutical history who is commonly regarded to represent a kind of a starting point for hermeneutical method.
Chapter II: The Hermeneutics of Matthias Flacius (Illyricus)

Introduction: Why Flacius?

It was Wilhelm Dilthey who credited Protestantism with the founding of both historical criticism and the science of hermeneutics (Gesammelte Schriften 2:115).\(^1\) Within this context, Dilthey revived Flacius for hermeneutical history and described him as a key figure for the further development of hermeneutics, a status which Flacius has retained with recent hermeneutical historians (cf. Grondin IPH 23; Maier, Biblical Hermeneutics 338). According to Dilthey, Flacius represents the first systematic response to a two-pronged Catholic attack on the Protestant affirmation of the Scriptures as a self-interpreting text (Dilthey, GS 2:117). The purpose of the Catholic theologians was to prove the insufficiency of scriptural authority, which they saw as needing to be supplemented by the teachings of Roman Catholic tradition.

The first line of attack was an attempted demonstration of the coherence of patristic interpretation as a witness against Protestant hermeneutics, an attempt which was quickly dispatched by the Reformers. The second Catholic charge, against the clarity and sufficiency of the Scriptures for matters of faith and moral practice, was less easy to defuse. The Protestant notion of faith as trust in credible (meaning factually correct) testimony required belief in the truthfulness of God’s revelation. Especially the doctrine of justification by faith alone, the main pillar of the Protestant Reformation, was at stake in the discussion about the biblical text’s reliability and authority. Thus the debate about doctrines was inextricably interwoven with the issue of the Scripture’s reliability as divine

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\(^1\) Dilthey writes: "Nicht exegetische Kunst oder Versuche der Reflexion über dieselbe, aber wohl die hermeneutische Wissenschaft beginnt erst mit dem Protestantismus. Denn die hermeneutischen Stellen des Origenes und der Antiochener, die sieben Regeln des Tychonius, selbst was Augustin im dritten Buche seiner christlichen Lehre und Iunilius im zweiten seiner bekannten Schrift ...vollständig entwickelt haben, so wichtig alle diese Schriften für die Geschichte des Kanons und der Dogmen sind: eine wissenschaftliche Bearbeitung kann man doch diese zumeist vereinzelt aufgezählten, immer aber ohne bindendes Prinzip zusammengehäuften Sätze nicht nennen" (115).
revelation (as may be seen from both Flacius' and, later, Perkins and Owen’s reactions to
the Roman Catholic theologian and polemicist Robert Bellarmine [1542-1621]).

The Roman Catholic side, in order to substantiate their claim for extra-biblical
authority, went so far as to argue that the Scriptures had been corrupted by the Jews so
that no doctrinal decision may be made on the basis of the text alone. Such claims
evoked several efforts by Protestants to provide hermeneutical ground-rules for scriptural
interpretation, of which Flacius' was the most sustained and influential (ibid. 117).

Flacius wrote many polemical and historical works, but his most discussed legacy
is the Clavis Scripturae Sacrae (1547). Both Flacius and his work have been re­
introduced into contemporary hermeneutical discussion via Dilthey’s assessment of him as
the founder of modern hermeneutics. Dilthey correctly points to Flacius as a good
starting point for any reformational and post-reformational hermeneutical study, because
in the Clavis he attempted to systematize Luther's practice of Scripture translation and
exegesis (Geldsaetzer ii). Thus for our study too, Flacius’ importance lies in his role as
the first systematizer of hermeneutical rules on the Lutheran side, who strongly influenced
other writers of hermeneutical manuals such as William Perkins. Perkins, in turn, was the
first great English systematizing theologian after the Reformation, whose guide-book on

2 John Owen refers extensively to Bellarmines’s arguments throughout his writings. For the connection
between hermeneutics and doctrinal controversy see especially volume five of his Works “The Doctrine of
Justification by Faith” pp. 80-83.

3 “Der Begründer der neueren Hermeneutik.” W.Dilthey, “Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik,” 1900

4 Geldsaetzer states: “Flacius Illyricus gilt in dem Sinne als Begründer einer eigenständigen
Protestantischen Hermeneutik, als er die Praxis der Lutherischen Schriftauslegung und -übersetzung in
eine Lehre gefasst und in epochal wirksamer Form dargeboten hat.” Similarly, Johannes Wach in Das
Verstehen: Grundzüge einer Geschichte der hermeneutischen Theorie im 19. Jahrhundert, Band I,
Tübingen 1926, argues: "The Clavis of the famous Illyrian (1567) dominates the hermeneutics of the
seventeenth century. The great church historian and bibliclist [Bibelkenner] exceeds in originality and
systematic power his predecessors as well as most of his successors. His theory of interpretation is based
on Luther's basic principle [Grundgedanken] of understanding through a unified reading of the Scriptures
[des Verständnisses aus dem Zusammenhang der Schrift]. Although he did understand this scriptural
unity (as may be seen in his Parallels and Analogies) rather abstractly [formal]), his teaching on the Bible-
difficulties which oppose understanding and their solution constitute a significant achievement."
hermeneutics shows many similarities with Flacius' and therefore attests to the close connection between the hermeneutics of orthodox Lutheranism and English Puritanism.

2.1. Historical Context

Matthias Flacius was born in the Adriatic peninsula of Istria around 1520. His Croatian name of Vlacic was Latinized and Illyricus was added to indicate his homeland, resulting in his name Flacius Illyricus. He desired a career as a monk, but instead followed the advice of Baldo Lupentino, the provincial of the Franciscans, to study theology in the universities of Germany. Accordingly Flacius went to Basel in 1539, to Tübingen in 1540, and to Wittenberg in 1541, where he gave private lessons in Greek and Hebrew. He met Luther, whose teaching led to his conversion, and who personally attended Flacius' wedding in 1545. Their relatively close personal friendship may explain why Flacius became a zealous defender of the Wittenberger's doctrines. Luther's close friend Melanchthon was impressed by Flacius' linguistic skills in Hebrew and arranged a position for him as professor of Old Testament literature at Wittenberg. When the Smalkaldian war broke out one year after Luther's death (1546), Flacius moved to Braunschweig.

Flacius greatly opposed the interim of Augsburg (1548) as well as Melanchthon's conciliatory stance towards Catholicism and adiaphora. Because of his dogmatic defense of what he perceived to be Luther's teaching, his life was riddled with controversies. To quote Geldsaetzer, Flacius refused to join in Melanchthon's tolerant politics "mit aller Entschiedenheit für Luther und gegen alle Melanchthonischen politischen Kompromisse. Und damit setzte er sich gewissermaßen zwischen alle Stühle" (x). Much like the Swiss Reformed faction and later the Puritans, Flacius strongly opposed the interim concessions

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5 The interim of Augsburg was Charles V's attempt after the religious wars and the defeat of the Protestant league of Schmalkalden, to impose Catholic unity on Germany. He drew up the Interim, which was a provisional arrangement until the Council of Trent had completed its work of investigating possible reforms. It allowed for the laity's reception of the cup and permitted the marriage of the clergy. Most German Lutheran regions, however, perceived Charles' intention of eventually re-Catholicizing the nation and rebelled against an imposed Catholic liturgy.
Melanchthon was ready to make in liturgy and worship. It is said that Flacius almost single-handedly rescued Lutheran Protestantism and effected the failure of the interim negotiations (Geldsaetzer xii).

Besides the interim controversy, Flacius played leading roles in the other crises of Protestant theology: the majorist controversy with Georg Major about the significance of good works for justification and salvation, the antinomian controversy on the relation of gospel and law, as well as the synergistic controversy with Viktorianus Striegel about human participation in the process of justification and salvation. All these controversies and Flacius' prodigious literary output greatly influenced the shaping of Lutheran dogmatics on these important theological issues. Flacius also partly laid the groundwork of Lutheran historiography with his "Magdeburger Centurien", a church history which was compiled through an enormous team effort of several researchers and contains manuscript references which "saved a student entire libraries" because of its indices and registers (Geldsaetzer xiii; Dilthey II 114).

In 1557, Flacius was made professor of the newly-organized University of Jena, which became a stronghold of strict Lutheranism, and where he was chiefly instrumental in drawing up the "sächsische Confutationsschrift" to enforce Lutheran views. This document, however, evoked censorship by the authorities and finally led to the dismissal of Flacius in 1561. Especially offensive to Lutheran colleagues was his statement (uttered perhaps rashly in his debate with Striegel at Weimar in 1560), that original sin is the very substance of man in his fallen state. He was therefore often accused of Manichaeism. After spending five years in Regensburg, he accepted a call to Antwerp, and from thence to Frankfort and Strasbourg. Obliged to leave the latter city on account of his opinions, he returned to Frankfort, where he died in the hospital in 1575.

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6 For the making of the Centurien see also Heinz Scheible, Die Entstehung der Magdeburger Zenturien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der historiographischen Methode (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1966).
7 One of the best accounts of Flacius is Preger's Mathias Flacius Illyricus und seine Zeit (Erlangen, 1859-61) 2 vols.
That Flacius stands firm in the Lutheran theological and polemical tradition may be deduced from his conviction that the Pope is the Antichrist and that the Roman Catholic church has smothered true Christianity through the arrogation of the role of final arbiter in interpretation to the Church. Flacius quite self-consciously sees himself as living at a time when God was pleased to grant new learning so that the Scriptures may be better understood than at any other time since the apostolic church. He, like many other academically trained Reformers, saw that much of the obscurity in the Bible was due not only to insufficient knowledge of the Scriptures as a whole, but also to unfamiliarity with biblical culture and languages. He believed that God would allow an increasingly clearer reading of his Word, a process which Flacius understood to have gained tremendous momentum with the Reformation. Most of the practical advice for scriptural interpretation is contained in the second part of Flacius' work entitled De Ratione Cognoscendi Sacras Literas in which the author analyses the stylistics, genre, grammatical-historical and linguistic difficulties connected with reading the Bible.

In sum, Flacius marks the beginning of a new era in Protestant hermeneutics, when the Roman Catholic church challenged the clarity of the Scriptures on textual grounds in order to bolster its claim for interpretative authority. Flacius is one of the first textual apologists to admit in detail to textual difficulties and to show that they can either be overcome by sound hermeneutical rules or (in some extreme cases) must be borne until God is pleased to grant more light to the church. It is important to see that Flacius does not provide the first stepping stone toward a supposedly inevitable outcome of historical-

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8 Nosto sane tempore, licet nulla nova, ac immediata patefactio, fit coelitus immediateque facta; nec ulla Bibliorum pars addita: tamen nemo intelligens, ac studiosus veritatis, negare potest, praesertim Theologiam, et Sacrarum literarum lucem, prae omni vetustate, velut meridiem prae aurora luce, fulgere (Clavis 22).

9 The entire work was conceived as a statement of Lutheran dogmatics based on Luther's theology as drawn from the Commentary on Romans, and was meant to correct and supplement Melanchthon's Loci Communes (Geldsaetzer xii). The first part of the work therefore contains Flacius' theology, whereas the second part deals with Bible difficulties and hermeneutics in light of the theological foundation of the first section.
criticism, but rather manages comfortably to discuss precarious textual issues within the larger framework of trust in the Scriptures.

2.2. Hermeneutical Context: *Sola Scriptura* and the Perspicuity of the Scriptures

Flacius' overall concern is to demonstrate the verity and functionality of the Protestant idea that the Scriptures are a sufficient guide for all questions of the Christian faith, independent of ecclesiastical authority. If, as the Catholic church claimed, the Scriptures were indeed unreliable unless supplemented by extra-biblical sources, the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* would be worthless. Therefore the Protestant Reformers insisted on the perspicuity of the Scriptures, the basic clarity of the text, such that it could be read even by a lay-person. Given such textual clarity, the Reformers could claim that the Bible is self-interpreting when the principle of contextual interpretation is applied: "The subject matter of the Scriptures, therefore, is all quite accessible, even though some texts are still obscure owing to our ignorance of their terms....If the words are obscure in one place, yet they are plain in another; and it is one and the same theme, published quite openly to the whole world, which in the Scriptures is sometimes expressed in plain words, and sometimes lies as yet hidden in obscure words" (Luther BW 69).

In view of the complexity of the textual material contained in the Bible, such a view may sound naive. One must, however, take into account the qualifications made by the Reformers themselves regarding the phrase "perspicuity of the Scriptures." Even under pressure from humanist and Roman Catholic claims regarding the obscurity of many Scripture passages, the Reformers were careful to qualify the idea of perspicuity. Even

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10 Luther was, as in many things, not original in this view, but inherited it from the church fathers. Irenaeus, Athanasius, Origen and Augustine all held to this basic principle. Augustine's quotation is perhaps most famous: "Accordingly the Holy Spirit has, with admirable wisdom and care for our welfare, so arranged the Holy Scriptures as by the plainer passages to satisfy our hunger, and by the more obscure to stimulate our appetite. For almost nothing is dug out of those obscure passages which may not be found set forth in the plainest language elsewhere" *(De doctrina Christiana* 2.6).
Martin Luther, who is famous for his polemical style and unguarded statements, is careful to maintain the role of scholarship and patient effort in reading the text.

The question whether the Bible is clear or obscure goes back to the famous controversy between Luther and Erasmus concerning the freedom of the human will. Erasmus, in the preface to his work On the Freedom of the Will, had objected to Luther's statements on human freedom because this subject, he felt, was a very obscure one. Erasmus argued that just a few things are "needful to know" about the doctrine of free choice and that it is irreverent to "rush into those things which are hidden, not to say superfluous." Erasmus goes on to say that most doctrines such as the distinctions between the divine persons, the conjunction between the divine and human nature in Christ etc. have remained obscure to all commentators. The only thing God has clearly revealed are "the precepts for the good life. This is the word of God, which is not to be bought in the highest heaven, nor in distant lands overseas, but is close at hand, in our mouth and in our heart. These truths must be learned by all, but the rest are more properly committed to God, and it is more religious to worship, being unknown, than to discuss them, being insoluble" (Vom Freien Willen 39-40).

As is well known, Luther violently objected to Erasmus' pious position, calling it "phantasmagoria" by which "Satan has frightened men away from reading the Sacred Writ, and has made Holy Scripture contemptible, in order to enable the plagues he has bred from philosophy to prevail in the Church" (BW 56). More importantly, however, Luther did recognize that there are indeed certain kinds of obscurities in the Bible that require scholarly research: "I admit, of course, that there are many texts in the Scriptures that are obscure and abstruse, not because of the majesty of their subject-matter, but because of our ignorance of their vocabulary and grammar, but these texts in no way hinder a knowledge of the subject matter of Scripture" (57). Luther goes on to define the subject

11 All translations from German sources, (Luther's, the Pietists' and Gadamer's writings) as well as the translations of the cited passages from Flacius' Latin treatise are my own.
matter of Scripture as "the supreme mystery brought to light, namely, that Christ the Son of God has been made man, that God is three in one, that Christ has suffered for us and is to reign eternally" (ibid.). This subject matter is clearly laid out in the Scriptures for all to see in the overwhelming majority of textual passages, and it would be foolish, says Luther, to call such clarity of the Bible obscure, just because of some unclear passages.

Luther did not for a moment deny the limitations of the interpreter's knowledge. He realized that readers have different levels of maturity and that clarity of Scripture does not at all preclude the need for specialists who seek to bridge the gap that separates the reader from the languages and the cultures of the biblical writers. He insisted on the use of the original languages and was very meticulous in his own translations (Wood 78). It would thus be a misunderstanding of the Reformers to interpret their emphasis on the perspicuity of the Scripture as if they considered biblical scholarship unnecessary (Silva 85). The essence of the Protestant position is expressed well in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). The first chapter contains a full statement regarding the character of Scripture, and in the seventh paragraph it says regarding perspicuity: "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them."

As in Luther's case, so the notion of perspicuity set forth in the Westminster Confession contains important qualifications. The emphasis falls on the clarity of the biblical message, but the framers of the confession have been careful to qualify the doctrine in several ways: (1) not every part of Scripture is equally clear; (2) the matters in view are those that are necessary for salvation; (3) readers of the Bible must be willing to make use of "ordinary means" - personal study, fellowship with other believers, attention
to the preaching of the Word; and (4) the interpreter's understanding will not be complete 
but will certainly be "sufficient" for the purpose stated (Silva 85).

Flacius thus merely maintains the mainstream Protestant view when he tries to 
show that the Protestant principle of sola scriptura and the perspicuity of the Scriptures is 
not a simplistic and naive view but is maintained with full knowledge of the complexities 
that inevitably arise with the transmission of an ancient text from a distant culture. In 
order to demonstrate this trustworthiness of the text, Flacius displays strategic genius. 
Just as in a modern day TV commercial for cleaning products where an object is soiled to 
the point where its cleaning seems inconceivable only to emerge brilliantly white after the 
application of the product, so Flacius progresses by painstakingly displaying the common 
difficulties of reading the Bible (chapter one, "causae difficultatis sacrarum literarum") 
and then offers the solutions (chapter 2, "remedia"). He ends his treatise by formulating 
rules for the reading of the Scriptures in chapters three and four.

The fact that Flacius begins with the difficulties of Bible-reading shows that the 
position taken by the first Reformers that the Bible is self-interpreting needed constant 
clarification and defending in the face of Roman Catholic theologians, who pointed to the 
confusion of the laity in order to bolster the Catholic claim that final authority in 
interpretation could not be left to the ignorant but belonged to the Pope and his 
theologians. The idea that everyone was his own interpreter of the Bible was soon 
popularized and so "released fundamentalist, millenarian and spiritualist impulses which 
neither Luther nor any other 'moderate' Reformers could control" (Dickens 33). The 
peasant uprising and the Anabaptist terror in Münster were fear-inspiring examples of 
individualized, subjective hermeneutics. The general fear of social and religious chaos 
helped Catholicism to start the counter-reformation. With a raised index finger, as if to 
say "I told you so," Catholic polemicists blamed these events on the very principle of sola 
scriptura (ibid.).
It is no wonder, then, that Flacius begins his hermeneutical manual with the explanation of Bible difficulties while at the same time asserting that such difficulties in no way justify an interpretative monopoly by the Roman Catholic church. Thus Flacius carefully explains from the outset of the treatise what he means by the term "difficulties" (*causas, quare Scriptura interdum fit difficilior*). He does not here speak about those difficulties which are alleged by his opponents as the reason for making the church the final arbiter in matters of doctrine. The Scriptures are very clear on the essential doctrines of the faith (*de omnibus necessariis dogmatibus*).

Rather (as we shall see in the following sections) Flacius talks about spiritual and grammatical difficulties. Flacius clearly echoes Luther's statement that "the holy Scriptures are a spiritual light by far more clear than the sun itself, especially in those things which pertain unto salvation or necessity...This indeed I confess, that there are many places in the Scriptures obscure and abstruse; not from the majesty of the things, but from our ignorance of certain terms and grammatical particulars" (BW 26). Thus any obscurity is due to the reader's inability to understand. Like any other text, the Scriptures do demand of one a certain degree of patience to read and familiarize oneself with the contexts and background of the narratives in order to avoid great misreadings (Clavis 5). However, as Flacius states at the end of his treatise and as Spener will later repeat after him, such prerequisites do not require highly trained biblical scholars, but may be attained by every lay-person through persistent and diligent study - especially since Luther's Bible-translation.\(^\text{12}\)

We have seen that Flacius' affirmation of the Scripture's sufficiency and clarity represents Luther's view on the nature of the Biblical text. Flacius always follows Luther very closely in his views, and remains true to Luther's ideas when it comes to the subject

\(^{12}\) The question whether the dependence of the laity on scholars for the translations is not merely another interpretative monopoly just like the Roman Catholic one is not addressed in detail by Flacius, but will be dealt with in our discussions of Spener and John Owen.
matter of the Word. In the next section Flacius lays down important hermeneutical principles which reflect Luther's earlier position and are based on the Reformer's belief that interpretation of the Scripture must be at once Christocentric and Christological. “Christocentric” means that Christ is the element on which all interpretation hinges. “Christological” has to do with Luther's recognition of the human and divine nature of the Word. He realizes that the Scripture is both human and divine, yet he does not thereby open the door to suggestions of fallibility. Luther draws a deliberate analogy between Scripture and the Person of Christ, between the Word written and the Word incarnate (Wood 83). Just as orthodox theology demands that the believer hold the divinity and the humanity of Christ in tension without leaning too much to either side, "without confusion, without mutation, without division, without separation," so Luther also expects the reader to recognize the twofold nature of Scripture and hold both to its full humanity and its full divinity (Wood 83).

2.3. Christ as Flacius' Key to the Scriptures

The Christocentric approach to the Bible is the essential, most basic starting point for Flacius. Flacius (and this is true, by the way, of all the orthodox theologians featured in this study) is completely aware that the reading of the Bible demands not an objective reader, but one who is deeply biased. In fact, Flacius is aware that understanding of any subject or discipline, to be successful, requires a consciously chosen presupposition. Flacius argues that just as understanding in general builds on a certain pre-knowledge,13

13 Flacius states: "In every way and with every attempt at teaching and learning, both in the free and mechanical arts, one has to begin with those things which are most useful for the understanding of the following, and with that which contains the sum of the matter itself. This way of teaching is also given in the Scriptures." (In omni docendi discendique ratione ac conatu, sive liberalium, sive etiam mechanicarum scientiarum praecipitur: ut ab iis incipiamus, quae & prosunt ad cognitionem sequentium: & faciliora sunt; & denique quae quasi summam rei continent. Talis ratio docendi, est & in Scriptura [47]).
so the Bible itself demands a believing pre-understanding of God's existence and character, without one's necessarily having proved it. According to Flacius, a knowledge of and a relationship with Jesus Christ constitute a necessary pre-understanding that allows the reader access to the Scriptures.

The reason why conversion to and belief in Christ is necessary if one is to perceive God's Word correctly is rooted in the idea of humanity's corruption in all spiritual things by the Fall. When one considers Flacius' hermeneutic, one must always bear in mind that, like Luther and Calvin, he argues from the position of comprehensive human depravity. For Flacius, this premise divides theological from philosophical hermeneutics: "Philosophy wants to begin with an understanding, insightful reader and listener. Our teaching, by contrast, denies from the outset that any mortal is naturally inclined to accept God's word, since all human beings are creatures without a sense for divine things."14 The subject matter of the Scriptures is thus repugnant to the reader: "It is the things themselves, though clearly revealed from God, which are treated of in the Holy Scriptures, which are alien to our minds and crude and perverted; we are easily offended by them and we despise them" (63).

Even if Flacius does uphold the usefulness of philosophy, reason and human learning, the only means of removing the veil (velamen) that covers the spiritual meaning of scripture for every non-Christian is a personal relationship with Christ the mediator. It is he who "removes the veil both from our hearts and the text" (35). If reason and philosophy are thus sanctified they become the "handmaidens of theology," which serve rather than determine it (35). The text itself, says Flacius, claims to be the word of God, and if its claims concerning human nature and its blindness toward the things of God are true, then it requires the work of God to remove the blindness (35).

14 Philosophia vult, statim initio habere auditorem capacem ac intelligentem: haec contra, mox in principio negat, ullum mortalium sua natura idoneum, ad eam percipiendam quia omnes homines sint animales, non percipientes divina (63).
Flacius states that the first principle of theology is to take the biblical text's own claim to be the word of God seriously. After all, "the prophets and the entire Bible are (according to the witness of Peter in his first letter, verse 20)\textsuperscript{15} not a matter of individual recognition or interpretation: but as [the Bible] has been given by the Holy Spirit through the Prophets, so it must also necessarily be interpreted through His light" (31). Flacius merely touches on the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation (a matter I will discuss in greater detail in the section on John Owen), but in the context of his teaching the meaning is clear. The Word of God is written under the supervision of the Spirit, and unless this Spirit is within the reader guiding him along as he reads, he cannot really grasp and appreciate the subject-matter conveyed by the text.

Just as it was for Luther, this subject matter is Jesus Christ. He is the hermeneutical fulcrum, the beginning and end of interpretation. Without Christ, the Bible cannot be properly understood, and if the reader has received Christ, the Bible will reveal nothing to him but Christ and that through Christ. According to Flacius, Christocentric hermeneutics distinguish the true Christian from the papist on the one hand and the enthusiasts (\textit{fanatici}) on the other. It is the office of Christ to open the Scriptures to the reader and illumine his heart (John 16:13), and in Christ are all the treasures of wisdom and the knowledge of God (Colossians 2:3).\textsuperscript{16} In short, Christ not only provides, but he \textit{is} the necessary pre-understanding for Flacius' hermeneutic: "If we turn to Christ, the veil is taken from our heart and also from the Scriptures themselves, not only, because we are now illuminated by the spiritual light, but also because we now hold the scope and the

\textsuperscript{15} The verse reads: "knowing this first, that every prophecy of Scripture did not come into being of its own interpretation; for prophecy was not at any time borne by the will of man, but having been borne along by the Holy Spirit, holy men of God spoke."

\textsuperscript{16} Christi munus est, tum nobis aperire Scripturam; tum cor nostrum illuminare, ut intelligat Scripturas. Ex illius plenitudine nos omnes accipere oportet. Hoc autem fit, cum cum fide agnoscimus et apprehendimus (35).
argument of the entire Scripture in our hands, namely the Lord Jesus himself with his sufferings and his good deeds" (35).\footnote{Cum convertimur ad Christum; tum tollitur velamen de nostro corde, & etiam de ipsa Scriptura; non solum, quia illuminatur spirituali luce, sed etiam, quia scopum et argumentum totius Scripturae tenemus, nempe ipsum Dominum Jesum, cum sual passione & beneficiis (35).}

Christ thus constitutes the necessary entry point into the hermeneutical circle of understanding. Flacius describes the hermeneutical circle as a process arising naturally from the way the human understanding is designed: "If the human mind from the beginning understands roughly the sum of the subject-matter and always keeps it before itself, it will more easily be able, while remaining engaged in the whole of the work to grasp [or understand] the individual parts and how they relate to one another."\footnote{The full quote runs: "Mens enim humana, si initio rei summam breviter concipiat, ac veluti in conspectu oculisque semper habeat, facilius postea, in toto prolixoque opere versando, singula complecti, & inter se-se conferre potest" (38).} After stating this general principle of understanding, Flacius applies it to textual and biblical interpretation. Since "the rough sum of the entire Bible is Christ, for he is the fulfillment of the law, so that Christ unites and interprets the Old and the New Testament," the reader needs this "sum of the Old and New Testaments" in order to make sense of the individual parts of the text (43). This is no different than reading any other book: "[to] have this sum of the Old and New Testaments in mind at the beginning is the most useful [thing] for the right understanding of the Scriptures, just as it is useful for the exact understanding of any speaker, a comedy or some other poem, of a story or a book, to know from the outset their main concern or the scope" (39). The overall scope of the Scriptures and the starting point for any reader are Christ. Flacius, in truly Lutheran fashion, sees the dialectic of law and gospel as the foremost structure which demonstrates that Christ is the interpretive fulcrum of the Bible.

Flacius remains faithful to Luther's Christocentric hermeneutic and develops from it three hermeneutical principles, all of which are more or less connected to it. Starting from the assumption of human depravity Flacius suggests (a) a hermeneutical circle, in
which the whole must be known before the parts. This circle begins with Christ and
proceeds within a dialectic of law and gospel, (b) the analogy of faith as a safeguard for
interpretation, and (c) a unified contextual reading of the Bible.

2.3.1. Flacius' Hermeneutical Circle

Jean Grondin sees the importance of Flacius in the Lutheran's emphasis on
grammatical knowledge for the solving of Bible difficulties: "The darkness of Scripture,
Flacius says in reply to the Tridentine Council, is due not to its obscurity but to our own
deficient knowledge of its language and grammar, a fault owing to the Roman Catholic
Church" (IPH 42). Grondin is convinced that Flacius saw the solution to the debate over
the obscurity of Scripture in grammatical knowledge: "Mastery of the letter, the gramma,
was to provide the universal key to Scripture" (ibid.). As we shall see, because of this
erroneous premise, Grondin is forced to conclude that Flacius failed in "constructing a
purely grammatical hermeneutics" (ibid. 44). Grondin also makes reference to a rather
mysterious scopus that is behind the words without clarifying what that scopus entails.

Flacius was deeply inspired not only by Augustine but also by the rhetorical
tradition. His famous doctrine of the "scopus" - the importance of considering the
view with respect to which a book was composed - is borrowed directly from
rhetoric....Flacius indicates the relative limits of the purely grammatical when he
speaks of unlocking the text's scopus, its inexplicit logos - a notion connected to
the older doctrine of the verbum interius with all its esoteric fascination. (43)

Grondin has seriously misunderstood Flacius' intention, because for him the key offered
by Flacius is the grammatical, whereas for Flacius, the grammatical is only an initial
prerequisite for obtaining the real key to the Scriptures, namely Christ himself as presented
in the dialectic of law and gospel.

Moreover, Grondin overlooks the fact that for Flacius the text's scopus was not
some inexplicit, mystical logos, but a self-revelation of God in the incarnation which,
though a mystery, nevertheless allows communion with the divine logos to be expressed in concrete terms. Yet Grondin’s oversight is symptomatic. As a proponent of the philosophical hermeneutic who operates within a framework stripped of the divine, he does not acknowledge the importance that a relationship with the divine had even for highly trained academics like Flacius. Grondin's failure to grasp this main aspect of Flacius' argument demonstrates the need for a re-examination of Flacius' hermeneutic (in fact of the history of hermeneutics in general) from a theological perspective.

Flacius' argument is more subtle and far-reaching than Grondin recognizes. The ultimate issue is not so much the obscurity of the Scriptures as their authority. The Roman Catholic theologians' attack on the Bible's perspicuity was intended to assure the need for an authority additional to that of the Scriptures in matters of the Christian faith. The Protestants argued for the authority of the sacred text by which all tradition, including that of the Roman Catholic church, was to be judged (Flacius 57). The Catholics retorted that the Protestants themselves relied on tradition for the formation of the canon and the analogy of faith in interpretation. Therefore the Protestants merely replaced one tradition with another. Thus what is at stake for Flacius is not only to refute the charge of the Scripture's obscurity, but, even more importantly, to establish the non-circularity of the Protestant argument for the sole authority of Scripture in matters of faith and worship.

The three most important and basic elements of Flacius' argument are, first, the premise of human depravity; second, Christ as the main scope of the Scriptures and as entry point into the hermeneutical circle of whole and part; and, third, the dialectic of law and gospel.

First, as we have already established, Flacius clearly argues from the premise of human depravity in biblical interpretation: "Concerning sacred doctrine, all human beings are naturally not only slow and stupid but also inclined to its opposite meaning; we are not only unable to love, desire and understand [sacred doctrine], but we even consider it
to be foolish and wicked and therefore shrink from it."\textsuperscript{19} Thus in Flacius' hermeneutical
circle the door to God's grace is Christ.

The second main element, then, is the dialectical movement from whole to part
which has characterized hermeneutics from its inception. Flacius constructs the whole
syllogistically. This is really the heart of his formal argument against Roman Catholicism.
For if he can prove that the Bible itself offers an "internal" key to interpretation, then the
Roman Catholic charge of circularity appears to be defeated. Flacius states: "The sum of
the Scripture consists of the following two syllogisms. The first and most important
syllogism of the Old Testament is this: What God says, that is true. This requires no
proof, it is the premise of all theology...[the second syllogism in the New Testament is]
everything which the Old Testament or the Prophets say about the Messiah is true" (37).
Flacius' reasoning, schematically arranged, looks like this:

1. Syllogism
   a) major premise: what God says is true
   b) minor premise: God relates the history of Israel and the Messianic prophecies
   c) conclusion: the narration about history and the Messianic prophecies is true

The second syllogism then takes the conclusion of the first as its major premise:

a) The narrative concerning Israel and the Messianic prophecies is historical and true
b) The jew Jesus Christ completely fits the profile of the Messianic prophecies
   c) Christ is the Messiah and therefore his teachings have divine authority

   After he has established Christ's authority, Flacius moves to his final element,
leaving the reader in suspense for a moment before he pulls together the various strands of
his argument to present the actual key to the Scriptures. Christ is the door to the grace
necessary to change the reader's negative disposition toward the biblical text. The

\textsuperscript{19} At in sacra doctrina, omnes homines, sua natura, non tantum tardi ac stupidi sunt; set etiam prorsus in
contrarium sensum proni praeceptiesque; non solum eam amare, expetere, ac intelligere nequimus; sed
etiam stultam ac impiam judicamus, prorsusque ab ea abhorremus (5).
dialectic of law and gospel, the third essential element in Flacius' hermeneutic, is the method built into the Scriptures which must be followed to attain both grace and right understanding. Even if the Scriptures are linguistically clear, the reader will err in his interpretation if he does not possess the key to the Scriptures. Thus contrary to Grondin's claim, not grammar but understanding of the subject-matter and a right relation to it are the universal aspect of Flacius' hermeneutic.

Flacius claims that there are two teachings in the Scriptures: "the law and the gospel; and these are contrary to one another according to their nature" (41). The voice of the law promises eternal life to the one who keeps it, but because of human depravity, no one can accomplish this task. The law shows the reader his or her sinfulness and forces one to admit the human inability to follow the rule of the law. The law adjusts the reader's wrong self-perception. The function of the law is "to expose our completely depraved nature and accuse us of our sins and to proclaim God's wrath and our just condemnation" (43). The reader now realizes that his former self-conceit of standing before God on his own merit (what Luther termed Werkheiligkeit) is destroyed.

This is where Christ enters the hermeneutical process. The reader, if he has the former syllogism and therewith Christ as the center of the Scriptures in mind, can now turn to the grace offered through him. The law therefore "forces us into the nets of the Messiah, and so acts as the guide [or teacher] leading to Christ."20 Unfortunately, says Flacius, the relationship of law and gospel often irritates the inexperienced reader. Yet rightly understood, the law-gospel dialectic is the main key to interpretation. The law has the function of leading people to Christ; it is the "paedagogus ad Christum."21 Following Luther's emphasis on the doctrine of justification by faith, Flacius points out that according

20 atque ita nos veluti in retia Meschiae fugere compellit; sicque paedagogus ad Christum (43).
21 The law as a schoolmaster leading the student to Christ is an image that is found everywhere in Puritan literature. See for example Thomas Watson on the ten commandments, who calls the moral law "a star that will lead to Christ" (The Ten Commandments 10).
to Paul's writings in Romans and Galatians, and similarly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ's obedience and atonement have completed what the law could not achieve, namely the reconciliation of man to God and thus the provision of eternal life.

Flacius writes that the tension between law and gospel can guide the reader much like the thread of Theseus through the labyrinth of the. In fact, the law-gospel dialectic is the key to the entire Scriptures and all theology. The law offers salvation to the righteous, that is, to the one who can completely keep God's law. The gospel, on the other hand, offers eternal life to those who are entirely unworthy of God's favour. Flacius repeats almost verbatim the Pauline explanation for the relationship between law and gospel. The law failed to provide eternal life not because it was bad or sinful, but rather because of our sinful nature. Nevertheless, under Christ, the law is not abolished, but according to God's wonderful and mysterious plan, fulfills a complementary function as a moral guide, a reminder of our sinfulness, and a schoolmaster that leads to Christ (45).

Thus the key to the Scriptures is not, as Grondin has claimed, "mastery of the letter," but rather a dialectic of law and gospel which leads to the very heart of the Bible, namely Christ himself. It is the relationship with the divine through the reconciliation with God which is the main concern, and to which grammatical solutions are merely secondary.

Having established his main point, Flacius now proceeds to analyze the problem of the Roman Catholic hermeneutic. He believes to have successfully proved that the Scriptures themselves provide the scope which determines interpretation. Following Luther, he proclaims that justification by faith, embodied structurally in the dialectic of law and gospel, is the main concern of Scripture. The hermeneutic of law and gospel derives

\[22 \text{ Flacius is silent on the issue of the Pauline authorship to this letter. As is well known, Luther doubted that Paul was the author and suggested Apollos as a possible alternative. In modern scholarship, Paul is quite unanimously believed not to be the author (see for example, F.F. Bruce Commentary on Hebrews, p.15-25).}

\[23 \text{ The quotation in context runs: Haec igitur revera clavis est totius Scripturae, aut Theologiae: scire, in ea contineri duplex genus doctrinae, et duplicem viam salutis, quae sint sibi invicem per se plane contratiae... Hanc clavem Scripturae Paulus, in Epist, ad Rom. & ad Gal.3.ac 4. prolixe illustrat...}(42).\]
its authority from Christ whom the text itself attests to be the Messiah. On the other hand, it is Christ's teaching and that of the apostles which confirms that salvation is by faith alone.

The real problem with the Catholics, Flacius argues, is their failure to recognize this basic hermeneutical structure of the Bible. "The Papists don't know the key, nor do they possess it," exclaims Flacius, alluding to the Roman Catholic claim to possess the keys to salvation. The key is the gospel prepared by the law. But the Catholic theologians, not recognizing the dialectical structure of law and gospel, hear Moses and the law shout from one end of the Scriptures "Whoever keeps the law will live by it" (45), and Christ and the gospel from the other end, "I have come to bring salvation to the sinner" (ibid.). The Roman Catholic interpreters try to allay the confusion resulting from these opposing voices by forcing them into one unified doctrine: "Doubtless," Flacius imagines the Catholic theologians thinking, "these two voices are one and the same, and in this book there is only one teaching, which calls too strongly for good works on the one hand, and on the other emphasizes God's grace and Christ's merit too much." As a result, the Catholic doctors teach a doctrine foreign to the Bible, namely that salvation is attained partly by works and partly by grace: "So they unite in a threefold way Moses with Christ, the law with the gospel and grace with merit, or they rather confound these things in the most impious and reckless manner" (45).

Flacius has managed cleverly to connect the hermeneutical issue with the main bone of contention between Roman Catholics and Protestants - salvation through grace alone and by faith alone. As for Luther in his controversy with Erasmus, for Flacius, although grammatical problems are vitally important, the issue of God's sovereignty in salvation is the real battleground of hermeneutics. It is after all through regeneration that the reader's disposition toward the text is changed and the proper hermeneutical perspective for biblical interpretation gained.
By demonstrating the inherent and self-affirming hermeneutical structure of the Bible, Flacius also makes the argument that all tradition, including that of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, must always be gauged against the text of the Scriptures. Flacius' refusal to subordinate the Bible to church-tradition did not mean, however, that he saw no need for tradition as such. Flacius was well aware that the interpretation was conducted within the boundaries of tradition. His concern was that those boundaries be set by the Bible itself. He believed that he has established that the Bible bears witness to its own credibility through the fact that God cannot lie and through Christ's fulfillment of prophecy. The question was how the Protestant tradition could claim to distinguish between right and wrong past interpretation in a way that enabled them to pass judgment on the church fathers. To address this argument, Flacius turns to concept of the "analogy of faith."

2.3.2. The Rule of Faith

Flacius' thoughts proceed with a tight logic. If Christ is the necessary pre-understanding of the Scriptures, then he must also be the unifying focus of both the Old and New Testaments. Furthermore, if Christ is the hermeneutical center and the one who illumines the reader, then his teachings must be the norm for any textual reading or spiritual impression that might flow from interpretation. That nucleus of the basic teachings on man's fallenness and his need of salvation through Christ leads Flacius to his third major regulative hermeneutical principle, the\textit{ analoga fidei} or analogy of faith. Flacius explains:

Every insight and interpretation of the Scripture should be according to the analogy of faith, which is a kind of norm for a healthy faith, or like boundaries (\textit{cancelli}), so that we cannot fall into abysses through either a storm from the outside or even through an assault from within. Therefore everything which is said
about or from the Scriptures must agree with the above-mentioned summarizing catechism, or the articles of faith.\textsuperscript{24}

When the reader has been given the whole (\textit{summam}) of the Bible, through the hermeneutical principles of Christ as the fulcrum of the text and the law-gospel dialectic, the next step is to undergo a short instruction, presented by the Scriptures themselves. These individual parts are to be measured against the whole for accuracy. Flacius located the main tenets of the Christian faith in what he calls the traditional triad of Genesis (first three or four chapters), the Decalogue, the words of Christ and the words of the sacrament.\textsuperscript{25}

The teaching of the Bible begins with history in the book of Genesis, which contains the foundation for theology because "the first three or four chapters of Genesis contain a certain summary of the entire Bible" (47). It is here that the reader learns about his roots, his original nature, the fall from grace, the curse (explaining our present miserable condition) and finally the promise of restoration through a system of guilt and punishment (\textit{culpa et poena}). Secondly, the Decalogue is a concise summary of God's will, where "God himself summarized his law in the briefest fashion" (47). Thirdly, Flacius concludes the model for catechetical instruction with the Lord's Prayer (\textit{oratione dominica}) and an explanation of the sacraments. Flacius admits himself that he is by no means original in advancing this model, but merely restates the traditional elements of catechizing, although he leaves out the apostle's creed (which Luther, for example, included among the "Hauptstücke" of catechetical instruction). Flacius points to the wise ordering of the biblical texts, which proceed from narration, a textual form that is easiest to grasp and digest, to the more theologically "packed" epistles. The narrative part of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{24} For Flacius, "\textit{catechisticas summa}" does not refer to a particular catechism, but describes a summary of the faith which the Scriptures themselves offer in the creation story, the decalogue and Christ's Sermon on the Mount (45). The full quotation runs: "Omnis intellectus, ac expositio Scripturae, fit analoga fidei: quae est veluti norma quaedam sanae fidei aut cancelli; ne aliquo, vel externo turbine, aut etiam domestico impetu, extra septa, in praecipitia abripiamur, Rom.12.v.6. Omnia igitur, quae de Scriptura, aut ex Scriptura, dicuntur, debent esse consona praedicatae Catechisticæ summae, aut articulis fidei."

\textsuperscript{25} Flacius states that: "\textit{quae capita doctrinae [the three elements of instruction] pro quadam compendiaria Catechesi, sunt habita: tametsi in Papatu nefaric obscurata suere}" (46).
\end{footnotesize}
Old Testament already contains the sum of the Bible in a nutshell. Divine creation, the Fall with its subsequent promise of redemption, and the giving of the law, which was meant to point toward the Messiah, are all contained in this part of the Bible (48).

The Bible thus contains in itself the basic instruction in the faith, and this basic instruction points to the law-gospel dialectic which is then fully unfolded in the New Testament. This hermeneutical circle, independent of external interpretative authority, is to protect the Christian faith from the "outside storm" mentioned by Flacius. Again, Flacius realizes the need to counter the Roman Catholic charge of circularity against the Protestant notion of sola scriptura. The analogy of faith, as drawn from the Bible and Christ's teaching themselves, provides the first foundation upon which the house of faith is built: "We have built on this foundation of the Prophets and Apostles alone. Leaning on it alone, we must place the church and religion on it" (57). The rule of faith, as drawn from the Bible, also helps to prevent reading into the text. It is important in any discussion, says Flacius, to differentiate between the subject matter and what we say about it; otherwise everything becomes opinion and the true matter of discussion is lost (ibid.).

Care for the preservation of the subject-matter and the text's voice over against the reader's opinion is typical of the Protestant hermeneutic as practiced by Flacius, the Puritans and the Pietists. In fact, concern for the subject-matter continues, albeit in altered form, in the writings of liberal theology, a tradition out of which not only Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, but also those of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics arise. While Flacius takes great care to present the biblical text as the arbiter of any interpretative tradition, modern hermeneutics does something similar by trying to maintain the authority of the text against deconstructive criticism, which grants the reader sole power in dealing with the text. Yet unlike Flacius, modern hermeneutics has no foundation for the demand that the text be allowed to speak, whereas Flacius could point to the author of Scripture who was also the creator of reality.
Flacius realizes the importance of the analogy of faith for the establishment of the text's intrinsic authority. It is clear from the context of the treatise that the "storm from the outside" mentioned by Flacius refers to the Catholics' teaching of additional authority and their succumbing to Aristotelian philosophy, whereas the attack from the inside concerns enthusiasts (fanatici) in general and to Kaspar von Schwenkfeld in particular. 26 Within the analogy of faith, Flacius deems it extremely important that ideas and concepts be very carefully defined. He mentions, for example, Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 1:7 about the deceivers in doctrine who "do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm." Flacius takes this to mean that these false teachers are obviously confused about both the subject-matter itself and the necessary terminology to express it.

Flacius' care for terminology and proper expression of the subject matter is characteristic of post-Reformation theology. His generation of theologians had to clarify and refine the more loosely formulated teachings of the first Reformers. In the face of Roman Catholic and Sectarian Protestant opposition, the exactness of propositions became very important. Theologians often turned to Aristotelian writings to borrow terminology for the formulation of clearer theological concepts so that still outstanding questions in the debate with Catholic theologians could be clarified. This did not necessarily mean, as Gadamer and Grondin assume in their assessment of Protestant theology, that it fell prey to "Western philosophy's obsession with propositions" (Grondin, IPH 37). Theologians like Flacius did not forget the existential dimension of hermeneutics. But the very idea that the truth exists apart from existential appropriation, because of a

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26 Kaspar von Ossig Schwenkfeld (1489-1561) is one example of (moderate) literalistic interpretation, a practice which led him to unorthodox doctrines especially regarding the nature of Christ and the Lord's Supper. For Flacius, Schwenkfeld represents learned academic transgression of the rule of faith, where subtleties and overly literal application undermine and finally destroy clear teachings on the Christian faith, replacing them with clever obscurities.
transcendent divine other, required that description of this truth through language come as close as possible to the norm as taught in Scripture.

Flacius is therefore a good example of early Protestant orthodoxy, which was a "movement toward a lucid schema of doctrine... accompanied by a response to a still more sophisticated Roman polemic" (Muller Vol. 1 32). Expression was important, for God himself had accommodated his revelation to human language. It may well be the loss of the transcendent divine which sparked the dislike of propositional exactness so evident in Schleiermacher, which in turn led to the modern trend to find the true kerygma behind the language of the Scriptures, as in Bultmann's program of demythologizing. As we shall see, this aversion to propositions is still evident in Gadamer's writing.

2.4. A Purposeful Pattern: Textual and Narrative Unity

Flacius' last two "keys" deal with the grammatical-linguistic and narrative aspects of the text. The concept of textual unity in its scope and purpose is based on the assumption that the Bible is God's revelation to humankind. Flacius takes the text's own claim to divine inspiration seriously and often collapses distinctions between human and divine author in statements such as "it is, after all, the author, or rather the Spirit of the Lord through him in 1 Corinthians ..." (55). The Spirit does not override the human characteristics of the authors, as in verbal dictation theories, but works with them to express the divinely intended meaning. Above all, Flacius praises the narrative unity of Scripture. For him:

God has anticipated our ignorance in that the Scripture is written with marvelous artistry in complete harmony, so that not only the individual books or writings and the various places, but also one and the same place and the entire context are illumined and explained beyond measure, so that all doubts are overcome best when one meditates upon the places in doubt diligently and in the fear of God.27

27 "Prosperit vero Deus mirabiliter nostrae imbecillitati; ut ita Sacrae literae sint mirabili artificio, sibique invicem consonanti harmonia conscriptae: ut non solum diversi earum libri, aut scripta,
Like all of Flacius' hermeneutical insights, the concept of narrative unity and clarity is based on his Christocentrism. If God has revealed himself to humankind, he has not done so in an obscure way, so as to tease humanity, but with clarity. After all, Flacius argues, the two portions of Scripture are God's testament, and a testament is usually made for the sake of clearly communicating the deceased's will: "Which human being of sound mind does not take care that he, when he makes out his will, expresses himself with the utmost clarity and purity in order to avoid doubts or causes for contention among his heirs?" (105). Just like the wise testator, God has clearly expressed his will in the Scriptures. According to Flacius, the Bible is given by God as a testament, and should be read with this purpose in view. Thus, "the correct and actual meaning [of the Scriptures] may be deduced from the viewpoint [which is] not merely to narrate vague allusions or shadows or dreams, but rather to construct a testament and to confirm the covenant with transparent and true words" (105).

Any remark like Flacius' about the unity of the Scriptures and their "marvelous artistry in complete harmony" was, from the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, deemed impossibly naive. The historical critical school effectively resisted ideas of authorial or doctrinal unity in the biblical manuscripts. Old Testament critic Robert Alter summarizes the common sentiment of the historical-critical school regarding textual disunity:

A century of analytic scholarship has made powerful argument to the effect that where we might naively imagine that we are reading a text, what we actually have is a constant stitching together of earlier texts drawn from divergent literary and sometimes oral traditions, with minor or major interventions by later editors in the

diversaque loca; sed etiam idem locus, ac totus contextus, supra modum sese illustret ac explicet; utque non alio unde felicissim omnia dubia tollantur, quam ex ipsomet toto loco, diligenter ac in timore Dei expenso" (105).

28 The quotation in context runs: "Ex scopo igitur (qui non est vel nudos typos ac umbras condere, vel somnia exponere; sed perspicuis propriisqve verbis testamentum condere, & foedus sancire) facile vera genuinaque sententia haberis potest" (105).
form of glosses, connecting passages, conflation of sources, and so forth." (Art of Biblical Narrative 132)

Alter does not deny the evidence for multiple sources and final redaction. What he rejects, however, is the notion that such evidence must lead in turn to a fragmented reading of the Biblical text. Instead, much like Flacius, Alter argues for a unity in the diversity. In his opinion,

the editorial combination of different literary sources might usefully be conceived as the final stage in the process of artistic creation which produced biblical narrative....What I should like to propose here is that the biblical writers and redactors...had certain notions of unity rather different from our own, and that the fullness of statement they aspired to achieve as writers in fact led them at times to violate what a later age and culture would be disposed to think of as canons of unity and logical coherence. The biblical text may not be the whole cloth imagined by pre-modern Judeo-Christian tradition, but the confused textual patchwork that scholarship has often found to displace such earlier views may prove upon further scrutiny to be purposeful pattern. (133)

Flacius certainly argued from a much more theological background than Alter, but both the modern literary critic and the pre-critical Lutheran see a great unity in the text despite its multiple authorship. Flacius realized that only a mature reader has the capacity to live with the tension that a textual concept of unity in diversity entails: "The difference in the discourses of the individual writers (although the entire Bible must, because it is that, be perceived as the work of one single author) is no small impediment for the inexperienced reader" (9).

One should not, of course, minimize the profound differences between Alter's new literary criticism of the Bible and Flacius' conviction that Scriptural unity is derived from divine inspiration. Robert Alter himself anticipates such comparison in chapter nine of his The World of Biblical Literature. He recalls the eager question of a Jewish-Orthodox student whether the complexities of moral motivation in a particular biblical story he had just discussed didn't prove divine inspiration of the story. Alter replied that no literary analysis could confirm faith in this way and that certain gifted writers, including
thoroughgoing secularists like Henry James and Joseph Conrad, as well as intent monotheists like the authors of Genesis and the David story, manifested this "ability to imagine moral dilemmas and ambiguities of motivation with an uncanny complexity" (203).

Nevertheless, in opposition to the historical-critical school whose literary division Wellhausen's theories have dominated for so long, Alter shows that the text may more legitimately be read as a whole than as a collection of incoherent fragments. The work of textual critics such as Alter thus demonstrates a re-kindled interest in a coherent reading of the biblical text, although without a divine author, an overall redactor, so to speak, a coherent reading lacks a foundation of the same strength and clarity as Flacius' concept of divine revelation and inspiration implies.

2.5. Historical Distance and Narrative Style

Having established the unity of the biblical text(s), Flacius addresses some of the problems that arise from our historical distance from the language of the past and the cultural traditions that shaped its expressions. Flacius is evidence that practitioners of the so-called pre-critical hermeneutic were not at all ignorant of the importance of language. Philosophical hermeneutics in our day also greatly stresses the importance of language, but it often does so to the point where language becomes the instrument whereby we create not only discourse but also reality (Lundin/Thistleton 34). Flacius adopts a mediating position between language as purely mimetic and language as shaping reality. He realizes not only that language is a means of communication, but that our perception of things is

29 Richard Rorty in Contingency, irony and, solidarity claims that words are no longer tied to any transcendent realities, but are always contextually determined. Thus they are mere tools. He concludes: "But if we do that, we shall eventually be driven back on the questions 'What is the point of playing the game in question?' and 'For what purpose is this final vocabulary useful?' The only available answer to both seems to be the one Nietzsche gave: 'It increases our power; it helps us get what we antecedently decided we want'" (115).
also shaped by language: "Language is a mark or image of the things, and a kind of
spectacles through which we gaze at the things themselves." 30  The comparison of
language to spectacles suggests that Flacius is aware that just as lenses influence our
vision, so language formed by cultural influences shapes our understanding of the subject
matter. This conjecture seems justified, because he then goes on to state the problems that
arise if the reader does understand the cultural and linguistic conventions which shape the
biblical discourse.

For Flacius, the linguistic problems arise from the ‘modern’ reader’s ignorance of
both grammar and custom. As a scholar of Hebrew language and culture, Flacius
realizes that the use of language is connected to a way of life, which provides necessary
context for translation, and that this important background is often unknown. In addition,
individual style and use of idioms differs from author to author of the various biblical
books, so that if the reader has become thoroughly accustomed to one book, he cannot
simply transfer his knowledge into the reading of another (9). This lack becomes painfully
evident in the encounter with the original tongues. Flacius mentions some of the peculiar
characteristics of the biblical languages (10 ff.). 31  They are oriental and therefore highly
figurative and that in many different ways. The writing uses “tropes, allegories, types,
questions, narratives onomatopoeia and similar figures of speech, which cannot be
discerned and understood without preparation (11).” 32

An additional difficulty is the taking over of tropes from other languages and
cultures that surrounded the biblical writers (quorum [tropos] non pauci sunt inusitiores
aliis linguis) and giving them a peculiar meaning so that their significance cannot be
found out by merely explaining a Hebrew trope with the same Egyptian figure. Flacius

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30 Est vero sermo, nota aut imago rerum, et veluti quaedam perspicilla, per quae res ipsas intuemur (7).
31 Since Flacius was a Hebrew scholar, his comments are mostly pertaining to the Old Testament writings.
Yet much of what he says also holds true for the New Testament.
32 praemonitus actually means warning, but the context makes clear Flacius’ attempt to show that without
familiarity with these concepts they will go by unnoticed and so may lead to misinterpretation.
would have envied current biblical scholarship for its wealth of comparative material, for he laments the lack of non-biblical writings from the same time-period whereby one could “illuminate and illustrate the use of obscure words or expression from another place” (10).

Flacius also observes that the Hebrews freely mix tropes of the same kinds, or even of different kind such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and anthropomorphism (10). Also, the Hebrew writers often use in one expression two or three tropes. Flacius gives the example "the hand of the Lord was upon me" (Manus Domini tetigit me) which contains an anthropomorphism, describing a divine action in human terms, but also a metonymy, where the hand stands for punishment"(11). In the New Testament the biblical writers also use tropes that make little sense to a western reader (Flacius calls them "far off" and "difficult") such as "to put on Christ" (induere Christo). It is therefore vital to understand the metaphorical nature of the Hebrew and Greek tongue.

This might seem like a formidable array of difficulties, too many in fact for the ordinary reader to overcome. However, Flacius stated at the outset that all essential teachings of the Scriptures are free from difficulties that would make them inaccessible to the reader. Moreover, especially as Puritan history shows, constant catechizing and instruction in the basic teachings of the Bible so familiarized the laity with expressions such as "to put on Christ" or "to be clothed with Christ" that these metaphors were well understood. This shows again that the Protestant principle of the self-interpreting Scripture was necessarily tied to an enormous educational effort and patience on the part of the reader.

Flacius' analysis of Hebrew narrative structure is quite impressive, because here too the Lutheran pastor had insights that have been restated in our day by literary critics. Flacius notices the terseness of the biblical narrative where

one finds incomplete and unexplained [things] in words, language, meaning and in things. It occurs very often that either words or sentence construction, or rather the form of speech and finally also sentences and subject matter if examined
according to Latin custom, correspond insufficiently with the previous [sentence/subject matter]; they are either clearly absent, or must be inferred.¹³

Such a procedure is much more feasible in Greek or Latin than it is for Hebrew writing. The Hebrew narrative is very terse (concisus). As a result, the reader has to infer much of the meaning by filling in the lacunae left by the language. As a Latinate scholar, Flacius is frustrated by the crude biblical narrative style: "For Latin ears the interconnection of the language is harsher. The words or sentences are not in a smooth and artful way related to one another, as in other writers. Rather they tumble down with rough, undulating and whirlpool-like impetuousness. In this the sacred Scriptures are similar to the writings of Thukydides and Sallust" (15).³⁴ This crudeness is reflected in the defectiveness of the verb forms and their conjunctions as well as the lack of cases. Those, he argues, cause the most problems, because the article is often ambiguous and the lack of compound words (as they are used in Latin) forces the reader to engage in much reconstructive activity. In Hebrew, single words often express entire sentences which provide the context for the next narrative step. This terseness and foreign narrative construction can easily deceive the inattentive reader.

Another difficulty with Hebrew narrative, according to Flacius, is that the human authors of Scripture freely shift around persons, time, circumstances and numbers.³⁵ At one point Flacius wonders why the Bible is not composed like a scientific discourse beginning with general statements and then moving to illustrate these by particular examples. In contrast to scientific writing, which deals mostly with generalities, since the individual elements of science are always disputed, "scriptural discourse is made up of

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³³ Saepimisse enim fit, ut vel verba, vel constructio, seu forma orationis, vel denique etiam sententiae aut res, si ad Latinum morem examinantur, parum respondeant praecedentibus: aut plane non adsunt; sed tantum intelligi debeat (11).
³⁴ Tota connexio sermonis Latinis auribus durior est. Neque enim ita in hoc, vel verba, vel sententiae, inter se molliter concinque connexae aut conferruminatae sunt, ut in multis alis Scriptoribus: sed confragoso, fluctuoso, et vorticoso quodam impetu, interdum ruunt. Qua in re Sacris litteris non nihil similes sunt, Thucyd. & Salustius (15). - Thucydides was a Greek nobleman and historian around 460 and 404 B.C. Sallust (Sallustius) was a Roman historian (born 86 B.C.).
³⁵ mutationes subitae personarum, temporum, modorum et numerorum (15).
both general and particular." This again is an additional problem, because particular narrative situations demand knowledge of a multitude of contexts that are referred to by the narrator and shed light on the meaning of the narrative. Flacius, in fact, doesn't quite understand why "God has transmitted the Scriptures, as it were, sentence by sentence and so concisely, divided into various parts like Roman law." Flacius speculates that the reason might be that Scripture is actually nothing but the recorded dealing of God with man in particular situations. Both Caesarean law and the Scriptures have been written because of the worst behavior of humankind (ex pessimis moribus humani generis). The Scriptures, says Flacius, consist largely of individual inspirations (apparationibus), summonses (conciunibus) and letters (epistolis), which are "given by God for the correction and removal of evil resulting from the fault and punishment of man" (19).

Flacius' observations about the nature of the biblical narrative structure are shared by modern critics. Erich Auerbach noted in his famous comparison of the Homeric and the biblical narrative style:

It would be difficult...to imagine styles more contrasted than those of these two equally ancient and equally epic texts. On the one hand, externalized, uniformly illuminated phenomena, at a definite time and at a definite place, connected together with lacunae in a perpetual foreground; thoughts and feeling completely expressed; events taking place in leisurely fashion and with very little of suspense. On the other hand, the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal (and to that extent far more of a unity), remains mysterious and 'fraught with background.' (Mimesis 11)

36 At disceptatio Sacrarum literarum mixta est ex individuis et generalibus (18).
37 Dubium vero est, cur Scripturam sic quasi sententiatim et concisim, in quibusdam partibus, tradiderit Deus, sicut et Jus Caesareum scriptum est (18-19).
Meir Sternberg, professor of poetics and Comparative literature at Tel Aviv University, also concurs with Flacius' assessment of the narrative style as terse and in need of much "filling in" by the reader. While Sternberg realizes that such lacunae are problematic, he also postulates that every literary discourse, even children's literature, requires a certain amount of "gap-filling" by the reader. The filling of gaps is basic to the reading process (The Poetics of Biblical Narrative 186). In simpler genres of literature, the filling in of implied information is automatic, but becomes more problematic in works of greater complexity (ibid. 187). Sternberg goes a step further, claiming that this gap-filling is indeed an adequate reflection of our every-day hermeneutical enterprise where we constantly interpret situations by filling in gaps: "To be sure, in everyday life people also construct hypotheses and fill in the gaps. They work out the doings and motives and personalities of others and, on the basis of whatever information they have at their disposal, guess at what remains hidden." Thus the terseness of Hebrew narrative shows "...the Bible's genius for processing our experience" (ibid. 228).

Flacius was obviously not so finely attuned as Auerbach and Sternberg to the productive function and literary artistry of what he saw as "crude" style, but at least he paid attention to it. And as we shall see, the issue, once raised, was picked up by Puritan writers, in particular by John Owen. What Flacius does realize, however, is the importance of context. Precisely because the biblical narrative structure contains gaps, context is all-important. Otherwise, individual sentences whose broad application makes proper interpretation difficult may be used to bolster any doctrine. For instance, the words "*Omnia possum in Christo*" are also used by the papists to show that every monk and priest should be capable of remaining celibate (20). And there is a sense in which Flacius does realize that the biblical narrative is purposefully demanding. He follows the
church fathers in his view that many interpretations are difficult so that believers would retain an incentive for reading the Scriptures more diligently.\textsuperscript{38}

Moreover, according to Flacius, the function of Scripture difficulties is comparable to that of Christ's use of parabolic speech. In Matthew 11:25-26 Christ himself admits to speaking in parables so that only God's chosen children will perceive the message to the exclusion of those who glory in worldly wisdom (Flacius 23). In short, the biblical narrative structure is indeed purposefully designed. It is a "no-frills-no-gimmicks" discourse:

The holy Scripture should not in the least be deprived of its grave and manly eloquence. There are, in the language of the Scriptures, none of those leisurely and pleasing charms and allurements; [none of that] external sweetness and flattery; that richness of voices, or those foolish melodious sounds which were listened to and celebrated with greatest eagerness and admiration in the pompous writings of the orators and poets in Greece and Rome at that time. (60)

It is interesting to note that Flacius associates the solemn and purpose-oriented speech of the Bible with manliness (\textit{mascula eloquentia}) but the allurements of Greek and Roman poetry with "female" terms such as trumpery and illicit sexual allurements.\textsuperscript{39} By the time we reach Schleiermacher's hermeneutic, the female becomes superior because of its intuitive qualities. However, the main point is that Flacius does not regard the narrative style of the Scriptures as inferior but appreciates its plainness. It is possible that the allusions to harlotry in the Greeco-Roman style are meant as references to the Roman Catholic Church, which was often referred to by Protestant writers as a harlot. Flacius' celebration of the plain style would later be adopted by the Puritans, who also used it as a pattern for their preaching (Ryken 104-105).

\textsuperscript{38} Ut tanto ardentius scrutentur sacras literas, et petant patefactionem clariorem (23).
\textsuperscript{39} Veneres, the term Flacius used for allurements, derives from Venus, the goddess of love, and has definite erotic overtones.
2.6. The Remedia: A Step by Step Guide to Exegesis

We have seen so far that Flacius located the authorship of the Scriptures with God, who inspired the human authors to convey his will through them. Secondly, we have seen his treatment of the text; and now, at the end of his work, Flacius addresses the (regenerate) reader by giving a step-by-step approach to the reading of the text. It is worth presenting Flacius' advice fully, because it constitutes the earliest such direct "technical" guidance in orthodox Lutheranism. This section is entitled Remedia, where Flacius tries to offer solutions to the problems he has enumerated throughout the treatise.

Flacius names eight "salutaria remedia", some of which overlap with what he has already stated at the beginning of his treatise. The first help to our understanding of the biblical text, which is "to be sought with greatest zeal," is the triune God, "the heavenly father which draws us to the son, the son revealed from the bosom of the father, who is our entrance, truth and way to the father; and finally the Holy Spirit himself, whose task it is to lead us into the whole truth, to make us God-knowing or taught by God and to endow us with true and saving thoughts in all our studies and efforts" (25). Thus, as with all Reformers, especially the Pietists and Puritan devotional writers after Flacius, the combination of personal piety (meaning an ongoing relationship with the triune God) is a main ingredient in the reading of Scripture.

The second remedy is some instruction (aligua catechistica) and knowledge of the subject-matter of Scripture as taught by "pious and experienced servants of Christ" (25). The most important starting point is self-knowledge, that is, the realization of our sickness consisting in and deriving from a broken relationship with the divine, and the only remedy, Christ Jesus. This catechetical instruction will help the reader to establish a framework, the analogy of faith, which will serve as interpretative boundary. We see here already the impulse for catechetical instruction which was practised widely by the church of the third and fourth centuries and taken up with great energy and enthusiasm first by Luther and then by the English Puritans and German Pietists two generations after Flacius. Thus the
drive for education, which accompanied the Reformation wherever it went, was based on
the desire to understand and disseminate the word of God. The basic truths of revelation
(the meaning of Christ’s life, death and resurrection for the human-divine dialogue) as
derived from the text, were taught as the hermeneutical entry point into the text.

The third remedy is a firm knowledge of the Bible’s original languages. According
to Flacius, lack of skill in languages is the most common source of problems for the reader
of Scripture. The fourth solution to Bible difficulties is found in "assiduous meditation
and study of the divine law." Only such sustained effort will yield proper fruit. The
phrase studying *legis divinae*, helps to highlight the change that will take place in the
meaning of meditation by the time of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic. For Flacius,
meditation is tied to action, since the divine law not only provides an extra-human, non-
subjective standard of conduct, but is also bound up with life-application. As we shall see,
however, Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic is less conducive to rigorous application in the
social sphere, because ultimate happiness is provided by a mystical oneness with the
World-All.

As a fifth remedy Flacius mentions ardent prayer (*ardens oratio*) to God who, in
time, will answer by illuminating the dark passage to the seeker. Jean Grondin dismisses
this remedy as "the usual appeal to the Holy Spirit" (*Philosophical Hermeneutics* 42), but
Flacius considers it vitally important. His appeal to the aid of the Spirit in interpretation
gains additional weight by its prayer-like style and its position at the end of the *remedia*:
"From God [the only teacher of theology], we should urgently request that he write his
law and the knowledge thereof with his holy finger, that is the Holy Ghost, on our heart
and that he may mercifully grant us the fullest cognition of the holy trinity and its
mysteries" (87). Flacius here expresses what we will find repeatedly in the manuals of
theological hermeneutics: understanding is not natural, but rather constitutes a gift from

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40 assidua meditatio ac studium legis divinae (26).
God. Precritical hermeneutics regarded understanding without the Holy Spirit to be impossible. In the chapter on John Owen's hermeneutic we will deal with this topic in greater depth. Suffice it to say here that Grondin's nonchalant dismissal of Flacius' appeal to the Holy Spirit shows a limitation modern philosophical presuppositions place on the interpretation and understanding of hermeneutic history.

The sixth remedy is experience. As in all sciences and arts, says Flacius, the interpreter needs "true and living experience" (vera ac viva experientia) to achieve his task. It is after all experience which marvelously illumines "all obscure theories" (27). Flacius is convinced that practical application is part of textual interpretation: "But the teaching [of the Scriptures] is by far most effective if one employs an examination [or testing] not only of the words, but, indeed, also of reality, so that the student is forced to exercise the practical application of the teaching, and learns to swim as it were without the cork" (83). Here too, Flacius anticipates the Puritan and Pietist hermeneutic, in which applicability played such a large role.

The seventh remedy is the time honored practice of explaining Scripture with Scripture, the sola scriptura principle of Augustine, Luther and most later Protestant Reformers. Flacius quotes Augustine and completely agrees with his findings that most often an obscure passage in Scripture is repeated and contextualized in another place. The final, eighth, remedy is to be found in good translations of the original text by faithful interpreters. Flacius realizes that a translation is always an interpretation. Yet he does not regard this as a liability but believes instead that valuable insights may be gained from those who have already struggled with the interpretative problems of the text (28).

Despite all these "remedia," Flacius openly confesses that there will remain some obscure passages in Scripture. Especially for the lay-person, many of these salutary rules will be useless. However, there are excellent translations which have cleared up many obscure passages for the reader, such as Luther's Bible. Secondly, Flacius explains, lay-persons are not at the mercy of scholars and academics since the obscure passages do not
contain any revelations which are not clearly stated elsewhere in the text. Yet the scholars are needed to probe continually into the less obvious parts of the Scriptures (29).

2.7. Final Instructions

The remainder of Flacius' manual contains concrete rules and regulations for the interpretation of the Bible. These are divided into two groups, one comprising rules taken directly from Scripture itself, the other containing aids which have already been used by others, or which God has shown Flacius himself (*mihi munere almi Spiritus incident*). The dominant theme in this segment is the rule of context. Flacius' rule of context is based on his conviction that all writing aimed at conveying something of importance is written in some sort of order, for "it is impossible that anything written in a sensible manner would not have a certain viewpoint (*scopum*) and, as it were, a certain corporeality, containing particular parts, or limbs, which are connected not only to one another but also with the entire body and especially to the whole scope [of the writing]" (97). Again, this reminds us of Robert Alter's comment concerning a "purposeful pattern" in the biblical narratives. If interpretation is context-oriented, the text must be divided according to subject-matter or themes.

According to Flacius the division of the text not only demands a solid knowledge of the words and their meaning, but also requires the utilization of all human learning such as linguistic and grammatical skills, as well as knowledge of dialectic and rhetoric. Even philosophy may help, if it is used with caution. After all, all truth is God's truth, whether it be revealed under natural light or by supernatural revelation (79). But besides these technical skills, one must have the ability to recognize the substance of the discourse. The Bible treats "of the sacred and profane, the creator and the creature, of just and unjust things" and it talks about the peculiar teaching and tasks of each of these binary opposites (52). Thus it is important to distinguish between negative examples of human behavior
and positive ones, to prevent excesses by fanatics who believe their immoral behavior to be sanctioned by the Scriptures.

The next step is to determine the genre of the passage read. In a section that reads like a manual for narrative and form criticism (96-101), Flacius suggests:

if the text remains generally obscure for us, either because of linguistic problems, or due to the subject-matter, it will prove very useful to examine the genre (genere scripti) of the entire corpus: whether we are dealing with a narrative or history (narratio aut historia), an instruction or some doctrine (institutio aut doctrina quaedam), a consolation or a reprimand (consolatio aut objurgatio), a description of some thing, a speech or something similar. (97)

Flacius is convinced that certain genres follow particular forms in Scripture, so that a recognition of such genres would help to put the disputed passage or sentence into context and thereby throw some new light on it: "When we have found the genre, we have to examine its parts or members (membra), and subdivisions. And if we have found those, then we must observe their relation to each other as well as their mutual relations to the whole of the text....for if we have examined the writing in this way, it will by necessity become more clear to us" (ibid.).

After the genre has been determined, the interpreter should continue the examination according to the typical rules of the genre. The "status,"41 the parts of speech, and the arguments need to be determined. Also, the interpreter should try to find the passages or prior arguments (loca) from which the present arguments are derived. In short, Flacius, much like his contemporary Peter Ramus, seems to believe that rational structures of the human mind are God-given and are reflected in human discourse. Therefore if writing is carefully analyzed, the truth will eventually reveal itself. This is particularly true in the case of Scripture, where God, a God of order, tries to convey his

41 "Status" in rhetoric means the question for the determination of the subject matter, the status quaestionis, which determines what the text is talking about. This expression is borrowed from the realm of law where, in contrast to philosophy, the questions for the determination of the facts, rather than "why" questions, were given utmost importance (Geldsaetzer 112, n22).
good news to humankind.  The discourse may be broken down into its skeleton (another procedure for which Ramism and its Puritan practitioners - especially Perkins - was famous). "It is of no little use," says Flacius, if you put the discourse into your own words, as if, after accomplished anatomy (the breaking down of the speech into its parts) and after you have removed all flesh, the ornaments of expansions and embellishments, only the skeleton of the speech remained, then you only take up those sentences which are the foundation of everything which carry everything else as an addition, and which at the same time necessarily, like bones that are connected by sinews, are connected to each other.  

At the end of this procedure, it remains the task of the reader to consider the remaining essential sentences in light of the guiding question with which he approached the text. Each time the reader of the Scriptures "does the anatomy" he should "write down the result in form of a chart." He will then quickly discern the central themes and issues of the passage under examination and will not be sidetracked by secondary issues (101). This again, as we will see in Perkins' manual, was practised by the Puritans. The work on the chart will burn the material into the interpreter's memory, make him aware of the passage's design and its main arguments. Especially one's reformulating the subject-matter in one's own words without adding or subtracting any essential meaning will serve to familiarize one with the passage (101). After this breakdown the reader is thoroughly familiar with the context (contextus) of the passage.

42 I will give the passage in full, for the parallels to Ramus (1515-1572) are uncanny. Especially the use of the syllogism as confirming rather than foundational follows exactly the Ramian pattern. Unfortunately I have not been able to find any evidence for a connection between the two men: "Ubi id crit deprehensum, examinetur secundum praecepta illius generis: quaerantur ac constituantur status, partes orationis, et argumenta. Videantur etiam loca, unde argumenta ducta sint; examinentur et expendantur ad Dialecticas praecipositiones, tum ordo scripti totius; tum definitiones ac divisiones, si quae insunt; tum denique etiam argumentationes; quas aliquando utile est, in breves syllogismos, aut alias Dialecticas formas, includere" (99).

43 Nec parvam utilitatem afferet, si tuo sermone id scriptum varie retextas, ut si primum, veluti facta anatomia, ac tanquam abjectis omnibus carnibus, ornatus amplificationum, dulcoramentorum, digressionum, & similium, sola quasi ossa tuo sermone delinees: ut tantum eas sententias complectaris, quae sunt veluti basis totius; quae omnia accersita, & quasi accidentaria, sustinent; & simul plane necessario inter sese, sicut ossa nervis colligata, cohaerent (99).
With the context emerges the viewpoint (scopum) according to which a passage should be read. Flacius insists that many doctrinal controversies could have been prevented if the scope of the passage in question had been determined correctly (105). If, for example, the institution of the Lord's supper were recognized as the giving of a testament, there would be no bickering over the nature of this institution. For not only would the finality of the action be clear (one dies only once and then the testament takes effect forever, making the Catholic repetition of the sacrifice unnecessary), but there would be no ambiguity about the nature of the elements, since Christ makes his testament for the church until his return and would therefore not speak ambiguously (107).

Flacius' idea of a context-oriented hermeneutic comprises both the spiritual and the grammatical aspect of the text. On the surface level, grammatical considerations, such as the context of a passage, and the viewpoint from which it was written, play important roles. But on a deeper level, understanding does not depend on technical rules, but on a relation to the divine, namely the communion with Christ. It is through him that "we hold the scope and the argument of the entire Scripture in our hands" (35). In other words, the real key to the Scriptures, for Flacius, is Christ. According to Flacius, however, this viewpoint is offensive to the reader, and his heart must be changed through the workings of grace before he may attain this perspective.

2.8. Conclusion

It is time to summarize Flacius' contribution in light of our quest to correct, from a theological perspective, the narrative of hermeneutical development. If one had to summarize Flacius' hermeneutics with one phrase, I would choose "Contextual text-immanent interpretation." Flacius recognized that the basic literal or grammatical sense was the sense intended by the original author in addressing his ancient audience in Hebrew or Greek. This is not a move toward the historical-critical method in exegesis, but it is an exegetical method that roots the meaning of the text a) in the text itself and b) in the
context provided both by the larger framework of the book or passage in which the text appears and by the "purpose of the speaker" of the text (Clavis 83).

At the same time, and without the sense of contradiction that informed the higher critic, "Flacius argued the unity of Scripture in its doctrinal truth, the absence of genuine contradictions in the text, and the necessity on both the small and the large scale to use Scripture to elucidate Scripture" (Muller II 99). Flacius applies this principle of unity and context also to the doctrinal content. The basic teachings of the faith can clearly be taken out of the text and form the "Analogy of Faith" which in turn controls doctrinal excesses: "Flacius, in other words, understands Scripture as the norma normans theologiae and the creeds and confessional writings of the church as norma normata: the creeds and confessions express the contents and the general theological sense of Scripture and, this being the case, any interpretation that differs from that offered in the creeds and confessions must be a denial of the true sense of Scripture" (Muller II 100).

Most importantly, however, Flacius extends the scopus, or viewpoint, to the reader's spiritual state. Flacius explains that a Christological bias is needed for an understanding of Scripture. In spite of textual clarity, the fallen condition of the reader hinders the understanding and appropriation of the subject-matter which can only be adequately accessed in a relationship with Christ. Thus a close examination of Flacius' hermeneutic shows Grondin's assessment, that it tries to assert the "universality of the grammatical," to be incorrect. The key to the Scriptures is rather Christ and the dialectic of law and gospel. The need for Christ is universal, because the sinful condition of humanity and hence spiritual-moral blindness are universal. Consequently, right understanding is not a matter of mastering grammar (although that is also vitally important), but of the reader's conversion to the right perspective for the reading of the text.

Flacius' Christocentric hermeneutic, which demands personal application, also sets Flacius (and the tradition of biblical hermeneutics in general) apart from the narrative
criticism of present-day secular theoreticians like Hans Frei and Robert Alter. It is of course wrong to think that the secular critic is objective while Flacius 'merely' adheres to a faith or confessional stance. Secular narrative criticism as advocated by Hans Frei and practiced (brilliantly) by Alter is based on a presupposition that ignores or brackets the text's claim to divine inspiration and its consequent demand on the reader to make the text's interpretation of reality his or her own. Robert Alter goes quite far by admitting that the position of modernist historical-criticism "is a vantage point of cognitive superiority from which the modern investigator overviews the ancient text, and that assumption of superiority entails a sense of existential distance from the text" (World of Biblical Literature 204-205). Alter also rejects the anti-authoritative stance of Deconstructionism (ibid. 200).

Yet Flacius would say that Alter does not go far enough, because he refuses to take a position regarding the claim of authority with which the text confronts the reader. Alter is, of course, to some extent correct when he asserts that "Literary appreciation [of the biblical text] does not automatically contradict belief in the inspired character of the text, but it can manage comfortably without reference to such belief" (ibid. 203). However, as Flacius points out, the text claims to be inspired, and to ignore or bracket this claim, as a purely literary approach does (ibid.), is certainly to deny a great part of the text's content, namely the demand for application. If the biblical text is read exclusively as a piece of art in its own right, then it is already being misinterpreted because it claims to be the revealed will and testament from God in the Old as well as in the New Testament and as such demands submission to its world-view.

In other words, Alter is right when he points out that the "ancient writers sought to realize through the medium of literature an order of truth that utterly transcends literature" (World of Biblical Narrative 42). But if the truth so portrayed is indeed real (God's existence, his character, human fall and corruption, the need of redemption especially in light of divine judgment), then how can one simply bracket personal
application of the text? Textual critics like Hans Frei and Robert Alter thus separate the reading of the text from application, a gap that was foreign to hermeneuts like Flacius. As we shall see in the final chapter of this thesis, philosophical hermeneutics tries to close this gap, but has considerable difficulties in doing so without re-admitting the divine as a dialogue-partner and transcendent source of moral values.

Flacius in his Clavis does not bracket his faith while engaging in serious textual-criticism. He is proof, as were most Reformers, that critical scholarship of the Scriptures doesn’t require a hermeneutic of unbelief and/or radical scepticism. It seems that whether the Bible is regarded as a patchwork of conflicting texts, or whether it be regarded as possessing an overarching unity, depends more on the assumptions with which one approaches the text than on any scientific method. Recent discussions have tried to show that the shift in biblical hermeneutics from pre-critical to historical-critical should be regarded as a radical change of presuppositions rather than as an inevitable outcome in the progress of objective critical thinking.

For example, the German theologian Gerhard Maier states in his Das Ende der historisch-kritischen Methode that the most serious charge against the historical-critical method is its unsuitability to the subject matter. For Maier the basic fault of the historical critical school is not its textual criticism, where, in fact, it has produced some fine philological work, but rather its basic presumption that it can judge God’s revelation by human reason (20).

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44 Robert Alter writes: “Literary analysis, on the other hand, brackets the question of history, not necessarily out of indifference to history but because it assumes that factual history is not the primary concern of the text and that it is, in any case, largely indeterminable, given the scant data we have to work with at a remove of two to three millenia from the originating events to which the text refers. A literary approach, instead, directs attention to the moral, psychological, political, and spiritual realism of the biblical texts, which is a way of opening ourselves to something that deserves to be called authority” (World of Biblical Literature 204).

45 “Der tiefste Einwand ist aber der, daß Kritik einer möglichen göttlichen Offenbarung gegenüber eine unzutreffende und falsche Entsprechung darstellt, die im Grunde die menschliche Eigenmächtigkeit und deren Maßstäbe gegen den Anspruch der Offenbarung aufrechterhält. Weil diese Methode also dem Gegenstand nicht angemessen ist, ja dessen Tendenz widerstreitet, müssen wir sie ablehnen” (Meier 20).
In other words, as Flacius together with all Reformers would have agreed, if the basic hermeneutical presupposition is one of unbelief, where the text explicitly demands trust in God, interpretative chaos must be the result. Thus the commonly held notion that improving scholarship necessitated an abandonment of the Scriptures as divinely inspired becomes highly problematic. With the demise of the myth of objective scholarship that has served as the main justification for the rise of the historical-critical school, the motivations for this approach to biblical criticism need to be re-examined (Maier 9). Thus pre-critical hermeneutics, while recognizing the value of methodical scholarship, exhibits the same mistrust of method as an agent for the progress of humankind as does modern philosophical hermeneutics.

For Flacius, and here too he is a forerunner of the Puritans and Pietists, the interpretation of Scripture is not a mere objective, technical and theoretical affair, but is inevitably tied to practical application. The teachings of Scripture, according to Flacius, are profitable only if they are lived rather than merely intellectually held (106). God, like a good teacher, teaches through doubts, hardship, reward and discipline. Since God teaches practical truths, he will also send his students through trials, that is, situations in life where the student will have the opportunity to apply his 'lesson' (107). Here again, Flacius' hermeneutic sets the precedent for the Puritan and Pietist approaches. The reading of the Scripture cannot be conducted without its application in practical life.

Flacius also anticipates a number of hermeneutical aspects in his writing that will concern the Puritan and Pietist hermeneutic as well as philosophical hermeneutics as presently conducted. Flacius, for example, speaks about meditation on the divine, something that we will find in Schleiermacher. Both writers suggest that meditation leads to a correct self-understanding. For Flacius, however, meditation on the Word describes the contemplation of a word that enters the human realm from the outside and thus provides an objective standard for the interpretation of human existence. In Flacius' opinion, contemplating the will of God corrects man's prior self-understanding in light of
the divine object of contemplation. Thus, as part of a continual dialogue with the divine through the reading of the text, interpretation must lead to action. Schleiermacher, by contrast, mediates not on a word of recognizable intellectual content, but rather on the mysterious workings of a monistic world Spirit. This problem of application of reading will re-appear with Gadamer's attempt to construct a practical philosophy, and, as we shall see, it is in the area of moral conduct that Flacius' theological hermeneutic helps to expose the weakness of philosophical hermeneutics.

Most importantly for this state of our investigation, Flacius' hermeneutic contains features which he will pass on to Puritan interpreters. The use of logic and rhetoric, the close attention to narrative structure of the text, the plainness of the biblical language, the importance of balancing grammatical with spiritual considerations, the emphasis on a relationship with the divine, the combination of complete trust in the text as divine revelation while practicing critical scholarship, and finally the ever-present urge to combine interpretation with application--all are prominent features of the Puritan hermeneutic.

One group of interpreters who urgently felt the need for application were the English Puritans, among whom William Perkins was the first methodical exegete and hermeneut. He adopted many of Flacius' principles and is an important link between Lutheran exegesis and English Protestant hermeneutics. With the thought of application and practical theology in mind, let us now turn to see how Flacius' principles are developed in William Perkins' manual of biblical interpretation.
Chapter 3: The Hermeneutics of William Perkins

Introduction:

It may be helpful to restate briefly the goals of this study in order to contextualize William Perkins' contribution to hermeneutical history. I am recounting the development in hermeneutics from a theological to an anthropocentric perspective for the purpose of correcting common misconceptions about pre-critical hermeneutics. In fact, the term pre-critical itself may be ill-chosen, because it conveys the erroneous perception that grammatical-historical criticism was not practised by Puritan and Pietist commentators, when in truth such critical concerns originated with biblical exegesis. Practitioners of biblical interpretation during and following the Reformation were well aware of Jewish exegesis, interacted with scientific and textual-critical theories of their day, and readily admitted corruptions of the biblical text. Thus one strand of my argument addresses the textual-critical abilities of these “pre-critical” theorists.

However, underlying textual theories are more philosophical concerns the examination of which should render the comparison between “pre-critical” (or theological) hermeneutics and modern theories of interpretation a valuable contribution to present scholarship in the field of hermeneutics. I want to examine philosophical-theological changes within the foundations of hermeneutical theories in terms of a general shift from theocentrism toward anthropocentrism, or subjectivity. While pre-critical hermeneutics was based on the biblical framework of a created universe where meaning does not ultimately depend on subjective impressions, modern and post-modern approaches conduct interpretation within a framework bereft of the divine and thus void of
transcendent meaning.

My focal point within this change is ethics, or, to use Charles Taylor’s expression, the ability to talk about what constitutes “a good life,” in a world troubled by “a loss of meaning, the fading of moral horizons” (Malaise of Modernity 10). The argument is that former hermeneutics derived moral confidence and norms for social activism from an extra-human standard and the framework of a created universe, while the attempts of philosophical hermeneutics to achieve similar applicatory strength are illusionary in the absence of such a framework. Again, my purpose is partly to describe the true nature of the pre-critical faith to correct the common misunderstanding of Puritans and Pietists as fideists and moralists. The main point, however, is that the anthropocentric starting point of philosophical hermeneutics, in contrast to pre-critical theocentrism, lacks a transcendent ethical norm, and that its applicatory dimension is thus vitiated by moral relativism.

The hermeneutics of Flacius, Perkins and Owen will serve to show the concern of “pre-critical” hermeneutics with textual problems and the demand for application inherent in their hermeneutics. The hermeneutics of German Pietism will be used to illustrate the applicatory strength of biblical hermeneutics. Schleiermacher will be examined as representing a major turning point in hermeneutical frameworks from theocentrism to anthropocentrism. Finally, Gadamer’s hermeneutic constitutes an attempt to extricate interpretation from mere subjectivity. Its success and failure will be evaluated in light of our analysis of Flacius, Perkins and Owen and the Pietists. With the direction and goal of our study in mind, let us turn to William Perkins.
3.1. Historical Background

William Perkins (1558-1602) was the first English expositor and theologian to attain international standing. He rivaled both Luther and Calvin in his influence on seventeenth century Protestantism. In terms of his reputation among his contemporaries and his literary output, Perkins is the most significant of the first generation of practical Puritan theologians. He can be regarded as the English counterpart to Flacius in that he is the first great systematizer of Puritan theology. Perkins' *Golden Chain* was the first comprehensive theological summary by an English theologian since the Reformation (Breward 106).

Besides his great reputation as a scholar, Perkins also enjoyed an equal if not greater popularity as a preacher who seems to have had a peculiar gift for using the dialectic of law and gospel in his sermons to apply practically what Flacius had already worked out as a hermeneutic method. The biographer of Puritans, Benjamin Brook (1746-1848) alludes to Perkins' method of preaching the law (in order to arouse conviction) succeeded by the gospel. He states:

[Perkins] was a rare instance of those opposite gifts meeting in so eminent a degree in the same preacher, even the vehemence and thunder of Boanerges, to awaken sinners to a sense of their sin and danger...and the persuasion and comfort of Barnabas to pour the wine and oil of gospel consolation into their wounded spirits...His sermons were all law and all gospel... He used to apply the terrors of the law so directly to the consciences of his hearers, that their hearts would often sink under convictions: and he used to pronounce the word damn with so peculiar an emphasis, that it left a doleful echo in their ears a long time after. (II 130)

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1 R.T. Kendall in *Calvin And English Calvinism* states that "by the end of the sixteenth century Perkins had replaced the combined names of Calvin and Beza as one of the most popular authors of religious works in England" (52; see also n 9 and n1 on p. 53 for documentation).

2 The best timeline of Puritanism is given by Packer (*Quest for Godliness*), who sees Tyndale as the starting point and concludes the Puritan period with the death of John Howe in 1705. Tyndale died at the stake in 1536, John Bradford in 1555, and Perkins lived from 1558-1602. These men, along with Hildersham, Rogers, Greenham, and Dod are the first cluster of practical writers, followed then by Sibbes, Bayly, Goodwin, Bunyan, Brooks, Watson, Manton, etc. as the seventeenth century string of divines. Such a division must be artificial and is made according to which writers have made their way into our consciousness, while hundreds of others of like mind remain largely unknown.
Perkins' wisdom in giving advice and comfort to troubled consciences is said to have been such "that the afflicted in spirit, far and near, came to him, and received much comfort from his instructions" (Brook II 131).

Perkins probably knew the pangs of a troubled conscience from personal experience. Brook states that as a young scholar at Cambridge Perkins was "much devoted to drunkenness," a condition which remained unaltered until Perkins' guilty conscience effected a change: "As he was walking in the skirts of the town, he heard a woman say to a child that was froward and peevish, 'Hold your tongue, or I will give you to drunken Perkins yonder.' Finding himself become a by-word among the people, his conscience smote him, and he became so deeply impressed, that it was the first step towards his conversion" (I 129).

The now-converted Perkins became a fellow of Cambridge at the age of twenty-four and soon demonstrated the sincerity of his practical Christianity by starting a prison ministry. Brook recounts how Perkins, feeling "compassion for the poor prisoners confined to Cambridge, prevailed upon the jailor to collect them together in one spacious room, where he preached to them every sabbath with great power and success" (130). Perkins' fame as a preacher quickly spread and he was soon called to St. Andrews' church, where he spent the rest of his life as a minister, without, however, relinquishing his connection to Cambridge (ibid.).

Perkins was a ferocious reader, gifted with a photographic memory, and a prolific writer whose paralysis in his left hand did not impede his prodigious output in the least (Brook 132). Perkins was a typical Puritan with his Calvinist attitude toward the liturgical element: "in things indifferent we must go as far as we can from idolatry. Mr. Calvin taught me this, in his sermon on Deut. vii" (quoted in Brook 132). Despite his zeal for a Reformed liturgy, Perkins tried to subordinate liturgical controversies to his passion for preaching the Word. For example, when he was accused by a commission of dissent from church worship and of preaching from the pulpit his scruples regarding the Church of
England liturgy as verities, Perkins exhibited a self-critical disposition while at the same
time insisting on his right to reject liturgical elements that were "offensive to his
conscience" (Brook 133).³

Perkins was a very popular author with the two generations of Puritans after him. He was so famous that John Goodwin attempted to blame the wide-spread adherence to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints on Perkins' teaching (Owen XI, 491).⁴ Perkins is quoted by almost every Puritan writer who appears in this dissertation. He is referred to as "a shining light" (Owen XI, 364) and quoted as a weighty authority on biblical exegesis along with Bullinger, Calvin, and other continental Reformers (Brooks III, 218).⁵ Perkins' popularity, however, was not restricted to the academic world. In Arthur Dent's The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven (1599), a Puritan devotional manual of considerable popularity written in the form of a conversation, the character of the theologian admonishes his non-Christian listener (Asunetus)⁶ to "peruse catechisms, and other good books; and especially Virel's Grounds of Religion, and works of the two worthy servants of God, Master Gyffard and Master Perkins" (256).

William Perkins' international reputation connects him to Puritan and Pietist movements all over Europe. In a recent article "Die Frömmigkeitsbestrebungen in den Niederlanden," Johannes van den Berg shows that Perkins influenced Dutch Pietism through the national poet Jacob Cats (1577-1660), who attended a lecture by Perkins at

³ In an autobiographical interlude in one of his sermons Perkins states: "I hold looking unto the east or west to be indifferent, and to be used accordingly...we are commanded to flee from every appearance of evil. These things I have said to satisfy every man in the congregation. I did not seek the disquiet of the congregation; yet I might have spoken these things at a more convenient time" (Brook 133).
⁴ Owen cites as one of Goodwin's arguments: "Mr. Perkins received this doctrine, and therefore all the godly ministers of this nation did so too." Owen dismisses this fable by asking sarcastically: "Is Mr. Goodwin the only person who in this nation hath impartially weighed all things of concernment to the refusing or embracing any matters of doctrines in religion?" (XI, 491).
⁵ The Puritan Thomas Brooks quotes Perkins and also Johannes Gerhard, a Lutheran orthodox theologian, who in turn is often mentioned by Spener. This is another indication that literary horizon between England and Germany may have been more unified than previously suspected.
⁶ Asunetus is depicted as an ignorant man who knows nothing about a personal relationship with the divine. He is converted later in the book (293 ff.).
Cambridge (Geschichte des Pietismus 72). In 1598, Perkins' A Discourse on Conscience (1596) was published in the Dutch language, followed by the translation of 48 other works in rapid succession. Van den Berg also notes that Perkins’ influence was mainly based on his practical, applicatory theology: "In the Netherlands [Perkins] must have enjoyed, just as he did in English Puritan circles, overwhelming popularity; [in the Netherlands] perhaps not primarily due to his theological views, which generally agreed with those of Dutch Calvinists and thus offered nothing new, but rather because of his strong incentives for piety and a practical application to life" (75).

Perkins' teachings were also spread by his student William Ames (1576-1633), who was the first English Puritan theologian of repute in the Low Countries (Stoeffler 117). Perkins' works, collected in the three volumes folio edition of 1606, entitled "the Workes of the Famous and Worthie Minister of Christ, in the Universitie of Cambridge, M.W. Perkins," were translated into many languages. Perkins' writings seem to have been extremely popular in early Pietist circles in Germany, and most of his practical writings were translated into German in the early seventeenth century. Perkins is also counted

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7 "In den Niederlanden muß er also wie in englischen puritanischen Kreisen überwältigende Popularität genossen haben; hier vielleicht nicht primär wegen seiner theologischen Anschauungen, die im großen und Ganzen mit denen der niederländischen Calvinisten zusammentrafen, und daher nichts Neues darstellten, als vielmehr wegen seiner starken Anregungen für die Frömmigkeit und die Fragen der praktischen Lebensführung" (75).

8 The famous Golden Chain was translated as "Christliche und gründliche Erklärung der Zehn Gebott und Gebet dess Herren" by G. Antonius in 1604 in Hanau (today a part of Frankfurt); The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Consciences appeared in Germany under the title Gewissens-Spiegel, translated by P. Zeisig and published in Frankfurt and Leipzig in 1690; His A Direction for the Government of the Tongue (1593) was published as Die Zungenleiter by L. Hulsius in Oppenheim in 1616; An Exposition of the Symbole (1595) appear as Das Symbolum in Hanau (1603), as "Gruendliche Erklerung der Lehre von den Heiligen Sacramenten" (1607), and was also appended to various catechisms. How to Live and that Well was printed as "Recht Edle Kunst Wol und Christlich zu Leben" (H. Galler, Oppenheim, 1610), and as "Recht Lebens-und Sterbens Kunst" (P. Zeisig, Helmstedt, 1680). A Graine of Mustard-seede (1597) appear as Das geistliche Senffkoernlein in Zwey lehr-und trostreichen Stücken (Oppenheim, 1610); A Reformed Catholicke as Per Catholische Reformierte Christ (C. Rab, Herborn, 1602); A Treatise of Mans Natural Imaginations (1607) as Tractatlein von des Menschen natürlichen Gedanken (Cassel, 1667). This list is taken from Perkins' Works in Vol.III of Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics.
among the influences on Jacob Philipp Spener, the father of German Pietism (Lovelace, Geschichte des Pietismus 37).

3.2. Theological Background

Theologically, Perkins is a true heir of Calvin and his hermeneutical circle, according to whom human existence needs to be interpreted in a dialectical movement between the human and the divine. Perkins interprets human existence in terms of self-knowledge as gained from divine revelation: "Blessed life ariseth from the knowledge of God and therefore it ariseth likewise from the knowledge of ourselves, because we know God by looking into ourselves" (Golden Chain 177). As this quotation shows, Perkins immediately links epistemology to practical application. It was characteristic of the Puritans to view theology as a complete philosophy of practical life. Since the source of theology was divine revelation as recorded in the Bible, the Puritan life revolved around the text of the Scriptures. "The body of Scripture," explains Perkins, "is a doctrine sufficient to live well," and "theology is the science of living blessedly for ever." Since the triad of self-knowledge, knowledge of God, and practical application is the foundation of Perkins' hermeneutic, his thought is presented best by following this division.

3.2.1. The Book of the Self

The first step in Perkins' hermeneutic is a kind of spiritual anthropology, based on knowledge about ourselves derived from natural and written revelation. Perkins argues that if we look at ourselves, we can deduce the existence of God from the faculties of understanding (the mind), the affections and the will, which constitute the image of God in human beings (Works 392). According to Perkins, the Bible teaches that each of these

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faculties which had formerly served in complete harmony in the full enjoyment of
communion with God was corrupted by the fall. The fall negatively affected "the integrity
and purity of the faculties whereby they are conformable to the will of God and bear his
image."

On the one hand, Perkins asserts, each faculty retains its function as a witness to
God. For example, the mind or understanding retains a remnant of God's image in
"certain notions concerning good and evil as that there is a God and that the same God
punisheth transgressions, that there is an everlasting life, that we must reverence our
superiors and not harm our neighbours" (Works 192). Unlike modern hermeneutics,
Perkins is able to justify the assertion of our being moral creatures by pointing to the
creator of the universe as a moral being whose image is reflected in the make-up of the
human creature. Part of this image is that every human being possesses a notion of
transcendence as well as a moral sense.

On the other hand, however, these senses, formerly attuned to the divine, have
now become perverted through the fall. Beginning with the mind, Perkins describes the
conditions and changes of the postlapsarian human faculties:

Men's minds received from Adam: ignorance, namely a want, or rather a
deprivation of knowledge in the things of God, whether they concern his sincere
worship or eternal happiness; impotence, whereby the mind of itself is unable to
understand spiritual things, though they be taught; vanity, in that the mind thinketh
falsehood truth and truth falsehood; a natural inclination only to conceive and
device the thing which is evil. Hence it is apparent that the original and, as I may
say, the matter of all heresies is naturally ingrafted in man's nature. This is worthy
the observation of students in divinity. (Works 193)

For Perkins, human nature has incurred the loss of the pre-lapsarian divine image issuing
in the aversion of all human faculties toward spiritual things (ibid. 393). The unregenerate
mind is, so to speak, a factory of heresies. Perkins further argues that without recourse to
divine revelation, a progressive darkening of the human understanding takes place, when
"God withdraweth the light of nature," allowing for "the spirit of slumber, a spiritual drunkenness, strong illusions." In other words, the more the human mind withdraws into a subjective position devoid of revelation, the more it becomes inebriated with finite human knowledge, and believes that such knowledge is all there is. Perkins compares those who rely on human understanding to a drunkard whose intoxicated condition makes him hallucinate and who, in his "spirit of slumber" is oblivious to reality (ibid.).

The affections are another aspect of God's image in man and, in Puritan theology, are always mentioned in conjunction with conscience. Ideally, the affections are controlled and regulated by the conscience. The conscience, one of the most important faculties in Puritan preaching and teaching, is "an observing and watchful power like the eye of the keeper, reserved in man partly to reprove, partly to repress the unbridled course of his affections" (ibid.194).

John Bunyan has vividly described the conscience as part of God's image in man and as a remnant of the divine law in the human psyche in his allegorical tale The Holy War. Here conscience is allegorized as Mr. Recorder, who "before the town [of Mansoul] was taken, was a man well read in the laws of the King, and also a man of courage and faithfulness to speak truth at every occasion; and he had a tongue as bravely hung as he had an head filled with judgment" (Works III 261). After the fall, the conscience is disoriented, and confused about absolute truth. In fact, human proclivity to evil stifles even the occasional twinges of guilt, so that conscience will both affirm and deny morally deplorable actions in swift succession, or be so corrupted as to be entirely silent on moral matters (Bunyan II 261; Perkins Writings 193).

The third faculty negatively affected by the fall, but still reflecting God's image, is a free will: In "the will, the remnant of God's image is a free choice" (Works 194). In our dealings with others, in our life choices, we exercise the freedom of choice. However, Perkins reminds the reader that through the fall, the will received "an impotence whereby it cannot will or so much as lust after that which is indeed good, that is which may please
and be acceptable to God; an inward rebellion whereby it utterly abhorreth that which is
good, desiring and willing that alone which is evil. By this appeareth that the will is no
agent, but a mere patient in the first act of conversion to God and that by itself it can
neither begin that conversion, or any other inward and sound obedience to God's law"
(ibid. 194). The problem is therefore not that humans do not have free choice, but that
their natural inclination is to make morally and spiritually poor choices.

Perkins' reading of human nature shows that his teachings are firmly grounded in
Calvin's hermeneutic and the Reformed tradition. He affirms the complete depravity of
human nature. This fallen state of mankind does not mean utter moral, intellectual,
aesthetic or emotional evil. The former glory of God's image in man still shines through
his achievements in the various disciplines, although even his best works are tinged with
the evil of original sin. But when it comes to the knowledge of spiritual things, there is
absolute blindness except for the notion of a vague (Gadamer would say
unthematic/unconscious) notion of a deity and a moral conscience.

Fallen humanity, though created in the image of God and thus possessing moral
and intellectual qualities unequaled by other creatures, lives in alienation from God,
confined to its finite horizon without divine revelation, which it refuses to consult.
Conscience, the moral watchdog and impotent remnant of God's image, is utterly confused
and can be fed any false information since it has been cut off from its original source of
knowledge, the divine moral law, and is henceforth condemned to fill the rough categories
of good and evil with cultural or individual values.

In short, the human mind is radically unfit to read the book of nature correctly, or
interpret human existence "objectively," and it thus succumbs to strong illusions
concerning the nature of reality and ethics. Again, Bunyan provides a fitting illustration of
this teaching. The confusion of human understanding apart from a transcendent
perspective is illustrated by the mayor of the city of Mansoul, "my Lord Understanding."
Whereas before the fall understanding was informed by its communion with the divine, the
postlapsarian mind is in almost complete darkness. The Giant Diabolus, who stands for 
both Satan and the effects of sin on human nature, "thought not fit to let [my Lord 
understanding] abide in his former luster and glory, because he was a seeing man. 
Wherefore he darkened it not only by taking from him his office and power, but by 
building of a high and strong tower, just between the sun's reflections and the windows of 
my Lord's palace; by which means his house and all, and the whole of his habitation, was 
made as dark as darkness itself. And thus being alienated from the light, he became as one 
born blind" (Works III 261).

For Bunyan, as for Perkins, human understanding, our interpretative faculty, is 
unable to rise above its finite human horizon. Deprived of its former connection to the 
divine, it now is confined to a house of darkness, "as to a prison; nor might [it] upon his 
parole go further than within [its] own bounds" (ibid.). Bunyan, Perkins, and with them 
the entire Puritan tradition, lament a condition in terms of blindness and imprisonment which some have exalted as liberty and freedom in the centuries that followed them. 
Whereas the Puritans regarded the absence of the divine as a deprivation that enslaved the 
will to evil, smothered moral conscience, and made understanding impossible, elements of 
modern hermeneutics and philosophy celebrate the absence of the divine from "the town 
of Mansoul," to use Bunyan's term. Nietzsche's proclamation that "God is dead," is the 
starting point of late modern and postmodern philosophy, and extends itself from 
Heideggerian and Sartrian existentialism to the anti-metaphysical stance of 
deconstructionists like Jacques Derrida, and philosophers like Richard Rorty.

Rorty, in fact, suggests his own "town of Mansoul," a "liberal utopia," where 
"ironism, in the relevant sense is universal" (Contingency, irony, and solidarity xvi). 
Ironism is the attitude of the postmodern and post-religious person, who has a strong 
sense of the contingency of life, of the absence of unchanging moral truths. In Rorty's 
city, there is, instead of a divine objective narrative, a rapid replacing of one utopian 
narrative with another, "an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a
convergence toward an already existing truth” (ibid.). Rorty, in other words, regards the absence of the divine not as imprisonment, but rather as the freedom to play out human fantasies.

The Puritan notion of human depravity could serve as a cautioning corrective to Rorty’s exuberance. What if they were correct in their basic assumption that there is an objective standard of truth and morality? What if the present state of human consciousness is indeed a fallen one, inauthentic because alienated from the divine? What if all efforts of philosophy and its movements from modernism to postmodernism are merely manifestations of the progressive hermeneutical blindness due to unbelief in divine revelation? Hans-Georg Gadamer has claimed that all understanding is essentially self-understanding (Philosophical Essays 55). What if our self-understanding of humanity as living in a silent universe, as modern philosophical hermeneutics teaches, is tragically wrong, even a self-deception? Puritan writers urged their readers to consider the possibility that rather than regarding the loss of Christian metaphysics as liberty, they should look at the “death of God” as an impoverishing enslavement.

In John Bunyan's narrative, for example, the Giant Diabolus strengthens his reign on the fallen city of Mansoul by building three strongholds. The "Hold of Defiance," to keep the town from the knowledge of God; the "Midnight Hold," because "it was built to keep Mansoul from the true knowledge of itself"; and, finally, the "Sweet-sin-hold," to keep the understanding from any transcendent notion of the good (Works III 264). Is it merely coincidental that Bunyan's three fortresses correspond to urgent philosophical issues of our day?

First, the dismissal of a knowledge of the divine caused the anthropocentric turn in philosophy, the apotheosis of the human will. Kant rejected knowledge of the divine, replacing it with subjective faith, thereby denying transcendent values objective status. Second, since Descartes, the notion of the self has ranged from that of a self-contained unit to the idea of the self as fragmented construction, in fact to its almost complete
eradication in postmodern theory. And finally, hermeneuts like Hans-Georg Gadamer, who are serious about practical application of their thought, inevitably come up against the problem of a moral standard, groping for a non-transcendent notion of the good (TM 307 ff.). The Calvinistic notion of human depravity tries to account for these developments, finding their root in the alienation of humanity from the divine, and in human reluctance to avail themselves of divine revelation.

The reading of Puritan literature, whether it is Perkins' Golden Chain, or Bunyan's Holy War, with its intense concern for the human condition and the interpretation of human existence, shows that the Puritans anticipated modern philosophical problems. They clearly saw the division between a silent and a created universe. Without the divine, self-knowledge and interpretation of one's life-world are confined to information drawn from our finite human horizon. According to the Puritans the lack of an external moral norm is not necessarily liberating, but can also create serious problems. Without an understanding enlightened by the divine Word, the will and the affections, not rational argument, were the primary motivators giving direction to human existence (Bunyan II 265). The Puritans argued that if there were no transcendent values for the interpretation of human existence, "man would set himself up as his own rule; secondly as his own end and happiness" (Charnock; WSC I 99). Thus Puritan theorists anticipated that the logical terminus of the path taken by hermeneutics of the silent universe would be subjectivism, leaving human individuals and communities to create values and meaning for themselves.

For the Puritans such a philosophy of immanence was not freedom, but enslavement under the illusion of freedom. In Bunyan's allegory, the Giant Diabolus assures the city of Mansoul of its new-found liberty under his rule:

Your liberty also, as yourselves do very well know, has been greatly widened and enlarged by me; Whereas I found you a pent-up people. I have not laid any restraint upon you; you have no law, statute or judgment of mine to frighten you; I call none of you to account for your doings, except the madman [you know who I mean (i.e. conscience)]. I have granted you to live, each man, like a prince, in his
own, even with as little control from me as I myself have from you. (Works, III 262)

One could easily read the ethic of atheistic existentialism, with its emphasis on personal choice in moral matters, (a sentiment that is still very much alive in postmodern philosophy), as the fulfillment of Puritan "prophecy" in our day. The Puritans declared that casting off the divine yoke would put man in charge "like a prince, in his own, free to create new values." If however, such values issue from a fallen mind, Perkins' "factory of heresies," then to embrace them may be hasty and uncritical.

The notion of human depravity provides the context for the next step in Perkins' hermeneutic. For the Puritans the only solution to the interpretative darkness of humanity is a re-establishing of the complete hermeneutical circle advocated by Calvin; interpretation of the self is only possible through knowledge of the divine. Flacius had already stated that conversion to Christ is the only way in which communion with the divine can be re-established. Likewise, Perkins and all Puritans taught that the blindness of the human interpreter must be lifted by divine grace. Only then can divine revelation, as contained in the Scriptures, be understood adequately.

3.2.2. The incarnate Word: Perkins continuation of Flacius' Christocentric Hermeneutics

For the Puritan and later the Pietist hermeneutic, the reason for the requirement of conversion is quite simple: an objective and detached approach to the text is impossible, since reading is tied inseparably to the acceptance and application of the message. However, the carnal understanding, hostile toward the divine authority, will never of itself consent to the message, let alone apply it practically. If an unregenerate person picks up the word of God, he is confronted with true knowledge of himself as sinner and as alienated from God. But a truly biblical process of interpretation includes the acceptance
of this truth and action toward a reconciliation with God. Without divine intervention, however, the unregenerate reader is incapable of such action.

The Puritan Stephen Charnock (1628-1680), who devoted two entire volumes to this subject, argues that, first, we need knowledge of God for obtaining a life-purpose and moral guidance, and secondly, that without a restitution of communion with God through conversion such knowledge is impossible: "God made man's nature fit for his communion; man made himself unfit by guilt and filth. This unfitness must be removed by regeneration before this privilege man had by creation can be restored. Not that this restored righteousness is the cause of our communion with God in happiness, but a necessary requisite to it" ([The Knowledge of God], WSC III 23). Perkins and Flacius teach that the mediator, who makes both reconciliation to the divine possible, and who also serves as the teacher of divine truth, is Christ. Therefore, Flacius and Perkins agree that hermeneutics must be Christocentric.

Perkins, like Flacius, felt the pressure of the Catholic challenge to the Scriptures' reliability. Like his German colleague, Perkins made Christ the interpretative focus of the text, as well as of human existence. For Perkins, as for Flacius, the central issue in hermeneutics is justification by faith, which has always been the main concern of most Protestant Reformers, because it centers on the sovereign authority of God in every aspect of human life and establishes Christ as the sole source of faith. Perkins' concern with this issue is expressed in his writings on predestination. The doctrines of predestination, election and justification by faith alone, actually address the same central issue, namely how a fallen human being, unwilling to have anything to do with the divine, is restored to communion with it.

It is not my intention to focus on the doctrinal controversies surrounding the concept of justification by faith, nor to address the charge leveled against Perkins of
distorting Calvin's teaching on this subject. The main point is that Perkins, like most Puritans, believed God to have elected a certain portion of humanity in Christ from their deserved fate and received them back into a relationship with God. Thus at the very heart of the Puritan hermeneutic is the person and work of Christ.

The question must be asked, however, if the concept of sovereign election itself, which was so vital to Luther's theology and that of the Puritans, does not, at least theoretically, eliminate the main strengths of the Puritan hermeneutic, namely the necessity

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10 Perkins has been charged with two deviations from Calvin's teachings: First, by Arminius, in his perception of predestination, secondly, and more recently, by Kendall, in the area of soteriology. We do not need to concern ourselves with the details of these charges, but they must be mentioned briefly in order to situate Perkins properly within the Calvinist tradition. In 1598 Perkins wrote a treatise on predestination De praedestinationis modo et ordine, republished 1599 in Basel as De praedestinationis modo et ordine: et de amplitudine gratiae divinae. In his attempt to make the doctrine of predestination more "reasonable" than it is in Calvin, Perkins' logical rigor "drove him to a supralapsarian point of view in which the creation and fall become the means for carrying out the prior decree of election or damnation" (Bangs 208).

The real issue is not predestination itself, but rather the logical order of divine decrees. By locating God's electing grace prior to the fall, Perkins eliminates a foundational teaching of Calvin, namely that God elects from a rebellious human race. A God who actually creates some creatures for the purpose of destroying them appears rather tyrannical, while a God, who sovereignly elects his people out of the mass of humanity that is universally and justly guilty of sinning against Him justifies God's elective prerogative. If the fall is bypassed as a just reason for human depravity and condemnation, and if in the logical order of divine decrees election precedes the fall, then God's action violates any notion of justice. The Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a former admirer of Perkins, was sorely disappointed with Perkins' work and wrote a response wherein he insists on Calvin's own view that "the predestination of which the Scriptures treat is of men as they are sinners" (Works, III 274-75). For only when God's election is made from the pool of justly condemned souls does Christ's coming and atonement make sense. The Scriptures, says Arminius, speak of the "gracious and tender affection of God towards the human race. Arminius argues that God's love toward men (philanthropia) cannot be applied if the decree of election is not preceded by the fall: "Which term [philanthropia], signifies in general terms, the love of God towards men; which affection cannot be attributed to God, if He pursues with hatred any man, without reference to his deserts and his sin" (III 351).

The second charge that Perkins' Calvinism deviates from its original author was leveled by R.T. Kendall's book Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649. Kendall contends that Perkins and the Puritans inverted the historic Reformed teaching of justification by faith to a soteriology based on works righteousness. Perkins, according to Kendall, separates faith from assurance, which in turn he bases on the personal efforts to holiness (sanctification) rather than on the already accomplished redemptive work on Christ. Upon closer examination, however, Kendall's charges prove groundless, mainly because of his faulty assessment of Calvin's theology. It may thus be safely assumed that Perkins and the entire Puritan tradition continued quite faithfully in Calvin's teaching. Arminius' charge is, of course, correct in so far as supralapsarianism tends to make God look like a tyrant who condemns innocent creatures to eternal punishment. However, this theoretical position did not affect the strength of the Puritan theology, which lay in its practical application and exhortation to moral conduct according to a divine standard (Packer 34).
of the text for a dialogue with the divine, and the applicatory element in hermeneutics. Given the fact that communion with the divine was essential to the Puritan hermeneutic, does not the doctrine of election and predestination contradict the Puritan emphasis on application by eliminating the importance of human effort and by removing human responsibility for moral action?

This is a question that Erasmus had already asked Luther: "What a gigantic window would the propagation of this opinion open for countless people toward Godlessness....What weak person would any longer brave the continuous and laborious battle against his own flesh? Which evil person would any longer try to improve his life?" (Vom Freien Willen 16). The same question is put to the Puritan pastor in Arthur Dent's fictional dialogue by the "caviller" Antilegon: "If men be predestinate before they be born, to what purpose serve all precepts, admonitions, laws, &c.? It forceth not how we live; for neither our godly or ungodly life can alter the purpose of God" (Plain Man's Pathway 229).

Yet these objections arise from a misunderstanding of Puritan theology. William Perkins' treatise A Golden Chain (Armilla Aurea 1592) clearly delineates that predestination does not, as it were, bypass history but comprises both the means (reading of the Scriptures, repentance etc.), and the end (communion with God and godly life). Perkins explains that "they whom God elected to this end, that they should inherit eternal life, were also elected to those subordinate means whereby, as by steps, they might attain this end: and without which it were impossible to obtain it" (Works 213). Thus predestination, or the teaching that salvation is wrought by God alone, does not obviate human effort to pursue a dialogue with the divine through the Scriptures, but rather establishes it.

The foundation of election is Christ, who therefore occupies the same central role in Perkins' hermeneutic as he does in that of Flacius. Perkins follows Calvin in holding that "Christ's office is threefold - priestly, prophetic, regal" (ibid. 204). It is the
prophetic office which is most important for hermeneutics, because it deals with Christ's role in conveying God's will to mankind. Perkins explains Christ's importance for interpretation in this rather lengthy but important statement:

His prophetical office is that whereby he, immediately from his Father, revealeth his word and all the means of salvation comprised in the same. The word was first revealed partly by visions, by dreams, by speech, partly by instinct and motion of the Holy Ghost. The like is done ordinarily only by the preaching of the word, where the Holy Ghost doth inwardly illuminate the understanding. For this cause Christ is called the doctor, lawgiver and counsellor of his Church. Yea, he is the apostle of our profession, the angel of the covenant. Therefore the sovereign authority of expounding the scripture only belongs to Christ: and the Church hath only the ministry of judgment and interpretation committed unto her. (Works 208)

For Perkins, Christ is both the originator of the word and its only interpreter. It is not without significance that Perkins often refers to Christ as "the Word" (200 ff). The incarnate Christ is the clearest revelation of God's will, the very word of God come in the flesh (200). The hermeneutical role of the church is to reproduce accurately Christ's teachings (interpretation) and apply them ("ministry of judgment").

Perkins, like Flacius, makes Christ the "sovereign authority" in interpretation, according to whose teaching all ecclesiastical doctrine and biblical interpretation must be judged. Perkins uses exactly the same reasoning as Flacius to justify Christ's authority. Flacius had seen Christ as the interpretative focus of the Bible, and had justified this from the text of the Old Testament. Perkins uses the same syllogism as Flacius to describe his Christocentric approach to the Bible:

The Summe of the Scripture is contained in such a syllogism or form of reasoning, as this is which follows: The true Messias shall be both God and man of the seede of David; he shall be born of a Virgin; he shall bring the Gospel forth of his Fathers bosom; he shall satisfy the law; he shall offer up himself a sacrifice for the sinnes of the faithful [definite atonement]; he shall conquer death by dying and rising again; he shall ascend into heaven; and in his due time he shall return unto judgment. But Jesus of Nazareth the Son of Mary is such a one; He therefore is the true Messias. (The Art of Prophecying 732; italics Perkins')
Like Flacius, Perkins wants to establish the authority of the Scriptures from the Scriptures themselves, in order to counter the Roman Catholic claim for the need of an additional interpretative authority. Perkins realizes that once tradition becomes the norm of interpretation, the text relinquishes its *intrinsic* authority. The text claims to be the word of God, and as such proclaims Christ as the interpreter of God's will to man. By this authority alone shall doctrine be judged. Perkins claims the Christian reader should not "believe a thing, because the Church saith it is to be believed: but therefore we do believe a thing, because that which the Church speaketh the Scripture did first speak" (ibid. 735).

According to Perkins, the necessary self-authentication of the biblical text is demonstrated by the power it exercises over the reader. After all, the primary means by which God draws the elect to communion with himself is the Scriptures. Perkins states: "But how doth God worke this faith? By his word: for as God is the author and worker of faith, so God hath appointed a means whereby he workes it, and that is his Word, which word of God is the onely ordinarie outward meanes to worke faith" (Hebrews 39). This means is "executed," as Perkins put it, "when the said word outwardly is preached to such an one as is both dead in his sins and doth not so much dream of his salvation" (Writings 229).

Perkins follows Flacius in asserting that the regenerating power of the text unfolds itself in the dialectic of law and gospel. Thus preaching, the proclamation of the word, should follow the law-and-gospel dynamic: "And first of all, the law showing a man his sin and the punishment thereof, which is eternal death; afterward the gospel showing salvation by Christ Jesus to such as believe. And inwardly the eyes of the mind are enlightened, the heart and ears opened, that he may see, hear and understand the word of God" (ibid. 228).

Thus for Perkins as for Flacius, the law prepares the way for the gospel. Also, for both writers, the law continues to perform the function of a binding moral guide. Perkins teaches that "the use of the law in unregenerate persons is to lay open sin and make it
known...to effect and augment sin...[and] to denounce [i.e. announce] eternal damnation for the least disobedience, without offering any hope of pardon." In this way the sinner is forced to "fly unto Christ" (ibid. 212). When the sinner has been converted to Christ, the law continues its usefulness, because "it guideth them to new obedience in the whole course of their life, which obedience is acceptable to God by Christ" (ibid.).

Perkins argues somewhat paradoxically that although conversion comes through the word, the reader must first have faith in Christ before he can understand the word. This for Perkins, as for Flacius, is a decisive difference between theology and other sciences: "In Philosophy we first see a thing true by experience and afterward give our assent to it: as in natural philosophy I am persuaded that such a water is hot, because when I put mine hand into it I perceive by experience an hot quality. But in the practice of faith it is quite contrary. For first we must consent to the word of God, resisting all doubt and diffidence, and afterward will experience and feeling of comfort follow" (Works 230).

Yet this seeming contradiction actually shows that Perkins here already anticipates what postmodern thinkers state as the human epistemological condition and what is so contrary to scientific rationalism: there is no objective, uninvolved observer. The reader's paradigm needs to be adjusted before understanding may be achieved. The mind must be persuaded that what the eyes see is indeed true, before experiential affirmation follows. The difference between the postmodern and the Puritan hermeneutic is that, for the latter, the needed affinity with the textual paradigm cannot be produced through tradition alone. In fact, if such were the case, how could we transcend and critically evaluate human traditions? To use Perkins' example, if we only knew cold water, how could we ever differentiate it from cold? What is required for transcending the finite human horizon is a radical changing of the reader's disposition through divine grace. This need applies to any reader and so transcends the boundaries of culture and tradition, thus laying a claim to universality.
Perkins goes even further than Flacius in the use of the law and gospel dialectic by recommending it as a tool for pastoral counseling. The main function of the law is to provide the reader with genuine self-knowledge according to the scenario of human existence drawn up in the Bible. The best sign of one's having obtained the right perspective is a repentance of one's sins before God: "Sorrow according to God, is a griefe for sinne, even because it is sinne" (Art of Prophecying 754). The law's function is to produce this condition: "To the stirring up of this affection, in the first place a man must use the ministry of the Law, which may beget contrition of heart, of the horrors of conscience, which, though it be not a thing wholesome and profitable of its owne nature, yet is it a remedy necessary for the subduing of the sinners stubbornesse, and for the preparing his mind to become teachable" (ibid. 754).

Perkins has greatly extended the use of Flacius' dialectic of law and gospel by making it the pattern of preaching and pastoral counseling. Whenever a parishioner comes to the pastor, Perkins urges his colleagues: "we must by asking of questions first draw out of them, whether they be displeased with themselves, because they have displeased God, that is to say, whether they hate sinne as sinne: which is the foundation of repentance unto salvation" (ibid. 756). If a person has a relationship with the deity, he or she will loath sin as an offense against a loving God, and not because of possible punishment.

We have seen that Perkins' theological background is that of Calvinism, according to which knowledge of God, in the sense of a relationship with the divine, is possible only through a knowledge of the self in light of divine revelation. The answer to the questions raised earlier by Erasmus and in Dent's dialogue also lies in this relation to the divine. A person regenerated by God through the law-gospel dialectic, will always, even if ever so faintly, feel the impulse to please God, even if it seems impossible to do so. As Perkins says, as long as people "have or do feele in their heart a desire to be reconciled to God, which is the ground of a lively faith," they may count on the promises extended to them in Scripture. Similar to Perkins argument, the theologian in Dent's fictitious dialogue
answers the caviller Antilegon that election establishes rather than contradicts the application of God's teachings to everyday life: "But I would wish such men to consider the end of our election, which is that we should lead a godly life" (Plain Man's Pathway 229).

Our reading of Perkins demonstrates the direct link in the Puritan hermeneutic between the human-divine dialogue and application. For the Puritan, self-knowledge and the interpretation of human existence were intensely tied to the Bible. Christ was central as the messenger (prophet), ongoing interpreter and help in application (priest) and the binding authority of the word (King). The doctrine of election to fellowship with God through Christ fostered an attitude of gratefulness on behalf of the reader which proved to be a powerful force for ethical activism and intellectual independence from church-tradition. Much of the Puritan confidence in divine revelation depends on the Puritan view of the biblical text, a topic which we will turn to next.

3.3. Perkins' Exegetical Practice

3.3.1. The Concept of Progressive Revelation

Puritan scholars were not as naive in their exegetical practices as is commonly assumed; they were astute textual critics, skilled in the original languages and aware of the historical-cultural differences between the past and present horizon of the text. Perkins, much like Flacius, shows awareness of textual difficulties, but he also pays greater attention to the concepts of inspiration and canon than does Flacius.

Perkins' exegetical practice is guided by the assumptions of divine authorship and the text's Christological focus. Like Flacius, indeed like most Protestant theologians, Perkins was careful to derive the divinity of written revelation from the text itself, as well as from experiential data, in order to avoid the circular argumentation from tradition:
"Admirable is the excellency of the Word, which is evident partly by the nature thereof, partly by the operation" (The Art of Propheaying 731).11

In Reformed theological hermeneutics, the nature of the biblical text is determined by the two concepts of progressive revelation and inspiration. Unlike some modern fundamentalists, the Reformers did not treat the Bible as if it had fallen from the sky in the form of the King James version, but were well aware that it represented a corpus of various texts gathered over a long period of history. As Calvin explains:

When it pleased God to raise up a more visible form of the church, he willed to have his Word set down and sealed in writing....He commanded also that the prophecies be committed to writing and be accounted part of his Word. To these at the same time histories were added, also the labour of the prophets, but composed under the Holy Spirit's dictation. I include the psalms with the prophecies....That whole body, therefore, made up of law, prophecies, psalms and histories was the Lord's Word for the ancient people. (IV, viii, 8)

For Calvin, God's word existed in oral form before it was set down in writing. It was then inscripturated in various stages, albeit under the supervision of the Holy Spirit. Perkins also speaks of the Scriptures as written in "two waies," first "as written and penned by holy men" sometime after the church was formed, and second, "as it is the word of God" which existed long before the church or any Christian Bible. Using the term Scripture in these two ways, Perkins concludes, "[s]o then the Scripture was afore the church; but penned after" (Commentary on Hebrews 16).12

The idea that God's word existed in substance before the actual production of the written word is reasserted by John Owen. In his Biblical Theology Owen argues against the Quakers, who reject the written revelation from God as something that pertained to a specific period in history and has lost its validity for the seventeenth century. Instead, they

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11 Perkins' position on the divinity and authority of the Scriptures is essentially the same as John Calvin's in chapters six to eight of his Institutes.
12 Further references to this title will be abbreviated as "Hebrews."
want to rely on a fresh and direct inner revelation by the Spirit. Owen objects: "When God spoke thus directly, what was uttered was His word. But how could such words cease to be the words of God, when they came to be written down at His command? That is, the very fact of being written does not make it the word of God, but rather it was an existing word of God which was committed to writing at His command" (788).

This argument is important to the Puritan mind, for it establishes a continuity of theology from the origin of society down to the present day. Perkins claims that Cain and Abel "had not [written] scripture, it was penned many yeares after; namely, by Moses first of all." Yet, the first human society was "taught the same religion and, delivered the same doctrine to their children...neither by [written] scripture, nor revelation, nor their owne invention, but by the instruction of their Parents" (Hebrews 15). John Owen concurs: "So all true post-lapsarian theology is at root of one and the same kind, complete in itself but with a completeness arrived at, strengthened, and illuminated by successive stages of divine illumination" (Biblical Theology 169).

The successive stages of revelation mentioned by Owen are part of the theological concept of progressive revelation. God is thought to have revealed his will with increasing clarity, culminating in the incarnate word Jesus Christ. This idea is already hinted at in Flacius when he states that God "revealed initially darker, later more clear mysteries. We have to adore and respect this, but it brought necessarily a certain darkness to the [interpretations of] the ancient commentators" (Clavis 29). As so often, John Calvin formulates the concept of progressive revelation most clearly:

The Lord held to his orderly plan in administering the covenant of his mercy: as the day of full revelation approached with the passing of time, the more he increased each day the brightness of its manifestation. Accordingly, at the beginning when the first promise of salvation was given to Adam (Gen 3:15) it glowed like a feeble spark. Then, as it was added to, the light grew in fullness, breaking forth increasingly and shedding its radiance more widely. At last - when the clouds were dispersed - Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, fully illumined the whole earth" (II, x, 20).
The concept of progressive revelation also determined the inner dynamic of the Biblical text and had significant bearing on its interpretation. Combined with the dialectic of law and gospel, the concept of progressive revelation is a foundational element of the Puritan hermeneutic, because it determines the relation of the Old Testament to the New. As Calvin points out in the above quotation, there is one promise of reconciliation with the divine which spans the entire Bible and is expressed in the form of two covenants. The difference between the two covenants is that the Old Testament rites and ceremonies were meant merely as pointers to the coming of Christ. Thus the relation of the Old to the New Testament was perceived in terms more of continuity than of opposition. Thus Calvin rejects the claim advanced by sectarian groups in his day that "the patriarchs were shrouded in the shadows of death until the Son of God took flesh" (II, ix, 3). Calvin insists that "the gospel did not supplant the entire law as to bring forward a different way of salvation. Rather, it confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised, and gave substance to the shadows" (II, ix, 4).

Calvin attaches much importance to the concept of progressive revelation, positing it as a foundational hermeneutical concept which he refrains from mentioning repeatedly throughout his work but which is to be kept in mind: "[n]evertheless, I shall warn my readers beforehand to remember to open up their way with the key that I previously put into their hands" (II, x, 20). The idea of progressive revelation contains the assumption that God has spoken his word into history and into a certain (Jewish) culture. God's calling of this nation changed its traditions in a way different from other surrounding cultures. However, this also requires that readers unfamiliar with the tradition in which God chose to reveal himself need to take into consideration the historical-cultural distance. Calvin believes that the interpreter must take into account the language, culture, and history of Old Testament times (Puckett John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament 55). Calvin is proof, therefore, that there is room in pre-critical hermeneutics for the
modern dictum that traditions are not so much an obstacle as the channel by which the past speaks to us.

Equally important, the concept of progressive revelation unites the Jewish and the Christian religion under one covenant-promise made by God. As Calvin writes: “Who then dares to separate the Jews from Christ, since with them, we hear, was made the covenant of the gospel, the sole foundation of which is Christ? Who dares to estrange from the gift of free salvation those to whom we hear the doctrine of the righteousness of faith was imparted? (II, x, 4).

Thus the concept of progressive revelation allowed the pre-critical interpreter to give full credence to historical circumstances of the text, while the assumption that God guided the entire process of revelation which conveyed one main message (the reconciliation of humanity to God through Christ), prevented historical relativizing.

3.3.2. Progressive Revelation as the basis for Typology

Hans Frei in his book The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative has noted that the unity of the Bible in precritical theory was based on the practice of typological interpretation (2). He argues that typology was used to join the various scriptural narratives into one grand story. It seems, however, that the assumption of progressive revelation allows typology to appear in a different light. The idea of progressive revelation makes typology not so much a clever method devised by those who want to impose a unitary reading on the biblical text, as a natural and organic way of seeing God’s revelation unfold throughout history. Typological interpretation was usually conducted according to the model presented in the epistle of Hebrews.

William Perkins, who seems to follow Calvin closely in his exposition of Hebrews, states the typological relation of the Old to the New Testament in four ways. 13 First, "in

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13 Perkins and Calvin merely follow the precedent set by the author of Hebrews in chapter 10: "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves." Likewise, Perkins
the olde Testament, spirituall and heavenly were propounded to the Church, under temporall and earthly blessings....But in the New Testament, life everlasting is plainly promised to the beleever, without any such type or figure" (198). Such a temporal blessing was, for example, the promised Land of Canaan, which Scripture itself interprets as prefiguring the promise of eternal life (Hebrews 4:8-9).

Second, "in the olde Testament Christ was shewed and signified unto them in ceremonies, rites and types....but now these types and ceremonies are abolished, the shadowe is gone, and the substance come: and in stead of dark signes and figures we have two most plaine and sensible sacraments."

Third, "in the olde Testament all the knowledge they had was in the Law: and then-understanding in the Gospel was obscure and very slender: but, in the new Testament, not onely the Law is made manifest, but also the supernatural knowledge of the Gospel."

Fourth and lastly Perkins notes that the New Testament universalizes God’s revelation, expanding its reach from national Israel to all nations: “the Law was onely committed and published to one nation and people; but the Gospel is spread and preached to all the world." Perkins, like Calvin, insists that Old Testament Jews did not trust the rites and “shadows,” but Christ himself for their salvation. They believed "in Christ to come; but now, the Church beleeves in Christ, which is already come and exhibited" (ibid. 198).

Thus for Perkins, as for Calvin and Flacius, the center of typological interpretation is once again Christ, whose coming and office were foreshadowed in Old Testament rites and events. Characteristically, Perkins immediately ties the greater knowledge ascribed by typological interpretation to the New Testament church, a dispensation extending to assertions: "...let us observe, how God promising Abraham onely the Land of Canaan, that is, a temporall inheritance; he looks further, for a city in heaven. This he did out of his faith; for he knowing that Canaan was but a type of heaven, therefore in consideration of the earthly Canaan, he arose to a consideration of the heavenly: and in the promise of the earthly, apprehended the heavenly"(Hebrews 78). Or in an earlier comment: "The land of Canaan, is to be understood, not onely as a Country of Asia, fruiefull and fertile, and plentiful of all good things, wherein the onely visible Church was confirmed till Christ's comming. But further as a Type of the heavenly Canaan, where the triumphant Church raignes in glory with God" (66).
Perkins' own time, to a greater responsibility for application. "If this be true," says Perkins, "that knowledge should so abound in the time of the Gospell; then all ignorant persons in the latter age of the world must knowe, that they have much to answer for at the last daie of judgment....Where there is more knowledge, there should be more obedience." Since Christians now possess such a clear revelation, they must "submit themselves to heare and learne the word of God taught unto them; not to content themselves with bare knowledge, though it be never so much: But withall, to bring forth the fruits of obedience in their lives and conversations" (Hebrews 98; italics Perkins').

Since the Old Testament saints had the same faith as the reader, and looked forward to the same Christ in order to establish a dialogue with the divine, God's dealings with ancient Israel contain examples and lessons for the present reader. Thus the hermeneutical problem of fusing the horizon of the past with that of the present is greatly simplified by the assumption that Old Testament saints dealt with the same faith-content as does the 'modern' reader.

Typology, then, based on the concept of progressive revelation, served as a bridge between the past and the present, without neglecting either the historical or trans-historical dimension of interpretation. This view appears to be challenged by some commentators of Puritan exegesis who claim that typological interpretation is a-historical. Thomas Luxon, for example, claims in his work Literal Figures that "Figurative interpretation, it would seem, is concerned with history as a text rather than as events per se...what signifies is the event as 'text' rather than the event as 'happening'" (62). Thus for Luxon former events had only narrative value to the diminution of their historicity.

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14 Here, again, Perkins follows Calvin's exegesis, who writes in his Commentary on Epistle to the Hebrews, "Though God gave to the fathers only a taste of that grace which is largely poured out on us, though he shewed to them at a distance only an obscure representation of Christ, who is now set forth to us clearly before our eyes, yet they were satisfied and never fell away from their faith: how much greater reason then have we to persevere? If we grow faint, we are doubly inexcusable" (Commentaries, XII 283).
Luxon argues that "the Reformers' renewed emphasis on Christianity's bipolar ontology - locating the real ever more absolutely outside of time and space, as something else very much elsewhere - had the effect of denying the historical any claim to reality" (62). Contrary to Luxon's assumption, typological interpretation is firmly rooted in history. It may, admittedly, be problematic for a modern mind to understand the Puritan concept of history, but typological interpretation is based on the idea of progressive revelation, because of the belief that God directs all history. For the Puritans, God so interwove history and the progressive revelation of his will, that he foresaw and supervised both historical development and Scriptural revelation to demonstrate his providential control for the comfort of the believing reader.

For the Puritan reader, most of God's historical dealings with Israel contain a spiritual significance for the Christian reader in any age. John Flavel believes that "for this end and purpose it is that the Holy Ghost hath affixed those notes of attention to the narratives of the works of providence in scripture, all which do invite and call men to a due and clear observation of them (Mystery of Providence, Works IV 415).

Besides helping to bridge the barrier between the past and the present, typology based on progressive revelation also allows Perkins to account for the apparent liberty with which New Testament authors use quotations from the Torah. Perkins advocates what is sometimes called the sensus plenior, the fuller meaning of a passage that - not at all divorced from its original meaning- has become clearer to succeeding generations in light of progressive revelation in history. Perkins notes that the New Testament often quotes Old Testament sources seemingly forcing them into a new context. Perkins suggests two kinds of such "collations:"

The first is that the NT passages elaborate on the meaning of the OT passage. So when Psalm 78:2 states; "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will declare things hidden from of old," Christ explains this prophecy by attributing the words to himself and explaining "I will open my mouth in parables, and will utter the things which have beene
kept secret from the foundation of the world" (John 6:31, Perkins Art of Prophecying 738).

A second reason for the altered quotations is "diacritical, or for discerning sake, that places, and times, & persons might be mutually distinguished" (ibid.). In other words, places of and persons mentioned in prophecies are more clearly identified as they are revealed over time. The relatively vague reference in Michah 5:2 to Bethlehem, for example, out of which a certain "he" shall come forth is specified in Matthew as Bethlehem in the land of Judah and the "he" is identified as "a governour, that shall feede my people Israel" (738).

The New Testament authors, due to their position of looking back into Jewish history after Christ was revealed as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises, do not really alter citations from that text but rather explain them "for applications sake, that the type may be fitted unto the truth; and the generall to a certaine speciall, and so contrariwise." As an example, Perkins suggests the type of Jonah staying in the belly of the whale for three days, which is explained by Scripture itself to refer to Christ in Matthew 12:40 "For as Iona was three dayes and three nights in the whales belly: so shall the sonne of man be" (739).

It is clear that Perkins does not explore the possibility that the whole story of Jonah may be a word picture, but he views it as factual history which also serves as a type for Christ. This idea of sensus plenior, a progressive revelation, was common in Puritan exegesis. David Dickson (1583-1662), a Scottish Puritan, explained in his commentary on Hebrews:

[The author of Hebrews] saith God spake at sundry times. By many parts, as the word importeth; now a part of his will, and then a part farther; at another time yet a part farther. Then, the Lord was in the way only, nor revealing his whole mind to his church, before Christ came; letting forth light by little and little, till the Sun of righteousness, Jesus Christ arose, and had not told his whole will. And for this reason the Jewish Church was bound to suspend her determination of the
unchangeableness of her Levitical service, till the lawgiver spake his last word, and uttered his full mind, in the fullness of time. (8)

As with Perkins, Dickson's sense of progressive revelation and typological interpretation of certain events of Israel's history, and especially of the ceremonial law, are based on the biblical text's own claim that "God who spake at sundry times in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son" (Hebrews 1: 1-2 as quoted by Dickson).

Again, as with Perkins, the basis for typological interpretation is Christ. Dickson explains that "...typical speeches in Scripture have not their perfect meaning, neither can be fully expounded or fully understood till they be drawn to Christ, in whom they have their accomplishment, and of whom they mean to speak, under the name of types. And therefore neither could the old church of the Jews, nor can we get comfort in any of them, till Christ, in whom all the promises are yea and amen, be found included in them" (9).

This concept of typology as a Christological interpretation of Old Testament events is seen as contrast to allegory. Allegory is not rooted in history, but serves as mere illustration. As one Puritan commentator observes, Christ's teaching often contains "lessons which our Savior designs to teach us here by parables and figurative expressions..." (Matthew Henry, Commentary on the whole Bible V 382). Typology, however is different in nature, because the actual event or statement retains its historical value, while it points to a future reality. The concept of progressive revelation thus legitimates typological interpretation. The basis for typological interpretation is the actual historical event as recorded by the biblical author, who did not know at the time of recording the event its full ramifications and meaning in God's providential direction of history.

Perkins makes abundant use of typological interpretation, but in most cases he is careful to buttress his typologizing with biblical authority, as with the example of Sarah,
who "figureth unto us mystically the spirituall Hierusalem, the Church of God." Perkins appends the warning that "Allegories are charily and sparingly to be taught, else much unsound doctrine may cumber mens consciences: but this is sound and sure; for it is the Apostles, Gal. 4" (Hebrews 89).

3.3.3. Inspiration and Illumination of the Text

Besides the concept of progressive revelation, the second, and closely related, major component in Perkins' view of the nature of the text is his concept of inspiration. The idea of divine inspiration is a crucial component of the Puritan hermeneutic, because inspiration and the related doctrine of illumination are the backbone to the Bible's self-authentication as divine revelation. The Puritans use inspiration to argue against the Roman Catholic demand to supplement Scripture with ecclesial authority as well as to define the limits of the Scriptural canon.

Once again, Perkins closely follows John Calvin (and Flacius) in his view that the inspired Bible is "the word of God written in the language fit for the Church by men immediately called to be the Clerks, or Secretaries of the Holy Ghost" (Prophecying 732). The term "secretaries of the Holy Ghost" hearkens back to Calvin, who also used the term "amanuenses," meaning scribes, secretaries or penmen, to describe the nature of inspiration:

Let this be a firm principle: No other word is to be held as the Word of God, and given place as such in the church, than what is contained first in the Law and the Prophets, then in the writings of the apostles....[The apostles] were to expound the ancient Scripture and to show that what is taught there has been fulfilled in Christ. Yet they were not to do this except from the Lord, that is, with Christ's Spirit going before them and in a sense dictating their words... [They] were sure and genuine penmen [certi et authentici amanuenses] of the Holy Spirit, and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God: and the sole office of others is to teach what is provided and sealed in the Holy Scriptures (I, vi, 2).
Perkins does not elaborate greatly on his own theory of inspiration, but his reference to "a language fit for the church" and the description of biblical authors as "Secretaries of the Holy Ghost" suggest that he agrees with Calvin's view not only on inspiration, but also on "dictation." The term "dictation" used by Calvin, conveys a sense of coercion to the modern reader which was, however, not intended by Reformed theologians. Most Reformers were careful to retain a human element in the process of inspiration.

J.I. Packer argues that for Calvin the term "dictation" was a theological metaphor conveying the thought that what is written in Scripture bears the same relation to the mind of God, its source, as a letter written by a good secretary bears to the mind of the person who dictated it - a relation, that is, of complete correspondence and thus of absolute authenticity (Calvin's View of Scripture 103). In short, the Reformed view of inspiration did not imply mechanical dictation nor therewith a psychological suppression or diminution of the free cooperative functioning of the penmen's minds under the Spirit's guidance.

That Perkins did not believe in Spirit-channeling is evident from his remarks of the authors' peculiar and characteristic styles. In describing the historical narratives of the NT, Perkins notes:

> The difference betwixt the Evangelists is on this wise: Matthew layeth open the doctrines which Christ delivered. Marke sets down the history briefly: *yet did not make an abridgment of the Gospel which Matthew wrote*, as Jerome supposes. For he begins his discourse in a manner and proceeds in another order partly intreating of things more largely, and partly interlacing new matters. Luke aimeth or frameth a perfect history, and described in a certain order. John is almost wholly taken up in laying open the Godhead & benefit of Christ which is derived from his Godhead unto us. (734)15

Perkins was scholar enough to avoid a theory of mechanical dictation. At the same time he affirmed that God's message was conveyed clearly and with absolute faithfulness. Thus

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15I have italicized Perkins' rejection of Jerome's position, because it shows that similarities and discrepancies in the biblical accounts have always been noticed and attempts have been made to reconcile them. It is not as though such observations have occurred only within the last two hundred years.
Perkins is not disturbed by the fact that St. Paul used "heathen Poets" in his address to the philosophers at Athens, because such activity was guided supernaturally by the Spirit: "...if the Apostles in the new Testament add anything in any Storie, which is not in the old that circumstance so added, is to be holden as scripture and not tradition because they, having the same Spirit of God which the Writers of the Old Testament had, have inserted it into the body of Scripture; even as the three sentences of the heathen Poets alleged by Saint Paul" (Hebrews 69).

Perkins is as aware as any modern exegete of Paul's free adaptation of pagan poetry in his speech, yet, because of his view of divine inspiration, the Puritan exegete has no trouble seeing such intrusions as what one may call a kind of divinely inspired 'intertextuality', all used by God to convey his meaning to the reader.

The fact that Perkins regarded the whole Bible as divinely inspired leads us from the nature of Scripture to the issue of its authority. The two issues are closely related, for it is because of divine inspiration that, in Perkins' view, the Bible is manifestly different from other books. Perkins is convinced that "there are very strong proofes, which shew that shee [scripture] alone is the word of God and no other besides" (Prophecying 734). These proofs can be divided into two categories, namely external and internal evidences. The former is evidential, the latter experiential. The internal witness to the divine authority of the Scriptures is "the inward testimony of the holy Ghost speaking in the Scriptures, and not onely telling a man within his heart, but also effectually persuading him that these bookees of the Scripture are the word of God" (ibid.).

Like Flacius, Perkins affirms the voice of God as independent authority against the claim of the Roman Catholic church to interpretative authority. The Church, argues Perkins, may bear witness to the Canon, but she cannot establish it, "[f]or by this meanes the voice of the Church should be of greater force than the voyce of God: and the whole state of man's salvation should depend upon men; then which what can be said to be more miserable?" (ibid.).
Perkins' assurance of the Spirit's testimony to the divinity of the Word is intended to cut through the Roman Catholic charge of circularity against the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. The Roman theologians claim that "[t]he Scripture is the word of God by itselfe, but it is not so to us, but by the judgement of the Church." Perkins answers that if God's Spirit clearly speaks in the Scriptures and works certainty in the heart of the reader concerning faith and practice, why would one need human beings, say an ecclesiastical council, to establish what the Spirit already demonstrates by his work?: "For we have the voice of the Holy Ghost speaking in the Scripture: who doth also work in our hearts a certaine full perswasion of the Scriptures, when we are exercised in hearing, reading and meditating of them" (ibid. 735).

In fact, Perkins opines, the Roman Catholics have it backwards: "Yea the Church cannot stand, nor yet be imagined without faith; faith is not without the word, which word is the Rule or object of faith; and not the judgement, though it be of most holy men" (ibid.). The Word comes first, it works faith, and the church, comprised of the elect who have faith, find their guidance from the word. The Catholic theologians pretend that the Church determines what revelation is, when in fact the Word gave birth to the Church.

Neither does the authority of Scripture depend on the judgment passed by the inquiring intellect. Rational arguments drawn from the remarkable qualities of Scripture - its majesty, internal consistency, antiquity, preservation, and so forth - can serve as real evidence of its inspiration and authority, and they show that faith is not blind, but reasonable. But the true ground on which biblical authority rests, Perkins maintains, is its divine authorship, the fact that it came from the mouth of the Lord. He emphatically claims that those who combine all available scholarly means, and due diligence coupled with prayer, will know assuredly that the Bible is God's word. It is worth quoting Perkins extensively on this issue because his argument is typical of the Puritan view. Since this quotation is taken from his commentary on Hebrews, originally a series of sermons, we also get a taste here of Perkins' ability and style as a preacher:
they [the Roman Catholics] ask us how doe we know true religion from erroneous; or true Scripture, or sacraments from forged? We answer, first by itselfe, by sight and sense of the excellencie thereof; as we know gold from brasse, or silver from lead. But what if the brasse or tinne be gilded over? I then answer secondly, we can know gold from brasse, and silver from tinne by the sound and smell, and hardnesse to endure, and by the operation: so there is a spirituall sound of the scriptures in the eares of a Christian, a spirituall comfort and taste in true religion, a spirituall operation (in holy mens hearts) of the true Sacraments. But what if false Prophets come in sheepe's clothing, and by lying wonders, seeme to give the same sound, taste, smell, vertue and operation unto their forgeries, or at least challenge it, and say, that theirs is true? I answer lastly; then we know true Religion, true Scripture, true Sacraments, true Prophets, true Doctrine from false, by a holy and supernaturall revelation from Gods spirit; which, by evident and powerful demonstration, assureth what is true and what is false. (Hebrews 38)

Perkins conceives of the inner witness of the Spirit as inward enlightenment whereby, through the medium of external verbal testimony, divine realities come to be recognized and embraced for what they are. To use modern hermeneutical terminology, the horizon of the text and the reader are fused by the Spirit through the work of illumination which connects the text's horizon (what it means) to the existential perspective of the reader (what it means for me).

At the same time, Perkins stresses the use of means in interpretation, because the assurance of the text's divinity and authority is given only to those who "in true humilitie doe seeke it, in holy praier, and in a holy and frequent use of God's word and Sacraments; and none else" (ibid.). Perkins' conviction that hermeneutics requires a combination of faith and textual criticism explains his emphasis throughout his commentary on Hebrews and in The Art of Prophecying on the use of the original languages and grammatical-rhetorical skills for textual interpretation.

Perkins' argument for the authority of the Scriptures does not depend on the assurance by internal testimony alone. Though it is ultimately the deciding factor in the reader's acceptance of the Word, the inward work of the Spirit merely applies to the understanding in a convincing way what is already rationally obvious from the text. In
ill other words, if the reader were free from the influence of sin, he would naturally admit and accept the divine authority of the Bible because of the many "external" evidences for its divine origin. After all, Perkins argues, the text itself claims God as its author: "touching the Author, the Scripture referes it selfe unto God. Therefore he alone is the true and undoubted author thereof, and none but he" (Cases of Conscience 62).

3.3.4. Canonicity and Authority

Perkins’ opinion on the nature and authority of the biblical text is summarized by the Westminster Confession of Faith:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the holy scripture, and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole, (which is to give all glory to God,) the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts. (WC, 21)

In other words, the inward illumination of the Spirit which fuses the horizon of the text and the reader is the deciding factor in interpreting the Bible. Yet neither interpretation nor the attestation of the Scriptures as divine revelation depend solely on the doctrines of inspiration and illumination. In an effort to avoid purely subjective criteria for the authority of the Scriptures, it is important for Perkins to establish the canon of Scripture by “external proofs” apart from the internal testimony of the Spirit. His principal argument is that the Bible possesses matchless features in comparison to any other texts which claim religious authority.

Whereas Flacius did not explicitly deal with the issue of canonicity, Perkins attempts to support the validity of the canonical books with ten "external" proofs of
"declaration or testification, which doth not demonstrate and perswade, but only testifie, and by certaine tokens approove the true Canon" (ibid.). The first of such external evidences is the "perpetuall consent of the Church," from the ancient Jews, through Christ and the apostles all the way to the church fathers. Secondly, Perkins draws on the fact that some teachings of Scripture are consented to "by the Gentiles, and enemies affirming the same things, which are delivered in the holy Scriptures." Perkins mentions Homer, and Plato who speak of a creation myth in their works, as well as other secular historians who bear testimony to events of salvation history.

Thirdly, the "Antiquitie of the word," unlike any other literature, contains "a narration of things done from the beginning of the world." The fourth evidence for the divine inspiration of the text is "the most certaine accomplishment of the prophecies." Fifth is the uniqueness of the subject-matter, and sixth "the astonishing harmony of all its individual parts."

The last four evidences are the Scriptures' "miraculous preservation" throughout the ages, its power to convict and convert its readers (although the subject-matter "be flatly contradictory to the reason and affections of men"), its simple yet majestic style, and, lastly, the fact that the biblical authors themselves admitted their own faults and shortcomings in their works "which argueth that they were led by the holy Ghost" (Prophecying 736).

Perkins' concern with the authority of Scripture naturally leads him to define the boundaries of the texts, which are to be regarded as authoritative. As is well known, Protestant theologians argued against the Roman Catholic inclusion of certain books in the canon. Perkins thinks that his list of external evidences suffices to exclude these works from the Bible. These apocryphal works are "not written by the prophets, they are not written in Hebrew, Christ and his Apostles alleged in the New Testament no testimonies

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16 Perkins names Origen, Melito, Athanasius, Cyril, Cyprian, Jerome, Epiphanius, John Damascene, Gregory, and the Nicaean and Laodicean councils.
out of those bookes, they containe some feigned things, and contrarie to the Scriptures" (ibid.).

The question arises, however, whether Perkins is not arguing for a canon within a canon at this point. Does it not depend on arbitrary human judgment (whether through traditional usage or otherwise) which book is regarded as Scripture and thus accepted as authoritative? However, just as Calvin had acknowledged certain "marks of divinity" in the inspired texts (Packer Calvin's View of Scripture 109), Perkins is convinced that both the subject-matter and the internal testimony of the Spirit combine to differentiate clearly canonical from non-canonical books. In other words, Perkins tries to find a balance between subjective and objective criteria for the canon. His argument that Christ is the scope of the canonical Scriptures follows Luther's famous subjective criterion of "was immer Christ treibt" (whatever advocates Christ). Thus for Perkins, Christ, whose incarnation and redemptive work forms the main narrative theme of both the Old and New Testament. This overarching scope gives coherence to the various texts, including the historical narratives which every regenerate reader must apply both as historical and typological examples to his or her life. This scope, which should be obvious to any reader, is especially imprinted on the believer's mind. For the elect "having the Spirit of God doe first discerne the voyce of Christ speaking in the Scriptures; Moreover, that voyce, which they doe discerne they do approove: and that which they doe approove, they doe beleive" (Prophecyng 734). But Perkins argues also from other, more objective evidences. He observes, for example, that not only the messianic expectation of the Jews, but also the testimony of Christ and his disciples, who refer to a fixed canon in their conversations and debates with the religious leaders of their time, bear witness to a certain number of Old Testament texts as canonical (ibid. 735). In addition he refers to the various "external" evidences we have already examined.

17 Roger Beckwith in The Old Testament Canon in the New Testament Church also appeals to Christ and his disciples' acceptance of an authoritative OT Scripture as evidence for an early closure of the OT
By dividing proof for the Bible's status as divine revelation between rational argument and spiritual inward assurance through divine grace, the Puritan approach to the canonical boundaries for biblical interpretation is superior to some modern attempts at recovering the pre-critical reading of the text as canonical unity. The Yale theologian Brevard Childs, for example, who used to be a prominent member of the historical-critical school (Parsons, 256), distances himself from that school's pre-occupation with the origins of biblical literature. Instead, he wants to return to the Scriptures as a text of faith that shaped and was shaped itself by the Christian church of all ages:

The initial point to be made is that the canonical approach to Old Testament theology is unequivocal in asserting that the object of theological reflection is the canonical writing of the Old Testament, that is, the Hebrew Scriptures which are the received traditions of Israel. The materials for theological reflection are not the events or experiences behind the text, or apart from the construal in scripture by a community of faith and practice. (Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context 6)

In 1984, Childs advocated the same approach for the New Testament in his work The New Testament as Canon. In the introduction Childs rejects a foundational claim of much historical criticism, namely that the shaping of the NT canon took place as a late, ecclesiastical activity, external to the biblical literature itself, which was subsequently imposed on these writings. Childs claims to the contrary that it is crucial to see that the issue of canon turns on the authoritative role played by particular traditions for a community of faith and practice. Canon consciousness thus arose at the inception of the Christian church and lies deep within the New

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canon: “For whether the New Testament is addressing itself to committed Christians or to others, the attitude to the canon that it reveals is essentially the same. Many of the discourses of Jesus are addressed to disciples, and so are all the epistles, and in these places the Old Testament is freely quoted and referred to as authoritative - its authority thus being something which Christians are expected to accept” (91). Beckwith repudiates claims which try to differentiate between a Jewish and a Christian canon of the Old Testament, as does, for example, Harry Y. Gamble who states that “the discovery of the Quamram library reopened the question of the OT canon by showing just how indeterminate were the authoritative scriptures of Judaism at the time of Christian beginnings” (“The Canon of the New Testament” in The New Testament And Its Modern Interpreters, Eds. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress Press) 1985.)
Testament literature itself. There is an organic continuity in the historical process of the development of an established canon of sacred writings from the earliest stages of the NT to the final canonical stabilization of its scope" (The New Testament as Canon 21).

According to Childs, modernist interpretative methods focus therefore erroneously on historical, literary, sociological, and history-of-religion forces to the exclusion of the author's theological-canonical concerns.

Childs thus shares Perkins' concern to let the text speak as a whole, rather than focus on the individual author. William Perkins noted that biblical writers often conceal their true identity as authors (Prophecying 23). Childs likewise finds "the very fact that the canonical editors tended to hide their own footprints, largely concealing their own historical identity" to contradict the "historicist reading of the biblical text which assumes that the meaning of a text derives only from a specific historical referent" (23). According to Childs, the biblical authors were particularly concerned with giving the material a shape that could transcend the original addressee and so become valid for all successive generations of Christians (Childs 23).

Perkins, too, shows much more concern for the text as a whole. Although his emphasis on the human element of Scripture justifies the use of every available tool for textual criticism, Perkins is ultimately more concerned with what the Holy Spirit says than with what a human author intends. Perkins is mostly concerned with letting the text speak ("the Text is plaine" [Hebrews, 72]) sometimes to the point of personalizing it ("the Text addeth" [107]; "the Text saith" [119]; "For so saith the Story" [51]).

This neglect of authorial intent makes Perkins' reading of the text different from modernist textual practices. Perkins is much more concerned with the text than with the originating circumstances of the text. This interpretative stance is, however, consistent with Perkins' view of inspiration. Perkins repeatedly identifies the principal voice that speaks through the text as "the holy Ghost." His most common expression is "the Holy
Spirit saith," which he uses before either specifying a textual feature or summarizing the content of a passage (Sheppard 54).

Since in his view the Holy Spirit has inspired the writing of the entire corpus of Scripture, Perkins can appeal to an inner logic that pervades the entire canon. For example, he says "thus reasoneth the holy Ghost here" (On Hebrews, 78); "the holy Ghost proceedeth to amplifie and enlarge the commendation" (ibid., 103); "Here then the holy Ghost setteth down two notable reasons" (ibid. 141). Perkins assumes that "the Holy Spirit has a special relation to the formation and function of Scripture" (Sheppard 54), and can therefore afford to give minimal attention to the precise role of the human author.

Brevard Childs wants to return to something like Perkins' "plain meaning" of the text, which, in [Childs'] terminology, is its "canonical sense" (24). Thus Childs tries to overcome the basic hermeneutical problem of how an ancient text makes sense to the present time, by stating that in the canonical shaping the text has gained the quality of a canon which may still be speaking to the present community of faith. Yet he is still too much a historical critic to concede the role of the Spirit in canon formation.

The limitations of Childs' canonical approach have been pointed out by John Barton in his work Reading the Old Testament. Barton lauds Childs' attempt at a canonical reading for establishing certain—if broad—parameters that will aid against the historicizing tendency to insist on "original meaning" and so to "wrest the work from its context" (82). Nevertheless, Barton is critical of Childs' seemingly easy way out and he asks: "But doesn't all this amount simply to a return to pre-critical exegesis? If we are to read Scripture as a unified work, doesn't that mean that we are going back to all the old abuses—allegory, harmonization, typology, even downright falsification of the text—from which the historical-critical method freed us?" (84).

Barton's question is ingenious, because it not only points exactly to Childs' main problem, the a-historicity of his approach, but also throws a very dim light on pre-critical exegesis by insinuating that a confessional approach to interpretation must result in
eisegesis and interpretative chaos. In light of our examination of Puritan hermeneutics, the proper answer to Barton's question may be that Childs' canon criticism is not a return to pre-critical exegesis, but rather is an incomplete, watered-down version of it. In fact, after an unconvincing attempt at portraying pre-critical hermeneutics as unfamiliar with canon-criticism,\textsuperscript{18} Barton himself puts his finger on what separates Childs' claim for canonicity from that of the Reformers: Barton argues that Childs tries to establish the canon on inherent literary and structural grounds, but not on theological grounds (inspiration and illumination). Childs cannot bring himself to admit an external force, like Perkins' "Holy Ghost," which could guide the shaping of the canon and the exegesis of its literature:

Once the matter is put this way, a committed Christian is almost certain to feel that it has a debunking tendency. Surely, he will say, the reason why our canonical texts must be read in this way is not that we have conventions for canonicity, but that the canonical texts are given by God and therefore must in reality (not just by convention) be consistent?" Childs, as we have seen, is not prepared to say this. (Barton 87)

Barton contends that Childs' approach is really not a return to pre-critical exegesis, but rather an innovative concept which borrows heavily from the formalist school commonly termed the New Criticism (Barton 143).

\textsuperscript{18} Barton objects that so-called precritical expositors such as Augustine and Calvin were completely unfamiliar with the historical-critical method which fragmented the text into countless redactions and interpolations. Thus in some sense Childs' reference is anachronistic. "To put it briefly: the canon critic [i.e. Childs] is asking whether the Bible may not have a unity after all, just as the fundamentalist is asking whether it may not be right after all; and it is the 'after all' that defines the gulf--widest very often when it looks least daunting--which separates the modern critic of whatever persuasion from even the greatest of the pre-critical commentators" (Barton 99).

Barton may himself be a little out of touch with interpretative history at his point, because he implies that pre-critical exegesis could innocently argue for canonical unity in the absence of a serious challenge to biblical authority. However, any close examination of pre-critical hermeneutics shows the contrary to be true. There was a lively discussion on the nature of the canon in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and many of the arguments used then were the same as those of today. Thus the 'after all' is not as decisive as Barton assumes.
The Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke, who argues from basically the same position as the Reformers, agrees with Barton's criticism of Childs at this point: "Childs does not clearly distinguish the stage of literary activity in the development of the text from changes that take place through scribal activity on the text. This is due to the fact that he has no clear definition of inspiration" (Waltke 3).

The debate among Barton, Childs and other biblical scholars concerning the authority and function of the Scriptures shows that many of the same hermeneutical problems have persisted from the time of the Puritans to our day. Barton's insightful criticism demonstrates that either one returns to the view of divine inspiration the Reformers held, following the Bible's own claim to be of divine origin, or one abandons the text's objective claim to authority. While the Puritans had no trouble whatever basing a unified reading of the text on God's sovereign supervision in the construction of the Scriptures, modern exegetes like Childs find themselves embarrassed by such claims.

But if such supernatural aid is not admitted, Perkins' and Flacius' criticism of Roman Catholicism applies once more. If the Scriptures are not self-authenticating, then something or someone else needs to invest them with authority. The Roman Catholic Church claimed this authority over the text, and so does historical criticism, albeit on different grounds. However, the early Protestant theologians were clear-sighted enough to see that unless God is allowed to be operative in the human penmen and redactors who compiled the texts of the Bible, divine revelation will always be tied to an authority other than itself.

3.4. Sola Scriptura at Work

The basis for the sola scriptura principle consists in the perceived unity of the Old and New Testament. As I have tried to show, Reformed hermeneutics took this unity from the text's own claim that Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. We have seen furthermore, that Perkins based typological interpretation with its concept of sensus
plenior on a progressive revelation of God’s word. The purpose of this section is to show how Perkins applies the principle of sola scriptura in his exegesis practically.

After affirming the divine authority of the Scriptures, Perkins turns his attention to the actual interpretation of the biblical text. For him, hermeneutics consists of three basic steps, namely a) interpreting  b) the "right cutting or dividing of the word," and c) application.

3.4.1. Interpretation

Perkins realizes that all interpretation has the nature of a circle wherein first a general scope is projected, which is then affirmed and corrected by repeated reading of the text. Even in his description of the interpretative procedure, he progresses from the whole to the part, that is, from a general notion of what the text is about to a confirmation or possible revision of that first hypothesis through continuous study of the text.

He suggests: "[f]irst, diligently imprint both in thy mind and memorie the substance of Divinity described, with definitions, divisions, and explications of the properties." The focus of divinity is Christ, wherefore the context of the Scriptures, its main scope, is determined by Perkins' Christological bias. Perkins reaffirms the interpretative principle of sola scriptura by stating that "the supreame and absolute meane of interpretation is the Scripture it selfe." He also emphasizes the role of the Spirit in interpretation, claiming that "the principall interpreter of the Scripture is the holy Ghost, for he that maketh the law is the best interpreter of the law" (ibid.). However, Perkins mainly stresses context-oriented interpretation.

With this general knowledge as pre-understanding to the text, the reader may then "proceede to the reading of the Scriptures," but he is to do so in a certain order: "Using a

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19 Every one of Perkins' major claims regarding interpretation is backed up by a text from the Bible. In this case he cites Nehemiah 8:8: "And they read in the booke of the Law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the Scripture it selfe, per Scripturam ipsam" (Prophecying 737).
grammatical, rhetorical, and logical analysis, and the help of the rest of the arts, read first the Epistle of Paul to the Romans after that the Gospell of John, (as being indeede the keyes of the new Testament) and then the other bookes of the new Testament will be more easie when they are read" (Prophecying 736). The books of the Old Testament are to be read in the order of their being cited in the New. Thus one should first peruse "the dogmaticall bookes of the old Testament, especially the Psalms: then the Propheticall, especially Esay: lastly the historicall, but chiefly Genesis," because "there are no bookes of the old Testament, out of which we can reade more testimonies to be cited then out of these" (ibid.). Thus even the order of readings is heavily influenced by Perkins' Christological interpretation of the Old Testament and his doctrinal focus on justification by faith.

Once the reader's pre-understanding has been formed by Christian doctrine, the actual work of interpreting individual passages and books can begin. According to Perkins, interpretation is "the Opening of the wordes and sentences of the Scripture, that one entire and naturall sense may appeare" (Prophecying 737). He advocates the "plaine sense" of the text in opposition to medieval theology: "The Church of Rome maketh 4 senses of the Scriptures, the literall, allegoricall, tropologicall and anagogicall. But this her device of the fourfold meaning of the Scriptures must be exploded and rejected" (ibid.). Perkins affirms that "there is onely one sense, and the same is the literall." He uses the term "literall" to describe the meaning of a passage that is obvious from the larger context, whether this meaning is expressed allegorically or not, for "an allegory is onely a certaine manner of uttering the same [literall] sense" (ibid.).

The context of passages is determined by the historical-critical questions "Who? to whom? upon what occasion? at what time? in what place? for what end? what goeth before? what followeth?" (ibid. 738). Perkins displays a great awareness of interpretative difficulties and the need for historical context. He notes that "The holy Writers speaking of things and persons, that are past, doe anticipate, that is, they speake of them according
to the custom of that place and time, in which they wrote" (746). Perkins argues that a reader cannot expect from an ancient document that has developed over time to retain the same names of locations and events over centuries.

Furthermore, it was customary for the biblical writers not to relate history always chronologically: "For the word of God does not always set downe things, as they follow in order of time just one after another: but sometime it doth anticipate, putting such things in former histories, as are alreadie done and accomplished, which in regard of their event would be related afterward. Sometime again it useth by recapitulation to declare things as following in order of time, which doe properly belong to a former narration" (Cases of Conscience 69). The reader must allow for the renaming of both places and persons throughout the biblical accounts, since revelation does not bypass history but works through it. An additional difficulty of the biblical style is that "[p]laces and persons in the Scriptures have very often two names: Gideon was called Jerubbaal..."(247).

Perkins also freely admits that scribal errors corrupted the text over the centuries. Like Flacius, Perkins refers to the Catholic argument, that the Jews out of malice corrupted the OT texts, as a "wicked calumniare." He does, however, recommend every textual-critical skill be used in reading so that "the divers readings, which in some places have crept in, either by reason of unskilfulnes or negligence and oversight of the Notaries, might be skanned and determined" (Prophecying 749). Elsewhere Perkins answers an allegation that the Bible is self-contradictory: "some say there is a fault, because Abrahams name is put for Jacobs." "Yet," Perkins retorts, such errors are "not a fault of the Bible, but of them that wrote out the Bible. Neither does this diminish the authority of Scripture, though the pen-men did erre and slippe in writing, so long as we may find out the truth by Scripture" (Cases of Conscience 70).

Perkins thus seems to hold to an uncorrupted original autograph of the inspired texts. The evidence for this inference is twofold. First of all, only then would his zeal to correct scribal errors make sense. Efforts for textual accuracy make sense only in light of
an original copy (even if it is an unattainable ideal). Secondly, he makes the remark that "the Papist plays the right Atheist, in going about to improve the originall copies" (Cases of Conscience 69; italics mine).

As may be seen, Perkins is fully aware of textual difficulties and he values grammatical-historical criticism. Yet different from the rather skeptical attitude of the historical-critical school, Perkins' analysis of context is directed by trusting the text to convey a gradually unfolding story of salvation. It is this presumption of unity behind the text which allows Perkins to suggest, as did Flacius, an interpretative strategy that hinges on context. Both men emphasize the necessity of a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible. Only then can the principle of sola scriptura truly work. As with Flacius, Perkins suggests two aids for the recognition of context: the analogy of faith and the "book of Commonplaces."

As one way of exposing the interconnected fabric of the Bible, Perkins repeats Flacius' advice to keep "tables or Common place bookes" into which the reader should copy all "those things, which in studying thou meetest with, that are nessecarie and worthy." Such tables are meant to facilitate the reciprocal movement between part and whole, because in the notebook striking passages are to be gathered under "every head of divinitie," so that the reader may then see at one glance how well established biblical doctrines are, and how interconnected the text actually is. We shall see later that the Pietist Philipp Spener suggests the same procedure to confirm projected meanings derived from catechisms and confessions, and to avoid following them uncritically.

Other means to establish the interconnectedness of Scripture are "the Analogie of faith, the circumstances of the place propounded, and the comparing of places altogether" (ibid. 737). The analogy of faith is defined with Flacius as "an abridgement or Summe of the Scriptures, collected out of most manifest & familiar places." Every textual problem is to be solved within this framework. Even translation from the original texts is to be aided by the analogy of faith, because it guides the translator in the use of what modern
approaches to translation have termed “dynamic equivalence,” which means that sometimes, for the better understanding of a translated passage, words need to be added, or a different idiom used in order to convey the meaning accurately. Perkins is aware that translation contains a great deal of interpretation and should thus be conducted within the rule of faith: "The supply of every word, which is wanting, is fitting for the place propounded, if it agree with the analogy of faith, & with the circumstances & wordes in the same place" (ibid. 741).

The "collation of places," mentioned by Perkins, is the principle of sola scriptura put into practice. Perkins demonstrates the use of this method over three pages on which he lists Old Testament passages that are explained and clarified by the New. This correlation between Old and New Testament occurs for two reasons. The first "is the comparing of the place with itselhe cited and repeated elsewhere in holy writ" for exposition’s sake. In such cases, a passage is quoted either verbatim, or with alterations, in order to elucidate Old Testament passages from the superior insight afforded New Testament Christians through the incarnation. I have already dealt with this typological reading in a previous section and will avoid repeating it here.

The second main reason for the "collation of places "is to assist understanding of passages which contain only little or no similarities, for instance, such as allusions of NT writers to an OT passage. Perkins gives the following example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gen.28.12</th>
<th>Joh.1.51</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Then he dreamed, &amp; behold there stooode a ladder upon the earth and the top of if reached up to heaven, and loe, the Angels of God went up and downe by it</td>
<td>And he said unto him, verily, verily, I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the heaven open, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Sunne of man</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, although Christ does not actually mention the Old Testament passage, the allusion to it is easily recognizable, if the two passages are juxtaposed.
Perkins realizes that there are passages which seemingly contradict one another. However, Perkins argues that within the framework provided generally by the analogy of faith and specifically by the literary context of the passage, such difficulties are more often resolved than not. The reader of the Scriptures, according to Perkins, usually faces two kinds of texts. Either a passage is "Analogical and plaine, or Cryptical and darke." The overwhelming majority of the places are of the first kind: "we must further knowe that every article and doctrine concerning faith and maners, which is necessarie unto salvation, is very plainely delivered in the Scriptures" (ibid. 740).

I want to conclude this section with a practical example in which Perkins employs his hermeneutical principles to resolve a problematic passage. Perkins demonstrates his hermeneutic on Christ's words "this is my body," the interpretation of which has caused great division in the church. First Perkins establishes that a literal reading must not violate common sense and should remain within the analogy of faith: "If the native (or natural) signification of the words doe manifestely disagree with either the analogy of faith, or very perspicuous places of the Scripture, then the other meaning, which is given of the place propounded is naturall & proper, if it agree with contrarie and like places, with the circumstance & words of the place, & with the nature of the thing, which is intreated of" (ibid.).

Next, Perkins demonstrates how this rule applies in the case of the Eucharist controversy. According to him an overly literal interpretation for obvious reasons does not work: "it is not likely that Christ sitting amongst his disciples did take and breake his owne body with his handes." Other descriptive phrases by Christ such as the bread being delivered, or the phrase "the Cup is the new Testament" show that Christ was speaking in an allegorical mode. Perkins shows with a large array of other passages, that Christ spoke metonymically, and explains that such use of language is also common in English: "So we put Fasces, or bundle of rods (used to be carried before the Magistrates) for government
itselfe: the goune we put for peace: and the laurrell garland for a triumph" (741; italics Perkins').

Furthermore, the literal interpretation of Christ's words violates the context of the passage, the analogy of faith (Christ has ascended, how can he be present in the bread and wine), and the circumstances of the action Christ performed ("it is not likely that Christ sitting among his disciples take and breake his owne body with his handes" 741). Moreover, Christ's action and choice of words is to be seen in the context of divine covenantal language in the Old Testament (ibid.).

Perkins demonstrates an impressive knowledge of biblical language, Hebrew customs and his arguments for a certain reading are quite convincing. Certainly, he does not have our advantage of centuries of critical scholarship, but his readings are far from naive.

3.4.2. The “cutting and dividing” of the Word

This process is the prelude to application. After Perkins has established rules for grammatical-historical context, and for literal, allegorical and typological reading, he examines the connection between hermeneutics, teaching and application. In other words, the right dividing (or cutting) of the word is "that whereby the word is made fit to edifie the people of God" (750). The prelude to application, then, is the establishing of doctrines from the text. This is done either by simply collecting the doctrine from the more straightforward theological epistles (resolution), or by collecting doctrines out of several passages which deal with the same topic. Perkins warns that in clustering various passages for the formation of a certain doctrine, one has to distinguish carefully between the respective contexts in which a topic is dealt with. Otherwise, he warns, "we shall draw any doctrine from any place" (751).
3.4.3. Application

In the last pages of The Art of Prophecying, Perkins moves from interpretation and the right "dividing of the word" to application. Application is defined as "that whereby the doctrine rightly collected is diversely fitted according as place, time and person doe require." The process of Application," he argues, "is either Mentall, or Practicall" (756). He admits that he is following Flacius in this applicatory methodology: "I will also set downe that example, which Illycrius hath propounded...in his booke of the way to understand the Scriptures" (757).

Mental application entails the mind’s acceptance of the doctrine gathered from the text. This process is followed by practical application, that "which respecteth the life and behaviour" (757). All application of the text follows the law-and-gospel dialectic already advocated by Flacius: "The foundation of Application is to know whether the place propounded be a sentence of the Law or of the Gospel" (752). Following this dialectic Perkins outlines seven different ways of how the text’s basic message of salvation may be applied to the various mental-spiritual states of the listener. A detailed outline of what is essentially a Pastor’s guide-book on counseling would lead us too far afield. However, Perkins demonstrates how well acquainted Puritan pastors were with the psychology of readers and listeners. It was after all their observations of the effect the biblical text had on readers which furnished them with arguments concerning the life-changing influence of the Bible, a sign of its divinity. 20

A brief example of Perkins’ exegesis will help to illustrate his applicatory hermeneutics. The passage is taken from the tenth chapter of Matthew’s gospel:

Feare yee not them which kill the bodie, but are not able to kill the soule: but rather feare him, who is able to destroy both soule and bodie in hell.29. Are not

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20 The Puritans tried to prove their psychological and pastoral insights from the biblical text itself. Even here, when establishing a method of application for doctrine, Perkins follows examples from the Bible. He uses the prophet Nathan’s dealings with David to show that correction needs to be handled carefully, and in a general way. Only after a person remains oblivious to his shortcomings, the correction "must be urged in a more speciall manner, that is with an open rebuke" (ibid).
two Sparrows sold for a farthing; & one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father?30.Yea, and all the haires of your head are numbered.31. Feare ye not therefore, ye are of more value then many sparrowes. (Prophecying 757)

Perkins translates this passage into the horizon of his time. He suggests as the teaching to be learned from the text that "it is needful for us publikely to professe the doctrine which we know, so often as there is neede" and that such confession be done even with "hazard of goods and life."

The doctrine Perkins takes from the text clearly reflects the influence of his life on the reading, because the Puritans were persecuted for their beliefs. The Puritan John Gree saw it as one of the trademarks of Puritanism to fear God above men: "The Old English Puritan was such an one, that honored God above all, and under God gave everything. His first care was to serve God, and therein he did not what was good in his own, but in God's sight." Perkins concurs by concluding that "our life should be condemned in comparison of Christ and his truth" (Prophecying 757).

This progression from doctrine, i.e. from mental to practical application is the basic pattern of Perkins exegesis: "Thus any place of Scripture ought to be handled." Although the text contains many doctrines and possible applications, Perkins admonishes his fellow pastors to handle the text "so as that all the doctrines be not propounded unto the people, but those onely, which may be fitly applied to our times and to the present condition of the Church. And they must not onely be choice ones, but also few, lest the hearers be overcharged with their multitude"(ibid.). Thus, in his practical way, Perkins approaches the text with present concerns and the needs of his congregation in mind.

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3.5. Conclusion

Perkins' hermeneutic is embedded in the framework of the created universe as described in the first chapter. Due to the universal effects of sin, humankind is unable to read either the book of nature or the book containing the revelation of God correctly. Thus interpretation is not merely technical, but depends upon the opening of the understanding through divine intervention. Perkins adopts the Calvinist dictum that the interpretation of human existence is only possible in light of divine revelation. The wide distribution and acceptance of Perkins' writings assured the dissemination of this doctrine into popular devotional manuals like Dent's Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven.

Perkins borrows heavily from the hermeneutics of Flacius and Calvin. From Flacius Perkins seems to have adopted the law and gospel dialectic, the method to prove the Christological focus of the Scriptures syllogistically, and, finally, the division of application into mental and practical elements (which he explicitly acknowledges to have taken from Flacius). From Calvin, Perkins seems to have inherited the argument of substance and shadow, the reading of the Old and New Testaments as one progressive covenant between God and mankind. Thus Lutheran and Reformed traditions are freely adopted by Perkins when it comes to hermeneutical method.

Far from having a naive view of textual interpretation, the Puritans believed the Bible to consist of both human and divine elements. The human element required the interpretative apparatus of rhetoric and historical-grammatical analysis, whereas the divine element required a relationship with the divine through regeneration, a sovereign act of divine grace. The central figure in this reconciliation with the divine and the resumption of the dialogue lost in the fall is Christ. The Puritan hermeneutic thus combined both propositional knowledge, knowledge of the letter, as it were, with spiritual requirements in terms of a personal relation with the divine through Christ. These two elements are not opposed to one another, but work hand in hand. Perkins' insistence on the means of
interpretation such as prayer, and historical as well as linguistic skills, evidences the careful balance the Puritan interpreter maintained between the divine and human elements of the text. Perkins shows that Puritan exposition was hardly naive, but engaged in intense textual criticism, not merely for apologetical purposes, but because of the realization that there were indeed scribal errors and corruption in the text, as well as narrative peculiarities which needed to be exposed and clarified.

The assumption that the Bible is self-interpreting motivated Puritan expositors to a familiarity with the text that is unparalleled in hermeneutic history. Perkins' comparative charts and "collation of commonplaces" exhibit a rare intimacy with biblical texts, and his solution of many seeming contradictions submitted by unbelieving detractors, similar to those leveled against it by historical criticism, are actually plausible. In Perkins' time, as in our own, the skeptical attitude toward the Bible as self-interpreting (exhibited also by philosophical hermeneutics) is sometimes based more on unfamiliarity with the text itself than on well substantiated criticism. As Robert Alter suggests, "the decentering of the Bible may have to do much less with conscious attitude than with a simple erosion of connection...for millions, the peripherality of the Bible is a matter not of skepticism but of ignorance" (World of Biblical Literature 195).

Lastly, the strength of Puritan hermeneutics, as practiced by Perkins, lay in its emphasis on life application. Since the reading of the text was seen as a dialogue with the divine, who, in the form of Christ, had actually left a recorded model for godly behaviour, obedience to Christ's words and the imitation of his model were the goal of reading. We shall see that German Pietism also stressed this practical application as the end of interpretation. However, before we examine the German counterpart to English Puritanism, one important and often neglected aspect of pre-critical hermeneutics must be addressed: the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation. No other Puritan dealt with this topic as exhaustively as did John Owen.
Chapter IV

The Spirit And The Word: The Relational Hermeneutics of John Owen

How few are there who understand and believe the truth aright. What divisions, what scandals, what animosities, what violence, mutual rage and persecutions, do ensue hereon, among them that are called Christians is likewise known. Hence some take occasion to countenance themselves in an open declension unto atheism, some, unto a great indifferency in all religion; some, to advance themselves and destroy others by the advantage of their opinions, according as they are prevalent in some times and places. (John Owen, 1678)

4.1. Historical Background

John Owen (1616-1683) is still one of the most neglected Puritan figures, especially in view of his activities as a statesman, as dean and vice chancellor of Oxford University, and as one of the greatest Reformed theologians in English history. In his role as a statesman, he has been eclipsed by the prominence of John Milton. In terms of literary importance as a practical Puritan writer and theologian, he has been neglected by modern research in favor of the more colorful and vibrant Richard Baxter. Yet Owen did act as personal chaplain and advisor to Cromwell, and his theology is more solidly rooted in the Reformed, Calvinistic tradition than either Baxter's or Milton's.

One of the reasons for Owen's relative obscurity is the comparatively small amount of biographical material concerning him. Full scale biographies of Owen are rare, and their authors usually admit the scarcity of material that would allow a reliable reconstruction of this Puritan's mind and personality. Peter Toon, who has produced a more recent and fuller account of Owen, concludes, "[n]evertheless, it must be admitted that despite the many facts about his career and connexions which have come to light in this study, Owen as a man, as a human being, still remains an elusive character. After reading the Reliquiae or Dr. Nuttal's biography one feels that one knows Owen's
contemporary, Richard Baxter, as a real, living person, but the same cannot be said of
Owen after reading his previous ‘Memoirs.’” (God's Statesman 176).

Toon also suggests why, in all probability, Owen's writings have not enjoyed
greater popularity, by citing the words of John Stoughton, written a century ago:

It is to be feared Owen will never gain that position in literature to which his
learning and abilities fairly entitle him; and the comparative neglect which encircles
one of the greatest names in English theological literature is a confirmation of the
great critical maxim that no writer, however able, can secure for his works abiding
popularity if he be heedless of the style and the dress in which he arrays his
thought. (ibid. 177)

Stoughton's criticism is in the main correct. Yet in defense of Owen, the same complaint
could be launched against much academic writing today. Besides, Owen's sometimes
lumbering and Latinate style is often relieved by humor and wit. Moreover, Owen
explicitly wrote for those who are not afraid to dig deep for the truth. In one of his
prefaces he asks the superficial reader: "If thou intendest to go any farther, I would entreat
thee to stay here a little. If thou art, as many in this pretending age, a sign or title gazer,
and comest into books as Cato into the theater, to go out again, - thou hast had thy
entertainment; farewell" (WJO 10: 149). Owen is not a theological lightweight, and there
is much repetition in his writings; yet no other Puritan writer reaches the same depth as
Owen on the psychology of the human mind in biblical interpretation.

There are several accounts of Owen's life which do much better justice to his
career and development than is possible in the context of this thesis, where a mere sketch
must suffice.¹

¹Apart from the usual sources for Puritan biographical material there are: 1. Volume I of Owen's Works
contains a LIFE OF DR OWEN, by Rev. A. Thomson. 2. The T. Russel edition of Owen's Works (1826)
which contains a biography by William Orme, entitled "Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Dr John
Owen. 3. Peter Toon, God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen, (Exeter: The Paternoster Press,
Owen was born into a Puritan household and followed the usual academic career of his time, first attending grammar school and then entering Queen's college at the age of twelve. After completing his B.A. and M.A., Owen enrolled for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity at Oxford. The resurgence of what Owen would regard as Catholic elements was particularly felt at Oxford at this time through the administration of Bishop William Laud (1575-1645), who became Chancellor of Oxford in 1630, and who was made Archbishop of Canterbury only three years later. Since the administration's course of fostering Pelagianism and of spending money on the reinstitution of Catholic liturgy went against Owen's beliefs, he left Oxford. Through the help of his father, Owen obtained work as a tutor and chaplain in two households (Toon 11).

Though Owen had up to this point accepted and preached Calvinist doctrine, he had not, as the Puritans termed it, been "effectually called" by God. In London, he went to hear the famous Samuel Ward preach. However, Ward was detained, and an unknown preacher delivered a message which removed Owen's "doubts, fears and worries as to whether he was truly regenerate and born anew of the Holy Spirit" (Toon 13). According to Toon, the spiritual experience Owen underwent in St. Mary's church is reflected in his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit and his continual emphasis on the need for both propositional and experiential knowledge of biblical truth (ibid.).

Owen's public fame and popularity as a preacher began with a sermon before the House of Commons on April 29, 1646, in which Owen identified himself with the theological and eschatological themes of the dissenting Westminster divines

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The Puritan Nathaniel Vincent describes this process in his The Conversion of a Sinner: "Those whom the Spirit calls effectually, He raises grief and sorrow in them because of their sin and misery. They see what they have done against God and themselves, and this makes their spirits to be troubled....Upon this he cries out of the depths unto the Lord Ps. 130:1.... And as the evil of sin is presented to his view, so the goodness of God is, in some measure, by the Spirit revealed. And therefore, he desires to be converted, not only upon necessity, because else he would be extremely and eternally miserable, but also upon choice, because this is the way unto the truest happiness. And these desires to be turned are, as it were, the first breathings of the Spirit's operation in those whom he calls effectually to turn to God" (Puritans on Conversion 113).
(independents), by interpreting Cromwell's success in battle as a sign of divine favour. However, the appendix to the sermon also shows Owen's advocacy for the toleration of all ecclesiastical factions and even those who opposed the gospel. He was firmly of the opinion that "heretics as well as dissenters from the established church should not be punished merely because they were so, but only if they caused a public disturbance or were openly licentious" (Toon 24).

In 1649, after serving as an army chaplain to soldiers of General Fairfax's army at the beginning of the second civil war, Owen was asked again to preach for the House of Commons. In that sermon entitled "The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth," Owen interpreted the recent events (the civil wars and the regicide) in terms of God's providence and eschatological development. Like many other Puritans of his day, Owen was excited by the progress of the Reformation and he seemed to believe that the defeat of the King's army was merely another barrier overcome by divine providence for the inauguration of the millennium. Oliver Cromwell, who was among the audience, was impressed with Owen's interpretation of events and invited Owen to be his chaplain and college inspector on a forthcoming expedition to Ireland (Toon 36).

After Cromwell took control of England, Owen remained firmly committed to the new republic, "and believed that he could influence its policies, especially in religious matters" (Toon 43). Owen was appointed to replace the congregational Puritan Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) as one of the official preachers at Whitehall. This appointment and

3 WJO 8: 244 ff.
4 Contrary to much present day evangelical millenarianism, most Puritans envisioned a gradual spread of the gospel across the globe, and expanding of God's kingdom (not necessarily connected to economic or martial success) leading up to the second coming of Christ. The Protestant Reformation was interpreted as a major turning point in church history, and the book of Revelation was usually read in light of the Reformation. Thomas Goodwin, for example, writes in 1639: "Therefore Christ hath seven vials, which contain the last plagues, for he means to make this the last act of his long tragi-comedy, to dispatch the Pope and the Turk, and root them out, even as the seals had done heathenism, and the trumpets had done the empire itself..." In Goodwin's reading of the apocalypse, the pope and the Turks will eventually join forces and be destroyed by Christ himself when he returns (Brief History of the Kingdom of Christ Extracted out of the Book of Revelation, Works 3: 209).
its responsibilities placed Owen at the heart of England's political affairs. His influence was furthered in 1650 with his appointment as Dean of Christ Church and, two years later, at the age of thirty-seven, as vice-chancellor of Oxford. Owen reversed many Laudian "improvements" and wanted to remodel Oxford into a center of Christian learning and evangelism (Toon 52). He emphasized the original tongues for the reading of the Scriptures, and generally raised the standard of the institution. He also personally supported and lodged poor scholars at his home.

It is impossible to list all of Owen's various activities under Cromwell's protectorate here. Suffice it to say that he played an eminent role in overseeing education and ecclesiastical affairs of England. Together with Cromwell, he envisioned and worked for a national church and his course was mostly reconciliatory.\(^5\) Owen was able to survive the restoration and the persecution of Protestant clergy that followed it with relative comfort, because powerful friends he had made during his time as a statesman shielded him from the worst (Toon 125). Dying in 1683, Owen did not live to see the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, when William of Orange ascended the throne of England.\(^6\)

Owen's political and educational background is important, because his hermeneutical insights are directly linked to his political views. The quotation at the opening of this chapter was written at a time when the persecution of Puritans made them more aware than ever before that no political power or imposition of religion can bring

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\(^5\) Owen's disagreement with Richard Baxter on the course of the non-conformists indicates that he changed his position. Baxter wanted unity among the (Presbyterian, Episcopalian and Congregationalist) ejected ministers in order to rejoin the Church of England. For Owen, however, this church had too many "marks of the beast," wherefore he thought the nonconformists should unite and form a separate church (Toon 135-36).

\(^6\) Owen's most unique contribution to Protestant scholarship is his work on the atonement (The Death of Death in the Death of Christ 1647), in which he argues against Baxter's Amyraldianism, and his writings on the work of the Holy Spirit comprising A Discourse of the Holy Spirit (1674), The Reason of Faith (1677), The Causes Ways and Means of Understanding the Mind of God, On the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer (1682), and Two Discourses, of the Holy Spirit as Comforter...and Author of Spiritual Gifts (1693). Owen has also left an exegetical legacy in his voluminous Commentary on Hebrews, "into which he put the wealth of his knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Rabbinical learning, Protestant theology and human nature" (Toon 169).
peace to England. Not only did the Catholic-Protestant debate flare up with renewed vigour, but in addition a great number of Protestant sects fought for domination, each one using the Bible to justify their position. John Owen believed that source as well as the solution of the schisms and troubles of Christendom was of a hermeneutical, rather than of a political nature.

Owen believed that the solution to this hermeneutical dilemma was not to be found in better textual-critical tools (though he regarded them as important), but in a return to a dialogical hermeneutic through the aid of the divine Spirit. Owen's importance for my project lies in his "psychological" analysis of the reader in relation to the biblical text, and his detailed description of the Spirit's role in interpretation. In what one may describe as a precritical version of reader response theory, Owen analyses in detail the noetic effects of sin on the mind of the interpreter.

Moreover, Owen represents the typical blend of orthodox theology and "affective" piety which was so common in Puritan writing and which serves to correct the common perception of Puritanism as either a renewed form of scholasticism on the one hand or a mere reaction against arid scholasticism on the other. Instead, as we shall see, Puritanism combined a high regard for scholarship and human learning with an awareness of the spiritual dimension of interpretation and the necessity of practical piety in hermeneutics.

Lastly, Owen provides invaluable insights into the Puritan concept of faith which offers an important alternative to the Kantian estimation of faith as incompatible with reason.

4.2. Owen's Hermeneutical Framework

John Owen moves within the same epistemological circle as Calvin. Like the French Reformer over a century earlier, Owen affirms that existential knowledge has two parts, the knowledge of self and the knowledge of God. He also adds the important applicatory dimension in his restatement of Calvin's hermeneutic, namely that existential
knowledge has the goal of communion with the divine: "The sum of all true wisdom and knowledge may be reduced to these three heads: - I. The Knowledge of God, his nature and his properties. II. The knowledge of ourselves in reference to the will of God concerning us. III. Skill to walk in communion with God" (WJO 2: 80).

In my analysis of Owen's hermeneutical framework, I will roughly follow his own outline. First I will establish Owen's view of the role and function of human existence within a created universe, i.e. his biblical anthropology. This includes the question of how knowledge of God and self may be attained, and what the quality of this knowledge is. I will then, secondly, outline the practical implications of such knowledge (Practical application corresponds to Owen's "skill to walk in communion with God"). In both sections, Owen's main contribution to the hermeneutical discussion is a relational aspect in both knowledge and application which follows logically from his dialogical view of interpretation.

4.2.1. Humanity's Role in the Universe

The foundation of Owen's hermeneutic is the existence of a deity who has created the universe and thus enjoys a higher ontological order than everything created. Since this deity is the sustaining power and cause of human existence, all knowledge for the interpretation of human existence must be related to this divine being. The question is how this knowledge of the self and of God is obtained. Undoubtedly, Owen answers, by revelation, since the finite human horizon of knowledge does not allow for a transcendent perspective. The only possible source of objective, external and transcendentally valid information for the interpretation of human existence must come through the self-revelation of the divine creator. However, access to divine revelation is made difficult by

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humanity's alienation from the divine. This problematic is depicted by Owen in terms of changes in the human-divine relationship.

Like all things, humankind was created with a specific purpose, described by Owen as threefold: "The first was, that [God] might therein make a representation of his holiness and righteousness among his creatures" (WJO 1:183). Humanity was to be, so to speak, an ambassador for the deity to the rest of creation. Owen argues that although God's fingerprints are all over his creation; "none of them, not the whole fabric of heaven and earth, with all their glorious ornaments and endowments, were either fit or able to receive any impressions of his holiness and righteousness - of any of the moral perfections or universal rectitude of his nature. Yet, in the demonstration and representation of these things doth the glory of God principally consist. Without them he could not be known and glorified as God" (ibid.). Only the human being was made in the image of God.

Secondly, humanity was created as a mouthpiece to pay tribute to God's glory. Creation itself, according to Owen, "could not in any way declare the glory of God, but passively and objectively." Creation was like "an harmoniously well trained instrument, which gives no sound unless there be a skillful hand to move and act it" (ibid. 183). Human beings, however, made in God's image, were created as the loudspeaker that would reflect the glory of creation back to the deity and intelligently voice his praise, for "What is light, if there be no eye to see it? or what is music, if there be no ear to hear it?" (ibid.). Thirdly, humanity was created to enjoy with God the beauty of creation. Human beings were made in God's image "that it might be a means to bring man unto that eternal enjoyment of [God], which he was fitted for and designed unto" (ibid.). Thus in Owen's view, man's ultimate end was to have communion with God.

Humanity itself broke this communion with the divine. As a result, human beings lost their qualifications to represent God on earth. The effects of sin destroyed the moral and righteous qualities which had been necessary for that task. Owen, a proponent of federal theology, teaches that in Adam, as the federal head of humanity, not only mankind
but all of creation was corrupted by sin:8 "Hence - instead of goodness, love, righteousness, holiness, peace, all virtues usefully communicative and effective of the good of the whole race of mankind, which would have been effects of this image of God, and representatives of his nature - the whole world, from and by the nature of man, is filled with envy, malice, revenge, cruelty, oppression, and all engines of promoting self, whereunto man is fully turned, as fallen off from God" (1: 184).

Like Perkins and Bunyan, Owen states that man's denial of the divine inevitably results in egocentrism. In a radical anthropocentric turn, man attempts to elevate himself to the position of God (ibid.). Owen compares the rupture of the divine-human dialogue to the failing of the visual faculties. The effect is disastrous. Deprived of a transcendent perspective by the cataract of sin, the myopic creatures turn to objects still discernible to their darkened eye in an effort to reconstruct what has been lost. They construct and worship other more immanent and controllable gods. Moreover, humanity's relation to its environment is affected. Fallen men, rather than tending the earth to God's glory, abuse it "to their lust" (ibid.). The overall effect of the fall is that man no longer represents God's goodness, holiness and righteousness. Rather, so distorted is God's image in man that those who study the 'book' of human relations in search of humanity's origin will deduce its creation by a holy God, but "will be gradually led unto the devil instead of God wherein we were created" (ibid.).

Owen, again like Perkins and Bunyan, speaks of the turn away from the transcendent in terms of a self-deception. Thinking to find greater knowledge and authenticity, in fact hoping to "become like unto God," man found himself in a position diametrically opposed to the purpose of his creation, because "he was so far from any advantage by his apostasy, that one part of his misery consisted in the loss of all power or

8 Owen states: "The first was the covenant of works, made with Adam, and with all in him. And what he did as the head of that covenant, as our representative therein, is imputed unto us, as if we had done it, Rom. v. 12." (Commentary on Hebrews, 5: 193).
ability to live to God" (1: 192). In other words, alienation from the divine has important moral implications. Man was now "wholly alienated from the life of God, "which greatly affected his moral vision, for although he retained a notion of good and evil, "in the principals of all his moral operations, he was at enmity against God" (ibid. 193).

Owen, consistent with his covenantal framework, teaches that God's gracious act of reconciliation with his creature was made in the form of contractual promises (covenants), the content of which was given orally to Adam (protoevangelium) and Abraham. The Prophets reminded the church of the covenant and also pointed to its ultimate fulfillment in Christ's new covenant. All of these revelations and their inspired interpretations were finally inscripturated and collected in the Old and New Testament. Christ is the very center of these covenants, so that Owen's hermeneutic, like Perkins' and Flacius', is entirely Christocentric. Owen declares that from the first promise in Genesis 3: 15, to the Abrahamic covenant ("explained by the Apostle, and applied unto Christ, Gal. iii, 8") all the way to the giving of the new covenant, Christ was the object of faith and foundation of all promises (1: 102-103).

Owen believes that with Christ's coming the scriptural canon has been closed and no further revelations will be given.

Owen's covenantal theology links the hermeneutical and relational aspects of his thinking. The covenants of the Old and New Testament are inscripturated promises made by God to his people and as such have textual as well as personal qualities. Thus grammatical interpretation is certainly required, but above all the reader needs an attitude of trust in the integrity and authority of the (divine) person who issued the promise. Such

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9 The use of the term covenant in Owen's writing can be a little confusing, but any ambiguity can be avoided if one realizes that he distinguishes between the general and the theological/doctrinal use of the word. Generally, every promise of God, Owen contends, has the nature of a covenant in that it holds forth blessings and punishments depending on human compliance with the terms. In theological terms, however, "There were never absolutely any more than two covenants; wherein all persons indefinitely are concerned. The first was the covenant of works, made with Adam, and with all in him...The other is that of grace, made originally with Christ, and through him with all the elect. And here lie the life and hope of our souls, - that what Christ did as the head of that covenant, as our representative, is all imputed unto us for righteousness and salvation" (Commentary on Hebrews 5: 393).
relational hermeneutics should characterize the church, because its very foundation and
doctrine (textual hermeneutics) is derived from a person (relational aspect), namely Christ
(The Glory of Christ 34). According to Owen, Christ animates the church by a personal
relationship with each Christian and the community as a whole, while his teaching, which
is recorded in the Scriptures, provides the content of doctrine. Owen thus adds a personal
dimension to faith and morality, but also guards the biblical concept of faith against mere
subjectivism by balancing it against textual evidence. One may ask, however, if the very
concept of faith is not the height of irrational subjectivism? Perhaps an examination of the
nature of faith will clarify this issue.

4.2.2. A Reasonable Faith: Faith as Belief in a Credible Witness

It is common to describe Puritan hermeneutics in terms of a dichotomy between
faith and reason. Specifically the search for meaning through communion with God is
sometimes explained as a leap of faith to bridge the gap between a seemingly “non-
readable” universe and the biblical teaching of providence. The scholar Paul Morgan, for
example, asserts that the Puritan insistence on communion with God was a “cry of the
existential being for meaning in a universe which itself could provide him with none.”
Morgan remarks that “the puritan thus arrived at a chasm in his confrontation of faith and
reason; from this dire struggle emerged his response to the external world”; and Morgan
concludes that “[t]he prime message of puritan Reformed Protestantism was irrational”
(Godly Learning 2-22).

Contrary to Morgan’s claim, however, Puritans did not see faith as irrational, but
rather as based on credible witness. Both creation and the written word provided such
testimony. Thus Morgan is also wrong in claiming that the universe yielded no meaning
for the Puritan. Although natural revelation could not be said to lead toward salvation, it
nevertheless served as a reminder that one lived in a created universe. The Puritans’
framework of a created universe sustained by a transcendent and immanent deity allowed
them to balance faith and reason. Unlike Morgan, they did not have to ‘read’ reality through a Kantian prism which separates faith from reason. The term “irrational,” for example, would not have made much sense to a Puritan theologian if used in connection with faith. A better term to use might have been “super-rational,” a faith that builds on reason. Yet Morgan’s misinterpretation of Puritan hermeneutics is symptomatic of our inability to understand “pre-critical” hermeneutics from an exclusively anthropocentric position. The tendency is to view Puritan hermeneutics either as rationalist or as mystical, whereas, unencumbered by Kant’s epistemological chasm, Puritan epistemology in fact combines both characteristics. Owen’s definition of faith will help to establish this thesis.

Owen defines faith as belief based on credible testimony. This thoroughly Augustinian notion of faith is strongly articulated by the later Puritans like Owen, Baxter (1615-1691) and William Bates (1625-1699) as these divines defend what they understand to be a biblical view of human existence against the rising rationalism within the established church.¹⁰ His conviction that faith is belief in testimony and thus tied to divine revelation is expressed in the title of his 1677 treatise The Reason of Faith or An Answer Unto That Inquiry, “Wherefore We Believe The Scripture To Be The Word of God;” With The Causes and Nature Of That Faith Wherewith We Do So.

In chapter four of this treatise, Owen sets out to explain the nature of faith as belief in divine revelation, the self-evidencing power of written revelation, and in particular the qualities of the Scriptures as the word of God (WJO 4: 82). Owen begins his epistemological investigations by outlining three general ways "whereby we assent unto any thing that is proposed unto us as true, and receive it as such." These three modes of

¹⁰C.R. Cragg, in his study From Puritanism to the Age of Reason, tells us that after the restoration, rationalism and Latitudinarianism gained increasingly the upper hand, especially under the influence of Locke, who "conceived theology in a latitudinarian sense, and later on, under the influence of the Arminians and the Socinians, he developed those ideas in his own peculiar, very able and original way, which was, however, entirely non-Calvinistic" (37).
knowing are by natural light, by the consideration of "things externally proposed," and by faith.

The term natural light refers to "inbred notions," such as the general sense that there is a transcendent dimension, and general moral categories of good and evil. These categories are objective because they are God-given. They are indeed the very basis of human apprehension: "The foundation of the whole, as of all the actings of our souls, is in the inbred principles of natural light, or first necessary dictates of our intellectual, rational nature" (WJO 4: 85). However, fallen human reason often fills these categories with foreign content. Although especially Greek philosophy progressed quite far in trying to reconstruct transcendent values, most conclusions arrived at through unaided reason were directly contrary to the actual truth.¹¹

The second mode of knowing is deduction: "Herein the mind exerciseth its discursive faculty, gathering one thing out of another, and concluding one thing form another" (WJO 4: 83). Knowledge derived from this method varies in degrees of certainty, "according unto the nature and degree of the evidence it proceeds upon." Hence such knowledge can range from mere opinion to certain knowledge (ibid.).

The third kind of knowledge is faith. Owen defines faith as assent to something true about which we have no innate notion and about which we can make no deduction from other known principles. Faith is to believe on the valid testimony of another person: "[faith] is our assent upon testimony, whereon we believe many things which no sense, inbred principles, nor reasonings of our own, could either give us an acquaintance with or an assurance of. And this assent also hath not only various degrees, but is also of divers

¹¹ "This is that which the apostle charges on and vehemently urgeth against the heathen philosophers. Inbred notions they had in themselves of the being and eternal power of God; and these were so manifest in them thereby that they could not but own them. Hereon they set their rational discursive faculty at work in the consideration of God and his being; but herein were they so vain and foolish as to draw conclusions directly contrary unto the first principles of natural light, and the unavoidable notions which they had of the eternal being of God" (4: 85).
kinds, according as the *testimony* is which it ariseth from and resteth on; as being *human* if that be *human*, and *divine* if that be so also" (ibid.; italics Owen's).

God, according to Owen, has orchestrated his self-revelation in such a way that all three modes of knowing are utilized. For the first, God reveals himself through the mental make-up of human beings. Our capacity for self-reflection and ability to make choices or form judgments on the basis of rational argument evinces the necessity of a creator who has the same qualities (WJO 4: 84). This conclusion hearkens back to Baxter's statement that each person is "an index to the Godhead." Baxter is perhaps over-zealous in trying to find Trinitarian elements in almost every human faculty in his exposition of the nature of God's image in a person. Nevertheless, he confirms the general Puritan teaching that rational contemplation of the human mind and body evidence a designer: "And, therefore, seeing God is known to us by this his image, and in this glass though we must not think that any thing in God is formally the same as it is in man, yet, certainly, we must judge that all this is eminently in God; and that we have no fitter notions and names concerning his incomprehensible perfections than what we have borrowed from the mind of man" (The Reasons of the Christian Religion, 2: 136).

Corresponding to the second way of knowing, that is "by things externally proposed," God offers unto human reason ample evidence of his existence in "the works of creation and providence." We must, says Owen, use our reason aright in order to discern God's fingerprints in creation: "So God calls unto men for the exercise of their reason about these things, reproaching them with stupidity and brutishness where they are wanting therein, Isa. xlvi. 5-8, xlv. 18-20" (Owen, WJO 4: 85). The Puritan commentator

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12 Owen says: "He makes himself known unto us by the innate principles of our nature, unto which he hath communicated as a power of apprehending, so an indelible sense of his being, his authority, and his will, so far as our natural dependence on human and moral subjection unto him do require: for whereas there are two things in this natural light and these first dictates of reason; first, a *power of conceiving, discerning, and assenting*; and, secondly, a *power of judging* and determining upon the things so discerned and assented unto - by the one God makes known his being and essential properties, and by the other his sovereign authority over all" (4: 84; italics his).
Matthew Poole also refers to the reading of this book of nature: "Because it might be further objected on behalf of the Gentiles, that the notions of God imprinted in their nature are so weak, that they may be well excused; therefore the apostle adds, that the certainty of them is further confirmed by the book of the creatures, which was written before them in capital letters, so that he that runs may read" (WJO 2: 481; italics mine).

The Puritans felt that the innate notion of God, which was evident in humanity's natural religiosity, and the cosmological evidence of a designer justified the condemnation of all who would not seek communion with the divine, since they clearly acted contrary to every principle of evidence and reason. This sentiment underlines the Puritans' strong conviction that faith was reasonable and not irrational.

The third way of knowing is most important to Owen, because it addresses the singular ability of human beings to attain knowledge beyond sensory perception by trusting the word of another. The ability to believe and act on knowledge based on testimony sets man apart from the beast. The other two modes of knowing function on the basis of direct evidence, either moral or empirical. Faith, however, is the most difficult kind of knowledge because it is indirect, relying on the testimony of someone else. Owen claims that the "faculty of assenting unto truth upon testimony" is "the most noble faculty of our minds." And it is to this faculty that God chose to reveal himself most fully through his written revelation (WJO 4: 90). Faith, then, becomes "that power of our souls whereby we are able to assent unto the truth of what is proposed unto us upon testimony. And this [God] doth by his word, or the Scriptures, proposed unto us in the manner and way before expressed" (ibid. 85).

Owen's concept of faith as belief in testimony has profound consequences, because it implies that believers in the divine as well as non-believers exercise faith in the acquisition and handling of knowledge. Human beings, Owen argues, cannot go through life without this ability: "And if our souls did want but this one faculty of assenting unto truth upon testimony, all that remains would not be sufficient to conduct us through the
affairs of this natural life" (WJO 4: 88; italics mine). The truth of this observation is certainly striking, but it also leads to another important idea which serves to further Owen's conviction that faith does not contradict reason: In our daily lives we trust those assertions the most which issue from a credible and trustworthy person. In other words, the integrity of the author of a testimony, his character and credentials, become crucial for the quality of knowledge thus obtained. According to Owen, God's word and character, especially as revealed in the incarnation, provide a testimony of the highest quality. For the Christian, assent to the divine revelation therefore does not consist in an irrational leap of faith but rests ultimately on trust in the verity of God's testimony: "Thus saith the Lord' is the only ground and reason of our assent; and that assent is the assent of faith, because it is resolved into testimony alone" (WJO 4: 85).

Owen emphasizes that all three kinds of knowledge work harmoniously together in God's self-revelation: "And concerning these several ways of the communication or revelation of the knowledge of God, it must be always observed that there is a perfect consistency in the things revealed by them all" (ibid.). Owen's doctrine of a reasonable faith, 13 which corresponds to a person's psychological-existential make-up, allows him to reject what he regards as unreasonable spiritual claims on the one hand, and merely rationalistic observations on the other. Thus claims to spiritual revelations which directly contradict reason, such as the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, are to be rejected. Yet Owen also objects to reason when it oversteps its bounds and tries to conduct a reading of human existence on its own, on the basis of the book of nature alone. Though reason is useful in the acquisition of knowledge of God from the light of nature, "the knowledge we have of [God] as he is represented to us in Christ is far more clear,

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13 It is important to note that Owen's concept of faith is reasonable, not rational. Faith is different from reason, because it trusts rather than deduces. However, it is reasonable because there is no irrational leap into a realm of faith that contradicts all other human experiences. Instead, faith opens the right perspective to judge and interpret human existence in the light of the new-found relationship to the divine.
certain, steady, effectual, and operative, than naturally we can attain in and by all other ways of revelation” (ibid. 103).

Owen explains further: "The reason hereof is, not only because there is a more full and extensive revelation made of God, his counsels and his will, in Christ and the Gospel, than in all the works of creation and providence, but because this revelation and representation of God is received by faith alone, the other by reason only: and it is faith that is the principle of spiritual light and life in us....Reason alone - especially as it is corrupted and depraved - can discern no glory in the representation of God by Christ" (WJO 1: 77). Thus without a relationship to the divine we cannot bring ourselves to trust the divine testimony. Instead, we revert to an anthropocentric perspective by evaluating the divine witness according to our finite horizons. We “would have all things that we are to believe to be levelled absolutely unto our reason and comprehension - a principle which, at this day, shakes the very foundations of the Christian religion” (WJO 1:50).

Owen regards this attitude as highly arrogant and attributes it to the deficiency of our epistemological dynamic due to the influence of sin: “This apprehension...ariseth from the pride which naturally ensues on the ignorance of God and ourselves” (ibid.).

Ignorant of God, the human mind turns to its own limited horizon in order to explain existence and refuses any answers to the deep existential questions which revelation has to offer. Instead, we are satisfied with our own limited viewpoint and acquiesce in our interpretative blindness: "Hence things philosophical, and of a deep rational indagation [searching out/investigation] find great acceptance in the world - as in their proper place, they do deserve. Men are furnished with proper measure of them, and they find them proportionate unto the principles of their own understandings" (WJO 1:51).

To use an illustration, we are like the angler who keeps all the small fish he catches while throwing the large ones back into the water. Asked by a passer-by about the reason for his non-sensical action he replies that his frying pan is too small. In the same way Owen
would say, we either refuse the divine message, or reduce it to the limited size of our finite horizon.

While Owen speaks thus against the reduction of knowledge to reason alone, he also rejects the subjective “inner light” position which abounded during and after the Reformation. Owen wanted to guard against such a merely private and subjective faith by tying the content of Christian doctrine to divine revelation as found in the Scriptures. The relationship with Christ grows through the contemplation of the written word:

It is not the work of fancy or imagination - it is not the feigning images in our minds of such things as are meet to satisfy our carnal affections, to excite and act them; but it is due adherence unto that object which is represented unto faith in the proposal of the Gospel. Therein, as in a glass, do we behold the glory of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, and have our souls filled with transforming affections to him. (WJO 1:157)

In short, therefore, Owen opposes the rationalists by emphasizing the personal and relational nature of knowledge based on a human-divine dialogue, and he also opposes the inspirationalists of his day, by stating that propositional knowledge, the text of the written word, is the only means by which knowledge about the divine dialogue-partner can be attained. It is significant that for Owen the “beholding of the glory of Christ” in the glass of the Scriptures results in “transforming affections.” Reading is never an end in itself, but always results in action.

The example of William Bates (1635-1699) shows that Owen was not alone in espousing a reasonable faith. Bates believes with Owen that the Christian religion is not contrary to reason, in the Kantian sense, but that faith in the divine constitutes the most reasonable act a human being may perform. Bates' writing shows that his imagined audience was the intelligent skeptic, with the result that his arguments often sound surprisingly modern. For example, he answers the charge the Christ's miracles were invented by his disciples, who couldn't get over the disappointment of their messianic
expectations, by saying: "I answer; the vanity of the pretense is apparent: for if they had artificially framed a narrative of extraordinary things as done by him in that time wherein they wrote, and in the view of many, how easy had it been to expose them to the just scorn and hatred of all for their notorious falsehood, and infatuated impudence? But they were never accused of this" (WJO 1:137).

It is especially in his discussion of the resurrection that Bates' view of reason as preparatory to but not sufficient for faith becomes evident: "In particular, if we consider the number and the quality of the witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and the circumstances of their testimony, we shall have so clear conviction of its truth as may induce us most firmly to believe it. I do not now speak of a divine faith, that supernatural light that makes us acquiesce in things because God has revealed them; but of a rational human faith, grounded on just and powerful motives, which is preparatory for the divine" (ibid. 138).

Bates' treatise is elaborate and reads in many respects like a modern manual for Christian apologetics. Its general thrust is clearly to prove that faith builds on reason yet to affirm that it is only divinely given faith which can re-establish man's dialogue with God. After all, Bates argues, the argument that faith is based on credible testimony entails that human beings were created by God with a free will, to make choices based on sound judgment. Thus one will never be convinced of anything by arguments alone, unless the human will, that mysterious faculty which commands all others, gives its assent: "For the arguments to induce belief, though of sufficient certainty, yet do not so constrain the mind to give its assent, but there is prudence and choice in it." Ideally, "the mind enlightened by sufficient reasons that the Christian religion is from God, represents it so to the will, and the will, if sincere and unbiased by carnal affections, commands the mind not to disguise the truth, to make it less credible, nor to palliate with specious colours the pretenses of infidelity. And thus the belief of it results from conviction and love" (ibid. 119).

Bates admits that the arguments for the reasonableness of divine revelation and the Christian faith are not scientific, but "of a moral nature." Nevertheless, though they "are
not of equal clearness with the testimonies of sense, or a mathematical demonstration, yet
are so pregnant and convincing, that the considering dispassionate spirit fully acquiesces in
them" (ibid. 118).

From the position of faith as reasonable, Owen and Bates argue that the natural
human impulse to turn away from divine revelation has nothing to do with the quality of
revelation, but rather with the unwillingness of the fallen human will to give assent to the
subject-matter of revelation. "We must," Bates argues, "distinguish between what is
incomprehensible to human reason and what is repugnant to it." For Bates there is no
point "in the whole complexion of the Christian faith that is repugnant to reason." The
problem lies rather in the inability of the fallen creature to comprehend a revelatory
message intended for a heart in tune with the divine. Even with regard to the concept of
the Trinity, though "it transcends our conception...reason cannot prove it to be
impossible" (ibid. 165).

According to Bates it is not the text itself, but rather its applicatory dimension of
the text which makes it repugnant to us. The subject-matter disclosed in the Scriptures is
too challenging for the reader who loathes to surrender his autonomy by acknowledging
an authority higher than his own: "The pretended difficulty of belief, is but a thin
transparent pretense, the difficulty of practice is the true cause of their rejecting the
gospel" (ibid. 172). The text demands moral change from the reader and the acceptance
of an authority different from his own. But because of the fall, the reader is biased against
the divine. There is, in other words, no irrationality in the gospel, but an unwillingness in
its readers to contemplate divine revelation.

However, as the Puritan Nathaniel Vincent (1644-1697) points out, the reader’s
very notion that communion with the divine will cost him his moral and personal freedom
is based on an illusion: “Sometimes the carnal heart rises against holiness, because it
imagines that nothing of delight and pleasure is consistent with it, whereas indeed by being
converted unto God our joy is not lost but only changed” (Puritans on conversion 119).
It is clear that Owen and Bates make every effort to show the reasonableness of Christian faith as propounded in the written word. Faith is not seen in the Kantian sense as contradictory to reason, but rather faith develops reason to its highest capacity. Owen states that God "doth not reveal himself by his word unto the principles of natural light, nor unto reason in its exercise; but yet these principles, and reason itself, with all the faculties of our minds, are consequentially affected with that revelation, and are drawn forth in their proper exercise by it" (WJO 4: 86).

In sum, in Puritan theology faith is a balance between objective and subjective factors. It is never to be equated with irrationality. The Christian faith is inseparably tied to the written word of God. The authenticity of this word, its textual accuracy in comparison to other classical works, all these factors make it a credible testimony. Faith in this testimony is different from scientific knowledge, but as Owen argues, much of human knowledge is based on testimony, rather than on our own empirical verification. Such knowledge, since it is based on trust in a credible authority is the noblest mode of knowing the human mind is capable of. Thus when the biblical text claims divine authority, "it giveth us the highest certainty or assurance whereof in this world we are capable" (102).

Since Owen and Bates show such confidence in the text of divine revelation, our narration of the history of hermeneutics from a theological perspective must take into account Owen's view regarding the nature of the word and the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation, before we can move on to deal with the applicatory dimension of his hermeneutics.

4.3. The Nature of the Word

Owen's view of the Scriptures, like his position on faith, must be seen in the context of the encroachment by rationalism, inspirationalism and Roman Catholicism on
the Bible's nature and authority. He frankly addresses the vexed question of a circular argument regarding the authority of the Bible and concludes that one either admits a Scripture that authenticates itself and is able to judge tradition, or else one reasons from tradition and thereby enters a never-ending circular argument:

And if we rest not here, we must run on the rock of a moral certainty only, which shakes the foundation of all divine faith, or fall into the gulf and labyrinth of an endless circle, in proving two things mutually by one another, as the church by the Scripture and the Scripture by the church, in an everlasting rotation. Unless we intend so to wander, we must come to something wherein we may rest for its own sake, and that not with a strong and firm opinion, but with divine faith. (WJO 2: 71)

In other words, Owen's approach to biblical hermeneutics is unique in its frank admission of a subjective criterion for the authenticity of the Scriptures. Yet the term 'subjective' evokes misleading connotations. Owen does not introduce some kind of gnosticism into his arguments for the divine authority of revelation. In evoking the inward testimony of the Spirit Owen argues for the assurance of the reader in the sense of conviction. This conviction is not contradictory to but congruent with empirical evidences such as the 'reading' of the universe and the unique attributes of the biblical text which set it apart from other, human works. But like Perkins, he teaches that these "moral persuasions," as he calls them, cannot give the reader complete trust and inner conviction

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14 John Wesley Campbell gives a concise overview of the opponents Owen must have had in mind when writing on the nature of scriptural revelation. In his ThM-thesis Campbell identifies Socianianism, Latitudianism and Cambridge Platonism as belonging to the group which tended to put more trust in human reason than in divine revelation. Another type of rationalist biblical criticism which tended more to a Rousseauean type of sentimental deism was the natural religion advocated by Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1593-1648). He taught that neither Scripture nor divine grace was necessary to grasp and accept truths about God ("John Owen's Rule and Guide: A Study In The Relationship Between The Word And the Spirit In The Thought Of Dr. John Owen," diss., Regent College, 1991, 84-100).

15 It should be remembered that Owen does not attempt to prove the existence of God from the text of the Scriptures. The existence of the deity was for him plainly evident from the "book of nature." Therefore he cannot be charged with any circularity concerning the supposed argument that theological hermeneutics tries to prove the existence of God from written revelation and bases the latter's authority on God's existence.
that the words read are divinely inspired. Only the work of the Holy Spirit can impart this certainty by authenticating the content of the text.

Of all the writers discussed so far, Owen realizes most fully that only a self-authenticating Word can avoid a circular argument for the authority of scriptural revelation (WJO 16:314). The nature of the Word is thus linked to Owen’s earlier concept of a reasonable faith: the Scripture is the one credible witness whose ‘external evidences’ for its authenticity are most conducive to the subjective and divinely given conviction of its absolute authority (ibid. 319).

### 4.3.1. The Self-Authenticating Text

Owen believes that the text is self-authenticating because it exerts an influence over the reader like no other book: "The Spirit of God evidenceth the *divine original and authority* of the Scripture by the power and authority which he puts forth in it and by it over the minds and consciences of men, with its operation of divine effects thereon" (WJO 4: 93). Neither miracles, nor the fulfillment of prophecy, nor any other external arguments ultimately convince the reader of the Bible as the word of God, but rather a

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**16** Owen says that those who claim the Bible as the word of God and yet want a proof of its qualifications, have already set up an impossible situation for themselves since every testimony drawn from the Scriptures will be discounted by them. Those on the other hand who do not believe the Bible to be divinely revealed must be brought to the point of seeing the Bible as the credible witness it represents through external arguments for its authenticity as a text. Yet Owen states that "it is neither of these that principally I intend to deal withal; my present discourse is rather about the satisfaction of our own consciences upon such principles as will stand against all men's objections. This, then, is chiefly inquired after, viz. what, it is that gives such an assurance of the Scriptures being the word of God, as that, relying thereon, we have a sure bottom and foundation for our receiving them as such; and from whence it is that those who receive them not in that manner are left inexcusable in their damnable unbelief. This, we say, is in and from the Scripture itself, so that there is no other need for any further witness or testimony, nor is any, in the same kind, to be admitted" (16: 314).

**17** The authenticity of the text is paramount for those who already acknowledge it, as well as for its skeptics. If a witness is trustworthy, even those who disown his authority can do so only against their better judgment. Owen says: "In both these cases the testimony of the Scripture is pleaded, and is to be received, or cannot with any pretence of reason be refused. In the former, upon the account of the acknowledged authority and veracity of the witness, though speaking in its own case; in the latter upon the account of that self-evidence which the testimony insisted on is accompanied withal, made out by such reasonings and arguments as, for the kind of them, persons who own not its authority cannot but admit."
mysterious power wrought by God which compels their assent: "It was not upon the force of any external arguments produced and pleaded unto that purpose...wherefore the only evidence whereon they received the word, and acknowledge it to be of God was the divine power and efficacy whereof they found and felt the experience in themselves" (ibid.).

For Owen, the Bible comes as a package deal. One may not separate its authenticity as a text from its claim to be divinely inspired. If this claim is rejected, "it must be not only with a refusal of its witness, but also with a high detestation of its pretence to be from God" (ibid. 317). It is the text itself which claims to be of God and also contains internal evidences to prove its claim. Owen almost collapses the difference between internal and external testimony established by Perkins, because, true to his theory of faith as based on testimony, the self-evidencing power of the Scripture is evident to believer and skeptic alike: "The self-evidencing efficacy of the Scripture, and the grounds of it ... consists in common mediums, that have an extent and latitude answerable to the reasons of men, whether they acknowledge it to be the word of God or no" (WJO 16:319).

Owen mentions two qualities of the text by which the written word authenticates itself. One is its quality as a moral and spiritual guide, described by Owen as "the beaming of the majesty, truth, holiness, and authority of God, given unto it and left upon it by its author, the Holy Ghost." The fact that readers under the effects of original sin cannot discern this light, Owen argues, detracts from this quality of the Word no more than a blind man's claim that the sun doesn't exist. Owen calls the word "light," because it "dives into the consciences of all men, into all the secret recesses of their hearts; guides, teaches, directs, determines, and judges in them, upon them, in the name, majesty, and authority of God" (ibid. 322).

However, as light itself cannot remove the visual impairment of the reader, so the moral and spiritual light of the word cannot remove the prejudices against divine revelation which are a natural occurrence in the fallen reader. Yet it is Owen's experience
that the read or preached Word challenges and convicts the reader. It is this mysterious ability to change the reader’s heart and open a new perspective to true knowledge about God and self, which sets the text apart from all other books that claim to be religious revelation (ibid. 325). This “power of the word,” constitutes the second mark of self-authentication and is identified by Owen as the work of the Holy Spirit.

Like Perkins, Owen affirms that it is through the Word that God works faith:

All the power which God puts forth and exerts in the communication of that grace and mercy unto believers whereby they are gradually carried on and prepared unto salvation, he doth it by the word. Therein, in an especial manner, is the divine authority of the word evidenced, by the divine power and efficacy given unto it by the Holy Ghost. The work which is effected by it, in the regeneration, conversion, and sanctification of the souls of believers, doth evidence infallibly unto their consciences that it is not the word of man, but of God. (WJO 4: 95)

Owen realizes, that this is a "private," subjective, argument, yet he concludes that because so many Christians throughout the ages have born testimony to its veracity, it ought to be admitted as rational evidence: "yea, of all the external arguments that are or may be pleaded to justify the divine authority of the Scripture, there is none more prevalent nor cogent than this of its mighty efficacy in all ages on the souls of men, to change, convert, and renew them into the image and likeness of God, which hath been made visible and manifest" (ibid.). This effect shows itself in the reader's conviction of his alienation from God, his selfish drive for autonomy. In short, the reader is brought, by the power of the word, to true knowledge about God and himself:

All things being filled with vanity, error, confusion, misapprehensions about God and ourselves, our duty and end, our misery and blessedness, the Scripture, where it is communicated by the providence of God, comes in as a light into a dark place, discovering all things clearly and steadily that concern either God or ourselves, our present or future condition, causing all the ghosts and false images of things which men had framed and fancied unto themselves in the dark to vanish and disappear. (WJO 4: 98)
According to Owen, the power of the Word is particularly demonstrated in its reforming influence over the human conscience. We remember that William Perkins had established the conscience as one element of God's image in man. Owen likewise believes that "conscience is the territory or dominion of God in man, which he hath so reserved unto himself that no human power can possibly enter into it or dispose of it in any wise" (WJO 4: 96). As we have seen, Bunyan's Holy War parallels Owen's thought: conscience is depicted as the reminder of El Shaddai's law, a voice which Diabolus, do what he would, is unable to expel from the city of Mansoul. According to Owen, conscience's main function within the human psyche is to judge the mind in respect to God: "No power under heaven can cause conscience to think, act, or judge otherwise than it doth by its immediate respect to God" (ibid.).

However while this function in itself cannot be eradicated, the damage sustained by sin allows the conscience to be informed by different moral values. Tradition and education play a great part in (mis)informing the conscience: "I know conscience may be prepossessed with prejudices, and, by education, with the insinuation of traditions, take on itself the power of false, corrupt, superstitious principles and errors, as means of conveying unto it a sense of divine authority" (ibid.). Conscience may be fooled even into accepting another authority than God as its own, such as the authority of tradition, nourished by education. The mind will then accept these false notions as the genuine transcendence of God's revelation. Thus secular notions can find access to the conscience through the mind and actually seem compatible to the malfunctioning conscience: "Wherefore, such opinions and persuasions are gradually insinuated into the mind, and are admitted insensibly without opposition or reluctancy, being never accompanied at their first admission with any secular disadvantage." They "affect, deceive, and delude the notional part of the soul, whereby conscience is insensibly influenced and diverted into improper respects and is divided as to its judging of the voice of God" (WJO 4: 97).
However, tradition and education can merely beset the "outward duties that conscience disposeth to, but none can be so upon its internal actings." Tradition and education, for example, may confuse the notions of what is right and wrong according to God's law, but they can never completely eradicate those notions themselves. The only power that can touch the innermost "springs of conscience," is the power of the word. Because the workings of the Holy Spirit have direct access to the configuration of the system, they override all other faulty programming: "these divine convictions befall men, some when they think of nothing less and desire nothing less...and some when they go on purpose [to a sermon] to deride and scoff at what should be spoken unto them from [the word]" (WJO 4: 97).

Owen realizes that there are fake versions of this conversion process. But he insists that the inborn hostility of man to the authority of divine revelation may be overcome effectively only by the work of the Holy Spirit. A traditional faith may do so only "notionally," but not permanently or lastingly. The Word alone can break the hold of tradition, and clear up misinformation accrued by education, because it speaks directly to the innermost conscience, giving the mind an entirely new direction, opening up a hitherto unknown perspective (ibid. 97).

However, the question still remains concerning the role of the Holy Spirit not only in attesting to the divine origin of the Scriptures, but also in aiding interpretation itself. This role of the Spirit is generally referred to as "illumination" in Puritan theology. No other Puritan has so clearly expressed the necessity for illumination and its psychology as John Owen in his work Causes, Ways and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurance Therein and a Declaration of the Perspicuity of the Scriptures, with the External Means of the Interpretation of Them (1678).
4.3.2. The Role of The Spirit in Biblical Hermeneutics

In his treatise, Owen sets out to explain why illumination is necessary and what it is. First Owen proposes a model of the human psyche. Like Perkins before him, he espouses the threefold division from St. Paul in Ephesians 4:17-18, where the apostle speaks of the mind (nous), the understanding (dianoia) and the heart (kardia). According to Owen, these three elements "are one entire principle of all our moral and spiritual operations, and all are affected with the darkness and ignorance of which we treat" (WJO 3:250). Owen then proceeds to delineate the effect of sin on all three faculties. He begins with the faculty of the mind, which he sees as the "leading and ruling faculty of the soul" (ibid.). Following a model of the human psyche similar to that of Plato, Owen identifies the mind as the discerning faculty which leads all others. It is the directing faculty which "looketh out after proper objects for the will and affections to receive and embrace" (ibid.).

In its ideal prelapsarian state, the nous had God as its worthwhile object of pursuit and contemplation, so that both the will and the affections were all aligned to the purpose of glorifying, serving and fellowshipping with God. In the postlapsarian state, the mind now still seeks the state of rest as it has formerly known it, but, because of its disoriented fallen nature, it does so by the wrong means, by engaging "in all manner of confusion; and

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18 This threefold division is common to much Puritan writing. The mind is the faculty which seeks out the objects desirable for the will and affections. It is, as the later Plato put it in his Phaedrus, the driver of the coach, resembling the human being, drawn by the two horses of will and affection (or passion and appetite). The passionate horse is a clean, upstanding creature which follows the guide of reason, whereas his fellow horse is a shaggy, recalcitrant beast which tries to drag the chariot down from its heavenly course (Long 5). The Puritans did follow the theoretical subdivision of the "soul" but did not at all adopt its disparaging view of the affections and the passions. All three are equally "upstanding" horses if harmoniously aligned toward their proper object - God. Thus, as Owen explains, all three faculties of the soul are in need of regeneration, not just the faculty of reason, so that it will willingly follow the now corrected vision of the mind. The affections ideally are the passenger in this coach analogy, and when they are allowed to take either the role of the mind or the will, disaster is sure to follow.

19 "There was the same cogitative or imaginative faculty in us in the state of innocency as there remains under the power of sin; but then all the actings of it were orderly and regular; the mind was able to direct them all unto the end for which we were made. God was, and would have been, the principal object of them, and all other things in order unto him" (251).
they all end in vanity or disappointment. They offer as it were their services to the soul to bring it satisfaction. And although they are rejected one after another, as not answering as what they pretend unto, yet they constantly arise under the same notion, and keep the whole soul under everlasting disappointments" (WJO 3: 251).

The second faculty of understanding (dianoia) acts as to diakritikon, "the discerning, judging faculty of the soul, that leads it unto practice. It guides the soul in the choice of the notions which it receives by the mind" (ibid. 252). This faculty, Owen says, is even worse affected than the mind. Since the understanding is more closely connected to the heart, the practical principle of operation and execution, it is in greater danger from sin: "for the nearer things come practice, the more prevalent in them is the power to sin" (ibid.). Thus Owen demonstrates once again how the thought of application dominates the Puritan hermeneutic.

Finally, the heart (kardia) is the praktikon, the executing "practical" part of the soul which includes the will. Owen describes this faculty as "the actual compliance of the will and affections with the mind and understanding, with respect unto the objects proposed by them." He then repeats the traditional Reformed position that the light of the scriptures is "received by the mind, applied by the understanding and used by the heart" (ibid. 252). In each of these steps the light is met with a stubborn refusal on the side of the unregenerate person to accept the saving message. The mind refuses to focus on it, the understanding will not apply it, and the heart refuses to implement the message conveyed in God's word ("an obstinate and obdurate hardness is upon the heart, whence it rejects all the impressions that come upon it from notions of truth").

In other words, the faculties of the soul, originally created to receive knowledge from and commune with God, are so perverted by sin that they may be said to be willfully unresponsive to light: "There is not in such persons so much as any disposition remaining to receive saving knowledge, any more than there is a disposition in darkness itself to
receive light. The mind indeed, remains a capable subject to receive it, but hath no power nor disposition in itself towards it" (ibid.).

The solution to the dilemma is the conversion of the reader into communion with God through a sovereign act of divine grace. Practically God needs to create a new faculty which makes reception of his truth possible. Conversion endows the reader with a willing disposition to accept the teachings of the text. Yet, there is need for further work of the Holy Spirit. Owen teaches that "[our] belief in the Scriptures to be the word of God, or a divine revelation, and our understanding of the mind and will of God as revealed in them, are the two springs of all our interest in Christian Religion" (WJO 4: 122).

Conversion takes care of the first “spring”, by creating in the reader a general disposition of good-will toward the text. But Owen also sees the necessity of illumination regarding interpretation even after the reader’s disposition has been altered.

Owen speaks of the “double act of the Holy Ghost” by which the reader is freed from repulsion by the text, and also accepts it as authoritative. For the first, the Spirit “gives wisdom - understanding - a spiritual judgment,” whereby the reader is enabled to “compare spiritual things with spiritual, in a spiritual manner, and to come thereby to a clear and full light of the heavenly excellency of the Word.” In this way the reader is enabled “to know of the doctrine whether it be of God” (ibid.). In modern parlance, the reader has received the potential to fuse with the divine horizon of meaning through the adjustment of his prejudice in favor of the divine. This change affects the interpretative approach to the text. Owen believes that without the assistance of the Spirit, the Bible will often appear less unified than it really is, and its teachings will seem less urgent. However, through illumination “all the parts of the Scripture in their harmony and correspondency, all the truths of it in their power and necessity, come together to give evidence one to another, and all of the whole” (ibid.). Owen thus makes the sola scriptura principle largely dependent on illumination by the Spirit.
The second part of the Spirit's "double act" is to give the reader "a spiritual taste of the things themselves upon the mind, heart, and conscience" (ibid.). As one recognizes a pleasing taste, the reader simply knows that the doctrine taught is divine. Owen describes this assurance as the "testimony of the Spirit" which leaves such an impression on the soul that the reader "infallibly" recognizes the authority and trustworthiness of the message. It is thus from the illuminating divine aid that interpretative assurance is derived, accompanied by the willingness to apply the word to one's life (WJO 16:327).

This interpretative independence, however, should not be misinterpreted to mean individualistic subjectivism. Owen, as in his description of faith, strives for a careful balance between illumination and outward means in the reading of the text. The Holy Spirit, says Owen, is a supreme teacher, and as such makes use of the faculties God has created. The Scriptures are meant to teach one about one's relationship to the divine and one's fellow human beings, but they do so without circumventing the use of one's intellectual powers. An approach which tries to suppress the use of reason is oppressive, because it wants to take control of the reader: "And hereunto the use of our own reason, the utmost improvement of the rational abilities of our minds, is required. Those who would take away the use of our own reason in spiritual things would deal with us, as we said before, as the Philistines did with Samson, -first put out our eyes, and then make us grind their mill" (WJO 4: 153). It is thus important that the reader be independent of "the authoritative interpretation of any church or person whatever" (ibid. 123).

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20 Owen describes the work of illumination as follows: "The Holy Ghost, together with and by his work of illumination, taking off the perverse disposition of mind that is in us by nature, with our enmity to and aversion from the things of God, effectually also persuades the mind to a receiving and admitting of the truth, wisdom, and authority of the Word. Now, because this perverse disposition of mind, possessing the to hegemonikon of the soul, influences the will also into an aversion and dislike of that goodness which is in the truth proposed to it, it is removed by a double act of the Holy Ghost" (16: 327).

21 Owen says that "in and by the works of grace [God] designed not to destroy or contradict the faculties of our nature, which at first he created. He would work on them, and work a change in them, by means suited unto their constitution and nature; which is done in the ministry of the word, 2 Cor. v 18-20" (4:191).
Owen upholds this hermeneutical liberty against the three forces of Roman Catholicism, inspirationalism, and rationalism that want to substitute their authority for the interpretative liberty granted by God's illuminating work in the reader. The Roman Catholic church makes its followers lazy through their dependency on an infallible ecclesiastical authority which sorts out all problems for them (ibid. 154). The Roman Catholic church can only do so, Owen argues, because all human beings are naturally prone to let someone else think for them, especially in spiritual matters. Roman Catholic practice removes readers from the difficult interpretative qualifications the Spirit requires of them. These requirements are "humility, continual prayer, meditation," and untiring study of the text. The most difficult requirement, however, is once again practical application which demands "above all, that [readers] endeavour a conformity in their whole souls and lives unto the truths that he instructs them in." According to Owen, the divine author of the Scriptures will not admit anyone into his 'school' unless these conditions are met, even though the Roman Catholic 'school' admits its students "on far easier and cheaper rates" (ibid.).

Owen opposes the hermeneutical enslavement of Roman Catholicism to the extreme of interpretative anarchy advocated by inspirationalists who confuse the illuminating work of the Spirit with the inspiration granted to biblical authors and prophets. The Holy Spirit's work is not to bring new revelations, but to confirm and explain what has already been written down: "we stand not in need of any new divine afflations, or immediate prophetical inspirations, to enable us to understand the Scripture, or the mind and will of God as revealed therein" (WJO 4: 125).

Owen denies the Quakers' argument that divine inspiration makes the written Word and the hermeneutical process obsolete, as allegedly proved by the examples of the OT prophets who were seized uncontrollably by the Spirit. Owen points out that even the OT prophets, like any other human being, needed divine illumination to interpret the
meaning of their own prophecies (ibid.).

For Owen, the Quaker's insistence on an inner light leads to utter subjectivism and a neglect of the Bible altogether as a standard of Christian guidance (ibid. 167).

Rationalism, the third interpretative extreme, usurps interpretative liberty under the guidance of the Spirit by relying on reason alone. Owen diagnoses several problems with this school of thought. The most obvious is their apparent deadness to the spiritual dimension of the text. Owen anticipates the objection that many scholars with their merely rational analysis have obtained by far greater knowledge than many theologians or laypersons, who claim to trust in the Spirit's illuminating aid in interpretation. Does this not render such a work by the Spirit unnecessary? (WJO 4: 155). Owen answers this argument by once again stressing the inseparable connection of interpretation and application for theological hermeneutics and does this by carefully defining what it actually

22 A fact to my knowledge not mentioned in any literature on Owen is his subtle distinction between the modes of inspiration of the Old and New Testament. The inspiration of the Old Testament prophets was more violent than that of the New Testament authors. In the case of the prophets, "the coming of the word unto them had oftentimes such a greatness and expression of the majesty of God upon it, as filled them with dread and reverence of him, (Hab. iii. 16), and also greatly affected even their outward man (Dan. viii. 27)." However, Owen argues that this particular manner of inspiration was characteristic of the Old dispensation, and "belonged to the pedagogy thereof (Heb. XII. 18-21)." In the New Testament, by contrast, the manner of inspiration was "related more to that glorious liberty in fellowship and communion with the Father, whereunto believers had then access provided them by Christ" (WJO 16: 299). Owen implies that the clarity of the NT revelation, in accordance with the earlier mentioned doctrine of progressive revelation, also coincided with a more gracious manner of inspiration, less forceful and more gentle. One can only guess why Owen brings up this point, but two possibilities suggest themselves. One is the Quakers' idea of the inner light. The Quakers got their name from reportedly quaking at the reception of extra-biblical revelations, being seized by the Spirit as the prophets of old. Owen's argument for a shift in the mode of inspiration from the Old to the New Testament would make the equation of Quaker and OT prophets illegitimate. Owen's argument is also an important hermeneutical consideration in light of the usual practice of spiritualist sects like the Quakers and the German Anabaptists to draw on Old Testament writings indiscriminately to re-introduce such customs as polygamy and "prophetic seizures." Thus Owen, despite the acknowledgment of one faith and savior in both Testaments, distinguishes the two testaments hermeneutically, not only by following Calvin's distinction between shadow and reality (which was meant to protect the NT interpretation from judaeizers), but also by making a distinction in the mode of inspiration between the two dispensations.

23 Owen concludes his observations concerning inspirationists by saying: "Until such men will return unto the only rule and guide of Christian, until they will own it their duty to seek for the knowledge of truth from the Scripture alone, and in their so doing depend not on any thing in themselves, but on the saving instructions of the Spirit of God, it is in vain to contend with them; for they and we build on diverse foundations, and their faith and ours are resolved into diverse principles, - ours into the Scripture, theirs into a light of their own" (4: 159).
means "to know" a biblical text. Scripture, he says, uses two terms for knowledge, gnostis (knowledge) and epignosis (acknowledgment). The former, Owen argues, depicts mere propositional, or head-knowledge which, on its own, is useless because it does not necessitate practical application.

The term epignosis, on the other hand, "gives the mind an experience of the power and efficacy of the truth known or discovered, so as to transform the soul and all its affections into it, and thereby to give a full assurance of understanding unto the mind itself" (WJO 4: 156). "Epignotic" knowledge of God's revelation thus entails trust in the truth-content of the text and therefore goes beyond mere propositional knowledge.24

Owen thus clearly advocates an "affective" hermeneutic which historians of hermeneutic development, such as Jean Grondin, ascribe to Pietism in contrast to Protestant orthodoxy: "From this assertion [of an affective hermeneutic] we can see the extent to which the pietistic vision helps guard against the naive verbal objectivism discernible in Protestant orthodoxy" (IPH 60). Yet Owen, one of England's greatest defenders of orthodoxy, teaches that true understanding must be gained by the help of the Spirit.

According to Owen, the author of Scripture must illumine the reader's inner eye to the spiritual dimension of the text. This "true meaning" is not, as is often supposed, a hidden Gnostic sense, but it is the dimension of belief and application. Neither is the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the interpretative work primarily intellectual, but rather affective. The Spirit not only enlightens the mind to a knowledge that is more than mere

24 The following passage nicely summarizes Owen's position:

"Men may have a knowledge of words, and the meaning of propositions in the Scripture, who have no knowledge of the things themselves designed in them. The things revealed in the Scripture are expressed in the propositions whose words and terms are intelligible unto the common reason of mankind. Every rational man, especially if he be skilled in those common sciences and arts which all writings refer unto, may, without any especial aid of the Holy Ghost, know the meaning of the propositions that are laid down in, or drawn from the Scripture; yea they can do so who believe not one word of it to be true, and they do so, as well as the best of them, who have no other help in the understanding of the Scripture but their own reason, let them profess to believe what they will. And whatever men understand of the meaning of the words, expressions and propositions in the Scripture, if they believe not the things which they declare, they do not in any sense know the mind and will of God in them; for to know a thing as the mind of God, and not to assent unto its truth, implieth a contradiction" (4: 156).
acknowledgment, but he also works an assurance of biblical teachings that shows itself in application: "That assurance, I say, which believers have in spiritual things is of another nature and kind than can be attained out of conclusions that are only rationally derived from the most evident principles; and therefore doth it produce effects of another nature, both in doing and in suffering" (WJO 4:157; italics mine). Thus "epignotic" knowledge of the text not only enables the reader to believe in God in a relational rather than only an abstract way, but it results in ethical application (ibid. 158).

Hence for Owen the Scripture objectively reveals the will of God, but it takes "subjective revelation," or an illumination of God's Spirit to align the reader's understanding and practice with what is expressed in the text.²⁵ In fact, Owen claims that God designed the text in such a way that a purely rational interpretative approach goes against its very nature and purpose. He not only revealed the divine will progressively, as best suits the respective historical stage of the church's development, but He also arranged its inscripturation so as to meet the reader in his particular life-situation: "Truths have their power and efficacy upon our minds not only from themselves, but from their posture in Scripture. There are they placed in such aspects towards, in such conjunctions one with another, as that their influences on our minds do greatly depend thereon" (WJO 4: 189; italics Owen's).

Owen points out that the text of Scripture is not put in the form of doctrines, like a systematic theology, but in the shape of "histories, prophecies, prayers, songs, letters, epistles" (WJO 4: 187). He contends that if Scripture had been put in the form of catechisms and doctrinal treatises, it "would effect in us only an artificial or methodical" knowledge (ibid. 188). In fact, often freezing doctrines in certain formulae destroys the existential and spiritual power these teachings exert in their narrative form: "Often when

²⁵ "There is more required unto a useful apprehension and understanding of the mind of God in the Scriptures than the mere objective proposal of it unto us, and our diligent use of outward means to come to the knowledge of it; which...is from the Holy Spirit also" (4: 170).
men think they have brought truths into the strictest propriety of expression, they lose both their power and their glory" (ibid. 189).

Most importantly, cold doctrinal and creedal statements discourage the applicatory dimension the text naturally possesses. Doctrinal creeds abstracted from the text are useful, but they can only convey a “methodical comprehension” of the text, while the applicatory dimension atrophies (“but this [rational understanding of doctrine] we may attain and not be rendered one jot more like unto God thereby” [ibid.]). Owen by no means disparages technical hermeneutics as long as these tools are given their proper place in interpretation.

Owen's hermeneutical approach to the text demonstrates the unfoundedness of recent claims that pre-critical hermeneutics was a merely technical affair (Grondin IPH 42). Owen certainly affirms the role of the arts and sciences as technical tools for interpretation: “It is true that the knowledge of common learned arts and sciences is of great use unto the understanding of the Scriptures, as unto what they have in common with other writings, and what they refer unto that is of human cognizance.” He cautions, however, that to construct theology on grammatical-historical grounds alone would be “as if a man should design to make up his house of the scaffolds which he only useth in the building of it” (WJO 4: 157). Thus for precritical hermeneutics, mere technical rules are not enough. Instead, the interpreter must also employ those non-technical hermeneutical means which are congenial to the spiritual nature and content of the text.

The foremost of these spiritual means is prayer, which reminds us again of the emphasis the Puritans place on interpretation as a dialogue between God and the reader. Prayer, says Owen, brings one into the presence of the divine so that "prejudices, preconceived opinions, engagements by secular advantages, false confidences, authority of men, influences from parties and societies, will be all laid level before it, at least be gradually exterminated out of the minds of men thereby" (WJO 4: 202). Prayer, moreover,
inclines us "to receive impressions from divine truths as revealed unto us, conforming our minds and hearts unto the doctrine made known." In other words, the reader must remain open to the text, eager to hear what the divine other has to say. More than that, since one is listening to the divine word, once the doctrine has become clear, the reader must be ready to be "impressed," by it, that is to be cast into the mould of the teaching. Once again, the urge for application becomes evident in this method of interpretation (ibid. 205).

In fact, Owen already adumbrates Jacob Philip Spener's insistence that an upright life in communion with the divine is itself hermeneutical aid: "The true notion of holy, evangelical truths will not live, at least not flourish, where they are divided from a holy conversation [i.e. a godly life]. As we learn all to practise, so we learn much by practice. There is no practical science which we can make any great improvement of without an assiduous practice of its theorems; much less is wisdom, such as is the understanding of the mysteries of the Scripture, to be increased, unless a man be practically conversant about the things which it directs to" (206). If the text is read without a dialogue with the divine through spiritual means, mere theoretical knowledge is the result: "But the practical neglect of this duty is the true reason why so many that are skillful enough in the disciplinary means of knowledge are yet such strangers to the true knowledge of the mind of God" (ibid. 202).

Owen is convinced that the absence of these spiritual graces in many readers of the Bible is responsible for differing interpretations among Protestant divines. Owen thus disagrees with those who read the hermeneutical disputes within Protestantism as a failure of the sola-scriptura concept (Grondin IPH 41). Instead, Owen believes that if the humility that befits any human being who has been re-admitted into a communion with God through divine grace were also applied to interpretation, then there would be much less strife in the church. It is the Spirit who opens the eyes of the reader to align his subjective reading with the objectively revealed one, and he does so only when the reader submits himself, under the diligent use of all critical aids, to divine guidance.
Owen so firmly believes in the power of the word and the work of illumination that, much like the younger Luther, he strongly trusts in the power of God's truth to solve doctrinal disputes through reasonable argument. Owen thinks that rather than punishing heretics, the Church should follow Christ's example in having compassion for them. Owen explains his sentiments in this powerful passage:

It is true, for the most part, there is an interposition of corrupt affections seducing the minds of men from the truth; with these are they tossed up and down, and so driven with the winds of temptations that befall them; - but is it humanity to stand on the shore, and seeing men in a storm at sea, wherein they are ready every moment to be cast away and perish, to storm at them ourselves, or to shoot them to death, or to cast fire in their vessel, because they are in danger of being drowned? Yet no otherwise do we deal with them whom we persecute because they miss the knowledge of the truth; and, it may be, raise a worse storm in ourselves as to our own morals than they suffer under in their intellectuals. (WJO 4:177)

Thus it is wrong, Owen argues, to punish or burn those who reject Christianity, or do not follow orthodoxy. Owen rejects punitive action against heretics as an easy solution. "Our proper work," he argues, "is to save such persons, what lies in us, 'pulling them out of the fire.' Duties of difficulty and danger unto ourselves may be required hereunto. It is easier, if we had secular power with us, to thrust men into temporal fire for their errors than to free them from eternal fire by the truth." The reason for the corporal punishment of heretics is, according to Owen, the callousness of our own hearts: "But if we were governed by compassion for their souls and fear of their ruin, as it is our duty to be, we would not decline any office of love required thereunto" (WJO 4:178).

Thus the direct consequence of Owen's hermeneutic based on divine revelation is religious tolerance and therewith a corrective to the common view that pre-critical hermeneutics resulted in oppression while the anthropocentric turn, beginning with the Enlightenment, gave birth to tolerance. Owen's plea for tolerance has been explained in a political context, mainly because his independent faction argued for an existence outside of
the Church of England (Yule 215 ff.). Yet my reading of Owen demonstrates that toleration proceeds from his biblical hermeneutic rather than from political motivations (although one does not necessarily exclude the other). The misconception of precritical hermeneutics as conducive to intolerance is commonly accompanied by the claim of their rigid moralism. The following section is an attempt to clarify this misguided perception of the applicatory dimension of pre-critical hermeneutics.

4.4. Sanctification: The Applicatory Dimension of Hermeneutics

4.4.1. The Skill to Walk in Communion with God: Morality and Moralism

Puritans are commonly conceived of as rigid moralists. However, just as Owen’s concept of faith as relational ought to dispel a perception of pre-critical hermeneutics as irrational, so Owen’s view of morality as “communion with God” shows that, at least in theory, Puritan theology is far removed from a merely legalistic ethics. In fact, an analysis of Owen’s idea of sanctification shows that the relational nature of ethics makes moralism impossible.

The “skill to walk in communion with God,” a process commonly termed “sanctification” in reformed theology, is the applicatory dimension of Puritan hermeneutics. Sanctification, the increasing restoration of a human being to the image of God, is the goal of biblical hermeneutics: “That wisdom in the mystery of the gospel, that knowledge of the mind and will of God in the Scripture, which affects the heart, and transforms the mind in the renovation of it unto the approbation of the 'good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God,' as the apostle speaks Rom.xii.2, is alone valuable and desirable, as unto all spiritual and eternal ends” (WJO 4: 157; italics Owen’s).

Thus communion with the divine through the text should always translate into ethical action insofar as the Christian is to be Christ-like in his or her moral conduct. This relation of morality to communion with the divine distinguishes the Puritan theory of ethics from moralism. Morality, for Owen, is tied to revealed truth, and truth in turn is
tied to the relation with Christ. Owen disagrees with those who think that one can have morality without a relation to the divine Being. The hermeneutical framework of a created universe understands all of humanity to be morally obligated to the creator, since in federal covenant theology, Adam stood for the entire human race, which fell in and sinned with him.

A decisive difference between anthropocentric and theocentric ethics, between moralism and morality, is the latter’s view of humanity’s universal obligation to God. For Owen, God as creator is not only sovereign but also morally perfect, wherefore morally good behavior is ultimately only that which pleases God, not primarily that which satisfies human desires. Since God’s moral law is designed to regulate social interaction for the benefit of humanity, the divine rules always meet human needs, but not human desires. The only moral behavior ultimately pleasing to God is that which grows out of a relationship with him. Sure enough, Owen admits, certain moral laws are evident from "the light of nature" (WJO 3: 633), and even atheists may adopt theistic morality when it suits their needs.

Moralism, then, views ethics from an anthropocentric perspective as that which is useful and pleasing to us rather than from a theocentric one as that which is pleasing to God. According to Owen, moralism suffers from three basic problems. First, divided from a relational dialogue with the divine, it does not solve humanity’s problems, because mere human theorizing doesn’t dispose the heart to action. The human condition needs a radical change in disposition: "The utmost imaginations of men never reached unto that wherein the life and soul of holiness doth consist, - namely, the renovation of our lapsed nature into the image and likeness of God. Without this, whatever precepts are given about the moderation of affections and duties of moral holiness, they are lifeless, and will prove useless" (ibid. 635). It is the power of divine revelation, and operation, Owen continues, to renew persons, rather than just impose moral regulation. None of the
"documents which were given by philosophers of old" ever effected such a "change on their conversation" (ibid.).

The second problem with moral philosophy relates to the implementation of "conversation," a term which translates into the modern idea of "conduct," or "lifestyle." This second major difficulty with philosophy, according to Owen, is that, while clearly spelling out some general moral principles, philosophers cannot agree on the essence of morality itself. They know by the light of nature that "others are not to be injured, that every one's right is to be rendered unto him," but "go a little farther, and you will find all the great moralists at endless uncertain disputes about the nature of virtue in general, about the offices and duties of it, about the rule and measure of their practice." What is worse, "in these disputes did most of them consume their lives, without any great endeavors to express their own notions in their conversations" (WJO 3: 635).

Owen charges moralism with being merely theoretical, either not daring or simply not caring to put principles into practice. The Christian reader of the Word, however, has no such luxury. The universal role and rule of Christ requires that his word be obeyed: "If once it appear that Christ requires any thing of us by his word, that he hath taught us any thing as the prophet of the church, no doubt remains with us whether it be our duty or no" (ibid.).

The third flaw of moral philosophy lies in its "partiality." Owen argues that moral philosophy, since it springs from the minds of sinful writers, cannot serve as an ethical rule. For Owen, Philosophy lacks both authority and radicalness when it comes to ethics. According to him, moral philosophers are more concerned with language than with substance. "What is," he asks, "in the manner of teaching by the greatest moralists, and what are the effects of it? Enticing words, smoothness and elegancy of speech, composed into snares for the affections and delight unto the fancy, are the grace, ornament, and life of the way or manner of their teaching...[a]nd so easy and gentle is their operation on the minds of men, that commonly they are delighted in by the most profligate and obstinate
Secular ethics is, in other words, a "partial" philosophy, tailored to the pride of human beings who do not want to realize that more than mere outward morality is needed to regulate human affairs. In human teaching the root-problem of alienation from the divine is hardly addressed, and even where healthy moral principles are advocated, they lack proper foundation. Where unsound moral principles are espoused, their folly is evident from the reluctance of their propagators to implement them themselves (ibid. 636).

In short, moralism and moral philosophy cannot be trusted as a rule for moral conduct. Besides, Owen argues, the best moral maxims philosophy may arrive at are already contained much more clearly in the Scriptures: "I dare challenge the greatest and most learned moralist in the world to give an instance of any one duty of morality, confirmed by the rules and directions of the highest and most contemplative moralist, that I will not show and envince is more plainly and clearly required by the Lord Christ in the gospel, and pressed on us by far more effectual motives than any they are acquainted with" (ibid.).

What Owen is principally arguing is the same as in his prior plea for the balancing of faith and reason. Morality needs to be relational, tied to the person of Christ rather than merely abstract and rational. Without the foundation of the divine, morality does not make sense, because it lacks a dialogical relation to a being of moral perfection and universal authority. Hence those who want to establish ethics without divine guidance, based on reason alone, run into the danger of relativistic ethics, because in an

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26 Owen believes that it is precisely the relational aspect of morality which makes secularists shy away from the Bible: "The reason why these things are more pleasing unto them than the commands and instructions of Christ is because, proceeding from the spring of natural light, they are suited to the workings of natural fancy and understanding; but those of Christ, proceeding from the fountain of eternal spiritual light, are not comprehended in their beauty and excellency without a principle of the same light in us, guiding our understandings and influencing our affections" (3: 633).
anthropocentric turn, they have shifted the authority to sinful human thought. Human thought cannot be genuinely self-reflective because it will always shun the ultimate truth that humanity not only is limited to a finite horizon, but also lacks communion with the divine, and is in a state of rebellion against it.

4.4.2. The Secularization of Biblical Morality: Reason and the Inner Light

Owen displays a surprisingly clear vision of what happens when communion with the divine is removed as the foundation for morality. In a chapter entitled "Corruption or Depravation of the Mind by Sin,"27 Owen states that the foundation for moral duties is the reconciliation of the fallen creature with the divine. Scripture "grafts all duties of moral obedience in this stock of faith in Christ Jesus" (WJO 3:279). However, the prejudice of our fallen minds "inverts the order to these things" (ibid.). Those who read the Bible without knowing God will inevitably "cry up" moral principles they are already familiar with from their upbringing. But such readers don't have the slightest idea what the foundation of these duties is. When those readers turn to the Bible, they believe the only useful information therein is the very moral codes they have imbibed through their upbringing in a Christian tradition, because they cannot perceive Christ as the true scope of the Bible. Owen's observations deserve extensive quotation, for he virtually forecasts the result of much biblical criticism in the Enlightenment:

These [moral duties] they make the foundation, according to the place which they held in the law of nature and covenant of works, whereas the gospel allows them to be only necessary superstrcutions on the foundation. But resolving to give unto moral duties the pre-eminence in their minds, they consider afterward the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, with one or other of these effects; for, first some in a manner wholly despise them, reproaching those by whom they are singularly professed. What is contained in them is of no importance, in their judgment, compared with the more necessary duties of morality, which they pretend to embrace; and, to acquit themselves of the trouble of a search into them, they reject them as unintelligible or unnecessary. Or, secondly, They will by forced

27 This chapter is part of Owen's Discourse on the Holy Spirit written in 1674
interpretations, enervating the spirit and perverting the mystery of them, square and fit them to their own low and carnal apprehensions. They would reduce the gospel and all the mystery of it to their own light, as some; to reason, as others; to philosophy as the rest; ...Hereby advancing morality above the mystery and grace of the gospel, they at once reject the gospel and destroy morality also; for, taking it off from its proper foundation, it falls into the dirt, - whereof the conversation of the men of this persuasion is no small evidence. (WJO 3: 279-80)

Owen prophesies that without a relation to Christ, biblical morality will degenerate into moralism and mistake the result of faith (morality) for its source (faith in God). About one hundred years after Owen penned those words, Kant wrote in the preface to the first edition of his Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone:

Morality thus leads ineluctably to religion, through which it extends itself to the idea of a powerful moral lawgiver, outside of mankind, for Whose will that is the final end (of creation) which at the same time can and ought to be man's final end. If morality finds in the holiness of its law an object of the greatest respect, then at the level of religion it presents the ultimate cause, which consummates those laws, as an object of adoration and thus appears in its majesty. (5-7)

Kant thus inverts the relationship between religion and morality, just as Owen had predicted. Kant's misunderstanding or perhaps willful re-interpretation of the Reformed teaching on conversion as the basis for the application of revelational knowledge becomes evident in the course of his argument during which Kant preaches a full-fledged gospel of moralism and re-interprets the biblical doctrine of regeneration in terms of a voluntary decision to moral improvement. To some degree, Kant argues, a person may become morally responsible by altering his behavior for the better. But, Kant goes on,

if a man is to become not merely legally, but morally a good man (pleasing to God), that is, a man endowed with virtue in its intelligible character (virtus noumenon) and one who, knowing something to be his duty, requires no incentive other than this representation of duty itself, this cannot be brought about through gradual reformation so long as the basis of the maxims remains impure, but must be effected by a revolution in the man's disposition (a going over to the maxim of
holiness of the disposition). He can become a new man only by a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation (John III, 5; compare also Genesis I, 2), and a change of heart. But if a man is corrupt in the very ground of his maxims, how can he possibly bring about this revolution by his own powers and of himself become a good man? (ibid)

Here the Reformation theologian would answer, he cannot; it is a work of divine grace and intervention; but Kant opts for a moralistic salvation by works. He sees no need for regeneration: "Yet duty bids us do this, and duty demands nothing of us which we cannot do" (43). Thus, Kant argues one achieves a “change of heart” by making the conscious decision to live a morally good life, while outwardly the progression of moral improvement will always lag behind that decision in practical execution: "That is, he can hope to find in the light of that purity of the principle which he adopted as the supreme maxim of his will, and of its stability, to find himself upon the good path of continual progress from bad to better...From this follows that man's moral growth of necessity begins not in the improvement of his practices but rather in the transforming of his cast of mind and in the grounding of a character" (Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone 43-45).

Kant preaches the stern moralism of the Enlightenment. Kant's categorical imperative, however rational it may appear, lacks a real foundation. In light of Owen’s concept of morality as dependent on communion with the divine, Kant’s moralism is a good example of the self-imposition of moral laws Owen had mentioned earlier in his treatise. As history has shown, Kant's stern moralism did not last and was scornfully denounced not only by Schleiermacher but also by Nietzsche and his postmodern followers. Hence Owen is already a critic of the Enlightenment before Romanticism,

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28 The development of morality from pre-modernism to postmodernity in light of the changing hermeneutics has been nicely summarized in Roger Lundin, The Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith in the Modern World (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 84-88.
he condemns the modernist reliance on human knowledge and its confidence in reason before postmodern criticism appears on the world stage.

We may conclude that, contrary to a common misconception of Puritanism, widely propagated by historians and novelists (such as Hawthorn in his *Scarlet Letter*), most Puritans were on the whole not propagators of moralism, but the severest critics of such an attitude. This is not to deny that Puritanism could easily degenerate into mere moralism; in fact that is exactly what happened in the subsequent chapters of European and American history. However, the early Puritans were highly critical of such developments, and to equate the term Puritan with callous, rigid insistence on mindless "moral" behavior is a perversion of the actual Puritan position.

The Puritans, in fact, found nothing more deceptive and detestable than morality based on reason alone. For them, morality could be based only on a dialogue with the divine made possible through regeneration. The "turn" of which they spoke, where the "whole man" was to be changed in attitude and behaviour into at least some likeness to the divine (Christ), was internal first, external second. Much of Puritan discourse was devoted to exposing a merely "external" morality. The Puritan Thomas Watson, for example, wrote in 1656 that deception in this matter "will often make a man take morality for grace. Alas, morality is but nature refined, old Adam put in a better dress. A moralized man is but a tame devil! There may be a fair stream of civility running and yet much vermin of pride and atheism lying at the bottom" (Puritans on Conversion 173).

Owen agrees, arguing that self-imposed morality, or in fact any ethical code which is merely intellectually accepted, soon becomes burdensome, because it goes against the human desire for autonomy. We naturally dislike authority, says Owen, and only through divine grace will we willingly obey the divine authority. "Want [of grace] is that which renders obedience so grievous and burdensome to many. They endure it for a season, and at length either violently or insensibly cast off its yoke." Obedience to moral law must be
made willingly, and this can occur only when the heart has been changed through divine grace.29

Owen's concept of morality as grounded in personal relation with the divine has another important corollary. It shows clearly that not only the hermeneutic of the Enlightenment but also that of Romanticism can be critically contrasted with Puritanism. Romanticism, perhaps beginning with Rousseau (1712-1778), who, in his famous chapter on the vicar from Savoy in *Émile* (1762), argued for a natural law written in every person's conscience.30 The Vicar rejects philosophy as well as divine revelation in favor of an inner light: "Je pris donc un autre guide, et je me dis: Consultons la lumière intérieure, elle m'égarera moins qu'ils [les philosophes] ne m'égarera" (388). This inner light is in effect nothing else but the Puritan conscience which has been cleansed of its moral defect. "la conscience ne trompe jamais," the Vicar exclaims, "elle est le vrai guide de l'homme....Je n'ai qu'à me consulter sur ce-que je veux faire: tout ce-que je sens être bien est bien, tout ce-que je sens être mal est mal: le meilleur de tous les casuistes est la conscience" (*Émile* 418). One does not need a relation with the divine through regeneration; all one requires for sound moral behavior is to look within. Such teaching is not only reminiscent of the Quaker's inner light, but it also leads to what Owen condemns

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29 Owen's full statement on this topic is: "Light and conviction have compelled them to take it on themselves, and to attend unto the performance of these duties which they dare not omit; - but having no principle enabling or inclining them unto it, all they do, though they do much, and continue long therein, is against the grain with them; they find it difficult, uneasy, and weirsome. Wherein they can by any pretence countenance themselves in a neglect of any part of it, or bribe their consciences into a compliance with what is contrary to it, they fail not to deliver themselves from their burden. And, for the most part, either insensibly, by multiplied instances of the neglect of duties of obedience, or by some great temptation before they leave the world, they utterly leave all the ways of holiness and respect unto the commands of God, or if they continue in any, it is unto external acts of morality, which pass with approbation in the world; the inward and spiritual part of obedience they utterly renounce. The reason hereof, I say, is, because having no principle within, enabling them unto a compliance with the commands of God with delight and satisfaction, they grow grievous and intolerable unto them. So unto many, on the same ground, the worship of God is very burdensome, unless it be borne for them by external additions and ornaments" (3: 622).

30 The attempt to read the Vicar's confession as essentially Rousseau's own view seems justified in light of Ernst Cassirer's observation that all of Rousseau's work is concerned with the moral progress of human society according to an inner light of nature (Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. Peter Gay [New York: Columbia UP, 1954] 76-78).
as man-centered ethics. Rousseau, and with him much of enlightenment philosophy, is no longer in need of a genuine dialogue with the divine. The book of nature still shows irrefutable evidence of a divine creator, and no unbiased reader could fail to conclude from contemplating God's works that the universe was purposefully designed (ibid. 396). But there is no need for dialogue with him. Moral certainty is man's endowment, and virtue is his "birthright" (240).

In effect, Rousseau turns the doctrine of original sin on its head by stating that man is naturally good but becomes corrupted through society and civilization. Only when he frees himself from those influences can the clear voice of conscience speak. Both natural reason and sentiment will then prompt the will to act upon these inbred principles (Émile 419). We see here the beginnings of the concept of human progress, affirmed by inner reason and sentiment, which will reappear in Schleiermacher's theology. Rousseau argues rightly that if man's basic inclination is toward the moral good (an assumption which also assumes that we all know innately what the good is), dialogue with the divine through the Scriptures becomes obsolete. In fact, man has become like God because of his infallible conscience ("Conscience! conscience! instincte divin...judge infaillible du bien et du mal, qui rends l'homme semblable à Dieu!" [425]). Dialogue with the divine through prayer has become useless. Where the Puritans argued for the need of divine aid for moral development, Rousseau's Vicar states, "Neither do I ask of him the power to do right; why should I ask what he has given me already?" (ibid. 459). Likewise, Scripture is superfluous, for it can only affirm the sentiments which are already resident in the human conscience. Also, God has given each and every human being the will to obey these moral impulses.

31 This inbred principle is designated by Rousseau as the conscience: "Il est donc au fond des âmes un principe inné de justice et de vertu, sur lequel, malgré nos propres maximes, nous jugeons nos actions et celles d'autrui comme bonnes ou mauvaises; et c'est à ce principe que je donne le nom de conscience [There is therefore at the bottom of our hearts an innate principle of justice and virtue by which, in spite of our maxims, we judge our own actions or those of others to be good or evil; and it is this principle that I call conscience]" (ibid. 422).
By contrast, Owen argues that only the regenerate have within themselves the basic willingness to obey God's law out of love: "Upon supply of [God's] grace, which gives both strength for and a constant inclination unto holy obedience, the command for it becomes equal and just, meet and easy to be complied withal" (WJO 3: 623). In communion with the divine one realizes the justice of the command, because one willingly acknowledges its authority and usefulness, but even then there remains part of the "old Adam" which makes obedience sometimes difficult (ibid.). Nevertheless, the regenerate person can indeed follow the voice of his or her heart: "Let us but, upon our proposal of it unto us, consider what our minds and hearts say to it, what answer they return, and we shall quickly discern how equal and just the command is; for I cannot persuade myself that any believer can be so captivated at any time, under the power of temptations, corruptions or prejudices, but that ...his mind and spirit will say, "This good I would do; I delight in it; it is best for me, most suited unto me" (ibid.).

As it turns out, Rousseau's teaching is nothing but a secularized revision of Owen's thought. Rousseau takes the regenerate heart of Calvinism and makes it the natural condition of every human being. In doing so he has set a precedent later followed by many German Enlightenment thinkers. The premise of the morally good heart formed the basis for the belief, also advocated by Rousseau in Émile, that the right education will afford moral improvement. The poets and dramatists of the German Enlightenment believed, for example, that aesthetic education will morally reform lives. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1792-1781), for instance, went so far as to claim in his Offenbahrung als Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts that written revelation itself had been superseded by man's now awakened reason as a once necessary step in human moral development.32

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32 Lessing states in § 3 of his treatise: "Offenbahrung gibt der menschlichen Vernunft nichts, worauf die menschliche Vernunft, sich selbst überlassen, nicht auch kommen würde, sondern sie gab und gibt ihm die wichtigsten Dinge nur früher."
It becomes increasingly clear that the question of epistemology, at least in the realm of ethics, is closely connected to that of anthropology. The secularization of relational morality is expressed in terms of the inner moral light, the heart. Owen, the Puritan, recommended listening to impulses of the *regenerate* heart, the heart that desired to adhere to divine revelation. Moreover, the conscience needs to be informed by the word of God. From Owen's perspective, Rousseau's advice to listen to an inner voice would be deadly, because he appealed to the 'voice' of the fallen, *unregenerate* heart, which has at best some vague notions regarding the transcendent law of God: "There are sundry moral duties, which I instanced before, which the light of nature, as it remains in the lapsed, depraved condition of it, never extended itself to the discovery of. And this obscurity is evident from the differences that are about its precepts and directions" (WJO 3: 635). In other words, the notion of Rousseau's sentimental deism that there is an innate natural law which we would follow if we only got in touch with our inner selves is rejected by Owen.

As we have seen, Owen would agree with Rousseau that there are general notions regarding human conduct to be gleaned from the "light of nature," but those ideas are mere general moral aspects which never point to the existential root-problem, humanity's alienation from the divine.\(^{33}\) Prior to the healing of this breach, all morality is merely a non-relational imposition that will soon become burdensome. Moreover, without the principle of God's inward grace, we would never feel inclined to obey willingly authority other than our own. The Puritans believed that this inward grace is conveyed through the work of the Holy Spirit.

\(^{33}\) In his *Pneumatologia* Owen actually laments the growing influence of the inner light, but vehemently opposes the persecution of such "deluded souls." They should be opposed by "praying, preaching and writing." Thus Owen demonstrates the hastiness of the commonly held notion that religion equals intolerance (WJO 4:179).
4.5. Conclusion

Among the "physicians of the soul," John Owen is without doubt one of the most precise and deep-cutting in Puritan or Pietist literature. Neither Flacius nor Perkins attain to the psychological-spiritual depth with which Owen discusses the existential aspects of hermeneutics. Owen's concern with the faculty of understanding demonstrates clearly, and contrary to Gadamer's and Grondin's claims, that understanding received equal if not greater attention in precritical hermeneutics as did technical rules. From a framework of universal human depravity, Owen argues that without a radical change in perspective (from an anthropocentric to a theocentric one), understanding of the biblical text or of existence, and therewith hermeneutics in the broad philosophical sense of interpreting human existence, is impossible.

Furthermore, Owen's balance between relational and propositional knowledge keeps the necessarily metaphysical nature of his hermeneutic from degenerating into a merely abstract philosophical system. By making existential knowledge dependent both on a text, and on a personal relationship with God through Christ, Owen achieves a balance between the empirical and intuitive or spiritual aspect of knowing that is lacking in either rationalist or existentialist-romanticist thought. This imbalance will become especially apparent with the increasing secularization of pre-critical concepts in the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Gadamer.

Lastly, Owen's balance between propositional and experiential knowledge is evidence that neither the Puritans nor (as I intend to show in the next section) the early Pietists should be stereotyped as either naive spiritualists or arid scholastics. As we have seen, while Owen pays much attention to spiritual elements and is deeply concerned with application, he is counted among the orthodox theologians of his time. Even if some of his assumptions are now outdated, he possessed a rare combination of piety and scholarship that exemplified the Puritan insistence on biblical hermeneutics as a dialogue with the divine. To examine the teaching of German Pietism and to establish differences
and similarities between them and their English counterparts will be the task of the next chapter.
Chapter 5: The Hermeneutics of Pietism

5.1. Introduction:

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the basic hermeneutical unity between German Pietism and English Puritanism. My thesis is that both movements share the same theocentric and Christocentric hermeneutic. Communion with the divine through written revelation is for both the key principle for interpreting human existence and providing a foundation for social action. Knowledge about oneself and the divine has a twofold source. Both groups agree that, in a created universe, interpretation of humanity and its environment could to some degree be conducted according to natural revelation. For both Puritans and Pietists, a close reading of creation, and of humanity in particular, provides too much evidence for a purposeful creation to allow one to attribute these to chance and a silent universe. But both Puritans and Pietists insisted that natural revelation alone is insufficient. An interpretation satisfying not only intellectual but also spiritual-existential questions that arise from the ‘reading’ of human existence requires knowledge found only in communion with the divine.

The quality of this dialogue with the divine is determined by the content of written revelation. The applicatory dimension of this hermeneutic (Daseinshermeneutik) is the restoration of the divine image in human beings through an act of sovereign divine grace, a transformation of the moral and intellectual character of the individual toward a “Christ-likeness.” However, since the applicatory dimension of interpretation is based on a relational rather than a punitive or pragmatic foundation, it differs from any other merely moralistic or legalistic system.

Thus the hallmark of Puritan and Pietist hermeneutics is its practical piety based on the biblical text. Theology translates directly into social action and does not degenerate
into mere theorizing (scholasticism). Historically, the practical outworking of the Puritan hermeneutic provided a tremendous impetus for the education of the laity, for alleviation of poverty and class disadvantages, for family life, and, above all, for preaching toward the conversion of those outside such a communion with the divine.

Although the basic hermeneutical framework of a created universe is undoubtedly the same in Puritan and Pietist thought, there is an ongoing debate not only about the very definition of these movements in general, but also about the different accents put on the cognitive and sentimental aspects of their religion. I shall devote part of this chapter to defining these two movements, not in the presumption of offering final definitions, but in an attempt to account for the movements' theological and hermeneutical unity. The remainder of this chapter will then serve to undergird my definition with evidence from the writings of the two foremost German Pietist theologians, Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727), showing how they taught principally the same approach to knowledge of the divine and the self as did their Puritan precursors and counterparts.

5.2. Mysticism, Intellectualism or Practical Divinity: The Problem of Defining Puritanism/Pietism

A survey of the secondary literature on Pietism and Puritanism reveals that the main problem in defining these movements lies first in identifying their shared and common characteristics. An important contribution to this undertaking is August Lang's informative but little known work *Puritanismus und Pietismus* (1941), in which he attempts to prove that certain Puritan writers, including William Perkins, Louis Bayly and John Bunyan form a line of "Puritan Pietists," because they share with German Pietism a certain antipathy against dogmatic religion. According to Lang, William Perkins is the
first Pietist who influenced certain writers among the Puritans. These writers differ from other English reformed theologians in the following elements: in attacking dead orthodoxy and mere moralism; in stressing spiritual joy in communion with God and the spiritual-emotional joy in the relationship with Christ in general (174); in showing little or no concern for the visible church as demonstrated by their avoidance of controversies about church polity and a focus either on the non-ecclesial fellowship of the faithful (geheiligtes Gemeinschaftsleben 181) or on the community of the saints in the invisible church; in that predestinarianism informs their practice of dividing humanity into two classes of people, saved and lost; in their focus on eternity (Ewigkeitsernst 185) and God's judgment (especially Bayly); in their non-moralistic understanding of sin (that is, sin as primarily a rift in man's relationship to God rather than a punishable disobedience); and finally in their urge for immediate repentance in view of a "Gnadenzeit" (271), meaning that a reader's or listener's confrontation with God through word or text may be the only and last chance to find communion with the divine.

While our reading of Owen and Perkins suggests Lang's observations are correct, his conclusion that these characteristics are confined to a small number of Puritan theologians, whom he calls "Pietistic Puritans," is simply inaccurate. Indeed, these characteristics do not set apart, but rather unite, most Reformed and even most Lutheran theologians, who insist on a personal dialogue with Christ and the adherence to the Bible as the inspired word of God as the essentials of their hermeneutic.

English historians more familiar with Puritan literature have taken exception to Lang's analysis. Ian Breward, in his introduction to Perkins' Works, for example, urges a

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1 Lang writes: "Herewith I believe to have sufficiently proven the thesis: William Perkins is the first Pietist...Pietism, which first became a historical reality with Perkins, did not become extinct, but spread gradually into all camps of Protestantism" ("Von Perkins an ist der Pietismus, der in ihm zuerst zur geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit geworden ist, nicht wieder ausgestorben, sondern hat sich nach und nach in alle Lager des Protestantismus ausgebreitet" 131).
strong qualification of Lang’s epitaph of Perkins as the “real father of pietism” (Lang 93; Breward 107), calling it “an exaggeration which rests on an inadequate appreciation of the debt Perkins owed to Puritan predecessors and contemporaries” (Breward 107). Likewise Manfred Schmidt’s study Biblizismus und natürliche Theologie is criticized by Breward, because it “overemphasizes the subjectivism of Perkins’ doctrine” (124 n13).

Both criticisms expose the inaccuracy of approaches which tend to draw sharp lines of distinction between Pietism, Puritanism and Protestant Orthodoxy whereby the subjectivism and world-denying asceticism of the former two is contrasted with the scholastic dogmaticism of the second. The disintegration of this older paradigm of interpreting church history is already anticipated in Lang’s observation that through the works of Heinrich Heppe and Albrecht Ritschl, “in theological jargon the expression ‘Pietism,’ which originally denoted exclusively the German-Lutheran movements connected to Spener, Francke and the Württemberger Pietists, has now been transferred to the similar phenomena in the reformed church. This expression is also not uncommonly applied to Anglo-Saxon Protestantism” (9-11).³

In more recent scholarship, the global and inter-confessional dimensions of Pietism have been recognized even more fully. While former Lutheran scholarship, represented by Martin Schmidt, Hans Beyreuther, and Kurt Aland, tended to restrict the term Pietism to German Lutheranism, recent research tends to view it as a religious force that spanned several countries and theological confessions (Brecht 1:4). Pietism, then, is not the

³ “Durch sie ist im theologischen Sprachgebrauch der Ausdruck Pietismus der ursprünglich nur den deutsch-lutherischen Bewegungen galt, die sich an Spener, Francke und die Württemberger knüpften, auf die verwandten Erscheinungen in der reformierten Kirche übertragen worden. Auch im angelsächsischen Protestantismus wird unsere Ausdrucksweise nicht selten verwandt.”
adherence to a particular liturgical, or ecclesiastical form, but rather a spiritual phenomenon, *eine Frömmigkeitserscheinung*. In other words, Lang's description of Puritan Pietism may be accepted as long one realizes that these characteristics cannot serve to distinguish between Puritans and Pietists in the English realm, or Pietists and the orthodox in Germany. Rather the Pietism of the Puritans and of German Pietists should be regarded as what both groups recognized as the basic ingredient of a Christian faith according to the biblical pattern presented in the New Testament writings. It is this pattern that both the Puritans and German Pietism wanted to recapture.

A further difficulty in defining Pietism is its usual but erroneous association with anti-intellectualism, which has long served as the foundation for the contrasting of English and German Pietism with orthodox theology, as exemplified by Lang and Schmidt. The notion of Pietism as a highly subjectivist phenomenon that emphasizes affection over the intellect was propagated largely by the German theologian and church historian Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889). Since Lang cites Ritschl frequently in his work, it is likely that his contrasting of Pietism with orthodoxy was influenced by Ritschl's work. For Ritschl, Pietism was both a reaction against arid orthodoxy and an erroneous regression to medieval mysticism.

Ritschl wrote his monumental *Geschichte des Pietismus* (1880-1886) at a time when the Kantian wall between faith and reason caused many Protestant theologians to re-interpret Christianity along modernist lines. In opposition to the Puritan notion of a balance between faith and reason, between subjective-spiritual and objective revelatory components, Ritschl believed the essence of Christianity to lie in its moral and ethical implications severed from a personal relation with the divine as found in Puritan and
Pietist spirituality. He rejected all forms of natural theology, mysticism, and metaphysics, arguing that theology must concentrate on moral and ethical realities.5

Based on this presupposition, Ritschl tries to separate post-Reformation theologians into two groups. The first group comprises Calvinism in general, but particularly those Calvinists whose further development of Calvin's views was corrupted by scholastic proclivities (Elemente der Schule). According to Ritschl, Calvinism had, from its inception, a tendency to overemphasize the intellectual element and the teaching of doctrine through catechizing. The effect of this emphasis, Ritschl finds, was that the moral aspect of Christianity became a mere afterthought (1: 90).6

Although Ritschl does not deny the need for doctrine, he states that Christian faith is more dependent on practical moral concerns. Accordingly, in book two of the first volume in Die Geschichte des Pietismus, Ritschl criticizes the Reformed theologians for not recognizing the essential nature of the Christian faith which, for him, lies neither in a mere intellectualism, nor in mystical contemplation.7 According to Ritschl the former is

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5 The theologian Hugh Ross Mackintosh in his Types of Modern Theology From Schleiermacher to Barth writes: "Broadly speaking, [Ritschl] argues that religion has emerged as a product of the struggle for existence. As he puts it roundly... 'religion is the instrument man possesses to free himself from the natural conditions of life.' God is the needed prop of ethical aspiration, the trustee of our moral interest. But, we must ask, in a description of this kind is there anything that radically distinguishes religion from civilization, which also in its own way is the conquest of nature... On Ritschl's terms the attitude of man to the cosmos is made central and all-determining, not his attitude to God. The point is one at which the theologian loses touch with Scripture" (151). These few lines show how far Ritschl's concept of the divine and its importance is removed from the Puritan/Pietist idea of a dialogue with God.

6 Ritschl writes: "Aber um so eifriger war [Calvin's] Streben, durch seinen Katechismus und die öffentliche Katechisation, mit der Allen auferlegten Verpflichtung der Teilnahme daran, dasjenige in die Kirchenglieder zu pflanzen, was er von vorn herein zu vermissen fand, ein schulmaßig geordnetes Wissen von der christlichen Lehre. Darum bekam auch in seiner Kirche die intellektuelle Bedeutung des Glaubens so sehr das Übergewicht, daß die praktische Überzeugung von dem gewußten Glaubensinhalt alsbald in die Stellung eines Anhangs trat, so nothwendig und werthvoll derselbe auch war." Ritschl sees the reason for this preoccupation with doctrine in the need to differentiate and defend the Protestant faith from Catholicism (Geschichte des Pietismus 1: 88 ff.).

7 Ritschl accuses the Reformers of lacking 'feeling' when it comes to the spiritual life. The Reformers gave in to intellectualism, because they lacked an educated view of the role of emotion in the Christian life: "Dieser durch die Umstände herbeigeführte Fehler [i.e. the intellectualizing of Christianity] würde sich aber nicht so festgesetzt haben, wie es geschehen ist, wenn nicht die Menschen des Reformationsjahrhunderts mit einer eingehändiglich beschränkten geistigen Disposition behaftet gewesen
the error of Calvinism, the latter of radical Pietism. Both schools fail to recognize that
the human psyche is driven by the need for moral feeling besides the need for knowledge
(“Erkennen”) and desires (”Begehren”). It was moderate Pietism which brought the
church back on track in emphasizing the practical application of Christianity, namely that
"everything works out for the best for those who love God in the Christian community"
(1:92).  

According to Ritschl, Reformers especially of the second and third generation
lacked a complete view of the Christian faith, because in rejecting the medieval piety (fides
implicita), they fragmented the faith into single chunks of doctrines and deprived
themselves of the emotional element. The term fides implicita denotes a blind faith, a faith
that is mere assent without certain knowledge. As we have seen in the discussion of John
Owen, Puritans rejected such implicit faith because of its subjectivism. Ritschl, however,
aligns himself with a subjectivist-anthropocentric position foreign to both Puritans and the
early Pietists. It is worth quoting Ritschl extensively, because his analysis has greatly
influenced the perception of Pietism:

It looks as if Protestantism, by relinquishing monastic life, also denied itself access
to the religious emotions common to that environment...So that in the mere
cognitive development of evangelical doctrines, the holistic view of Christianity,
which was so characteristic of the Reformers, was not yet adequately expressed,
but rather fragmented on the one hand, and covered up and overshadowed on the
other. The private feeling of personal trust in God, which is the touchstone of
reconciliation through Christ, was not possessed in the clear recognition of its

wären. Ich meine die Unbekanntschaft mit dem Gefühl im Allgemeinen und mit seinen Bedingungen und
Beziehungen im geistigen Leben” (1:92).
8 “Wenn also auf diesem Punkte eine fides implicita zugestanden werden soll und muss, kann man sie
dann in einem andern Satze zweckmäßiger ausdrücken, als daß denen, die in der christlichen Gemeinde
Gott lieben, alles zum Besten dienen muss?”
9 Richard Muller defines fides implicita as an “implicit faith, sometimes called blind faith; a faith that is
mere assent without certain knowledge, e.g., faith that accepts as true “what the church believes,” without
knowing the objective contents of the faith.” Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms (Grand
essence and operation, but merely in the euphoria of possessing pure doctrine, or at best as an appendage to the latter. (1:93)

Any form of Pietism is accordingly seen by Ritschl as a counter-measure to the regression of Protestant theology into mere dogmatism (94). Yet John Owen’s discussion about the relational nature of faith, as we saw in the previous chapter, reveals how misleading Ritschl’s assessment is. And Owen was a thoroughly Calvinistic divine, educated in scholastic theology. The writings of other Calvinist theologians such as Perkins, Bates, Charnock, Howe and a host of others show that their concern for practical Christianity was based on the conviction that correct doctrine, as well as existential knowledge of God must serve as the foundation of social action. In fact, for the Puritans and early Pietists there was no difference between these two.

Ritschl’s failure to recognize the co-existence of dogmatic and subjective spiritual elements in the Puritan/Pietist concept of faith is also reflected in the second shortcoming of Reformed circles lamented by Ritschl: the regression into medieval mysticism. Ritschl differentiates between neo-Platonic mysticism, which seeks a unification with God by conflating the subject-object relationship, and a “modified mysticism.” As a representative of the social gospel Ritschl dismisses both these forms of spirituality as "Dilettantismus" (II 12).

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10 “Es sieht so aus, als ob der Protestantismus, indem er das Klosterleben aufgab, sich den Zugang zu der Übung des dort heimisch gewesenen religiösen Gefühls versperrt hatte...Also in der bloß verstandesmäßigenAusprägung der Lehren des Evangeliums wird die der Reformation entsprechende Totalanschauung des Christenthums noch nicht zum entsprechenden Ausdruck gebracht, sondern einerseits zersplittert, anderseits verhüllt und beschattet...Das persönliche Selbstgefühl des Gottvertrauens, welches die Probe der Versöhnung durch Christus ist, besaß man nicht in der deutlichen Erkenntnis seiner Art und seines Werkes, sondern nur eingewickelt in dem Hochgefühl des Besitzes der reinen Lehre, oder im bessern Falles als einen Anhang zu der letzteren.”

11 Ritschl’s distinction between the two is useful, for the Reformed ‘mysticism’ retains the subject-object distinction. Nevertheless Ritschl’s bias toward a moralistic interpretation of Christianity is clearly shown by his rejection of both kinds of spiritualism.
With this assessment, Ritschl has dismissed what may well be the very center of the historical Christian faith, in which a relationship with the divine as the essence of Christianity precedes and outweighs an adherence to mere moral principles. In Ritschl’s view the hairsplitting of the orthodox Lutherans and Reformed diverted the focus from practical issues to doctrine; and accordingly the Pietists, reacting against this tendency, reverted to medieval mysticism and self-imposed monasticism. Ritschl criticizes this development, because these tendencies resulted in the depreciation of the everyday world.

The black and white division of Reformation spirituality into either mysticism or intellectualism shows that Ritschl reads through Kantian lenses, with their dichotomy of faith and reason. He is also closely related to Schleiermacher, however, in combining practical morality with a certain feeling (“Gefühl”) which is incompatible with hard rational thinking. As a result, Ritschl sees Pietism as the reaction against the scholasticism of Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy, a reaction which takes the wrongheaded path back to medieval mysticism. 12

Ritschl’s once dominant picture of Pietism and post-reformation dogmatic theology has undergone some correction. Two more recent publications especially stand out in this regard. The first, by Robert Preus, The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism (1970) deals with Lutheran orthodoxy of the later 17th century and tries to show that it was not at all an impractical, merely scholastical phase in church history: "we see orthodox theologians and dogmaticians who are capable of writing the most stirring hymns, the most touching devotional literature, and the most moving sermons...There is nothing in evangelical orthodoxy that is withdrawn from practical church life or inimical to piety, nothing in the theology of the day that ignores Christian life" (29). A similar

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12 What Ritschl advocates as ideal Christianity is more along the lines of Schleiermacher’s idea: practical moral concern is based on a rather anti-doctrinal basis of moral feeling.
conclusion regarding Reformed Calvinistic orthodoxy is reached by Richard Muller who, in his seminal work Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, tries to show that

There is a genuine need to review the theology of Protestant orthodoxy and to examine its presuppositions and principles in view of the frequently inaccurate presentation of scholastic Protestantism in histories of Christian thought and even in scholarly monographs dealing with the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This inaccuracy reflects several levels of misunderstanding. Much of the literature assumes a discontinuity between the thought of the Reformers and their orthodox successors without recognizing that a change in form and method does not necessarily indicate an alteration of substance. Scholastic Protestant theology has been described as rationalistic, intellectually arid and theologically rigid - without due attention to its own statements concerning the use of reason and the import of dogmatic system for faith. (1: 10)

Once the biased reading of Ritschl is uncovered, it is easier to understand Lang’s assessment of Pietism, because he errs whenever he follows Ritschl’s interpretation. For example, Lang, in following the assessment of Ritschl, adopts his view by treating as Pietists those Puritan scholars in whose writings there is found little material on doctrinal controversy. Though Lang is certainly a meticulous scholar, his limited selection of Puritan writings, and in particular his neglecting to consult theological treatises by “Puritan Pietists,” such as William Perkins, result in a distorted representation of Puritan literature.

Likewise Lang’s characterization of Pietists as disliking controversial doctrinal issues excludes writers who otherwise exhibit the kind of religious fervor Lang associates with Pietism. John Bunyan, for example, whom he mentions in his study as a Pietist, has written treatises on church government and infant baptism. Richard Baxter, who is also considered a practical writer, uses scholastic terms and Latin phrases throughout his works and covers almost every single theological controversy of his time.

Moreover, Ritschl’s and Lang’s characterizations of Pietism and Orthodoxy are too static. According to his own categories, many Reformers whom Ritschl would
classify as leaning toward scholastic orthodoxy could easily be listed as Pietists, since they also exhibit those characteristics. Similarly, Puritan writers whom Lang classified as scholastic were not primarily animated by wars over terminology and dogma. Even those who dealt more exclusively with dogmatics, like John Owen, or Spener's teacher Dannhauer, were as concerned with the personal spiritual life as Spener was.

In short, as far as spirituality and biblical hermeneutics are concerned, the terms Pietism and Puritanism cannot be used to denote two vastly different movements. Nor do these movements constitute a radical break with orthodox Protestant theology. Instead, both fall under the same category of spiritual revival whose nature is based on a biblical theology. In both Germany (die Präzisen) and England (precisionists or Puritans), the label denoted those who applied their Christian convictions seriously enough to arouse dislike in others. In other words, the labels of Pietist and Puritan describe one and the same spirit and should be employed to contrast those 17th century Christians who pattern their life after the Bible with those who thought that any consistent application of Christian spirituality is fanatical precisionism. The German Lutheran scholar Stoeffler already expressed this thirty years ago: "If A.M. Hunter is right in pointing out that Calvinism is a spirit, this can be asserted with even more justification of Pietism. It had no one system of theology, no one integrating doctrine, no particular type of polity, no one liturgy, no geographical homogeneity. Yet...it presented a discernible historical unity" (Stoeffler 13).

Richard Baxter expresses the same sentiment when he relates the following about his Anglican father:

When I heard them speak scornfully of others as Puritans whom I never knew, I was at first apt to believe all the Lies and Slanders wherewith they loaded them. But when I heard my own Father so reproached and perceived the Drunkards were the forwardest in the reproach, I perceived that it was mere Malice. For my Father never scrupled Common Prayer or Ceremonies, nor spake against Bishops, nor

ever so much as prayed but by a Book or Form, being not ever acquainted with any who did otherwise. But only for reading Scripture when the rest were Dancing on the Lord's Day, and for praying (by a Form out of the end of the Common Prayer Book) in his House, and for reproving Drunkards and Swearers, and for talking sometimes a few words of Scripture and the Life to come, he was reviled commonly by the name of Puritan, Precisian and Hypocrite: and so were the godly conformable Ministers that live everywhere in the country near us, not only by our neighbours, but by the common talk of the vulgar Rabble all around us. (Reliquiae Baxteriae 2-3)

Thus one did not have to display the main characteristic of Puritanism, the objection to liturgical elements, in order to receive the label Puritan. Spener also observes that mere adherence to a biblical faith attracts accusations of fanaticism.\(^14\)

J.I. Packer in A Quest For Godliness is one of the few Puritan scholars who has adequately isolated the desire for revival, based on correct doctrine, as the central feature of Puritanism. We can also unhesitatingly apply his definition to Spener's and Francke's Pietism:

And I venture to suggest that for a truly adequate understanding of Puritanism we must await the day when its history will be told as a revival story, in which the church conflict which has hitherto been taken as the key to interpretation is recognized as having all along been subservient to the larger Puritan aim...- a spiritually renewed nation. (28)

Packer further states that the Puritans saw themselves as pushing for a continuation of an as yet incomplete Protestant Reformation, and he approvingly quotes Dr. Ivonwy Morgan's assessment that "The essential thing in understanding the Puritans was that they were preachers" (37). Following both Packer and Peter Toon, who has also made

\(^{14}\) Spener says: "I am alarmed and ashamed whenever I think of the fact that the teaching of an earnest, inner godliness is so unfamiliar and strange to some people that those who zealously cultivate such godliness can hardly escape being suspected as secret papists, Weigelians, or Quakers" (Pia Desideria 47).
suggestions for the definition of Puritanism, one should perhaps summarize the Puritan/Pietist characteristics as follows:

1) a commitment to the Bible as the Word of God and as authoritative in all matters of faith, morality and worship
2) a commitment to Reformation Theology (in the broadest sense)
3) a desire to reform the national church rather than separate from it
4) A belief in the necessity of personal regeneration, of justification by faith alone and sanctification by the Holy Spirit
5) The need for reformation at the domestic, local and national levels by means of legislation, catechizing, religion in the home and fervent prayer
6) A reliance on God's power to accomplish these things, but at the same time a view that preaching and teaching combined with prayer are divinely ordained means whereby this work would be accomplished.

In light of these findings, it seems advisable to revise the background against which research into Puritanism and Pietism is commonly conducted. As Hans Leube states in *Orthodoxie und Pietismus*, the view that orthodoxy designates a low point in church history is no longer "eine ausgemachte Sache" (36). A definition seeking to underscore the unity of English and German Pietists and orthodoxy would have to take into account their conviction that communion with the divine through the Scriptures is the core element of hermeneutics. As especially Muller demonstrates in his recent work, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, a balance of subjective spirituality and objective doctrine pervaded all three ecclesiastical groupings. The Categorization of Pietism and Orthodoxy becomes even more difficult when one considers that "adherents of both groups" argue for the same piety which has traditionally been at the heart of biblical Christianity from Christ himself, to St. Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Paul Gerhardt, Dannhauer, Perkins, Owen and all other "Pietists" in the history of the Church. There are, of course, differences in how

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16 Spener goes back to early church history in order to show the continuity of German Pietism with ancient Christianity and to ward off accusations that Pietism is an innovation (*Pia Desideria* 82-83).
this piety works itself out within the various Protestant confessions as they developed in
the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Spener worked explicitly within a Lutheran
framework, whereas Perkins, Baxter and Owen follow closely in Calvin's footsteps.\textsuperscript{17}

If, as recent research has shown, there was no essential theological-hermeneutical
break between Pietism and post-reformation orthodoxy, why did Pietists write and preach
against the spiritual sloth of the established church? Hans Leube, for example, points out
that theologians of the Wittenberger circle, which was a main target of anti-ecclesial
polemic, are now counted by church historians among the forerunners of Pietism. The
same holds true for Reformed theology: "The Strassburg theologians Johann Schmidt,
Johann Conrad Dannhauer und Johann Georg Dorsch are proof that university theologians
of that time were not at all unfamiliar with practical-ecclesiastical needs" (Leube 20). If
the old paradigmatic opposition of Pietism versus orthodoxy is no longer adequate, what
\textit{are} the conditions that gave rise to German Pietism?

\section*{5.3. Historical Context of Pietism}

Hans Leube suggests that the answer must be sought within an eschatological
context (72). According to his view, Germany in the seventeenth century was gripped by
a certain "Weltuntergangsstimmung" (72). The doctrine of divine providence and a sense
of collective guilt inherited from the Old Testament chronicles encouraged the Christian to
look for a link between the state of religiosity and the fate of a nation. This was true in
England as well, where the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the discovery of the
gunpowder plot were seen as signs of divine favour, but also led to warnings not to
neglect the gospel and pure worship, lest God withdraw his Spirit.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{17} Richard Baxter would certainly align himself with Calvinism, because like most Amyraldians he
believed the teaching of the Saumur Academy to be closer to Calvin's theology than the Westminster
standards as represented by his colleague John Owen.
\textsuperscript{18} There are many examples for this, but Richard Sibbes' "gunpowder-plot-anniversary sermon" (1640)
In Germany, the ravages of the thirty-years'-war and the threat of Turkish invaders heightened the apocalyptic mood of the nation so that preachers urged the people to repentance. At the same time they painted their times in apocalyptic colours, borrowing from images in the book of Revelation, and the Genesis record, where cities and nations were judged by God because of their unfaithfulness. Leube concludes: "Thus emerged the dark picture of the conditions in the era of Lutheran orthodoxy" (73).

Leube argues that the eschatological urgency strongly coloured the preacher's perception of society. Consequently, "one should never deduce from the seriousness of the accusations, as we find them in writings of these men [Pietists], the extent of corruption in those times" (ibid.; italics Leube's).

However, Puritan and Pietist theology itself fails to verify wholly Leube's theses, but rather shows that while eschatological excitement certainly played a role in the rise of Puritanism and Pietism, it cannot be regarded as the main contributing factor. The post-millennial eschatology of many Puritans made them look confidently into the future, because they trusted divine providence to usher in the messianic Kingdom through an increasing spread of the gospel and a prospering of the church even while (in fact perhaps because) it was under persecution. Trust in providence also allowed theologians easily to revise their unfounded hopes in social revolutions.

Many Independent Puritan theologians, for example, regarded Cromwell's protectorate as a possible indication of the coming millennium. However, when the

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19 Leube cites a prominent critic of those times, Sigismund Evenius, as proof that many of the accusations were merely exaggerations meant to move the people to repentance. Evenius states at the end of his critical pamphlet "Bescheidentliche Erörterungen" that "such evil, godlessness and utter corruption as he depicted it is not presently felt, since most people still held to God's word" (73).
Restoration made such a vision unlikely, these post-millennialists had no difficulty revising their view, because of their trust in divine providence. Likewise, Spener's reform program was driven by the belief that it would sweep across Germany and inaugurate the millenium ("der Verheissungsglaube bildet den Rückhalt für das pietistische Reformprogramm"; Schmidt AGP 13:14).20 Spener cites Arndt's despair of a reformed church a hundred years earlier to declare his hope for a better time (Pia Desideria 79 ff.). Spener's optimism regarding the future of the church does not at all accord with the doom and gloom scenario that Leube paints in his analysis.

Moreover, the stylistically rather sober tone of Spener combined with the practical nature of his suggestions for reform conveys no apocalyptic frenzy. He refuses to engage in eschatological speculations (ibid.) or teach Christian perfectionism as if the millennium had already arrived. Those who desire such things, says Spener, should "enter the world to come"; and to expect such conditions now would be self-deception (ibid. 80). Thus the theology of the Puritans and Pietists renders Leube's identification of Chiliasm as the sole factor in the rise of Pietism along with other claims, for example that Chiliasm primarily motivated Pietism's criticism of the institutionalized church, implausible (Leube 30).21

Instead, I suggest that the rise of Pietism be seen as primarily motivated not by anti-intellectuals, nor by eschatological causes, but by a desire for communion with God. Spener's remarks concerning the possibility of better conditions in the church make clear that his efforts at reform were to be maintained even if millennial hopes never materialized: "Even if it be evident that we cannot achieve the whole and complete purpose, we can at least do as much as possible...Let no one think that we intend and seek too much. We are

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20 As the collective title is given in the list of works cited, all references to this edition will be given with the page number preceded by the volume number.
21 Leube points out that many so-called orthodox theologians shared some of Spener's concerns and recommended his reform-programs, and observation which further undermines a strict opposition of Pietism and Orthodoxy (ibid.)
not living in a Platonic state, and so it is not possible to have everything perfect and according to rule” (Pia Desideria 78-80). Spener’s prime motivation for reformation is not Chiliasm but the honour of God (33) and the suffering of Christ’s body, the church (31-32). Spener was driven by a desire to do God’s will, and this motive did not engender an apocalyptic frenzy, nor an anti-intellectual and world-rejecting asceticism. I would like to make two suggestions regarding the context of the phenomenon called Pietism which may aid further research into the hermeneutics of its adherents.

First Pietists pastors’ intent was not at all to gainsay the doctrines of Protestant Orthodoxy, but rather to supplement them with practical application. Thus their great emphasis was to educate lay-people. Their desire was precisely to teach doctrine, but to boil it down to a digestible format for the laity. These Pietists lived at a time when involvement with religion, either Catholic or Protestant, played a dominant role for the majority of the population. Everyone’s vocabulary was replete with references to the deity and basic theological terminology, so that mere use of religious vocabulary allowed the flavor of religion without the presence of real substance. In other words, perhaps one should give more credence to the Pietist argument that external religion was present simply through language and culture which had been stamped by some form of Christian

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22 “Let us remember that in the last judgment we shall not be asked how learned we were and whether we displayed our learning before the world; to what extent we enjoyed the favor of men and knew how to keep it; with what honors we were exalted and how great a reputation in the world we left behind us; or how many treasures of earthly goods we amassed for our children and thereby drew a curse upon ourselves. Instead we shall be asked with how childlike a heart we sought to further the kingdom of God; with how pure and godly a teaching and how worthy an example we tried to edify our hearers amid the scorn of the world, denial of self, taking up of the cross, and imitation of our Saviour; with what zeal we opposed not only error but also wickedness of life; or with what constancy and cheerfulness we endured the persecution or adversity thrust upon us by the manifestly godless world or by false brethren, and amid such suffering praised our God” (Pia Desideria 36-37).
influences for centuries. Thus it was against empty professionalism that English and German Pietists alike stressed regeneration and “Wiedergeburt.”

Second, if communion with God and the revival of the church through the growth of biblical Christianity throughout society constitute the primary motivation of Pietism, we can no longer think of this movement as a purely German national phenomenon. The German scholar Martin Brecht, for example, in his recent discussion of the character of Pietism, views Pietism as a Europe-wide phenomenon: "The origins of Pietism and with it the history of Protestantism in the 17th century can be understood only if one conceives Pietism in its full breadth. In that way one may perceive commonalities more clearly and supposed or actual particularities may be more easily attributed" (Brecht 5).

In my comparative work on the English and German components of Pietism, I will make use of this broader definition of Pietism, but retain the common distinction of Puritanism and Pietism to denote the geographical and cultural differences of two nearly identical spiritual phenomena.

There are, then, mainly three ways to account for the rise of Pietism in Germany, and the movement of spiritual revival in general to which the devotional literature and the evangelizing efforts of the seventeenth century in both England and Germany testify. One, as already mentioned, is Leube’s eschatological expectation (Endzeiterwartung) toward the end of the 17th century, yet this factor is less central to the Puritan/Pietist hermeneutic than may be assumed. Two other elements, one largely confined to the continent, the

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23 It is no accident that this doctrine is the central focus of Spener (Schmidt AGP 2: 171). He was worried that the mere forensic understanding of justification by faith without emphasis on the consequent implications of conversion could deceive many people (ibid.172).

24 "Die Umstrittenheit des Gegenstandes und die Begründung der vorliegenden Konzeption" in Geschichte des Pietismus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck &Ruprecht, 1994) 3ff.

25 "Die Anfänge des Pietismus und damit die Protestantische Kirchengeschichte des 17ten Jahrhunderts werden eigentlich erst verstehbar, wenn man den Pietismus sofort in seiner ganzen Breite erfaßt. Auf diese Weise lassen sich Gemeinsamkeiten schärfer erkennen und angebliche oder tatsächliche Sondererscheinungen leichter einordnen” (Brecht 5).
other international, seem more likely to have contributed to the rise of Pietism: first, the consequences of the Thirty Years War (1618-48), and second, the break-up of the geocentric cosmology which had served as the scientific foundation of the previous centuries.

Most historians of German Pietism agree that the ravages of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1638) contributed to the rise of renewed piety (Beyreuther 34 ff.; Brecht 1: 114 ff.; Stoeffler Rise of Evangelical Pietism 180 ff.). The war infused into the participating nations a great abhorrence of politicized religion. More importantly, however, the gruesome aftermath of the war caused a renewed hunger for a personal religion.

Pestilence and poverty, which rapidly depopulated vast areas of Germany, together with marauding bands of unemployed soldiers and bandits, which terrorized the already ravaged German territories, caused a thirst for meaning in life which mere external religion was unable to provide. Moreover, the moral fiber of Germany was all but destroyed. Regard for human life was very low, and a good argument can be made that in the absence of a biblical hermeneutic, religion reverted to a mix of superstition and folklore, a deadly mixture as the witch-hunts proved (Stoeffler 182). All these events awakened a longing for something that could give meaning in the midst of adversity, a religion which could offer peace and harmony. In the words of Beyreuther: “man hungerte nach inniger und das ganze Leben erfüllender und umwerfender Nähe des lebendigen Gottes” (Geschichte des Pietismus 34).

The second important factor in assessing the rise of German Pietism is the breakup of the Ptolemaic cosmology through the discoveries of Kepler and Galileo. This major paradigm shift produced philosophical as well as theological efforts to reconcile the rigid confessionalism of the state churches with the discoveries of science. It was perhaps the unwillingness of Lutheranism seriously to re-examine the biblical text in light of the new
discoveries, and its inability to see beyond too narrowly formulated creeds, that made Christian scientists like Kepler search the book of nature through the lens of science in opposition to the confessions of the church, in order to find knowledge about God.\textsuperscript{26}

Thus one important factor in the resurgence of practical piety was the great struggle to unite traditional hermeneutics with the new insights of science. Yet contrary to a common misconception, there was no initial conflict between faith and science. In fact, the framework of a created universe provided the incentive to “think God’s thoughts after him” in the exploration of the book of nature. As one scholar of Pietism points out, many of the revolutionary scientific discoveries were made by devout Protestants: “As if the evangelical faith necessarily required an outdated worldview or incorrect or underdeveloped insights! The confrontation between Johann Kepler, this deeply pious Protestant, with the orthodox Protestants, already heralds the intellectual failing of that kind of theologians” (Leube\textit{ Orthodoxie und Pietismus} 111).\textsuperscript{27}

There is even evidence that many Reformed theologians, in contrast to their theological ancestor Calvin,\textsuperscript{28} had relatively little trouble with the emerging cosmology.

\textsuperscript{26} Hans Beyreuther cites Kepler as an example of this tendency: “Der jüngere Zeitgenosse Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) vermochte bereits nicht mehr die jeweils zentrale Formulierung der christlichen Wahrheit durch die drei großen Konfessionen nachzuvollziehen. Er zog sich auf das Buch der Natur zurück und faßte seine Arbeit als Astronom und Priesterdienst auf. Der Mensch, nach Gottes Bild geschaffen, denkt in der Naturwissenschaft Gottes Schöpfungsgedanken nach” (35).

\textsuperscript{27} “Als ob der evangelische Glaube mit einem alten Weltbild und falschen oder unentwickelten Erkenntnissen verbunden sein müßte! In dem Zusammenstoß Johann Keplers, dieses tief frommen Protestanten, mit den orthodoxen Protestanten kündigt sich bereits das geistige Versagen jenes Theologengeschlechts an.” It should be noted that there was no necessary conflict between science and the biblical text, but rather between the perceived interpretation of the Genesis account as demanded by Lutheran and Roman Catholic confessions and scientific discovery.

\textsuperscript{28} William J. Bouwsma states that “[Calvin] also followed the traditional scheme in its movement from sight, through the study of the heavens, to a grasp of the divine order governing the universe; and this order remained for him that of the old astronomy. Whether he thought that, to be appreciated as a manifestation of God’s wisdom, the universe must be intelligible, or because he associated infinity with God, he insisted on the finiteness of the universe. ‘However widely the circuit of the heavens extends, ‘he wrote, ‘it still has some limit.’ He opposed Copernicanism, warning his followers against those who asserted ‘that the sun does not move and that it is the earth that moves and turns.’ Such persons were motivated by ‘a spirit of bitterness, contradiction, and faultfinding’: possessed by the devil, they aimed ‘to pervert the order of nature.’” \textit{John Calvin A Sixteenth Century Portrait} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 72.
The Puritan William Bates, for example, writes in 1680: “Some modern philosophers have argued, that the earth is a planet: but whether the earth or the sun be the center of the world, the structure of it is not less admirable, nor the commerce of its parts less regular, nor less convincing that a most wise author framed it” (1: 5 A3). Bates is willing to give up a preferred and traditional interpretation of the cosmos, as long as the new one is still in accord with the biblical account of a created universe.

It is this flexibility and willingness to review one’s position which shows the superiority of some Puritan divinity over the confessionalism of the state churches in the seventeenth century and also the fundamentalism of our own day. It may well be that this ability to grow with a revised cosmology has its cause in the greater acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty and otherness by Puritan theologians than is found in their Lutheran counterparts.

In other words, where in-depth knowledge of the biblical text was coupled with the realization that the Bible is not a scientific encyclopedia, theologians saw no real threat to their hermeneutic in the new discoveries. The German Lutheran church, by entrenching itself as a whole against the new cosmology, left its lay-members to fend for themselves in coming to terms with the increasingly influential new discoveries. Ironically, the Reformation principle of sola scriptura may well have fostered a spirit of interpretative individualism directed against the unreasonable demand for the rigid confessionalism many pastors demanded from their congregation. Confessional rifts and the inherent Erastianism of Lutheran ecclesiology29 had impeded the education of the laity as Luther had

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envisioned it. This task was reserved for the efforts of Pietism. Meanwhile, without hermeneutical guidance on the one hand, and the desire to make sense of the irresistibly emerging new discoveries on the other, the laity was left to its own resources to work out a view of reality.

The vacuum left by the ravages of the war, empty confessionalism and the struggle to uphold a Bible-centered hermeneutic in light of the new science was filled by two religious currents. The first is an illuminist or radical pietism represented by the pansophism of Jacob Böhme (1575-1624). This first phase of spiritual revival was followed by a more moderate or biblical Pietism based on Reformed doctrine as expressed by Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) and his followers.

Radical Pietism is akin to the inspirationalists Owen had warned against. It seems that the theological efforts of these 17th-century German enthusiasts (Schwarmer as they were called) were determined by two main themes. One was the effort to harmonize science and theology, the other to formulate a theology which placed greater emphasis on ethical application than on doctrine. It is true that the same goals also informed the agenda of the more moderate Spenerian Pietists. But while their efforts were rooted in Bible-centered hermeneutic, the conviction of the radicals that new theological insights may be gained through extra-biblical illumination led to theological hypotheses not corroborated by the biblical text itself. Central to these new philosophies was their derivation not from the Bible, but rather from direct, inner revelation, so that despite their ample proofexting from the Scripture, radical Pietism was the precursor of later anthropocentric approaches to hermeneutics.

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30 Martin Brecht confirms this view: "Luthers Konzeption vom tätigen Glauben wurde an der Herzenshärte des breiten Kirchenvolkes zuschanden...Luther war derartig frustriert, daß er Anfang 1530 in den Predigtstreik trat: 'Ich mag solcher Säue nicht Hirt sein'" (1: 117; italics mine).
5.3.1. The Hermeneutics of the Inner Light

Time does not allow a detailed description of the main figures of radical Pietism, but one who has remained influential to our day must be mentioned, for he combines sincere piety with non-biblical theology: the German mystic and theosophist Jacob Böhme (1575-1624). His writings are an example of the struggle to harmonize Christian cosmology with the new sciences. The title of Böhme’s seminal work Morgenröthe im Aufbruch (1612), reflects his notion that a new teaching must be found to combine theology, philosophy and natural science. The new dawn has come with his “philosophia,” a universal theosophy and description of a cosmic Christianity (Morgenröthe 2).

A renewed interest in the “book of nature” revealed how vast the universe actually was, and how infinitesimal and insignificant humanity looked in comparison to the cosmos. The attempt of the natural sciences to break out of their theological dependency was resisted by pansophic theorists. In contrast to science, these writers did not explore possible mechanistic causes of existence, but rather sought after the dynamic which lay behind the surface of causality (Beyreuther 22). These speculations were executed within the former framework of a created universe. But the source of knowledge was no longer the book of revelation, but increasingly the book of nature from which former revelational teachings were justified and modified.

Jacob Böhme combines the teachings of two important theosophists. Of tremendous influence on Böhme, and on this area of thought in general, were the writings of doctor, natural scientist, philosopher and lay-theologian Theophrast Bombast von Hohenheim (1494-1541), generally referred to as Paracelsus. He coined the expression that human beings were a microcosm which reflects the macrocosm of the entire universe, a concept which we will meet with again in Schleiermacher’s writings. This concept of micro/macrocosm was connected to a neo-platonic division of the human ontology into a
spiritual and a physical body, which had largely been avoided by Lutheran and Reformed theology in its insistence on the Old Testament view of the human person as a holistic entity. Jacob Böhme was familiar with the works of Paracelsus and his writings are shot through with the alchemistic illustrations and vocabulary borrowed from their literature.

The second major influence on Böhme was the theologian Kaspar Schwenkfeld von Ossig (1489-1561) whose Christology and sacramental theology were adopted by Böhme (Stoudt 150-152). Böhme used Schwenkfeld’s teaching on the Eucharist as a model for his pansophic speculations: “In the hands of [Böhme] the doctrine of divine ubiquity became the foundation of an irenic mysticism which made qualitative variety the complement of the One” (Weeks 175). Thus for Böhme all things emanate from God. Using Schwenkfeld’s substantial salvation, whereby the believer actually receives the mystical body of Christ, Böhme declares that the one who is regenerate is capable of looking into all the secrets of nature. This anthropocentric hermeneutic attempted to provide a comprehensive view of reality (Zentralschau), which was derived from a subjective experience or vision.

The anthropocentric turn within the former Augustinian framework is demonstrated by the opening lines of Böhme’s treatise The Way to Christ:

The whole Christian religion consists in this: [firstly] that we learn to know ourselves, what we are, whence we have come, how we have gone from unity into disunity, evil and unrighteousness that we have awakened in ourselves; secondly, where we were in unity when we were the children of God; thirdly how we now are in disunity, in strife and antagonism; fourthly, where we are to go out of this fragile life (being); where we wish to go both with the immortal and with the mortal. In these four points consists our whole religion. (2; italics mine)

Böhme still insists on self-knowledge, but the theocentric component of the hermeneutical circle is missing. Knowledge about ourselves is no longer derived from Scriptures as God’s revelation, but from within.
Finally, Böhme claims originality for his thought, which is not derived from revelation, but was written by God directly into his mind: “Because I do not take my writing nor my book from other masters. And even though I cite an equal amount of examples and testimonies of the Holy Ghost in them, all these things are written into my mind by God so that I believe, recognize, and see it without doubt, not in the flesh, but in the spirit, under the driving and wallowing of God” (Aurora 80). Böhme’s idea that the non-cognitive, unmediated nature of knowledge guarantees its verity and value is typical for the subjectivist hermeneutics of radical Pietism. Also typical is Böhme’s insistence that the indwelling of God in the believer renders the external written revelation obsolete. Böhme regards the person indwelt by God as a complete book of revelation:

Had I no other book than the one I am myself, I have books enough; because the entire Bible lies within myself if I have the Spirit of Christ. What need have I of other books? Should I fight against what is external before I have not learned what is within myself? (Aurora 11-12; italics mine)

When I read myself, I read in God’s book and you my brothers are all of my letters which I read within myself; Because my spirit and my will find you inside of me: I desire from the bottom of my heart that you will find me also. (ibid. 24)

We may observe here not only Böhme’s perceived freedom from biblical revelation, but also his idea that all of humanity is somehow spiritually interconnected, a concept which also re-appears in Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic.
An important corollary of Böhme's insistence that extra-biblically-derived theosophy is superior to biblical theology is his idea of a hidden spiritual meaning behind the letter of Scripture, a meaning which only inner revelation can explain. According to Böhme, orthodox theologians don't understand the language of the Spirit ("die sensualische Sprache") in which the Scripture is written. Böhme denounces Lutheran theologians for their inclination to the historical and literal meaning of the word. They, claims Böhme, take the plain meaning as the real signification, instead of perceiving the actual spiritual message (Aurora 34).

Although Böhme's insistence on the Spiritual sense is expressed in the traditional vocabulary of illumination which was also used by Owen, there is a crucial difference. For Owen, the Spirit merely attests to the propositionally correct meaning already expressed clearly in the word. He does not speak of a difference between Spirit and letter in the sense that one conveys a different meaning than the other. As Calvin had already pointed out, the contrast of letter and spirit does not refer to meaning at all, but to the inability of the reader to achieve true experiential knowledge of God by trying to obtain communion with God through human effort. The letter-Spirit opposition does not refer to exegesis as much as it does to the practical application of a text whose content is clearly expressed.

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34 In his comment on the crucial passage regarding the Letter-Spirit opposition 2Cor. 3:6 Calvin notes: "This passage was mistakenly perverted, first by Origen, and afterwards by others, to a spurious signification. From this arose a very pernicious error - that of imagining that the perusal of Scripture would be not merely useless, but even dangerous, unless it were drawn out into allegories. This error was the source of many evils....In consequence of this, too, heretics had it more in their power to trouble the Church; for as it had become a general practice to make any passage mean anything that one might choose, there was no frenzy so absurd or monstrous, as not to admit of being brought forward under some pretext of allegory...the meaning of the passage, however, is as follows - that, if the word of God is simply uttered with the mouth, it is an occasion of death, and that it is life-giving, only when it is received with the heart. The terms letter and spirit, therefore, do not refer to the exposition of the word, but to its influence and fruit. Why it is that the doctrine merely strikes upon the ear, without reaching the heart, we shall see presently" (Commentaries XX 175; italics mine).
Böhme, however, introduces a contradiction between Spirit and letter which is foreign to Reformed and Lutheran theology. He extends the spirit-letter dichotomy also to the book of nature and the reading of history: “for the mystic, Historia und Buchstabe are extraneous to the human existence that is the subject of faith” (Weeks 179). Böhme thus introduces a gnosticism by appealing to a hidden meaning, behind the surface of written revelation, just as he had suggested such a hidden insight for the interpretation of God’s works.

The immediate problem with inspirationalism is its verification. As one scholar remarks about Böhme’s subjectivism, “If dogma is newly created by the individual born-again Christian, then its actual value consists in the unique content each individual lends to his teaching” (Elert Die Voluntaristische Mystik Jacob Böhmes 34). It is precisely the content which is in question. Böhme believes, for example, that ethical norms are written into the book of nature: “Because the law to do right is written into nature and you have the same book in your heart” (Aurora 163). According to this law neighborly love would be understood by all religions as a universal law, if only they read nature correctly (ibid.). The problem is, however, that Böhme projects his Christian background onto his reading of the book of nature. He thus exemplifies the procedure so typical for the anthropocentric turn in Western history which upholds biblical values while eroding the authority of the Scriptures from whence they are derived.

35 Erich Beyreuther confirms this: “Böhme steht nicht mehr auf der Linie Luthers und dessen Schriftverständniß.....Für seine Erkenntnisse beruht er sich auf jenen letzten heimlichen Sinn der Schrift, der sich hinter ihrem groben buchstäblichen Kleid verbirgt....Bei Böhme gibt es eine ständig neue Selbstopenbarung Gottes. Das Lauschen auf diese gegenwärtige Offenbarung, die gegenwärtige Inspiration der Frommen durch die prophetisch-mystische Erkenntnis ist bei Böhme der neue Tön, die Loslösung von einer nur äußerlich bindenden Autorität der Schrift....So ist Jakob Böhme zum Vater des schwärmersischen, des radikalen Pietismus geworden” (26-27).
36 “Wird [die Kirchenlehre] vom wiedergeborenen Christen selbsttätig neu geschaffen, so liegt der eigentliche Wert doch in dem originellen Gehalt den der einzelne der Lehre gibt.”
37 “Denn das Gesetz, recht zu tun, ist in die Natur geschrieben und du hast dasselbe Buch in deinem Herzen.”
Böhme's pansophism was quickly disseminated into England, where his writings were translated by well educated members of the higher society almost as soon as they had appeared in the original (Hutin 38).\(^{38}\) According to one scholar, these writings were debated at the universities and triggered many sects from within the Church of England: the Behmenists (which later became the Philadelphians), the familists, the seekers, Ranters and many more (Hutin 48).\(^{39}\)

The theosophical speculations on the continent did not escape the attention of the Puritans. In his *Reformed Pastor*, Richard Baxter writes vehemently against these lay-theologians. The danger of these men, according to Baxter, is that their insights were based on their own reason, yet they peddle it as theology. True theology, however must be conducted according to revelation and in communion with the divine, and not in the fashion of "Paracelsian Behmenists," who "spin them a religion of their own inventions" (*The Reformed Pastor*: PWRB 4: 425).

Thus in an attempt to find a theology which harmonized confessional and cosmological differences, radical Pietism turned to natural philosophy and medieval mysticism. The church's unyielding adherence to an increasingly outdated cosmology opened the door for private speculation among the dissatisfied. The result was a turn to

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\(^{38}\) A 1752 edition of an introductory work to facilitate the acceptance of a new edition of Böhme's work shows how popular these writings were. This work by William Law is titled: *A Way To Divine Knowledge: Being Several Dialogues Between Humaus, Academicus, Rusticus, and Theophilus*. Theophilus is a spokesperson for the Böhmian system, which is propagated as a pansophic alternative to revelation. One brief sample must suffice to show that Böhme diverged from orthodox teaching. Theophilus: "Now suppose you knew no more of what God is in himself, distinct from Nature, and what Nature is as thus distinguished from God, than is already opened in you, you would know enough to be a key to all that which Jacob Behmen speaks of God, and of Nature; and enough also to show you how to cooperate with God and Nature, in bringing forth a New Birth of the Divine Life within you" (198; italics mine). Thus it seems that Pelagianism was a natural concomitant of Böhme's anthropocentrism.

\(^{39}\) Interestingly, the English followers of Böhme regarded his system less as a speculative philosophy than as a way to salvation. Hutin writes: "Il est à remarquer combien Edward Taylor, comme beaucoup d'autres admirateurs de Boehme, voit dans la theosophie de ce dernier moins une possibility de connaissance metaphysique que l'indication de la véritable 'voie' que doit suivre l'âme humaine pour être sauvée" (45).
the inner self, a virtual rejection of written revelation, the letter, in favor of the inner subjective Spirit. It is natural that this development was accompanied by Pelagian tendencies, because the Calvinistic doctrine of a fallen will, and its insistence that knowledge of God and the self can only occur through the Word, represents an inconvenient obstacle to the anthropocentrically oriented theosophy.

5.4. Philipp Jakob Spener

True Theology or Christianity does not consist in mere science, not in words alone, not in the external profession of doctrine and the name of Christ, not in sophistical questions and answers but in the power of the Holy Spirit and true practice, in the living experience of Christlikeness and of a virtuous life (Spener, Die allgemeine Gottesgelehrtheit 1680).

The radical phase of theosophy with its claims to direct divine inspiration was followed by a more moderate movement originating with Philipp Spener. In contrast to the rather contemplative and speculative theosophists, Spener's program was characterized by a constant appeal to Scripture as the revealed will of God according to which German society must be reformed. Spener's strength lies not in original thinking but in an application of already established doctrine, that is, in a social activism based on the example of Christ.

5.4.1. Personal Background

Philipp Jakob Spener was born on January 13, 1635 into a devout household where the Bible and Arndt's Das Wahre Christentum belonged to the literary diet. The death of his family's noble benefactress Agatha von Rappoldstein, in 1648, which

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40 Die wahre Theologia oder Christentum besteht nicht in der blossen wissenschaft, nicht allein in worten, nicht in der äusserlichen bekenntnüß der lehre und names Christi, nicht in subtilen fragen und reden, sondern in der kraft im geist und wahrer praxi, in lebendiger erfahrung in der gleichförmigkeit mit Christo und tugendreichem leben (Spener, Die allgemeine Gottesgelehrtheit 1680).
coincided with the end of the Thirty Years War, triggered the first serious wrestling with religious questions in the thirteen year old Spener (Stoeffler REP 228).

In 1651, Spener matriculated at the University of Strasbourg. After taking his master of Arts degree, he commenced the study of theology. One of his most influential teachers at that time was Conrad Dannhauer (1603-1666), an orthodox Lutheran theologian who defended Arndt’s writings against accusations from other orthodox colleagues, and who was in favor of reform along pietistic lines (Stoeffler REP 210). In 1663 Spener concluded his education with a doctorate in theology. Stoeffler points out that during the time of his studies and lecturing activities at the university, Spener wrote his Soliloquia et meditationes sacrae, “which constitutes a remarkable combination of Arndtian mysticism and Puritan attention to the details of daily piety” (ibid. 229).

Spener manifested early an amazing intellect and capacity for learning. He easily learned Latin, Greek and Hebrew, in which he was conversant; studied Arabic and the Talmud, spoke French and could at least read English (Burns 20). His superb education, extensive travels and contacts in high places were advantages he coupled with great native ability, honesty, and a universally acknowledged piety. He rose quickly within the ecclesiastical ranks and in time became the leading pastor of Germany.

Spener’s career was marked by an attempt to encourage all practical Christianity and to avoid ecclesiastical controversies as far as he could. Spener greatly encouraged the general and theological education of the laity, instituted social services for the poor, widows and orphans, called for a remodeling of the family according to biblical standards, and above all, spent great energy in advocating a practical Christianity where works of love would flow from a genuine dialogue with the divine (Burns 44 ff). In short, Spener tried to live and implement the very program for reform he had advocated in the work that gained him instant popularity, the Pia Desideria.
It is also significant that Spener's ideas were partly formed by the reading of English Puritan literature. He confesses to have been deeply influenced by Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Piety*, and Immanuel Sonthom's *Golden Gem*. He was also familiar with the writings of Richard Baxter and Jeremia Duke (REP 231). While he mostly adhered to Lutheran theology, Spener's contact with Reformed circles on his travels clearly shows in his writings. As Stoeffler confirms, "[that] the piety which he advocated has a Reformed cast could hardly be doubted by anyone acquainted with Reformed Pietism." Along with the Puritans, Spener saw the essence of Christianity in a personal relationship to God expressed through living according to His will (Der Neue Mensch 31-40).

### 5.4.2. Main Sources and Influences of Spener's Pietism

The Pietism of Spener does not stem from the theosophical root of the Böhmian kind, but was influenced by a more biblically oriented hermeneutic within the Lutheran church. Besides Martin Luther's writings, three main sources of influence formed Spener's thought. The first was the Lutheran Pastor Johann Arndt (1555-1621) the author of the famous *Das wahre Christentum*, a treatise directed against nominal Christianity.\(^{41}\)

Although Arndt had affinities with Paracelcism (Brecht 1: 132), and formulated his theology out of a desire to meet the challenges of the perceived rift between theology and science, Arndt's Pietism is different from that of the theosophists. His mysticism doesn't lose touch with the objective guidelines of Scripture, and he advocates almost all the teachings which were to become the doctrines of Spener a hundred years later. Neither

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\(^{41}\) Scholars have identified Arndt as the actual father of Lutheran Pietism, a role popularly attributed to Spener (Stoeffler REP 202).
Spener nor Francke followed Arndt insofar as he engaged in his naturalist-philosophical speculations.  

The second major influence on Spener was the theology of Jean de Labadie (1610-1674). De Labadie was a convert from Roman Catholicism who finally settled as a preacher in Geneva. His engaging sermons attracted a great number of souls unsatisfied with the condition of the institutionalized church. Also among those listeners was Spener, who participated in the conventicles held mostly in Labadie’s house (Brecht 1: 100).

Spener would later pattern his collegium pietatis, a Bible-study group, after the pattern established by Labadie. Yet Labadie’s influence on Spener should not be overestimated. Spener was most impressed by the practical piety of the French pastor but did not follow his separatist or mystical tendencies. Spener’s ‘mysticism’ was closer to that of Arndt, who emphasized the practical-ethical application of the human-divine dialogue, rather than to any mystic contemplation of the divine.

A third important influence on Spener was the Lutheran orthodox theologian Johannes Conrad Dannhauer (1603-1666). Dannhauer was one of those Lutheran theologians who drew on Arndt’s suggestions to commence with a self-critical examination of the Lutheran church. Dannhauer first encouraged Spener to a careful reading of Luther’s works. In a way Dannhauer was not only his teacher, but also Spener’s spiritual father, because he first taught Spener to think of salvation as a gift of God which was realized already in the present and not merely in the future life. Dannhauer made Spener aware of the need for lay education in the church and suggested the use of the vernacular, rather than Latin, in theological education. It was also from Dannhauer that Spener learned the casuistical treatment of ethics (Tappert 10).

42 The fourth book in Arndt’s Das Wahre Christentum presents a Paracelcian cosmology and naturalism, but neither Spener nor Francke found any use for this part of the text (Beyreuther 75).

43 Grondin implies a tie between Dannhauer and Cartesian Rationalism (IPH 47-50), but in light of Dannhauer’s strong sympathies with Pietism and biblically based realism, such a connection is
5.4.3. The Theology of Spener's Pietism

Besides the three important figures who influenced Spener's views, Johannes Arndt, Jean de Labadie and Conrad Dannhauer, Spener was most of all a follower of Luther. Spener affirms his allegiance to Luther at every turn (Pia Desideria 22, 24, Vom Lesen Der Schrift 6, 13 etc). His emphasis on rebirth is also taken from Luther, but also to a great extent from the teaching of Arndt's Das wahre Christentum to which Spener's first famous work Pia Desideria constituted the preface. As a student of Dannhauer (1603-1666), Spener self-consciously remained a Lutheran; his theology and hermeneutics were developed within a Lutheran framework (Brecht 373).

Like the academic Lutheran theologians, Spener objected to the distinction between theology and faith which had just begun to appear in England and Germany, with the influence of Herbert of Cherbury, Descartes, Spinoza, and Locke, whose writings became very quickly part of German university education (Leube 46). The distinction between dogmatics (the objective revelation) and subjective faith which Schleiermacher was to employ, is foreign to Spener. For Spener as for the Puritans, right living must be based on right doctrine.

Although he was very familiar with Luther's writings, the fathers, and church history in general, Spener wasn't an academic theologian. Spener never really systematized his thought. Such a lack is not surprising if we consider that Spener relied on Luther's teaching and the formulations of Lutheran orthodoxy without adding original

questionable. Cartesianism usually reconstructs all knowledge from the subjective human self and cannot solve the problem of solipsism. Dannhauer's world view, however, always balances subjective experience against the objective truth of divine revelation.

44 The most recent, and probably best account of Spener and his theology is given by the Lutheran scholar Martin Brecht in volume one of Geschichte des Pietismus. I am indebted in the following account to his assessment of Spener's theology.
material, because he was in full agreement with the doctrinal positions taken by orthodox theologians. Spener's interests were above all pastoral, not theoretical.

The textual material from which one may draw Spener's theology comprises his large collection of sermons "Die Evangelische Glaubenslehre" (1688), "Die Evangelischen Lebenspflichten" (1692) and "Der Evangelische Glaubenstrost (1695). In addition he wrote exegetical or thematic series of sermons and single sermons about rebirth. Spener also re-issued Arndt's True Christianity, and The Hope for Better Times or the True Justice with notes in which Spener stated his position on individual components of Arndt's teachings.

After two years of preparation Spener began to publish a series of "Theologischen Bedencken und anderen brieflichen Antworten auf geistliche, sonderlich zur Erbauung gerichtete Materien" (Brecht 371). In these writings Spener's strong emphasis on ethical concerns becomes evident. But of special interest is Spener's preface to dogmatic charts of his teacher Dannhauer entitled: "Von den Hindernissen des Theologiestudiums." Here Spener clearly expresses his skepticism towards Aristotelian scholasticism and abstract metaphysics. He also shows his disdain of Descartes' philosophy because of its anthropocentrism (Brecht 372).

In the hierarchy of theological disciplines, Spener placed biblical-exegetical theology first, because he regarded the Scriptures as the foundation of all spiritual and moral knowledge. This foundation makes Spener's Pietism just as biblicist as that of the English Puritans and explains the vehement clash between these pietistic movements and the beginning biblical criticism of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

Yet Spener's writings nowhere convey the impression that he regards systematic theology as useless. What he does advocate tirelessly, however, is the connection of theology to spiritual experience and practical application. Theology cannot be divorced
from its confessional character (Spener, *Das Lesen der Schrift* 39). Spener was convinced that growing atheism could not be fought with scholastic distinctions alone, but must be confronted with the clear and uncompromising teaching of the Bible and a living faith (Brecht 374).

The theological center of Spener's thought is the classic Protestant doctrine of justification through grace by faith alone together with its practical implications for the convert (Schmidt AGP 2:174-175). Accusations by twentieth-century Lutheran scholarship that Spener neglects the forensic character of justification in favor of ethics and casuistry (practical application of doctrine), an accusation that German Lutheran scholars often level against Puritanism as well, are unfounded (Brecht 24). Spener, in fact, is more true to the Lutheran Spirit than the modern Lutheran scholar Schmidt. After all, Luther himself often spoke of the necessary consequence of justification, namely the new nature of the convert which cannot but strive to live according to God's moral law. Spener merely emphasizes the practical over the theoretical side, because much like the older Luther, he saw the discrepancy between confession and commitment in committed Christians, and their consequent failure to advance the Reformation.

It is not by accident that Pietist writers commonly referred to Luther's preface to his commentary on

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45 According to Luther's foreword to the epistle to the Romans faith is a work of God that kills the old Adam and gives birth to the new human being ("den Menschen neu gebiert") and gives new life "ein lebendig, schaffig, tüchtig Ding" which cannot but desire conformity to God's law (also quoted in Brecht 117).

46 Martin Brecht states that "Luther's concept of practical faith [tätigen Glauben] was shattered by the hard-heartedness of the majority of German church-goers." In 1529 he realized that even his Wittenberg community did not do good works as demanded in the scriptures. Besides the general lack of moral improvement, this regress manifested itself in the selfish abuse of Christian liberty, in the reluctance to support pastors financially, and in neglecting acts of neighbourly love. Luther was so frustrated in 1530 that he refused to preach, stating: "Ich mag solcher Säue nicht Hirt seyn" (Brecht 117).
Romans (contained in every edition of the Luther Bible) for its symbiotic portrayal of faith and works.\(^{47}\)

Thus rather than shifting the emphasis of Luther from justification to sanctification, Spener reinstates the balance between these two elements already taught by Luther. As Stoeffler points out, Lutheran orthodoxy tended to overemphasize the forensic character of justification in order to ward off any theological threat smelling of Pelagianism (Rise of Evangelical Pietism 184). This resulted in a "pronounced ethical insensitivity, a deficiency which never developed to the same degree within the Protestant churches of Calvinistic origin" (ibid.). According to Stoeffler, the Reformed, however, have kept the balance between faith and works. If this assessment is correct, and there is no reason to doubt its validity, it would explain why Spener and Francke both received so many impulses from the reading of English devotional literature, all of which was in the Calvinist tradition.

However, as for the Puritans, the greatest source of Spener's theology was the Bible itself. We must therefore turn to his view of the Scriptures to demonstrate further his agreement with the Puritan hermeneutic.

5.4.4. Spener and the Scriptures

The dominant desire in Spener's life, one that he shares with the Puritans, is to disseminate God's word. For Spener, as for Puritan pastors, the effort of reforming is thus primarily a textual and hermeneutical work. This focus, Spener claims, is nothing new but rather a continuation of Luther's work, who reinstated the priesthood of all believers and yearned for the biblical education of the laity (Pia Desideria 91-92).\(^{48}\) Because the Bible

\(^{47}\) "Hence it comes that faith alone makes righteous and fulfils the law; for out of Christ's merit, it brings the Spirit, and the Spirit makes the heart glad and free, as the law requires that it shall be. Thus good works come out of faith" (Luther Commentary on Romans, xv).

\(^{48}\) "Nobody can read Luther's writings carefully without observing how earnestly the sainted man advocated this spiritual priesthood, according to which not only ministers but all Christians are made priests by their Saviour, are anointed by the Holy Spirit, and are dedicated to perform spiritual-priestly
is God's infallible and inspired Word, it must be the chief source of reformation. Like the
Puritans, Spener believed that the written word is the seed of faith, and that lives are
changed by the impact of this text on its readers:

This much is certain: the diligent use of the Word of God, which consists not only
of listening to sermons but also of reading, meditating, and discussing (Ps. 1:2),
must be the chief means for reforming something, whether it occurs in the
proposed fashion or in some other appropriate way. The Word of God remains
the seed from which all that is good in us must grow. If we succeed in getting the
people to seek eagerly and diligently in the book of life for their joy, their spiritual
life will be wonderfully strengthened and they will become altogether different
people (Pia Desideria 91).

The clearest description of Spener's biblical hermeneutic is contained in a little
treatise called Das notige und nützliche Lesen der Heiligen Schrift (1704). In this work
Spener aligns himself with Luther and his desire to make the Bible accessible to the laity,
something which the Roman Catholic church had neglected to do. "Therefore he who
does not most diligently study the holy Scripture and also drives others to do the same,
and who truly seeks his enlightenment by this light, is not a true student of Luther and
does not possess the mark of evangelical religion as it differentiates itself from most other
[faiths]" 49 (33). It is the biblical text itself that God uses to work and strengthen faith in
the reader; thus it is this special book that needs to get into the hands of the public (25).

Spener prefaced his hermeneutical rules with a short defense, explaining why such
rules are necessary if the Bible is as perspicuous as the Protestants claim:

One might want to object to [hermeneutical rules] that we ourselves teach in
opposition to the Roman Catholics the perspicuity of the holy Scriptures, and that

acts....What did our sainted Luther seek more ardently than to induce the people to a diligent reading of
the Scriptures?" (Pia Desideria 91).

49 "Daher ist derjenige kein wahrhaftiger Schüler Lutheri und hat nicht das Kennzeichen der
evangelischen Religion, wie sie von andern meisten sich unterscheidet, der nicht am fleissigsten sowohl
auch andre zu der heiligen Schrift antreibt/als sich selbst darinnen übet, und seine Erleuchtung
wahrhaftig bey diesem liecht sucht."
therefore no more than mediocre diligence and attention are needed for understanding them. Answer: We do indeed profess such clarity of the Scripture, and thank God for such a blessing...but we must be careful to understand correctly the manner of this clarity. (44-45)

The entire treatise can be regarded as an effort to explain the notion of a perspicuous text. Spener’s view of the text, its perspicuity and how it should be read evince the same effort to maintain a balance between subjective impression and objective revelation as we observed in the Puritan approach to the Bible. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, Pietism is often seen as an anti-intellectual and subjectivist movement. However, a close look at Spener’s views about the nature and function of the biblical text should put to rest any notions of his piety as an overly subjective phenomenon.

In order to assess Spener’s biblical hermeneutic, it is best to proceed from the function of biblical revelation (supplement to natural theology) to his idea about the text’s nature (divine inspiration) and thus to end with Spener’s strategy for an edifying hermeneutic (illumination and application).

5.4.5. Spener and Natural Revelation

Although I could not find a detailed treatise by Spener on the subject of natural theology, isolated statements in various treatises lead me to conclude that the Bible serves the same function for Spener as it did for the Puritans in the Calvinistic epistemological

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50 "Man möchte zwar hiergegen einwenden wir lehrten ja selbst gegen das Papstum daß die heilige Schrift deutlich und klar sey, dahero zu dero verstandnüss nicht mehr als ein mittelmäßiger fleiss und acht geben könne gefordert werden. Antwort: Wir erkennen freilich solche klarheit der Schrift, und danken Gott auch für solche wohltat, ...aber wir müssen auch dabey die art solcher klarheit recht verstehen" (43-44).

51 As Manfred Schmidt points out in his essay Philip Jacob Spener und die Bibel, Spener's view of Scripture was not a whit dimmer than that of Luther himself (AGP 9:27).
circle. First of all, Spener states that there is a light of nature (das natürliche liecht), whereby even heathens may deduce certain truths about God: “Thus the actual reason is this: because the holy Scripture mainly presents matters are of spiritual nature, and information about God, which cannot be gleaned from nature, but had to be given through divine revelation” (Lesen der Schrift 44).\textsuperscript{52}

Spener agrees with the Puritan belief that human reason may deduce some clues for the interpretation of human existence from natural revelation. The phrase contained in the prior quotation “What cannot be known about God from nature,” implies Spener’s basic agreement with the classic Protestant epistemology. Spener also agrees with the Puritan position that the human creature is, to repeat Baxter’s adage once more, an “index to the Godhead.” Spener suggests that the regenerated person should seek the presence of the divine by looking inward. Although the Puritans also suggested self-examination in searching for evidences of divine workings in their lives, Spener’s formulation adds an interesting dimension of inner and outer revelation.

Calvin’s and the Puritan hermeneutic suggest that knowledge of self is found through knowledge of God. This knowledge of God comes through the clear but insufficient book of nature, that is the works of God, and through the divinely inspired word. Spener, however, summarizes both these books as the outer revelation, and suggests to the believer that he look inside himself as a second way by which God makes his presence known:

\begin{quote}
We must, then, look for the Lord in two ways, outside ourselves, and within. Outside ourselves not only in nature and in the creatures / where his footprints are recognizable and bear witness that he is near to us; but also in his Word where he reveals himself / and which he uses as a means to move graciously into our hearts: In us, however, we have to look for him by paying attention to his gracious
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{52}“So ist nun eigentlich ursach diese, weil die h. Schrift dergleichen materien hauptsächlich vortraget/die zu dem geistlichen gehören, und was von Gott nicht aus der natur erkannt werden kann, sondern aus der göttlichen offenbahrung hat kommen müssen.”
presence, in which he reveals himself as a living and powerful being: This is no different than the air which is in and around us. We do not look for it elsewhere, or run after it, but we must simply recognize and feel its presence. (Der Friede Gottes 68)

It is perhaps from passages such as this that some scholars like Schmidt conclude that Spener has succumbed to the anthropocentric tendencies of his time. Admittedly, Spener’s vocabulary does sound at times more immanent and anthropocentric than transcendent and theocentric. In my view, however, Spener advocates a careful balance between objective revelation and subjective experience. After all, “Gnadengegenwarth” is nowhere used as a means to knowledge about God or the self, but rather as an indication of God’s presence. As we will see in Spener’s teaching on illumination, in accord with Puritan teaching, he rejects the inner light as doctrinal. Thus, in the context of Spener’s untiring effort to encourage the reading of Scripture and to emphasize the centrality of written revelation, all that may be said is that Spener’s writings contain certain tendencies toward anthropocentrism which may be explained as a counteraction against mere external profession of faith.

Spener’s concept of natural theology also reflects the Puritan concept that “all truth is God’s truth: (Sapientia Dei 9). “The fact that some divine truths are found in the

53 “also haben wir den Herrn auf zweyerley Art zu suchen, ausser uns und in uns. Ausser uns nicht nur in der Natur und in den Geschöpfen / da seine Fußstapfen kenntlich sind, und bezeigen daß er uns auch daselbst nahe sey; sondern auch in seinem Wort da er sich uns offenbahr / und solches zum Mittel gebraucht, bey uns in Gnaden einzuziehen: In uns aber haben wir ihn zu suchen, da wir auf seine Gnadengegenwarth, in der er sich als ein lebendiges und kräftiges Wesen erweiset, Achtung geben: Nicht anders als wir auch die Luft, die um und in uns ist, nicht anderwertig suchen noch weit nachlaufen dürfen, sondern nur deren Gegenwarth wahrnehmen und fühlen dürfen” (Der Friede Gottes 68).

54 The quote is obtained from Spener’s preface to Balthasar Keopke’s (1646-1711) treatise Sapientia Dei, in mysterio crucis Christi abscondita. Die wahre theologia mystica oder ascetica aller Gläubigen A.u N. Test. ...entgegengesetzt der falschen aus der heyndischen Philosophia Platonis und seiner Nachfolger (1700). The tract is a response to M. Bücher’s tract Plato mysticus in pietista revivus, containing accusations that Spener taught Platonic mysticism: “Wenn einige göttliche wahrheiten auch in den Mahometischen Alcoran oder Judischen Thalmud sich finden/wie sich dergleichen finden/muss solches wegen dieser ihren ihre autorität und glauben nichts benehmen.”
Koran or the Thalmud does not diminish their authority and trustworthiness...but it is rather a witness to the remnant of the divine law in the hearts of man, Rom. 2.15."

Yet despite the relative clarity of the *natürliche liecht*, Spener also teaches, like the Puritans, that natural revelation is not enough to lead its "reader" back into communion and dialogue with the divine. In fact, even the moral values derived from the light of nature by highly developed pagan cultures are ‘muddied’ because they lack a relational foundation in Christ (ibid.).

5.4.6. The Nature of the Word: Inspiration and Illumination

For Spener, it is the Bible, as clear revelation from God, which possesses all the necessary qualities for leading the reader back into a dialogical communion with the divine. In his view of the text’s origin, that is, its divine inspiration, Spener aligns himself with men like Luther, Calvin and the Puritans: “We recognize, believe and teach that the holy Apostles and other prophets and evangelists of the Old as well as of the New Testament were illuminatingly driven by the Holy Spirit in such a manner in their writings and teachings that their contents were free of any error, and that they did not teach, preach or write their own human word, but the divine word” (*Die Allgemeine Gottesgelehrtheit* 340-41).\(^{55}\)

However, like his Puritan predecessors, Spener does not hold a theory of mechanical dictation. Spener’s view of God’s sovereignty in creation and providence allows him to argue that God uses the natural faculties with which he endowed an individual in order to accomplish his purpose (*Natur und Gnade* 6). On the basis of this

\(^{55}\)"Wir erkennen glauben und lehren / daß die h. Apostel / und andere so Propheten deß Alten als Evangelisten deß neuen Testaments also von dem heiligen Geist in ihrem lehren und schreiben erleuchtent getrieben worden seyen/daß sie darinnen alles irrthums frey gewesen und nicht ihr eigen menschliches sondern das Göttliche wort gelehret gepredigt und geschrieben haben."
Spener suggests that the biblical authors were not emptied of their personal
and stylistic characteristics, but that God used those very peculiarities to convey his
message:

I agree, therefore, that the Holy Spirit, where he speaks through sanctified men of
God, and inspired them to speak and write, provided even the words, but in such a
way that each [writer] maintained his usual style, his way of reading and writing
(which varies in nature according to the personal qualities and genius so that one
may truthfully say that *sermo character animi*, discourse is a reflection and
indication of one’s character), yet [these personal qualities] were sanctified by the
Holy Spirit [so that] in this ideal way, the truth was most faithfully expressed.
These stylistic differences in the Scriptures are evident from the way in which the
style moves from lofty heights to less elevated expressions, from easily
comprehensible to more dark and difficult ones. In the New Testament [the style]
ranges from a much purer Greek which agrees more with other Greek authors, to
less linguistic gracefulfulness and purity. This difference cannot be from the Holy
Spirit, since he was the same in all [authors], and must hence derive from nature
which was not erased by inspiring grace but rather sanctified by it and greatly used
for its purpose. (*Natur und Gnade* 6)56

Spener, like the Puritan expositors before him, felt free to engage in text-critical
work, because he believed that an inspired text in no way obviates the need for
grammatical analysis. Constructive textual criticism, arrived at through stylistic and
linguistic analysis, will clarify the divine message. As Manfred Schmidt shows in his

56 "Wie daher nicht unbillig bemercket wird/ daß der heilige Geist / wo er durch die heilige menschen
Gottes geredet /und sie zu reden und schreiben angetrieben/daher auch die wort ihnen
eingegeben/gleichwohl es also gehalten habe/daß by jeglichem sein sonst gewöhnlicher stylus, red-und
schreib-art (so sich nach jegliches gemüth und ingenio in der natur richtet/ daß mit wahrheit gesagt
werden kan sermo character animi, die rede sey ein bild und anzeigung des gemüths) geblieben/aber
durch den heiligen Geist geheiligt/und die wahrheit auffs gewissesse auszutruncken bequem gemacht
worden ist: dahero der unterschied solches styli in der Schrift noch offenbarlich vor augen lieget/ da er in
einem viel höher gehet/in einem ander viel niederer / in einem leichter und verständlicher in einem
andern dunckerer und schwerer/in einem was das N.Testament anlangt in viel reinem u. mit andern
Griechischen autoren näher übereinkommendem Griechischen, in andern in weniger zierlichkeit und
reinlichkeit der Sprache sich darstellet. Welcher unterschied wie er nicht vom heiligen Geist selbst
kommet/als der in allen einer gewesen/ also muss er noch aus der natur kommen/und hat also die gnade
diese in denjenigen / welche sie erfüllet nicht aufgehoben sondern geheilt/und zu ihrem zweck kräftlig
gebraucht" (6).
analysis of Spener's exegesis of Galatians, Spener dealt with questions of the document’s authorship and authenticity. He gave a structural breakdown of the text and paid attention to stylistic details ("Spener was conscious even of a letter’s style and especially its tone" [33]).

Schmidt also shows that Spener often tended to psychologize by trying to determine why a certain situation may have taken place. All this leads Schmidt to the conclusion that Spener exhibits a subtle shift from a teaching of Scriptural to authorial inspiration and therefore moves unconsciously in the direction of Schleiermacher and modern-historical criticism (33).

As Schmidt himself correctly points out, however, in contrast to later historical-critical hermeneutics Spener's approach is untainted by skepticism toward the supernatural or toward efforts to extract an authentic kerygma from layers of textual transmission and redaction: "It is important to realize that such steps were based not on a skepticism toward the recorded text (Überlieferungsbestand), but rather on the desire for an exact description of the situation, which meant taking seriously the revelation in human form" (Schmidt AGP 9:32). Moreover, Spener himself indicates in the above quotation that every word is given by the Holy Spirit. Also, like his Puritan precursors, Spener talks about reading the text in terms of hearing God’s voice ("[the reader] should always imagine the book contains the word of the living God"). Thus every word is put there by the Holy Spirit, so that the order of narration and argument in the text is vitally important (Lesen der Schrift 76). Spener does not fragment the text into individual human messages, but regards the whole as a coherent, divinely inspired unit. With Flacius,

57 "Spener Auch den Stil des Briefes, vor allem die Tonart nahm er bewußt und betont wahr."
58 Schmidt wants to show that Spener moved from regarding the whole text of Scripture as one divinely inspired product to espousing individual authorial inspiration: "Da Paulus sich auf den Auftrag berief, den er unmittelbar von Gott erhalten hatte, mußte der Brief als eine von Gott selbst eingegene Botschaft angenommen werden. Die Inspiration wurde also nicht dem Schriftworte als solchem zueckens, sondern auf das ausdrückliche diesbezügliche Zeugnis des Apostels gegründet. Auch das war ein Schritt auf dem Wege zur historisch-kritischen Betrachtung der Bibel."
Perkins and Owen, Spener agrees that Christ is the center of the canonical Scripture, whose gospel is revealed in terms of the law and gospel dialectic: “alle erkännten Gottes und seines willens nach dem gesetz und evenaglio” (ibid.).

So far, then, we have seen that, like his predecessors, Spener advocates a divinely inspired Word which displays an inner unity. He acknowledges the divine and human nature of the text, and insists that its inspired nature does not obviate textual criticism. However, he also teaches that the divine element requires a special hermeneutical element, the aid of the Holy Spirit. According to Spener one problem with the notion of perspicuity of the word is that knowledge of God is not merely propositional but also relational. The lack of the reader’s relation to the divine makes the hermeneutical endeavor extremely difficult, if not impossible. One must correct this situation by entering into communion with the divine and by relying on the assistance of the Holy Spirit in interpretation for every reading of the word. In other words, Spener too teaches the need for illumination.

5.4.7. Illumination and Understanding

Like Owen, Spener differentiates between distanced and engaged knowledge, between mere notional and genuine understanding. The message of the word is not contrary to reason, but goes beyond fallen reason. The unregenerate reader may well understand the propositions of Scripture as propositions, but cannot grasp their true meaning. Spener admits that there are many people who know the Scriptures inside out and yet have not attained to the knowledge of God, which is relational:

Based on this explanation, I gladly admit that out of common grace, by which God has given man his natural understanding and left it to him even after the fall, man may not only learn the languages [Greek and Hebrew] but he may also understand and conceptually grasp other things belonging to words. On the basis of this natural light alone a non-regenerate person without the Holy Spirit may, if he
diligently reads and searches the Scripture and contemplates its content with the help of other sources, sufficiently understand its teachings to form certain habits, and to discuss and debate his findings with others as he does with other worldly knowledge which he acquires in philosophical, legal, medical and historical books; knowledge which is obtained either by the light of reason or the words of other men. (Die allgemeinge Gottesgelehrtheit 10)

Spener’s attributing even the rational comprehension of the Word to common grace shows how close he is to Owen’s understanding that God’s presence is evident in all epistemological activity. Like Owen, Spener contends that propositions such as “there is a God, and Christ is God’s son, has suffered, died, and rose from the dead etc.” are true no matter who handles them (ibid. 15). The biblical concept of revelation and truth demands that God’s truth be valid, no matter who utters it.

That there are many critics of the Bible who understand its teachings well cannot be denied, says Spener, for he has met many such people. But if every human being possesses such ability, i.e. if such knowledge of the text is possible to the unregenerate, why is there need for illumination? Or as Spener asks the question, “[ob] solche natürlichem liecht aus menschlichen kräftten gefasste wissenschaft und erkänntüß die wahre erkänntnüß Gottes seye?” (ibid. 16). Spener thus tries to formulate a difference between wissen and verstehen, the latter being possible only for the one who enters into the relational aspect of biblical hermeneutics. In other words, Spener suggests the same difference between propositional and relational knowledge which had already animated the

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59 “Vorausgesetzt dieser Erklärung bekenne ich gern/ daß außer der jenigen allgemeinen Gnade da Gott dem menschen seinen natürlichen verstand gegeben und noch nach dem fall gelassen hat aus welchem er die Sprachen arten zu reden und was sonst in den worten gehört verstehen und sich einen concept darvon zu machen vermag ein unwiedergebohner mensch der als des H. Geistes nicht fähig ist/ wo er fleissig die Schriftt liest untersucht/nachdenket/ anderer erklärungen darbey erwegen und in summa seinen verstand anwenden allein in deßelben liecht aus der Schrifft und dero worten etlicher massen verstehen kan/was die Schriftt von diesen und jenen puncten da oder dorthen sage und lehre/ kann sich darvon einen concept und gedancken in ihm selbst machen und einen habitum dardurch erlangen darvon mit andern reden handeln ihnen solches wie ers gefasset wiederumb vortragen es vertheidigen und darmit umgeben gleich vieler anderen weltlichen dingen umbgehet die er in philosophischen juristischen medicinischen historischen buchern liest und die entweder aus dem liecht der vernunft selbst oder anderer leute worten erkannt werde."
Puritan epistemology and Daseinshermeneutik. The natural man, the *anthropos psychikos*\(^{60}\) is the one who has no relation to the deity and whose knowledge about God from the Scriptures remains thus propositional; it is not the kind of existential apprehension the text itself advocates as a requirement for interpretation:

However, the text says that the natural man does not understand these things, he does not grasp them; and that not merely in such a way as to say he does not participate in them while he may understand them correctly, rather the text says he **cannot recognize** [the truth]; thus even the least bit of proper recognition is lacking. (ibid. 18; emphasis Spener’s)\(^{61}\)

This darkness is not due to any fault in the text, however, but entirely to human deficiency.\(^{62}\)

Again, Spener does not advocate a distinction in propositional meaning between the Spirit and the letter as if the one would yield a divergent reading. The problem is that Scripture demands a knowledge not *only* according to the letter *but also* according to the Spirit. The unregenerate reader cannot understand (begreifen) the subject-matter because such requires a different kind of understanding. The knowledge of God and the obtaining of a divine perspective for the interpretation of existence cannot simply be obtained by diligence (*Fleiss*): “Bu why does one lack understanding [knowledge of spiritual things]? [because] it is spiritually oriented. Thus [understanding] requires a **spiritual sense, one which has been changed and illuminated by the Holy Spirit**.”\(^{63}\)

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60. Spener uses the same term as Owen derived from their close reading of Paul’s epistles.

61. “jetzo aber heisset diese güter vernimt der natürliche mensch nicht, oder er fasset sie nicht; und zwar daß man nicht etwa nur fragen möchte/ er fasse sie nur also nicht/ daß er ihrer nicht selbst würchlich theilhaftig werde/ in dessen könne er sie doch recht verstehen/ so heißt es ferner /er kann es nicht erkennen/ es mangelt schon an dem erstenstück dess erkennens” (ibid. 18).

62. “Es bleibt die Schrift hell ob wo unser blinder verstand dieselbe ohne dess heiligen Geistes der den wahren verstand einem jeglichen glaubigen herzen eintrucke nit fassen kan wegen der hoheit der dinge damit der glaub umbgehet und alle vernunft übertreffen daher unbegreiflich sind/hingegegen des h. Geistes gnade zum verstand und erkanntnuß der wahrheit nöig ist” (Gottesgelehrtheit 92).

63. “Warum mangelts aber an dem erkennen? Es will geistlich gerichtet seyn. Also gehöret ein geistlicher / und von dem heiligen Geist gänzender sin und erleuchteter Verstand darzu” (ibid. 21; emphasis Spener’s). Spener agrees with the Lutheran orthodox opposition to Bellarmine’s statement that only the rational faculty, but not the cognitive is affected by the fall. Spener agrees: “Sondern er hat auch
The words *Sinn* and *Verstand* are critical, for they determine that Spener’s hermeneutic is one with that of the Puritans. Not only is there a problem in cognitively grasping the full import of the biblical truths (*Verstand*), but the reader outside a relationship with the divine lacks the ability to appropriate the text. The term *Sinn* carries the same sense as when Germans say “Danach steht mir nicht der Sinn,” meaning “I have no inclination toward a certain activity.” In other words, Spener is talking about good will toward the text, the unwillingness inherent in every *anthropos psychikos* to accept the authority of the divine word.

Until, therefore, the reader has entered into dialogue with the divine based on personal communion, any reading ultimately remains a misreading. Spener thus uses the same arguments to defend the clarity of the Scripture as his greatest mentor Luther, whom he quotes extensively on this position. Spener believes that in order to achieve a proper understanding of the text, the reader must be illuminated by the same Spirit which animated the authors of Scripture. Thus Spener rejects the hermeneutics which claim...
that knowledge sufficient for communion with the divine may be gained from either observing the created cosmos or searching the human heart.\footnote{66} 

In light of this required spiritual knowledge, Spener defines cognition as understanding: "erkennen heisse nicht eine Sache erfinden oder erdencken/sondern eine sache /die schon erfunden und furgetragen ist/fassen. (27). This *fassen* or *erkennen* is not mere mental assent to a proposition but trust in its truth (28). Thus a proposition in the biblical text can only be fully understood when it is grasped in light of the meaning the divine author gave it; and this meaning is always one that demands the context of communion with the divine: “The one who does not love God has not known God. Knowledge without love is wrong”(ibid.40).\footnote{67} 

In order to drive home the difference between propositional and relational knowledge Spener resorts to rather mystical vocabulary. It will not do to understand God merely propositionally or historically. Rather, “one has to know him internally, one has to see him in the heart, to embrace, kiss, taste and sense him”(ibid. 41).\footnote{68} Yet Spener’s graphic choice of words does not permit one to dismiss him as a mystic. Like the Puritans, he observes a careful balance between the subjective impressions of the reader and the objective nature of revelation in the text. The order of knowledge is, as in the case of the Puritans, from the mind to the affections. First comes knowledge of God through the text, and then divine communion is entered into, or, if such is already present the relationship is deepened: “Thus love comes from knowledge [of God] and knowledge
comes through the word" (ibid. 56). Both understanding and whole-hearted assent to the truth, in the sense of really believing it, are given by the power of the Spirit: “Since we hear that not only the assent but also the preceding illumination of the understanding are attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit” (ibid. 33). Thus true knowledge of the divine and love for his message are gifts from God.

Moreover, there is no radical difference between the Spirit and the letter of the book, as, for example, Jacob Böhme had taught. To put it another way, for the regenerate reader, the subjective impressions from the reading of the text are not contradictory to the objective meaning. The text signifies properly when it signifies according to the letter, not in opposition to it. Spener defends himself against the same accusations of advocating, as did the Quakers in England, an inner light apart from the Scriptures. He insists that his teaching about illumination is not “Enthusiastisch, Weigelaiianisch, Quackerisch [or] Donatisch” (Gottesgelehrtheit 335).

Thus for Spener, there is no inner light apart from the written text, neither before nor after conversion: “humanity after the fall has no inner natural word which would be sufficient to illuminate or guide one concerning salvation” (343). Spener distances himself from the inspirationalists and mystic prophets when he declares that even after conversion, the word does not become a dead letter which should be abandoned in favor of an inner word, or for pansophistic philosophies. Such, maintains Spener, are the errors of Weigel, but not of his teachings. Rather, the word “is not a dead letter in itself, but

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69 “Also, die liebe kommt aus der erkenntniß [Gottes] und erkenntniß kommt durch das wort.”
70 “Da wir auch hören daß nicht nur der assensus sondern vorgehende erleuchtung des verstandes der sonderen krafft dess H. Geistes zugeschrieben wird.”
71 “Der mensch hat nach dem fall kein innerlich natürlich wort welches genugsam wäre denselben zur seligkeit zu erleuchten oder zu führen.”
72 Spener concludes his observation on the inner and outer word by denying any enthusiastic tendencies in his teachings: "Damit kundbar wird das also die von mir droben behauptete Lehre worinnen ja alle erleuchtung auß den Göttlichen mitteln des worTes dessen lesung hörgung betrachtung hergezogen und erwartet wird auch nicht mit einem vernünftigen Schein dess Enthusiasmus mäge beschuldigt werden" (Gottesgelehrtheit 338).
alive and full of the power of the Holy Spirit who works in and through it, whose power one cannot pass by or replace with another means [of understanding]" (ibid. 342).

What then is the exact relationship between word and spirit? Although Spener uses slightly different terms, his description of the Spirit's work is the same as that of Puritan theology. The Spirit applies the letter to the heart where it is 'sealed' and results in action (Pia Desideria 117). There is therefore always a hermeneutical reciprocity between the inner witness and the outer word:

therefore the following witness exists, that we sense the power of the Holy Spirit when he works in us through the Word so that we agree with Him. If the witness of the text is correct, you sense the Holy Spirit in your heart; that indicates a living doctrine, because God's finger, the Holy Spirit writes the Word into your heart...the truth of what the Spirit shows you by means of the letter has to be recognized and sensed in the heart. (Gottesgelehrheit 122-124)

Spener warns against a strict differentiation between word and spirit ("die zwischen dem Geist und dem buchstaben scharffrichter seyn wollen"). Such approaches have always resulted in disaster, he argues, as the examples of Thomas Müntzer and others have shown. As Spener points out, interpretation through an inner light apart from the external Word has usually, and ironically, led to literalistic readings. He condemns, for example, the literal interpretations of the Anabaptists, whose ignorant

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73 "One should emphasize that the divine means of Word and sacrament are concerned with the inner man. Hence it is not enough that we hear the Word with our outward ear, but we must let it penetrate into our heart, so that we may hear the Holy Spirit speak there, that is with vibrant emotion and comfort feel the sealing of the Spirit and the power of the Word" (117).

74 "solch zeugnis gehet also zu daß wir die kraft dess heiligen Geistes so er durchs wort in uns wircket auch empfinden und wahrhaftig mit Ihm übereinstimm. Ist dies Zeugniss recht/ hast du und fühltest auch wahrhaftig den heiligen Geist in deinem Herzen.....das heißt eine lebendige Lehre, da Gottes finger/ der heilige Geist das Wort ins hertz schreibet....Was der heilige Geist durch den Buchstaben zeigt, dafür muss im herzen erkannt und empfunden werden / daß es also in wahrheyt seye."

75 The context makes clear that Spener includes Weigel in his denouncement of enthusiasts. Spener knew about Böhme too, but never wrote openly against him, although he couldn't possibly have agreed with his pansophic hermeneutic.
literalism led to the reinstitution of Old Testament laws and caused foolish non-contextual interpretations (ibid. 125).

As an example of such misinterpretations, Spener, in his commentary on Galatians, points out the fallacy of having scruples about oaths ("eyde") on the basis of Christ's statement (Matt.5:34) which - if taken literally - must conflict with the apostle Paul's own use of oaths in God's name. Spener explains that this difficulty will not occur if the reader takes the Bible as a whole into consideration, which puts the passages into context and dissolves many difficulties (Schmidt AGP 9:27). The enthusiasts, however, shun such contextual readings, and want to have communion with the divine without the external word, with the result that they read their subjective impressions into the text (ibid. 337).

In short, Spener's high view of Scripture and Lutheran anthropology required a doctrine of regeneration and illumination for the reading of the text. Like Perkins and Owen he believes that divine aid is required to overcome the noetic and psychological effects of sin. Both the understanding and the general attitude toward the text must be changed before a genuine dialogue with the divine is possible. What remains to be examined is Spener's actual hands-on advice for interpretation and application, which flows from his theoretical position.

5.5 Interpretative Strategies:

Like Owen, Spener states that the reader who has resumed the dialogue with God through an act of divine grace gains a new perspective on the Biblical text. Owen had

76 "Wir sehen auch aus diesem Exempel/wie nicht nur Widertäuffer und andere auch in andern Stücken irrgläubige/ sich ein Gewissen über die eyde machen/sonder auch oft Christliche gemüther sorge und Scrupel darüber tragen/daß wir zwar feylich allen die Schrifft solen und müssen lassen unser glaubens und lebens regel seyn/so dann dieselbe nach dem buchstaben nehmen/wo nichts anders denselben hindert; dass dannoch man aber nie auf einem Spruch allein bestehen solle/wo andere hingegen das Gegenteil dessen/was wir sonstien meineten/aus dem buchstaben abzunehmen/in sich haben: sonder wir müssen allemal die Schrift zusammennehmen/und sie miteinander vergleichen/daß nichts gegen einander sich darinnen finde (Comment. zu Galater 102 as quoted in Schmidt 27, n78).
described this good will toward the text in terms of tasting; Spener uses the same metaphor. Not only does the converting power of God come by means of the text (“Der neue Mensch ist aus Gott und seinem Wort geboren” [Der Neue Mensch 194]), but the reader also acquires a taste for the word:

He is already inclined toward the Word, so that he loves the divine Word greatly, He prefers it to any word whatever [texts]. Indeed he prefers it to anything whatever that may be. He takes true delight in it. It tastes to him as mother’s milk to a child. He does not exchange this for any other drink, however delicious it may be. The divine Word does not need to be recommended or made pleasant to him by others. Rather the initial taste, once received, suffices to make the word pleasing to him (Der neue Mensch 201)\(^7\)

For those who have acquired this new perspective, however, there will still be hermeneutical problems, since conversion is only the beginning of a long process of growth in God's truth. Spener had already stated that one needs to define the perspicuity of the biblical text carefully to avoid naive perceptions about the Bible. As an heir of Luther, Spener subscribes to the general textual practices of sola scriptura: Those doctrines that are essential for conversion and Christian growth are so clearly expressed in the text that even the uneducated reader may understand them (Lesen der Schrifft 46). For the remaining obscure places Spener reverts to the Augustinian principle of a self-interpreting scripture. The clear passages illuminate the dark ones, and there is nothing stated in the harder passages which cannot also be found in those that are easily understood (De Doctrina Christina, III 1; Spener, Lesen der Schrifft 47).

However, besides these general principles, he also stresses the use of grammatical-historical tools for the better understanding of the text. Spener deals with two issues

\(^7\) “Er hat bereits angefangen, selbst dem Wort gleichgesinnt zu sein. So liebt er das göttliche Wort innig. Er zieht es allem anderen Wort vor. Ja, allem anderen; was es auch sein mag. Er hat also wahrhaftig seine Lust daran. Es schmeckt ihm so, wie einem Kind die Muttermilch schmeckt. Es will dieses nicht vertauschen mit einem anderen, sonst noch so köstlichen Geränk. Das Göttliche Wort braucht ihm nicht erst von anderen anmutig gemacht und empfohlen zu werden. Sondern der Geschmack, den er davon einmal gefaßt hat, macht ihm das Wort angenehm genug.”
which were of pastoral concern to him: the problem of allegory and the trustworthiness of translations in Luther’s German Bible.

In dealing with allegories, Spener follows Luther’s appeal to common sense. Arbitrary allegorizing is to be avoided. Most allegories, he argues, are advertised as such, for example, Peter’s comparison of baptism with Noah and the flood. Even when Scripture gives no interpretative guideline, common sense lets one understand that the speech is parabolic (Lesen der Schrift 111). Spener warns, furthermore, that one should stick to those allegorical readings which are endorsed by Scripture itself. The first kind of allegorical reading, typology, must be conducted within the framework of the canonical Scriptures. If the Old Testament type is not fulfilled and explained in the New, one should refrain from allegorical interpretation.  

In order to avoid problems with allegorical readings, Spener advocates a comprehensive knowledge of the text. The reader is to read the Bible through at least one time to gain “a general concept und idea of the books and themes.” All subsequent readings should emphasize the New Testament (without, however neglecting the Old), since Spener, who follows Flacius’ view of progressive revelation, believes that the Old Testament should be read through the New (ibid. 124) Continued reading and increasing familiarity with the text should show the reader that the rule of faith is indeed derived from the text itself. One’s own reading should increasingly replace reliance on creeds and confessions for interpretation. In this way Spener wants to lead the reader to interpretative independence. Direct knowledge from the text should replace dependence on these secondary sources (ibid. 131-132.)

78 Spener simply repeats Luther’s statement: “wer die erfüllung nicht kan zuvor beweisen in der Schrift der [dem] fehlet gewisslich die figur und nimmt seinen eigenen traum für die figur. Denn aller figuren erfüllung stehet im Neuen Testament. Darum muß man zuvor die erfüllung aus dem neuen Testament ziehen und dann die figur darauff beziehen so giebt sichs und stimmt lieblich miteinander und gehen ein rad in ander wie Ezikiel sagt” (ibid. 115).
Thus context, or scope-oriented reading, is as important for Spener as for the other commentators we have discussed, because it is the nature of Scripture to explain itself if everything is read in context (87). Spener advocates the same technique for comparing passages as does Perkins: “Comparing gathering and the comparison of passages which deal with the same or at least with a related matters illumine the reading considerably and one [passage] always explains the other so that we do not reach a complete knowledge until we collected all passages pertaining to one subject matter”(81). Spener employs Luther’s warning against taking passages out of context (85). Words should not be mutilated (verstümmeln) or wrested out of context (nach ihrem gefallen herausser zwacken). All these aids are to help clear up confusion concerning allegorical readings. Spener’s dealing with this problem shows once again that the principle of sola scriptura, in order to work, requires not a technical but a comprehensive knowledge of the text.

Spener also advocates the use of commentaries, but warns against two excesses. One should neither despise commentaries out of an arrogant attitude that one knows it all, nor assume that the Spirit alone suffices immediately to guide into all truth. Spener’s sense of the Spirit’s aid is more communal than such individualism. The Spirit has worked in the commentators as members of Christ’s church and gifted them with extraordinary talents and insights. Moreover, the richness of the biblical text affords various angles of approach depending on the life situation of the interpreter. Thus one should read commentaries to gain different perspectives (Lesen der Schrift 140). On the other hand, one should not forsake the biblical text itself (“den bloßen text”), because if one relies entirely on commentaries, or even fears to contradict their interpretations of the original

79 “Vergleichende zusammenhaltung und Vergleichung der Schrifftstellen die von einerley oder doch verwanten materien handeln gibt dem lesen ein großes liecht und erkläret immer ein die andere: also daß wir von nichts eine völlige erkänntnuß bekommen/bis wir alle stellen/so davon reden/gleichsam zusammengesucht haben.”
text, one becomes once again a hermeneutical slave to human traditions (ibid. 143). But all of these aids are to help the reader to gain a sense of the text’s scope, so that any reading will be context-oriented.

Another issue connected to the question of clarity was the prevalent assumption of the Lutheran establishment that Luther’s translation of the original text was practically infallible. However, some of Spener’s parishioners actually worried about its accuracy: "Some are wondering if Luther’s translation, although we cannot say that it is without mistakes, still expresses in all places exactly the power of the original text" (Lesen der Schrift 98). Spener, as the people’s theologian, takes great pains to assure these anxious readers that although he does not consider the translation of Luther to be perfect, is does nevertheless convey all essential doctrines regarding salvation and sanctification without distortions.

Spener adds that essentially no translation can do exact justice to the idioms and the dynamic of another language, so that it would be best for everybody to know the biblical languages. He encourages all who have the talent and find the time to learn Greek and Hebrew, especially since the reader can now take advantage of the Renaissance scholarship and linguistic aids which were not available before (99). If we esteem God's world highly enough, Spener argues, we would certainly make the effort to learn the

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80 "Da haben nun solch zu merken ob wir wohl unseres lieben Lutheri dolmetschung nicht allerdings ohne Fehler zu seyn rühmen oder ihr diese beylegen können, daß ist an allen orten ganz genau die Krafft des grundtexts ausdrücke."

81 Spener on Luther’s translation: "daß ob wir wol solche übersetzung nicht eben an allen worten ohne einigen fehl zu seyn ausgeben können/sonder gestehen/daß oftmals hie und dort einiges eigentlicher und nachdrücklicher hätte gegeben werden können/wir dennoch das billige lob derselben beyzulegen vermögen/daß wir nicht allen darinnen was uns zur heiligkeit genug ist antreffen/welches auch andern dolmetschungen die zimlich grobe fehler haben gleichwol gemein bleiben/sondernd sie wegen treue und deutlichkeit allen anderen auch besten übersetzungen in andern sprachen mit gutem fug vergleichen, vielen aber vorziehen mögen? da hingegen die vor Luthero verfertigte deutsche übersetzung wie sie allein aus der lateinischen so viermal übel gerateten Vulgata vorgenommen worden/zugeschweigen der undeutlichen Sprach/der unsrigen bey weitem nicht zureichen" (Lesen der Schrift 29-30).
original tongues, since we often do the same for advancement in our secular interests such as international trade and business (100).

5.6. Application of the Text

The heart of Spener’s hermeneutical concern, however, is the text-to-action model. A genuine understanding of the text, argues Spener, much like Owen, includes application. Spener sees a direct connection between epistemology and application. The proof for a genuine knowledge of the divine and one’s self is reformation of one’s own life into the image of God and social interaction according to the model of Christ. On the one hand, he argues, God’s word should be preached to strengthen the inner man. On the other hand, works must be set in motion from this communion with the divine: “our whole Christian religion consists of the new man, whose soul is faith and whose expressions are the fruits of life, and all sermons should be aimed at this” (Pia Desideria 116).

Spener is convinced that only relational knowledge can produce such an applicatory manner of living. Mere theoretical approaches will fail to produce a life where social action flows from a dialogue with the divine: "As all knowledge of God and his will according to the law and the gospel cannot stop at mere knowledge but must result in praxis and practical application, even scholarly attempts at reading the bible to derive knowledge about God must be conducted under a holy resolution practically to apply every insight into the will of God which has been granted by his grace in one’ s reading” (67). Spener’s model for an applicatory hermeneutic is Christ himself, whose basic

82 “Wie aber auch alle erkänntnüß Gottes und seines willens nach dem gesetz und evangelio nicht bey einem bloßen wissen bleiben / sonder zur praxi und übung kommen/daher auch dahin gerichtet werden sollen/so müß auch das jetzt angezeigte verlangen nach dem erkänntnüß Gottes also bewahret seyn/dass stets auch ein heiliger Vorsatz daseye/dasjenige was man in dem lesen gottlichen willen zu seyn erkant/gleich auch mit schuldigem gehorsam nach der gnade/die man haben werde/ins werck zu richten."
message “those who love me will keep my commandments” runs through Spener’s writings like a guiding thread and summarizes his hermeneutical approach.

Thus the reader has to maintain an effort of personal reformation: where he or she cultivates a relationship with the divine whereby the formerly lost divine image is restored. Secondly, application has an inter-subjective dimension: the divine directions found in the text motivate to social interaction. There is no doubt that Spener’s, and later Francke’s, impressive record of social activism is founded on the summary of the mosaic law given by Christ to “love God with all your strength and love your neighbour as yourself.” Spener clearly states his position in a sermon entitled Christliche Verpflegung der Armen. His opening lines indicate the foundation of his applicatory hermeneutics:

Beloved in Christ Jesus. We who are called Christians, and who are even remotely familiar with our saviour’s commandments in the Scripture know, and should know, that next to the love of God, love to our neighbour is the main virtue demanded by the law; a virtue also taught by our most beloved saviour himself; the most faithful keeper of God’s law: more than that, he makes this virtue the mark of recognition by which we make known that you are his disciples, when you love one another John 13/35. (13)

In agreement with the sermon text Spener teaches that charitable action is not confined to the fellow Christian, but also any other person in need, because all human beings are made in God’s image: “Therefore all neighbours are all human beings, every single one without exception and therefore those who are our brothers according to creation and in that sense have the same God as a father as we do according to Malachi

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83 "Geliebte in Christo Jesu. Es ist uns allen/die wir Christen heißen/und nur etwas von unseres heylandes Geboten aus der Schrift gehört haben beckandt/und soll billig bekannt seyn/dass nechst der Liebe Gottes/die Liebe des Nechsten die einige und haupt Tugend sey welche das Gesetz von uns erfordert/und auf welche auch unser liebest Erlöser /als der treueste Ausleger des Gesetzes/so uns den Willen seines himmlischen Vaters verkündigt/ seyne Christen weiset; ja eben dieses als ein kennzeichen setzet/dabay wir jehmanden erkennen dass ihr meyne jünger seyd so ihr Liebe untereinander habt; John 13/35"
Thus, as in the case of Owen, Spener’s idea of tolerance and charity is firmly grounded in his biblical hermeneutic within the framework of a created universe. Spener argues that if there is a God, then reality is already determined and not created individually. Since God is eternal (“ewiglich”), his will, as expressed in the law and gospel dialectic, is universally binding for everyone at all times, and thus transcends historical and cultural barriers (Lesen der Schrift 103). Hence Spener’s humanitarianism is founded on the unchangeable fact that all human beings are “made in the image of God.” Heretics and pagans all are entitled to every possible aid, not because charity is a personal choice of the individual but because of the universally binding truth of common creation (ibid. 23).

Spener’s insistence on social ethics is sometimes construed to show that he abandoned the teaching of justification by faith for a works-oriented religion. However, Spener himself adamantly rejects such an accusation. In most of his casuistical works, as in Natur und Gnade (1705 ?), he insists that morality must flow from communion with the divine which in turn may only be achieved through justification by faith (14 ff.). The same sentiment is stated in a series of sermons called Die evangelischen Lebenspflichten. Spener opens his addresses with the assertion that neither legalism nor natural goodwill will lead to charity that is pleasing to God. Instead, a relation to the divine is required, because strength for genuine social action must come from a divine change of heart.

84 “Also heißen Nächste alle Menschen durch und durch ohne einige ausnahm und daher diejenigen die aus der Schöpfung unsre Brüder sind und in solchem Verstand Gott zu einem gemeinen Vater mit uns haben/nach Malachi 2/10.”

85 Spener states: “Daher all diejenige Gottesdienste/welche ausser Göttlicher einsetzung und offenbahrung von menschen erfunden und mit sorgfalt von einigen getrieben werden/ob sie auch und ihr herz so heisser andacht sind wie ein backofen (hos. 7:6-7) sind dennoch wercke des fleisches und der natur nach ihrem eigenen sinn und verderber [fallen] vernunft” Morality must come from submission to God and must be conducted according to his word (15): “also erkenne ich den glauben vor ein nothwendiges stück ohne welcher kein Gott gefälliges gutes geschehen kan (19; italics mine).
Without this conversion, Christ’s commandment to exercise neighbourly charity out of love to the divine, cannot be kept (Vorrede xxx).  

The inseparable connection between reading and application preached by Spener demands that the reader approaches the text in an attitude of humility and prayer. Since the divine commandments go against the inherent egocentrism in the human psyche, prayer for divine aid to overcome these reading impediments is the first step to the reading of the text. With the aid of prayer (i.e. dialogue with the divine), the reader is to achieve a hermeneutical attitude of humility before the text, and a willingness for application. Quoting Luther at length, Spener explains that prayer must be used to invoke the help of God’s Spirit, for he is the only agent who may lift fallen human reason to the heights of God’s point of view. The Spirit must purify the heart and lead it to a contrite and humble position before God’s text; otherwise the true meaning of the text will not be reached.  

The Spirit leads the reader into a repentant attitude to seek honestly the will of God in the text. Those who read the Scriptures for merely academic interest and fame or even for entertainment should rather direct their efforts to the Greek poets and narrators, for God’s word is challenging and practical and should not be toyed with (Lesen der Schrift 60).  

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86 Möchte vielleicht jemand sich an dem titul stoßen/daß ich Evangelische Lebens-Pflichten nenne, da man doch die pflichten nicht zu dem Evangelio sondern zu dem gesetz/ zu rechnen habe. Es wird mir aber socher name verhoffentlich nicht übel genommen werden/wo man den verstand/wo ich ihn brauche/ansiehet...weil ich diese Lebens-Pflichten nicht bloß gesetzlich beschriebe oder treibe, sondern allezeit auch weise/wie sie aus dem glauben/der dem evangelio eigen ist/herkommen/und so die krafft als beförderungsmittel aus dem Evangelio genommen werden müssen" (xxx; italics mine). Works are according to the law but done according to the spirit who gives the strength of willing obedience in relationship with God.  

87 Spener states: "also wer sich da einbildete aus dem wort ohne des Heiligen Geistes wirkung erleuchtet zu werden, und sich nicht nötig achtete daß er unsere herzen zuerst zur buße bringet und also zu reinigen anfanget ehe er einen hellen Schein in dieselben ziehet sich hingegen von denselben zur busse nicht leiten lasse wollte, der würde die heilige Schrift erfolgende erleuchtung lesen und derselben klarstes liecht nicht in seine Seele eindringen" (55).  

88 "welche aber fürwitz mit der Schrift treiben/oder ihre Kunst daran üben, und insgesamt ehre darinne suchen wollen, die hat Lutherus oben an Homerus, Ovidium, Virgilium, und dergleichen gewiesen."
Perhaps the most serious challenge of Spener to the Christian reader is his insistence that those who do not plan to implement Scriptural teaching should not even bother to open the text. The demand of the text is always for one to enter into its world, adjust one’s own view to the text and then apply the textual insight to everyday living. The progressive understanding of the text by the reader is thus inseparably tied to practical application. According to Spener, God will not grant new insights to those who do not even practice what they already know to be true. Those who do not implement their knowledge are not serious about sanctification, says Spener. They want merely to tickle the old Adam ("den alten Adam kitzeln") and can pray and search the Scriptures all they want, but God will grant insight and growth only to serious readers. Those who obediently practice God's will are also those who will soon see the fruits of their application and will thus be encouraged to approach the text again with increased trust and eagerness.\(^89\)

Thus practical piety becomes a hermeneutical precondition for successful Scripture reading. Those readers who live in continuous sin\(^90\) will not increase their knowledge about spiritual things and practical wisdom, but those who try to live a godly life will be more likely to succeed in knowledge and spiritual growth through feeding on the text

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\(^{89}\) Applying the parable of the faithful servant, Spener states: "Wer da hat (wer auch eine erkäntniss göttlichen worts erlangt und sie nemlich nach seiner maß als ein treuer knecht auff wucher legt) dem wird (nach weiterer gnade/liecht und weissheit mehreres zu begreiffen) gegeben werden/und wird die fülle haben (dass er nemlich nicht nur so viel verstehe als ihm nötig/sonder noch mehr und warmit er anderen dienen kann) wer aber nicht hat (der das anvertraute nicht treulich anwendet noch dem Herrn in danckbarkeit damit wuchert/sondern es gleichsam müssig bey sich behält) dem wird auch was er hat (sein voriges liecht)genommen werden" (71).

\(^{90}\) Sin is fundamentally defined by the Puritans and by Spener as willful rebellion against communion with the divine. The Westminster Shorter Catechism’s definition of Sin as “lack of conformity unto, or transgression of the law” sounds very legalistic. But one must remember that the Puritans knew and taught the summary of the law to be love of God and of one’s neighbour. Thus transgression of the law means the breaking of relational ties through disobedience.
5.7. Conclusion:

As far as hermeneutics is concerned, Spener follows the Puritan - Calvinistic paradigm. There are certain anthropocentric tendencies in his writing, but unlike the theosophists whose preference of subjective revelations over the written text is carried on in Schleiermacher, Spener observes the same balance between subjective faith and a written standard as did the Puritans; they are not to be separated.

Spener shows the same care for textual-critical work as the Puritan interpreters, and also recognizes a spiritual dimension in reading and application. Due to the noetic influence of sin, the interpretation of human existence can be conducted only if a relationship with the divine is resumed. Like the Puritans, Spener advocates a unique connection between application and understanding. This connection is once again based on a relationship with the divine through Christ. Since Spener, in common with the writers previously discussed, also holds that Christ is the center of the Scriptures, and that faith is trust in a person, for him likewise application needs to follow the example of Christ.

Our reading of Spener's hermeneutic also uncovers an interesting problem. Since the hermeneutic of sola scriptura required a knowledge of at least the general direction of the entire book, it required a great deal of patience from the lay-reader that was often lacking in practice. Thus application became problematic when it was initiated on a superficial non-contextual reading of the text. At the same time Spener did not want his

91 "Daher wir mit weisheit sagen können, daß ein gottseliges leben auch ein nicht geringes mittel der heilsamen lesung der Schrifft seye."
readers to read the text in a detached way, but encouraged an involved reading. The reader should regard the text as if personally addressed: “that one should not read more of the text than one can do with direct application and appropriation of the text to oneself, as if God did address the general or merely the one to whom the words were originally addressed, but [one should read] as if he speaks to everyone who reads the text” (Lesen der Schrift 101).

However, Spener also realizes the potential abuses of such a practice. For if the reader reads all passages as if they were meant for him, erroneous assumptions are certain to arise. Thus Spener warns in the same breath of his admonition for an involved reading that one should not read the Scriptures too subjectively, lest the reader think all experiences narrated in the text about individuals must necessarily become his own. Spener argues that the context of the entire Bible shows that miraculous events and extraordinary commands were special gifts conferred on godly people for a specific purpose, and it would be presumption to claim these for one’s own life” (Lesen der Schrift 118).

It is unfortunate that Spener did not discuss in greater detail how such misreadings may be avoided, because they were often accompanied by disastrous results, as in the case of Thomas Müntzer, or the peasant wars. Yet Spener seems satisfied to refer the reader to the rule of context. His advocacy of reading the word as “if it was happening to yourself” (ibid. 120), derives from the important recognition that there cannot be a detached and scientific reading of the biblical text. It would be anachronistic to ascribe to Spener and the Puritans a conscious criticism of modernity’s concept of objective knowledge. At the same time, however, rationalism was well on its way in Spener’s time,

92 "Dafi man nicht anders in der [Schrift] lesen solle / als so viel geschehen kan mit einer hären application und zueignung des gelesenem auff sich selbst/und also wie Gott darinnen nicht nur ins gemeine oder nur mit denjenigen an welche die worte unmittelbar vor diesem gerichtet gewesen rede, sondern einen ieglichen deren noch anspreche der in der [Schrift] liest."
as was the new science. Thus his insistence that a detached reading will remain without fruit, since the text demands a complete surrender - not of the intellect, but of any inherent self-reliant arrogance and of humanity’s boast for autonomy - may well have been directed against men like Spinoza and Descartes, who thought to interpret human existence by the light of reason alone.

Before we come to an assessment of the Puritan-Pietist hermeneutic as a whole, we must turn to one other crucial figure of Pietism, who surpassed even Spener in the practical outworking of his faith, namely Spener’s successor August Hermann Francke (1663-1727). The following section on Francke will be brief, because there is little originality in his writings, and it would be very tedious to reiterate every point of the Pietists’ basic agreement with one another. The only real difference between these two post-Reformation reformers is Francke’s initial impetuousness, and recklessness in advocating reform. However, with advancement in years, Francke became more moderate. Almost more than Spener, he is an example for social action based on a biblical hermeneutic.

5.8. The Hermeneutics of August Hermann Francke

5.8.1. Personal and theological Background

The early life of August Hermann Francke is relatively uneventful. He was born on March 22, 1663 in Lübeck, into a prosperous household. His father died four years after taking a position as counsellor (Rat) to earl Ernst der Fromme in Gotha. Francke spent a great part of his youth in Gotha - a city known for its openness toward reform and piety. Francke’s grandmother was as an ardent reader of Arndt, and also of the more radical mystics Mollers and Heinrich Mullers.
Practically predestined for the study of theology, Francke exhibited the same prodigious ability for learning and languages as Spener. He learned both Greek and Hebrew, spoke and read English and French, and even mastered Italian to such an extent that he later translated works by the Italian mystic Miguel de Molinos (Brecht 1: 442).

Francke never finished his theological studies, because after his conversion sometime in 1687 he wanted to distance himself from scholastic methodology and to study the Bible on its own terms without the aid of philosophy. Francke’s conversion is important because it already marks a slight departure from the more objectively oriented theology of Flacius, Perkins, and Owen. The subtle but important difference lies in Francke’s shift of emphasis from Christ as the object of faith, to personal assurance in the process of conversion. The Puritans held that one may lose one’s assurance, but that subjective feelings are not as important as the truth of Christ’s promises. Thus in times of trouble, the believer is to feed on the written word, the promises of God.

Francke, by contrast, makes personal, subjective certainty the mark of faith, as becomes evident from his conversion account: “When I arose, my mind was changed. For I had bent my knees under great worry and doubt, but I got up with unspeakable joy and great certainty. When I lay down I didn’t believe there to be a God, but when I arose I would have confirmed it without fear and doubt, even with the shedding of my own blood.” Remarkedly absent from this conversion account are references to Bible promises which were so characteristic of Puritan conversion narratives. Nevertheless, in contrast to theosophical concepts of rebirth, as advocated by Böhme, for example, Francke remains within the Lutheran tradition by ascribing his break-through (Durchbruch) to communion with the divine entirely to the grace of God (ibid. 449).

Francke met Spener twice during his studies, and it was with Spener’s help that he obtained a post at Erfurt. This short and controversial engagement (1690/1691) reveals much about Francke’s Pietism. Francke always retained an affinity with the more radical elements of Pietism. While Spener distanced himself from inspirationalisists, and wrote, albeit hesitantly, against them, Francke counted on such excesses for support of the Pietistic cause. Also, Francke seemed at times to advocate perfectionism, which, in combination with house meetings outside the regular church-environment, did not endear him to the orthodox Lutheran pastors in Erfurt.

When Francke’s views began to penetrate Erfurt society, and orthodox Lutheran school teachers were confronted by their students with Francke’s teachings, the Lutheran pastors attempted to remove Francke from his position and succeeded. On invitation by Spener, Francke moved to Berlin where he stayed for two months before Spener procured for him the pastorate in Glaucha close to Halle (Brecht 1: 456).

In Glaucha, Francke began the work he has become famous for, namely the relentless carrying of his theories into practice. The “Glaucher Anstalten,” out of which grew an internationally famous educational center, were born out of Francke’s attempt to meet the challenge presented by the spiritual, educational and economical deficit of a city still reeling from the effects of the Thirty Years War. Poverty, sickness, a high crime rate caused by weakened moral fiber and almost complete indifference to religion presented Francke with an almost impossible mission. However, faithful to his understanding that the Christian faith should translate into social action, Francke began his work.

According to an established tradition, the poor would come to the pastor’s house once a week to obtain money and food. Francke used this brief opportunity to catechize

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94 Perfectionism is the view that the believer can, with sustained effort and increasing sanctification, keep the ten commandments. Such a claim contradicts Luther’s and the Reformed position that the Christian is both justified and a sinner at the same time (*simul iustus et peccator*).
his visitors. He soon realized the illiteracy and ignorance especially of the children, whose poverty prevented them from attending school. Francke began to raise money among his friends and also placed a can in his living-room with the accompanying Bible verse: “So jemand in dieser Welt Güter hat und siehet seinen Bruder darben und schleuBt sein Hertz vor ihm zu, wie bleibet die Liebe Gottes in ihm?” (1 John 3, 17; Brecht 1.: 134).

The verse encapsulates Francke’s entire enterprise. His Biblical hermeneutic took very seriously the text’s injunction to care for one’s neighbour, who was either a fellow Christian, or at least a person created in the image of God, and thus entitled to dignity. He soon had enough money to start a small orphanage and a school for the poor. He hired a teacher and ordered educational books. Soon wealthier burghers wanted their children to be educated by Francke’s institution. Francke’s financial strength increased and soon allowed for the establishing of an academy (1697), where students were prepared for the universities. Also, Francke added a boarding school for the children of the nobility. All these institutions served his desire to spread the Christian Pietist faith.

It would fill an entire chapter to trace the development and growth of Francke’s institutions. Suffice it to say that by the time of his death in 1727, Francke’s work had grown into an educational-industrial complex including factories, a bindery, bookstore, and pharmacy, where he trained his wards and integrated them into society. Moreover, Francke did much to change customs that encouraged poverty and impeded economic growth. For example, he managed to procure the right of illegitimate children to enter trades, whereas before they were often condemned to a life of poverty.

Francke achieved practical reforms of the education system which were unprecedented. He abolished the abuse of corporal punishment, limiting it to a means of last resort. He encouraged the education of girls and women. Francke also originated the three tiered school system which is still widely accepted in Germany today.
He stressed the knowledge of languages for missionary purposes, for which reason he also was the first to found Slavonic studies at his schools. Francke’s book bindery served the same purpose. He managed to mass-produce an updated Lutheran version of the Bible, so that soon almost every household in his community possessed either an entire text, or at least a copy of the New Testament.

Incidentally, Francke’s and Spener’s exegetical freedom to improve on Luther’s translation was not welcomed by the Lutheran establishment. Kurt Aland in his article “Bibel und Bibeltext bei August Hermann Francke und Johann Albrecht Bengel” has documented the difficulties Francke had to suffer for his refusal uncritically to accept Luther’s translation. The actual debate, as interesting as it is, does not interest us here. What is noteworthy, however, is Francke’s recognition that language is dynamic and changes over time. He laments not only some mistakes in Luther’s translation, but also demands changes which make Luther’s Bible conform to current linguistic development: “nachdem ja die heiligen Sprachen/nebts der Lauterkeit unserer MutterSprache selbst / bißher umb merkliches mehr und besser in Schwang gekommen sind / als sie zu jener [Luther’s] Zeit im Schwange waren” (Francke, Kurtzes Project 26; Aland AGP 13: 97).

What is of importance for our study is Francke’s realization that inspiration extends to the original languages and the meaning conveyed through them. If adherence to an established translation hindered the free flowing of divine revelation as perceived in the original languages, be it by reason of semantic shifts through modernization or simply poor translation in the first place, Francke fought vehemently for a retranslation (Aland AGP 13: 98). The translation controversy demonstrates Francke’s conviction that biblical

95 Francke poured water onto the mill of Lutheran controversialists with his treatise Kurtzes Project / unparteysicher privat Gedancken/ von einer Emendation der Teutschen Bibel (1712). The entire debate is quite similar to what has become known as the “King James Version only controversy” in our day. Francke’s observations that new textual findings and insights into the oriental languages demanded a revision of Luther’s translation were met with skepticism by many Lutheran theologians.
truths need to be applied. The clearer and more contemporary the translation, the more easily the message can be received and the application would be facilitated.

Francke's lectures at the university of Halle were meant to propagate Christian ethics. Although from a modern perspective the selection of educational material appears narrow, as Francke's explicit aim was a Christian education, he nevertheless admitted a large selection of pagan authors in Greek and Latin. In his higher schools he also taught apologetics. Francke seemed to have been aware of the revolution in world views and wanted to equip his students to deal intelligently with the increasing challenge presented by scientific and cosmological challenges to traditional Christian thinking.

During Francke's lifetime this critical attitude toward philosophy prevailed even among many theologians at Halle University, where Francke had become a professor of theology. However, after Francke's death a rift, barely contained during his day, between the theological and philosophic faculty only widened. The result was that Pietist education of the kind Schleiermacher was to receive retreated from its critical engagement with philosophical developments. Such separation of faith and reason could not possibly satisfy a curious mind, and Schleiermacher was certainly not the only one to break out of such a stifling atmosphere.

However, before we take a closer look at those developments leading to modern hermeneutics, we must glance briefly at Francke's actual textual work, to support the claim that his understanding of the Scriptures was fundamentally similar to that of Spener and of Reformed Puritan theologians.
5.8.2. Francke’s Hermeneutics of the Cross

Like Flacius, Perkins, Owen and Spener, Francke makes a theocentric bias the prerequisite for biblical hermeneutics. Francke, perhaps more emphatically than Spener makes understanding of the text contingent on a relationship with Christ. More specifically, Francke declares an appropriating recognition of the crucifixion to be the key to biblical hermeneutics: “The entire Scripture will remain a mystery to you unless you know the secret of the cross” (*Christus der Kern der Heiligen Schrift* (1702), FWA 246). Francke is convinced that if one has genuinely grasped the meaning of the cross, then reading the biblical text will be a delight rather than a chore: “Many complain about the difficulty and the darkness of the Scripture; this is the reason they do not like to read it. The reason is the lack of love for the cross” (ibid. 247).

Francke uses the cross not only to point out the Christocentric nature of biblical hermeneutics but also to describe its applicatory dimension. An understanding of the cross also entails the taking-up of the cross (*Auffnehmung des Creutzes*) in the biblical sense of following Christ (ibid.). As in the Puritan hermeneutic, application is inseparable from reading; in fact it is the main purpose of reading: “in sum; if you take up the reading of the Bible your sole purpose must be to become a believing and pious Christian, not only as a pretense, but with true power so that you can be sure to be accepted by God in this present world and to enjoy him eternally in the next” (*Einfältiger Unterricht wie man die Schrift zu seiner wahren Erbauung lesen sollte* (1694), FWA 217).

The true strength of

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96 Francke’s view of the Scriptures is contained in four main treatises: *Einfältiger Unterricht, wie man die Heilige Schrift zu seiner wahren Erbauung lesen solle* (1694; abbreviated EU) *Einleitung zur Lesung der H. Schrift, insonderheit des Neuen Testamentes* (1694; EL), *Observationes Biblicae* (1695; OB), and *Christus der Kern Heiliger Schrift* (1702; ChK). All of these treatises are contained in Edward Peschke’s anthology as cited in the bibliography.
97 “Die ganze Schrift ist dir ein Rätsel / so lange du das Geheimniss des Creutzes nicht erkennst”
98 “Viele klagen / die Schrift sey ihnen so schwer und dunkel; Daher sie auch nicht gerne darinnen lesen. Untersucht man die Ursache, so fehlt es an der Liebe zum Creutz”
99 “In Summa; wenn du die H. Schrift zu lesen fürmmest/ muß das allein dein auffrichtiger Zweck seyn/daß du ein gläubiger und frommer Christ werden mögest/nicht nach dem Schein/sondern in der
Christianity. Not mere theory and pretense (*der Schein*) but the substance (a godly life) which lies in application is the mark of an effective hermeneutic.

Francke’s Christocentric bias extends to the content and structure of the biblical text and makes his textual analysis identical with that of the Puritan commentators discussed so far. In his treatise *Christus der Kern Heiliger Schrift* (1702), Francke, like Flacius, Perkins, and Owen, proposes Christ as the spiritual and narrative focus of the Bible. Francke is certain that "Jesus Christ is to be recognized and accepted as the center of the entire Scripture not only according to the external science [i.e. textual criticism], which has, however, pedagogical value, but also according to the true power through the grace of the Holy Spirit" (232).

Christ also serves as the uniting factor of the Old and New Testament. Francke adopts the traditional view of progressive revelation, whereby the Old Testament is read through a Christological lens: "Now the New Testament preaches Christ the saviour much more clearly than the Old: it is undeniable that [the NT] is the proper key to the Old because the New introduces in person the one who was merely announced in the Old Testament and that only by means of images and shadows" (Chk, FWA 236). Thus we have here the echo of Flacius’ and Perkins’ syllogism which makes Christ the center of the both the Old and New Testament. Francke points out that a knowledge and understanding of the Old Testament is indispensable for a proper grasp of the New (ibid. 237). Like Flacius and the Puritan commentators before him, Francke reads the Old Testament law as a prefiguration of Christ.

\[100\] "daß JESUS CHRISTUS als der Kern der gantzen heiligen Schrifft nicht nur nach der eusserlichen Wissenschaft/welche jedoch als eine Paedagogie anzusehen/sondern auch nach der wahren Krafft durch die Gnade des heiligen Geistes erkant und angenommen werde."

In other words, as in Puritanism, Francke's hermeneutic is conducted within a covenantal framework. In a lecture on the eighth chapter of the book of Hebrews he states:

If we want to find the scope of this chapter we will have to seek out the glory of the new covenant and its prerogatives which are its advantages in comparison to the former one of the Old Testament. One recognizes this glory in the fact that while under the old covenant everything happened externally, in shadows and earthly works, in Christ is grace and truth because here our hearts become a [lowly] dwelling place and temple of God. (Lectio Praenectica 198)

Francke demonstrates the same understanding of a progressive revelation as Flacius, Perkins and Owen, but characteristically not only explains the difference between Old and New Testament in terms of a more clear revelation, but also in terms of a move from external to internal. Yet one should not rush to the conclusion that this inward turn is already the harbinger of existential anthropocentric readings of the text.

Francke does not fall into subjectivism, but maintains the same balance between letter and spirit which characterized the sensus literalis of Flacius. Like the Puritans, Francke demonstrates the congruity between text (external) and spiritual meaning, rather than distinguishing sharply between the spirit and the letter. He explains their relationship

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102 Wenn wir nun auch spiritum in diesem Kapitel erkennen wollen, so ist das die Sache, die man in diesem achten Kapitel zu suchen hat, daß man die herrlichkeit des neuen Bundes [covenant] und die Praerogativen, welche der neue Bund vor dem alten Testament hat, daraus erkenne, daß wo dort nur alles äußerlich, auf Erden, und um Schatten-Werck und Vorbilde geschehen, also hingegen in Christ Jesu Gnade und Wahrheit sey daß da das hertz des Menschen eine hutte und ein Tempel Gottes werd.

103 Other commentators not in the tradition of German Pietism also realized the importance of the concept that Christ became the spiritual temple of all true Israelites. Calvin, for example, espouses this concept in his commentary in Hebrews. See especially chapter 9 vs. 11-12: "And then we must remember that this is said in allusion to the ancient tabernacle, which was made of wood, brass, skins, silver, and gold, which were all dead things; but the power of God made the flesh of Christ to be a living and spiritual temple" (Calvins Commentaries XXII 203). In this context Calvin also speaks about a change from external ritual worship to a more internal form of adoration. For the shadow of ceremonial worship could not reach the inner part of man, the conscience (199); the law could not "spiritually and inwardly" cleanse the worshipper. However, he warns against those who would abolish the word because of this change: "Fanatical men take hence the occasion to do away with public preaching, as though it were of no use in Christ's kingdom" (192).
with the analogy of a nut: the shell stands for the text (Wesen des Buchstabens) while the kernel represents the inner spiritual meaning: “Beydes wurde unzuverlässig gehandelt seyn/wenn einer den Kern essen aber die Nuß nicht auffbeissen wolte; und wenn einer die Nuß aufbeissen/den Kern aber wegwerfen wolte” (EL 222). In other words, the inner spiritual meaning is attained by a careful reading of the external word.

5.9. Reading Strategies

5.9.1. Non-technical Means of Interpretation

Christ as the main scope of the Bible also determines for Francke the central question with which the reader should approach the text, namely how to seek the dialogue with the divine through Christ. This purposeful approach to the text must be accompanied by a certain attitude of humility and recognition of one’s finitude. According to Francke, the text needs to be approached with a certain simplicity of mind which lets the text speak to the reader and avoids the temptation arrogantly to force the text into the finite frame of reference we naturally have (EL 230; cf. ChK 235). One way of entering into such a frame of mind is to approach the text knowing that its author is the creator of the reader: “Oh teach me to always consider from what great master builder and creator stems my mortal body, this little peace of soil.” Because of the human propensity to cover up and deny our finite status, this constant reminder of his/her

\[\footnotesize{\text{104 So laß die denn / der du gerne Christum / den Kern der Schrifft / recht treffen und seiner teilhaftig werden möchtest / vor allen dingen anbefohlen seyn / daß du bedenkest / warum liestest du die heilige Schrift? oder zu welchem Zweck richtest du alles dein Bibel lesen? Was suchest du dadurch? Denn eine jede Sache muß zu ihrem rechten und völligen Zweck geführet werden / oder man hat nicht den rechten und völligen Nutzen davon zu gewarten. In Lesung heiliger Schrifft muß Hertz und Sinn auff diesen und auff keinen andern End-Zweck gerichtet werde / daß man 1.) zu Cristo / und 2.) durch die Christum zur ewigen Seligkeit gelangen möge”(ChK 235).}}\]

\[\footnotesize{\text{105 „Wo man sich nun hierinnen in der Furcht Gottes fleißig übet / und sich gewehnet hat / von keinem Text frech und vermessen zu urtheilen / was der Verstand desselbigen sey / ehe man des Zwecks versichert ist / wozu es geredet oder geschrieben worden...“}}\]

\[\footnotesize{\text{106 „Ach lehre mich doch allezeit recht bedencken/was auch mein sterblicher Leib/das Stücklein Erde/für einen grossen Baumeister und Schöpfer habe.”}}\]
creaturely status and finite horizon (ibid.) is to be maintained even if the reader becomes more proficient in hermeneutics. ¹⁰⁷

The text is to be read dialogically, as if the reader were in conversation with the divine. Prayer and reading must go hand in hand, otherwise no benefit will be gained. As an example of this kind of reading Francke suggests that the reading of the Genesis account “In the Beginning God made heaven and earth,” should be accompanied by a prayer “Oh dear God! If you have created heaven and earth then you are greater and more glorious than heaven and earth. Therefore, if I only have you, I don’t ask for heaven and earth” (Einfältiger Unterricht FWA 217). ¹⁰⁸ Such close reading was to preclude a superficial scanning of a text, because only an in-depth study would make reading profitable on the applicatory level: “Where one rushes through a chapter, closes his Bible and then soon forgets what has been read, one should not be surprised when even a frequent reading of the Bible will not yield an increase in piety and devotion” (Einfältiger Unterricht, FWA 218). ¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Spener had advocated the same caution. The reader should always be aware not to become arrogant and begin to judge the content of the text from his finite perspective. He warns that the greatest hindrance to a profitable reading of the text is arrogance, “wenn man auf seine eigene weissheit vertrauet / und mit derselben in die Schrifft hineingehet / sich einbildende / man seye ja gelehrt und verständig genug / dieselbe von selbst zu verstehen” (Lesen der Schrifft 91).

¹⁰⁸ “Ach lieber Gott! hast du Himmel und Erde erschaffen, so bist du ja besser und herrlicher als Himmel und Erde. Darum, wenn ich nur Dich habe, so frage ich nichts nach Himmel und Erde.” Franccke used Bernhard de Clairvaux and also Luther as evidence that this model of reading was not new: “Also mag man bey einem ieglichen Versicul in der Bible stille stehn, und, wie Lutherus redet, gleichsam an ein iegliches Sträuchlein klopfen, ob auch einige Beerlein herunterfallen wollen” (ibid.).

¹⁰⁹ “Wo man über ein Capitel hinrauschet/darnach die Bibel zuschlägt/und was man gelesen hat/bald aus den Gedancken fahren läset/so ist es kein Wunder/daß man die Bibel wohl oft durchlese/und doch nicht frömmer und andächtiger werde.” Spener had similarly argued against a mere superficial reading of the text: “Wer auch das allerleichteste liest oben einiges achtgeben und nur oben hin/der hat gar keinen nutzen darvon: wer aber schwere dinge auch in weltlichen materien liest/wo nicht der fleiss des achtgebens derselben wichtigkeit und schwere gleichkommet wird ein solcher auch vergeben arbeit mit dem lesen thun.” Spener says that in light of the eternal import of the biblical text we should be even more concerned to use all means and diligence in reading the Bible (Lesen der Schrifft 75).
Another hermeneutical key is the sharpening of one's understanding of the text through adversity. Like Flacius, Francke suggests that trials and adversities are a hermeneutical aid sent by God to drive the reader deeper into the text and increase one's understanding, "How much more deeply will you understand under the cross than before the cross!" (Einleitung zur Lesung, FWA 219). All reading is meant to lead toward faith, to strengthen existing faith and to encourage those who already know the text to apply it to their lives (ibid. 221-222).

Francke also echoes the Puritans in declaring that an applicatory hermeneutic can occur only with divine aid. Like Spener, he insists that the Holy Spirit must open the reader's eyes for a genuine knowledge of the divine. Francke explains the dimensions of spiritual and mere grammatical reading in light of dialoguing with Christ: "Christum in der Schrift finden ist köstlich / aber noch köstlicher ist es ihn finden in seinem Herzen" (FWA 243). Francke merely repeats Perkins' idea that biblical truths must be experienced inwardly, not merely intellectually held.

This inward experience is not some mystical or Gnostic experience detached from the word, but is the same relational knowledge advocated by John Owen. For Francke, as for Spener, biblical epistemology is based on communion with the divine. In one of his expository sermons to the theological faculty in Halle, Francke distinguishes between knowing in a detached, propositional sense and knowing in a relational way. Francke argues that the biblical term for knowing God, epignosis, signifies a relational involvement through faith in God, rather than mere abstract knowledge:

The word epignosis properly signifies a realization rather than mere head-knowledge about which our Saviour said in John 17, 3: That is eternal life, that they may know [erkennen] you, the only true God, and that they may know Jesus

110 "Wie wirst du es so viel tieffer verstehen unter dem Creutz/als vor dem Creutz!"
111 "Wozu er ein jegliches lesen/und wie er es zur Gründung und Stärckung seines Glaubens und zur Besserung des Lebens anwenden soll."
Epignosis, then, is a living knowledge of the truth (eine lebendige Erkenntnis der Wahrheit). It is important to note Francke’s choice of words. The English “to know” can be expressed by two verbs in German, wissen and erkennen. Francke uses the latter term, which denotes the recognition of a truth already present. In German, epistemology is translated as Erkenntnistheorie, and thus originally denoted a science of how one recognizes something existent independently of human impressions. Francke defines knowledge, as did Spener, in this original sense as the recognition of something always present; an external, objective reality to which one has been blind. The interpretation of the universe and human existence is thus not a choice of personal preference. Rather in the created universe, the creator has already shaped reality and endowed it with meaning. Therefore the one who would interpret one’s existence correctly needs to open one’s eyes to recognize (erkennen) that one lives in a universe presided over by a divine creator. Therefore there is no objectively detached knowledge, but all knowledge makes sense ultimately only in light of a recognition of the creator and his purpose for his creation. Nevertheless, this knowledge is objectively (over against the human subjective impressions) revealed in the words of Scripture in such a way that a spiritual and grammatical dimension in the text do not contradict but complement each other.

It seems then that the very vocabulary used by Francke reflects the balance between propositional and relational knowledge which neither an objective scientism detached from the divine, nor a radically subjective theory of knowledge would be able to maintain. Although Francke himself does not enter into such speculations, his use of language allows us to analyze the basic reality-structure of his hermeneutic.

5.9.2. Technical Means of Interpretation

The reader’s humble openness to the text, and the word’s spiritual dimension do not, however, preclude serious text-critical work: "Doch hats nicht die Meynung / als wenn du die heilige Schrifft selbst nicht lesen / oder doch keine Betrachtung in Lesung der Schrifft anstellen soltest" (FWA 235). On the contrary, the grand theme of the Bible, Christ, is expressed through narratives, poems and literary devices, all of which demand recognition. Francke offers seven stages for reading the text which the reader will master step by step:

1.) to seek out the overall scope of the entire text / 2.) to consider adequately the preceding and following [texts] 3.) to consider accurately the circumstances [for what purpose the text was written], the who? what? how? where? when? to what purpose? etc. 4.) to compare one statement with another / the Old with the New Testament / Moses with the Prophets and Psalms / etc. / and to explain one with the help of the other / the difficult through the easier [places] / 5.) to accept the words of God's men according to their divine meaning / which indwells them/ (which they express in one place more clearly than in another) and not according to the outer sound / nor the carnal meaning as the world does / 6.) to deduce one truth from another / and 7.) to contemplate the sweet harmony and interconnection of all divine truths with pleasure (ibid. 235).
As is evident from the quotation, Francke adopts the *sola scriptura* principle when he talks about the “sweet harmony and interconnection of divine truths” revealed therein, and the reader’s ability to “deduce one truth from another.” The clarity of the text, however, is also dependent on a careful and intelligent reading (*Lectio Praenectica* II, 10).

Thus Francke pleads for a contextual reading: “Denn da ist in dem Studio Hermeneuticae Sacrae nichts nothiger und nützlicher/als daß man den Scopum oder End-Zweck einer jeglichen Rede erkenne” (FWA 223). The whole Bible is written intelligently and coherently, Francke argues, so that the scope of a text is also connected with the scope of the entire book (“sintemal der Zweck eines besonderen Texts allezeit mit dem Text eines gantzen Buches verknüpfli ist”; ibid.). According to Francke, the thematic structure of the biblical text(s) can be broken down into one main scopus and several sub-themes.

Francke designates these themes (or elements) which make up the structure of the text the *sedes materiarum* of each passage under examination. The term *sedes materiarum* ("seat-of-the-subject-matter") denotes the reader’s attempt to find sub-themes within a passage and determine their function. Francke suggests three types of *sedes*. One, the easiest, is where an entire book deals with a single subject matter. The second type is where a certain portion of one book deals with a subject-matter in contrast to the rest of the writing. Lastly, some portions of the text may contain foreign subject-matter which is used to illustrate a point at hand. As an example of this last class Francke cites Paul’s letter to the Phillipians, where the apostle uses the doctrine of Christ’s incarnation as an example to admonish the church to humility (*Einfältiger Unterricht*, FWA 231).

In other words, Francke realizes the narrative character of the text where the story of God’s interaction with humankind through Christ is expressed in various themes. This recognition enables Francke to encourage his readers to read the Bible thematically.
according to the cardinal Christian doctrines, instead of reading according to book divisions. That way, one may gain interpretative independence, as the doctrines grow out of the text, rather than being read into it (ibid.).

Francke also extends the use of context to linguistics. He encourages word studies. The reader becomes familiar with biblical idioms, colourful expressions, and imagery. Moreover, he should research allusions made by Christ and the apostles to the Old Testament in order to gain access to the full connotations of their statements.\footnote{Darum ist hoch vonnöthen / daß man nicht allein jetzt gedachten Grund aus denen von Christo und seine Aposteln angezogenen Orten des Alten Testaments mit allem fleiß lege; sonder daß man auch sich gewöhne / auff ein jedes Wort / welches Christus und seine Apostel geredet haben / acht zu haben / es zu erwegen / woher es genommen / und was es für einen Nachdruck in sich fasse / zu bedencken; ja daß man mit Christo und seinen Aposteln / vermittelst der Schrifften Neues Testamentes / als mit seinen besten Freunden ohne Unterlaß umgehe / und sich täglich mit ihnen gleichsam bespreche in der Betrachtung ihrer Worte und Reden" (ChK 238).}

Although our reading of Francke is admittedly short, it should suffice to conclude that he shares the Puritan concept of relational knowledge, the need for illumination in the reading of the text and the importance of grammatical-historical criticism. Most importantly, however, he demonstrates like his Puritan predecessors that application is an essential and integral part of "pre-critical" hermeneutics. In brief, Francke’s hermeneutic is not original, but stands well within the traditional interpretative paradigm advocated in detail by Flacius, Perkins, Owen and Spener.

5.10. Conclusion:

Before we move on to the last step in this thesis, the charting of significant deviations from the Puritan/Pietist hermeneutic in the writings of Schleiermacher, we should pause for a moment to assess our findings so far.

Puritanism and the Pietism of Spener and Francke principally share the same hermeneutic. Puritan devotional literature and the German Pietist writings both assert that
the interpretation of human existence must be conducted through a dialogue with the
divine. This dialogue is interpersonal and based on a balance of objective revelation and
subjective experience. The reader does not dialogue with a text as an impersonal object,
but, through the different textual and linguistic media, listens to the divine voice. Christ,
as the incarnation of God and the focus of the divine revelation, is the key to the entire
hermeneutical system.

Both hermeneutical approaches are oriented toward practical application. The text
cannot be read in detached ‘objective,’ fashion. Rather reading is inseparably connected
to application. This is what the German Pietists called “erbauliches lesen.” The verb
erbauen has connotations of building a house, constructing something by assembling its
parts over a longer period of time. The English term “growth” and its German equivalent
“Wachstumb” (Francke EL 223), were used in hermeneutical manuals to address these
two dimensions. Growth comprised both the growing relationship with the divine and the
restoration of the lost image of God in the believer at the same time.

For the Pietists as well as for the Puritans, morality was tied to a relationship with
the divine. Thus ethical principles, in contrast to moralism, were observed in willing
recognition that the divine perspective was the only possible foundation for an
improvement of society. John Owen made this clear by stating that sanctification was a
renewal of God’s image in man. Francke, similarly, ties morality to Christology when he
defines Christ as the face of God (“Christus als das Gesicht Gottes”). Thus to live an
ethically appropriate life was to do everything according to Christ’s example and so to
reflect the image of God (Schmidt AGP 2:259-260).

The strength of this applicatory hermeneutic is demonstrated by Pietist social
concerns. The example of Francke is especially impressive. He was a one-man army
against poverty, moral decay and oppression of lower social classes - all based on his
biblical hermeneutic. Hans Leube in his study *Die Sozialideen des kirchlichen Pietismus*, affirms that Pietism found value and worth in the ordinary because of its theistic Christocentric hermeneutic (AGP 13:148 ff.). Calvin and his English followers, the Puritans, were likewise known for their charity to the poor, their educational efforts and their conviction that even the most menial task can be done to the glory of God.115

This meant that traditions and customs which are contrary to the divine will must be overcome and aligned with the text. Such a procedure, however, takes time. This is why Puritanism and Pietism understood themselves as the completion of the Reformation, and it is perhaps in the light of progressive understanding of the text and the increasingly consistent application of it that we should assess the Pietist/Puritan movement.

We can see the correction of misconceived traditional practices within the Christian world-view. For example, where Luther and Calvin were still part of a system which had little compunction in continuing the Roman Catholic tradition of executing heretics (although not through the church but by handing them over to the magistracy), John Owen pleads for tolerance based on his conviction that it is the power of the divine word that ought to convince heretics, not human reason or external compulsion. The difference to non-biblical philosophical systems is that Owen could make his case by appealing to an absolute authority. He had a moral foundation, a standard for moral

115 Leland Ryken in his work *Worldly Saints. The Puritans As They Really Were* has two excellent chapters on social action and education in which he shows the tremendous contribution Puritanism (and Protestantism in general) made in restoring the dignity of secular offices (Ryken 157-187). A good idea of the Puritan ideals concerning education may be gleaned from Milton’s *Of Education*, which spells out the implications of education under the umbrella of God’s law (to love God and your neighbour). According to Milton, education needed to be based on a religious foundation because of the fall: “The end of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue, which being united to the heavenly grace of faith makes up the highest perfection.” Secondly, for Milton education had to equip a person to serve God in the church and in the commonwealth: “I call therefore a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully, and magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war” (“Of Education” in John Milton Complete Poems and Major Prose, (Hughes ed., New York: Macmillan, 1989) 131-132.)
conduct to which he could appeal and by which he could judge former actions.

However, those who advocate an ethic on the basis of a silent universe devoid of a final transcendent moral authority have no such standard for judging their own failures. They are condemned, as Taylor put it, to the self-creation of values. In this anthropocentric framework, however, Hitler's and Stalin's excesses can ultimately not be condemned, because in a silent anthropocentric universe there is no authority, save that of utility, to provide a moral standard external to our own.

Perhaps we can learn from the pre-critical paradigm the usefulness of a metanarrative of morality. The Puritan and Pietist idea that humanity is created in the image of God, for example, provides a genuine basis for the dignity of the individual, and prevents ethical relativism through its conviction that human existence can only be interpreted and conducted in dialogue with the divine through written revelation. Charles Taylor hints at such Christian notions at the end of his *Sources of the Self*. Gadamer grapples with the problem of the notion of the Good. Both sense the need for ethical confidence, but, as I will argue, their 'solutions' are unsatisfying, because their thoughts are turning again toward a moral metanarrative, but they also shy away from the Christian foundation of the pre-critical paradigm on which this narrative rests.

As I hope to show, Gadamer's attempt to construct an applicatory dimension for his philosophical hermeneutic fails, because he still holds on to secularized Christian notions which are no longer part of the paradigm of the silent universe to which he adheres. The next stop on our hermeneutical journey, however, is Schleiermacher, whose work coincides with the main anthropocentric turning point in the history of hermeneutics, manifested in a large-scale secularization of biblical hermeneutics.
Chapter VI: The Hermeneutics of Friedrich Schleiermacher

You ask me which language is secret enough: Speech, writing, action or the quiet mimicry of the mind? I answer: Each one, and you can see that I have not eschewed the noisiest one. In each the sacred remains secret and hidden from the profane. Let them gnaw at the husk however much they like; but do not refuse us to worship the God who will be within you. (Schleiermacher in *Reden über die Religion* SW 4:399)

6.1. A Justification for a Theological Assessment of Schleiermacher’s Hermeneutics

The thought of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is generally recognized as constituting a turning point in both theology and hermeneutics. Theologians have called him the "father of modern Protestant theology" (Tillich 387). In the field of hermeneutics he has been credited with establishing hermeneutics as a general method, disconnected from biblical exegeses (Palmer 40). Up to the time of Schleiermacher, the term hermeneutics had, for the most part, been exclusively tied to biblical exegesis.

Although there had been individual attempts at non-orthodox biblical criticism before him, it was Schleiermacher who formulated the insights of these attempts, based on a more liberal interpretation of Christianity provided by the deistic and rationalistic intellectual currents, into a general hermeneutic.

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1 "Ihr fragt, welche Sprache geheim genug sei, die Rede, die Schrift, die Tat, die stille Mimik des Geistes? Jede, antworte ich, und ihr seht, ich habe die lauteste nicht geschütt. In jeder bleibt das Heilige geheim und vor dem Profanen verborgen. Lass sie an der Schale nagen, wie sie mögen; aber weigert uns nicht, den Gott anzubeten, der in euch sein wird."

2 Paul Tillich recognizes a decisive turning point in the history of theology in Schleiermacher for: "theology was faced with having to make the basic decision, whether the attempt to construct a synthesis out of all the elements in theology we have described is the right way, or whether a return to the orthodox tradition with some modernizations is the right way. If the latter method is followed, then of course Schleiermacher has to be abolished; but if the former, then Schleiermacher remains the founder of modern Protestant theology" (A History of Christian thought 387).

3 Richard Palmer states that Schleiermacher's "conception of a general hermeneutics marks the beginning of the non-disciplinary 'hermeneutics'...It might almost be said that hermeneutics proper here emerges historically from its parentage in biblical exegesis and classical philology" (Palmer, 40).

4 Jean Grondin, in his *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, shows that there had been some isolated attempts to construct a more general philosophical hermeneutic. See especially his chapters on Dannhauer and Chladenius pp. 47-59.
Schleiermacher's theoretical framework is a defense of religion against both the orthodox theologians of his day and against a rationalist conception of religion. Schleiermacher rejected what he believed to be the naive and unproductive fundamentalism of orthodox theologians, but he also refused to allow the reduction of religion to abstract reason and morality as advocated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, especially Kant. Despite Schleiermacher's intention to rehabilitate Christianity, he in fact effectively removed written revelation as its foundation.

In order to make Christianity appealing to its cultured despisers of his day, Schleiermacher advanced his own system, which may be described as a monistic world view, a cosmos in which a universal Spirit, the "Welt-Geist" or "das All" is the ground of all being. By de-personalizing the divine, Schleiermacher represents the first step taken by Protestant theology toward a silent universe. Schleiermacher seems to realize that human worth and conduct must be founded in something that transcends humanity, but he cannot accept the authority of a divine being that is wholly other. Thus in an anthropocentric turn he tries to construct a system in which transcendence may be achieved without a deity whose sovereignty and holy character require reconciliation through Christ before a person can enter communion and dialogue with the divine.

It is my contention that the direct links of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical rules to his monistic universe have not been adequately explored and exhibited. Hans-Georg Gadamer, for example, in his account of Romantic hermeneutics, merely states that Schleiermacher's hermeneutics was formulated in contrast to that of Wolf and Ast (TM 185). Gadamer does not inform the reader about the theological and philosophical background which shapes Schleiermacher's concepts of spirit and understanding. Yet it is

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5 I chose the term monism because it best describes Schleiermacher's intention to conceive of human beings as interconnected, interdependent entities the unity of which lies in the individual's connection - conscious or not - with the whole, the world all. Schleiermacher is not really a pantheist, because inanimate objects are not included in this connective circle. The unity of which Schleiermacher speaks is neither really mental nor physical, but rather spiritual.
only within the peculiar mixture of Schleiermacher's theological philosophizing that his ideas can be adequately understood and integrated into the overall narrative of hermeneutical development.

Gadamer seems well enough aware of the spiritually charged foundation of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, as several statements suggest. Gadamer mentions, for example, that Schleiermacher's hermeneutic depends on "a pre-existing bond of all individuals" (TM 189). He also mentions that Schleiermacher extends the hermeneutical circle of part and whole that had been used by the philological school of Wolf and Ast to "psychological understanding, which necessarily understands every structure of thought as an element in the total context of a man's life" (TM 190).

However, Gadamer does not give the reader the necessary background to understand why Schleiermacher can make such claims. Gadamer presents Schleiermacher's monistic background in implicit and very moderate terms, as if Schleiermacher merely recognized common human qualities on the basis of which he can claim a universal hermeneutics (TM 191), and in general he overlooks the thoroughly spiritual-theological foundation of Schleiermacher's principles.

Jean Grondin in his Sources of Hermeneutics also neglects the theological context of Schleiermacher's thought and foregrounds his indebtedness to Romanticism (6). Grondin's otherwise insightful description of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics lacks the dimension of theology that is so vital for an understanding of this founder of modern theology. For instance, Grondin explains that Schleiermacher's notion of hermeneutics as dialogical is intended to make us

grow beyond our limited selves and achieve some kind of relative universality. We get to see things from different perspectives and enrich our limited understanding. This stress on the dialogical element of understanding is precious indeed. One can

6Gadamer also links Schleiermacher's concept of divination to the conception of the spiritual interconnectedness of humanity: "In hermeneutics, what corresponds to the production of genius is divination, the immediate solution, which ultimately presupposes a kind of con-geniality" (TM 189).
find traces of it in the contemporary hermeneutics, in Gadamer's dialogical conception of the hermeneutic experience, but also in the project of an ethics of discussion. (Sources of Hermeneutics 7)

Not a word do we read here about Schleiermacher's grounding of the universal and dialogical nature of hermeneutics in a rather monistic view of the divine and in the idea of God-consciousness. Grondin has 'gadamerized' Schleiermacher's view of dialogue by quietly dropping the telos toward which his whole hermeneutical enterprise is directed, namely the universalizing of God-consciousness. This event is Schleiermacher's eschaton, that to which he looks forward. His whole hermeneutical project is meant to contribute to the ushering in of this moment.

One must also mention Manfred Frank, professor of philosophy at the university of Geneva, who argues against a mystical reading of Schleiermacher. In his preface to a new edition of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical writings he explains that the psychological elements of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic have been unduly emphasized by Heinz Kimmerle's 1959 edition. Frank claims that Schleiermacher's very goal was to distance himself from the Enlightenment hermeneutics of both Romanticism and Rationalism. He neither believed in the interconnection of every human being through the notion of Geist, as the Fichte student Ast claimed, nor did he succumb to the Enlightenment trust in reason as the unifying factor of all interpretative efforts. For the former, any cultural-educational accretions on the original spirit of human expression were to be removed in order to discover the message; such was the task of philology (Frank 23). For the latter, the immutable powers of human reason built the bridge which closed the hermeneutical gap between author and reader (Frank 19).

Frank argues, in my opinion justly, that both attempts are at heart merely a substitute for the former theological notion of inspiration, which had guaranteed the

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timelessness of the text by transcending cultural and historical differences (15). Schleiermacher, according to Frank, refuses to advocate a transcendent perspective in interpretation. Schleiermacher is the first to apply Kant’s critique of reason to hermeneutics, by stating that all writing and interpretation are done out of, and within historical context. In an anthropological shift he moves as it were from a transcendent hermeneutic to a transcendental analysis of interpretation. Thus Schleiermacher is one of the first to realize that no overall hermeneutical method can solve textual problems, because there is no universal reason (logos) nor inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Although general rules can be loosely formulated, each text seems to require that the interpreter appropriate the same cultural-historical parameters as the author (Frank 19).

Frank is certainly correct in his assessment that Schleiermacher represents a shift toward the historicizing of interpretation and toward viewing the text as an expression of the author’s individuality rather than a mere construct of words for conveying a message. Yet Frank secularizes Schleiermacher too much. He loses touch with the latter’s Moravian heritage and theological roots. Especially in light of Schleiermacher’s more popular writings, Frank’s distancing of Schleiermacher from Ast’s universal “Geist” is hard to accept, because Schleiermacher does seem to advocate a similar concept. In fact, I would claim that Schleiermacher and Ast historicize with a similar aim, namely to get in touch with the moment of creation, when the author was touched by the spirit of the All.

Neglect of Schleiermacher’s metaphysical-theological background leads to a selective picking from his concepts. For example, modern philosophical hermeneutics derives from Schleiermacher the close connection between interpretation and understanding (TM 186). Yet, however valuable Schleiermacher’s insight may be, it

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8 Gadamer writes that Schleiermacher’s contribution “is more than an extension of the hermeneutical problem from understanding what is written to understanding discourse in general; it suggests a fundamental shift. What is to be understood is now not only the exact words and their objective meaning, but also the individuality of the speaker or author. Schleiermacher holds that the author can really be understood only by going back to the origin of his thought....What he finds ‘most neglected, and even
should not be decontextualized. As Grondin himself points out, the enterprise of hermeneutics is to discover how a question is framed: "Without taking into account this motivational context, which makes the understanding of the written more perilous than the spoken word, there is no way one can hope to understand. This is the heart of Plato's dialectic and of contemporary hermeneutics" (Sources of Hermeneutics 31).

Hermeneutics is never done in a vacuum. We must explore, at least to the extent of its relevance to our investigation, the metaphysical framework in which interpretation is conducted in order to recognize the successive secularization of traditional hermeneutics. Schleiermacher's contribution stands or falls with its metaphysical foundation. It seems that Frank, Gadamer and Grondin 'secularize' even further Schleiermacher's own secularization of biblical hermeneutics by not fully revealing his metaphysical construct. Yet Schleiermacher's concepts of (mis)understanding, interpretation and divination all derive from his metaphysics. They come as a package deal, so to speak, and cannot really be separated.

The process of secularization usually entails disregard for a theory's foundation. Enlightenment philosophy, for example, adhered to traditional Christian moral values, but rejected divine revelation as their foundation. In interpretation, as Frank has pointed out, rationalism replaced the Holy Spirit with reason in order to close the historical gap between author and reader. Yet no foundation was given for the timelessness of reason. The danger of failing to examine the foundation of a certain theoretical construct before appropriating it is pointed out by Charles Taylor. He observes that our present dilemma of relativism is a result of such foundationless thinking (Malaise of Modernity 26 ff.). It was only a matter of time before the substitutes for the divine power were exposed and the logical conclusion of non-theistic thinking - the ultimate historicity of all concepts - would gain ascendance.

largely ignored is 'understanding a succession of thoughts as an emerging element of life, as an act that is connected with many others, even of another kind'" (TM 186).
Schleiermacher himself is a main figure in facilitating this subjective turn. He jettisons the objective revelational side of Christianity, while expecting the same ethical results to flow from his re-interpretation of Christian teaching. Philosophical hermeneutics as taught by Gadamer makes the same mistake, by drawing on concepts in Schleiermacher's writing without paying enough attention to their foundation.

It is the task of this chapter to bring fully to light the theologico-philosophical nature of Schleiermacher's work and its connection to his hermeneutics. For when we understand that Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is based on a re-interpretation of Christianity in monistic terms, we can then understand Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics as a further-secularized version of Schleiermacher's ideas. In other words, the interpretation of modern philosophical hermeneutics is set into its proper perspective when viewed in light of a constant move away from the theocentrism of earlier hermeneutics.

The theoretical background to Schleiermacher's thought in my account is taken in the main from his earlier work Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern (1799) and his later publication The Christian Faith, systematically set forth according to the principles of the Evangelical Church (1821; revised edition 1831).

6.2 Schleiermacher's Hermeneutical Universe

An assessment of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical universe is made extremely difficult by a divergence between his stated intentions and the teaching conveyed through the majority of his works. In all of Schleiermacher's writings addressed to the more or

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9 In addition, Schleiermacher set forth some of his leading ideas in the Monologues (1800) and the Dialectic which was issued posthumously (1839). For the German quotations, I have used Dr. Otto Braun and Prof. D. Joh. Bauer's edition of Schleiermachers Werke, (4 vols. Leipzig: Fritz Eckhardt Verlag, 1910: all further references to this edition will henceforth be abbreviated as SW) and Der Christliche Glaube (Martin Redeker ed., Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1960). English quotes, when not my own translations from the German, are taken from the standard English translation of The Christian Faith. My own translations are always indicated by providing the German original in a footnote.
less cultured skeptics of Christianity, as well as in some of his sermons, Schleiermacher’s concept of the universe appears pantheistic. This is especially true for his Reden and Monologen. Yet in the section of Der Christliche Glaube pertaining to creationism, Schleiermacher expresses his desire to walk the fine line between pantheism and deism in his description of God and the cosmos. He states that the feeling of utter dependence cannot be tied to a pantheistic concept of the world, because then the finite would become the infinite and we would depend on ourselves. Advocating a balance between immanence and transcendence, he warns that every being depends on God, yet not in such a way that God can be made a part of creation.

It is nearly impossible to determine what he really believed. The fact that many of his pantheistic-sounding statements in Der Christliche Glaube are accompanied with cautious qualifications that God is to be seen as separate from the unity of all finite being (der Einheit alles endlichen Seins) shows Schleiermacher was aware of his own balancing act. However, in his writings Schleiermacher doesn’t manage to keep away from the ‘cliff’ of pantheism, as he calls it, but suffers shipwreck. His attempt to unify faith and reason in a pre-cognitive harmony with the universe appears even to the well intentioned listener, and contrary to Schleiermacher’s own claims, as a monistic construct. While some try to distinguish a theological and a philosophical voice in Schleiermacher

10 "Was aber die Bestimmungen selbst betrifft, so ist wohl deutlich, daß unser schlechthinniges Abhängigkeitsgefühl nicht könnte auf die allgemeine Beschaffenheit alles endlichen Seins bezogen werden, wenn in diesem irgend ewtas von Gott unabhängig wäre oder jemals gewesen wäre. Ebenso gewiß ist es aber auch, daß wenn in allem endlichen Sein als solchem irgend etwas wäre, das als von Gott unabhängig in die Entstehung desselben eingegangen wäre, so könnte, weil eben dies auch in uns sein müßte, das schlechthinnige Abhängigkeitsgefühl auch in Beziehung auf uns selbst keine Wahrheit haben. Würde dagegen Gott als schaffend auf irgendeine Weise beschränkt gedacht, also demjenigen ähnlich in seiner Tätigkeit, was doch schlechthin von ihm abhängig sein soll: so würde das diese Abhängigkeit aussagende Gefühl ebenso nicht wahr sein können, indem Gleichheit und Abhängigkeit sich gegenseitig aufheben, und also das Endliche, sofern es Gott gleich wäre, nicht könnte schlechthin von ihm abhängig sein. Unter einer anderen als diesen beiden Formen aber ist ein Widerspruch irgendeiner Theorie von der Schöpfung mit der allgemeinen Grundlage unseres frommen Selbstbewußtseins nicht zu denken. Mit dem christlichen Charakter desselben aber, der eine Erfahrung schon vorraussetzt, kann eine Lehre von der bloßen Schöpfung, wie sie auf das Fortbestehen keine Rücksicht nimmt, auch nicht in Widerspruch stehen. Die christliche Frömmigkeit kann also bei diesen Forschungen kein anderes Interesse haben, als nur sie von diesen beiden Klippen fernzuhalten" (Der Christliche Glaube 197-198).
(Mackintosh 94), I believe that Emil Brunner was right over seventy years ago when he stated that Schleiermacher's whole system is an irreconcilable departure from Reformation theology (Die Mystik und das Wort 10).\textsuperscript{11}

The "universum" is Schleiermacher's ground for all of reality. Thinking and knowing have this ground as their goal. Whatever this unifying ground may be, self-understanding, identity and religion are defined by one's relationship to it. Schleiermacher calls this focal point variously "the world, the universe, the eternal world, the heavenly, the highest world Spirit, the world All, the divine, God, and the Godhead.\textsuperscript{12} This universum is both the object and cause of religious feelings. In fact, the universe is Schleiermacher's replacement for God: "Now let us ascend higher...where the universe presents itself as totality, as unity in diversity, as a system and where it thus earns its name, should not the one, who sees it as such unity, even without the idea of a God, have more religion than the most educated polytheist?" (Werke 4: 287).\textsuperscript{13}

Schleiermacher is not out to destroy religion. Rather, much like the theosophists and pansophists of the seventeenth century, Schleiermacher seeks to bridge a perceived epistemological gap between reason and faith. He does so by retreating into a pre-cognitive state, where no subject-object opposition obstructs pure experiential knowledge. Yet, theologically, such oneness is impossible on the basis of Reformed thought, in which an ontological-spiritual difference separates the divine from the creature. But Schleiermacher refuses to seek reconciliation between human and divine along biblical

\textsuperscript{11} Brunner states that there is an "irreconcilable inner impossibility of a union between [Schleiermacher's] philosophy of immanence and the Christianity of the Bible" (10).
\textsuperscript{12} The respective German terms are: "die Welt", "das Universum", "die ewige Welt", "das himmlische", "der höchste Weltgeist", "das Welt All", "das Göttliche," "Gott" and "die Gottheit."
\textsuperscript{13} "Nun lasst uns höher steigen...wo das Universum sich als Totalität, als Einheit der Vielheit, als System darstellt, und so erst seinen Namen verdient; sollte nicht der, der es so anschaut als eins und alles auch ohne die Idee eines Gottes mehr Religion haben, als der gebildetste Polytheist?"
lines. Instead he attempts to eliminate the breach by reducing the otherness of the divine while elevating humanity's spiritual abilities.\footnote{The distinction between spiritual and rational abilities is influenced by Kant's critique of pure reason in which he states that only the feeling of God-consciousness, not reason, can attain to a vision that unifies all differences. For a good description of Schleiermacher's indebtedness to and criticism of Kant, see Thandeka, The Embodied Self: Friedrich Schleiermacher's Solution to Kant's Problem of the Empirical Self (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 108-118.}

As his biographer Dilthey asserts, Schleiermacher is driven to find "Zusammenhänge" (ultimate connections) which lend unity to the multiple fragments of human experience. Dilthey explains: "The world is not only to be explained in its finite causal relations, but it is also supposed to be understood as an all-comprehending piece of art in its own eternal harmony, as it mirrors itself to that spirit which focuses on the vision and feeling for the holistic, for the one" (GS XIII/1, 323).\footnote{"Die Welt soll nicht nur in ihren endlichen kausalen Bezügen erklärt, sie soll als das allumfassende Kunstwerk in ihrer ewigen Harmonic verstanden werden, wie sie in dem auf Anschauung und Gefühl des Ganzen, Einen, Allen gerichteten Geiste sich spiegelt"}

The Puritans and Pietists had found unity among the diversity of existence in the notion of providence. They believed that a supreme deity with the immutable attributes of love, goodness, justice and mercy directed and used every individual choice and historical event toward the growth of the church and the furtherance of the deity's glory. Schleiermacher rejected such theocentrism. However, neither did he embrace atheism, but rather changed the notion of providence into an impersonal force, operating progressively throughout history. I shall discuss this point presently.

The problem is that explanation of unity in the diversity of the universe always requires the positing of purpose. Any theory which favours contingency to the exclusion of a higher purpose has no explanation for appearances of design or unity in the cosmos. In common usage this problem is obscured. We often use the phrase "mother nature has done this or that" to explain intricate and purposeful design in creatures and natural processes. However, unless we are willing to invest the notion of "mother nature" with some form of real intelligence and purpose, such statements are non-sensical. Popular
concepts such as “mother nature,” or of “chance” as ruler of events, are mere secular replacements of the Christian notion of providence. Schleiermacher needed a concept which could explain unity in the cosmos as a form of transcendence devoid of the authority presented by the radical ontological otherness of the Christian God.\footnote{I use the term “radical” ontological otherness in distinction to the Greek and Roman religions, where the gods possessed superhuman qualities, but their otherness did not extend to moral superiority.} Schleiermacher found this construct in his readings of Shaftesbury and Spinoza.

The Puritans and the early Pietists saw hermeneutics as an essential tool in the dialogue with the creator God on both a personal and a corporate level. Who or what, then, is the dialogue-partner in Schleiermacher’s case? Dilthey tells us that Schleiermacher was heavily influenced by Spinoza (1632-1677) and by Anthony the Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713) in his ideas about human nature and the universe. Shaftesbury, like Schleiermacher after him, combined the disbelief in the traditional Christian deity with a conviction of teleological purpose and harmony in the universe to form a monistic concept of existence. In the last book of his Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times (1711), a section entitled “The Moralists,” Shaftesbury advances his basic view of existence through the character of Theocles:

In fine, continued Theocles (raising his voice and action), being thus, even by skepticism itself, convinced the more still of my own being and of this self of mine that ’tis a real self drawn out and copied from another principal and original self (the Great One of the world), I endeavour to be really one with it, and conformable to it as far as I am able. I consider that, as there is one general mass, one body of the whole, so to this body there is an order, to this order a mind; that to this general mind each particular one must have a relation, as being of like substance,...alike active upon body, original to motion and order; alike simple, uncompounded individual; of like energy, effect, and operation; and more like still, if it co-operates with it to general good, and strives to will according to the best of wills. So that it cannot surely but seem natural that the particular mind should seek its happiness in conformity with the general one, and endeavour to resemble it in its highest simplicity and excellence. (106)
Shaftesbury describes the universe as one great mind, driven by a desire for the general good. As we will shortly see, this organic teleological panexistentialism is reflected in Schleiermacher’s writings.

Schleiermacher was also familiar with Spinoza’s writings. Spinoza’s pantheistic world view is well known; therefore I will not discuss it, but merely point out Schleiermacher’s familiarity with it. In his Reden, he pays tribute to Spinoza in the enthusiastic style which is the characteristically romantic tone of this work: "Opfert mit mir ehrerbietig eine Locke den Manen des heiligen verstoßenen Spinoza! Ihn durchdrang der hohe Weltgeist; das Unendliche war sein Anfang und Ende, das Universum seine einzige Liebe, in heiliger Unschuld und tiefer Demut spiegelte er sich in der ewigen Welt und sah zu, wie auch er ihr liebenswürdiger Spiegel war; voller Religion und voller heiligen Geistes" (SW, V 243).17

Schleiermacher’s universe approximates the construct of Spinoza and Shaftesbury before him. The universe is really one giant organism that has existed from all eternity. It is God, but not the deity of the Bible. This construct allows Schleiermacher to overcome the gap between faith and science established by Kant. Already in his Dialektik Schleiermacher had taught that the very foundation of all sciences is to gain knowledge of the divine. He believes that one knows God when one gains a comprehensive view of nature. God cannot be known as a person, but rather becomes known through a comprehensive knowledge of the universe: “There is no isolated viewing of the godhead; rather we can only look at it within the whole system of viewing” (Dialektik 25).18

Schleiermacher already foreshadows Dilthey’s attempt at founding a universal basis for science. Schleiermacher’s motivation for such an undertaking is to gain knowledge of the divine: “We are therefore engaged in the formation of the living beholding of the godhead

18 “Es gibt keine isolierte Anschauung der Gottheit, sondern wir schauen sie nur an in und mit dem gesamten System der Anschauung”
insofar as we work on the completion of the natural sciences" (Dialektik 31). Natural sciences help to inform us about the workings of the universe in their intricate connections; thus science serves as the way to God. The individual’s knowledge of God is possible only through a comprehensive interpretation of the world: “Our knowledge about God is thus only complete with the world vision. As soon as we have a trace of the one, we also have the basic pattern of the other. To the extent to which the world vision is incorrect, the idea of the godhead will also remain mythological” (ibid. 25).

Schleiermacher’s intentions seem to be benign with regards to Christianity in so far as his monism could be interpreted as the conviction that science and Christian belief are not contradictory. We recall that ‘pre-critical’ hermeneutics had also advocated this position, albeit on the grounds of a created universe. Science was not a means to the knowledge of God, but rather to ‘think God’s thoughts after him’ to his glory and the improvement of humanity. Thus science became enframed in the moral obligations of the creature to the creator. For Schleiermacher, by contrast, science does serve as a means to knowing the divine. This subtle epistemological shift serves apologetical purposes. Schleiermacher believes that popular atheism is directed only against a mythical way of thinking about God (i.e. that of orthodox Protestantism), but not against his brand of Christianity (ibid.). However, his apologetics only work by jettisoning the teaching concerning human depravity. Schleiermacher on the one hand makes Christianity appealing to the cultured skeptics by arguing that true faith need not contradict empirical facts, while on the other hand he constructs a mystical monism along lines more suited to the self-esteem of his audience by downplaying the ontological-spiritual difference between a holy God and a fallen sinful creation.

19 “Wir sind also im Bilden der lebendigen Anschauung der Gottheit begriffen in sofern wir an der Vervollständigung der realen Wissenschaften arbeiten.”
20 “Zwischen Wissenschaft und Kunst ist zwar ein Gegensatz, der aber immer mehr sich zu verringern scheint, je höher man aufsteigt.”
In keeping with this monism, Schleiermacher's view of creation ultimately cannot distinguish between God and creation. He explains them as co-eternal (Dialektik 31; Christliche Glaube I § 41 199 ff.). He needs this unity for two reasons. First, it helps him to explain the notions of creation (Schöpfung) and preservation (Erhaltung) in a way that eliminates the distance between God and man foregrounded in the biblical account. God, for Schleiermacher, is bound up in the world, there is no difference between "can" and "will" that apply to God. He is, in other words, pure act. Schleiermacher claims that "[w]hat does not become actual, is also, so far as God is concerned, not potential" (Christliche Glaube 1 280). For Schleiermacher, the whole of God is fact, which is precisely what Spinoza had taught (Mackintosh 81). One commentator observes that Schleiermacher "does not wish to be a pantheist, nor is he one in his personal faith; yet as a theologian he never surmounts the difficulty of distinguishing the whole and its parts" (Mackintosh 81).

It is true that Schleiermacher is not a pantheist in the strictest sense of the word, because he does not explicitly suggest a consciousness in inanimate objects. Yet his thought cannot preclude such philosophy either. Especially in terms of knowledge of the transcendent or divine, his universe is decisively different from that of the Puritan/Pietist hermeneutic, because according to him knowledge of the divine and a transcendent perspective can be gained through increasing awareness of the interconnectedness of all things a process that obviates the need for revelation. This leads us to the second reason for Schleiermacher's non-biblical attempt at a unified interpretation of existence.

The second reason for Schleiermacher's monistic construct is its function as a foundation for his hermeneutical circle of part and whole. He addresses this topic in his lectures on dialectics. Schleiermacher defines dialectic as "the principles of the art of philosophizing" (4). To philosophize is, in turn, defined as the "achieving of an insight

21 "Unter Dialektik verstehen wir die Prinzipien der Kunst zu philosophieren" (Dialektik 4).
or knowledge] in conjunction with a clear awareness of how it came about” (ibid.). Schleiermacher calls philosophizing an art, because a piece of art is “a particular in which the whole is immanently present, and which contains an infinite” (ibid.). Schleiermacher’s use of philosophy comprehends all metaphysical speculations which attempt to generate knowledge of the whole. These are the most pure form of art.

The other sciences, he argues, are less pure, because in them formal concerns of method often come between the subject-matter and its presentation. However, this difference is only perceived, because there is ultimately no opposition between method and knowledge, as these merge in the most lofty ideas: “Although there exists an opposition between science and art, it seems to diminish the higher one ascends” (ibid. ibid.). For example, no one can have an idea of God without knowing “how this highest idea is expressed in the individual, or how the relation of the absolute is to the particular” (ibid. 5).

How, then is knowledge of the highest things possible? The answer to this question contains the seed of Schleiermacher’s hermeneutical circle. “All knowledge,” he argues, “depends on original knowledge” (ursprüngliches Wissen). Every individual already possesses this knowledge, albeit unconsciously (auf unbewusste Art): “[original knowledge exists in everyone as a power which raised to the level of consciousness)” (ibid., 9). Thus all interpretation, in fact, all knowledge, moves from the whole to the part. The vague notion of the highest knowledge (the whole) is constantly refined and further awakened by added knowledge from particular disciplines (ibid. 10). The source of this pre-cognitive whole is “God” or rather Schleiermacher’s universal consciousness. So the circle closes itself: Each individual has in himself the seed of the highest knowledge, a dormant God-consciousness. The education in natural sciences and the

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22 “Das Philosophieren ist das Zustandebringen einer Erkenntnis, verbunden mit dem klaren Bewusstsein ihrer Zustandebringung.” (Dialektik 4).
23 “In allen ist es [ursprüngliches Wissen] als eine Kraft, die zum Bewusstsein erhoben werden kann.”
humanities contributes to the refinement of this whole until the individual sees in all clarity, at least for a moment, the interconnectedness of all things. That, in Schleiermacher’s book, is the knowledge of God.

It is clear that Schleiermacher’s construct is far removed from the Puritan and Pietist hermeneutical universe. Rather it is a monistic structure in which the individual human being is a microcosmic reflection of the whole. Thus the doctrine of man made in God’s image is subtly transformed into a rather impersonal mimetic structure. Humanity now reflects the image of the universe and its teleological development, rather than the image of a creator. This shift also makes the concept of reconciliation superfluous. The way for a dialogue with the divine has now been opened by virtue of an ontological similarity allowing an interplay between the finite and the infinite.

Every human being, according to Schleiermacher, is a microcosm of the whole organism called universum. In fact, all things in measure are reflections of the infinite, but all are not equally so. Schleiermacher imagines nature as the weakest reflection; therefore he pays little attention to natural theology. Nature's laws, rather than the details of its beauty and design as in Reformed thinking, impress Schleiermacher as religiously sublime, because they speak to us of Divine unity and unchangeableness. Schleiermacher wants to diminish the role of natural revelation because it has been used so extensively in scholastic theology (SW, 4: 256).

Thus, where the Puritans loved to point toward the design of the universe as God's handiwork, Schleiermacher dismisses "Naturereignisse" as "the outer court of the Gentiles in the temple of religion, "When I lead you to the external nature, which is regarded by so many as the first and foremost temple of the godhead, and is considered to be the innermost sanctum, I do so as if leading you merely to the outermost court of the same. Neither fear of material forces, nor joy over the beauty of the bodily nature should or can
give you the immediate view of the world and its spirit” (SW, 4: 257). Such could guide only the crude and childish consciousness of former stages in human development to religion. The Puritans too had stated that natural theology is an “outer court” of the temple of religion, but they did not oppose it to super-natural revelation. Schleiermacher, however, reflects a time when the older cosmological arguments for the existence of God had already lost their persuasive power over the minds of the cultured elite. Now that nature was understood rationally, the appearance of design need no longer lead to religion. Instead one had to get in touch with the world-soul through self-examination (Selbstanschauung). Each human self is seen as an unique embodiment of the All, and religious feeling is the relation of an individual to the whole of the universe.

Schleiermacher teaches that there is a constant interplay between the individual and the whole, a form of dialogue. He explains this dialogue in terms of Selbstanschauung und Anschauung of the universe. The universe, not unlike a divine revelation, "discloses itself" to the individual in fleeting moments. To gain anything from these "encounters" we have to engage in self-reflection. Self reflection should then give birth to application, i.e. moral changes (SW, 4: 252).

The determining factor in this dialogue is the teleological nature of the whole. Schleiermacher's understanding of this process is very complex and his careful attempt to steer clear of heresy makes his long paragraphs arduous. The key terms for his idea of a universal telos are Naturzusammenhang and the tension between Schöpfung und Erhaltung (Christliche Glaube 202). In an effort to maintain God's sustaining of all

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25 Here then is the notion that religion which believes in the supernatural, including the miracles of Christ etc. is merely an infant-stage within the maturing process of humanity, a notion that will later be repeated by Nietzsche, Freud and Karl Jung.
creation, while at the same time asserting his apartness from creation, Schleiermacher constructs something like a monistic deism.

We must always remember that Schleiermacher teaches an organic whole as the foundation of his thought. Christian piety is the grasping of this unity at its highest level. This insight is no longer achieved with the help of revelation (knowledge of the divine through Scriptures), as in Calvin’s hermeneutical circle. Instead the existential knowledge of the divine through revelation found in Puritanism is replaced by existential consciousness of the self as part of the spiritual unity of all creation. Thus, Schleiermacher can claim that “the feeling of absolute dependence corresponds in its intensity to our becoming conscious of our being part of a unity of nature, that is, according to the measure of our own awareness as a part of the world” (Der Christliche Glaube 180).26

The first step to his Abhängigkeitsbewuβtsein (awareness of absolute dependence) is the opening of our consciousness to the fact that the world does not consist of individuals fending for themselves in a contingent world, but that there is an interdependency of all things (Naturzusammenhang). Hence Schleiermacher can claim that not supernatural occurrences, but, on the contrary, the mystical connection of apparent contingencies and natural events fosters a feeling of absolute dependence (ibid. 182).

According to Schleiermacher, God has created the cosmos with a natural tendency toward the development of this God-consciousness. Increasingly higher developments toward God-consciousness thus mark the history of humanity. According to Schleiermacher, the Genesis narrative did not account for this principle of progressive God-consciousness, because it was written in an era unfamiliar with “a dynamic view of

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nature” (ibid. 202). Schleiermacher sees this monistic construct as capable of overcoming an opposition of faith and empiricism. If piety means an ever increasing realization that we are part of nature, then the natural sciences should always foster piety. The only hindrance to this process is a false sense of objectivity in the sciences, whereby knowledge is objectified and our relation to the world repressed.\(^\text{27}\)

This teaching is reflected in Schleiermacher’s assessment of Adam and Eve, whom he regards not as historical figures, but as an attempt to describe the beginnings of human consciousness (Der Christliche Glaube 329). Schleiermacher repudiates the former teaching of humanity as created in the image of God in knowledge, righteousness and holiness (Westminster SC 10). Instead Schleiermacher explains that the perfection of our first parents consisted in the perfect alignment of all their senses for the experiencing of God-consciousness. Even they, however, did not have a fully developed God-consciousness, but were part of a first stage of development which has reached its climax in Christ (ibid. 337).

Having replaced the God of Christianity with the monistic All, Schleiermacher proceeds to conform traditional teaching to this concept. For example, the traditional teaching concerning eternal life has to make room for an immanentism which envisions complete unity with the divine in the here and now. Schleiermacher emphasizes the present existence and condemns the yearning for an afterlife: “You ought to remember how it was the highest goal of religion to discover a universe beyond and above humanity,

\(^{27}\) “Innerhalb dieses Umfanges nun gestattet unser Satz keinen Unterschied, sondern für alles und jedes sollen wir ebensosehr die schlechthinige Abhängigkeit von Gott fühlen und mitfühlen, wie wir uns alles und jedes als vollkommen bedingt durch den Naturzusammenhang denken. Dem ganz entgegengesetzt aber finden wir die Vorstellung weit verbreitet, daß dieses beides nicht zusammenfällt, sondern sich vielmehr gegenseitig ausschließt... Und auch schon vor der Vollendung beider Richtungen müßte der Naturkundigste immer der am wenigsten Fromme sein und umgekehrt. Da nun aber die Richtung auf die Erkenntnis der Welt ebenso wesentlich in der menschlichen Seele ist als die auf das Gottesbewußtsein: so kann es nur eine falsche Weisheit sein, welche die Frömmigkeit aufheben will und eine mißverstandene Frömmigkeit, welcher zu Liebe das Fortschreiten der Erkenntnis gehemmt werden soll. Der einzige Scheingrund für diese Behauptung ist wohl nur der Umstand, daß in der Regel allerdings je stärker in einem Moment das objektive Bewußtsein hervortritt, um desto mehr in demselben Moment das Selbstbewußtsein verdrängt wird” (225-226).
and that [religion’s] only complaint was that this effort is rather unsuccessful in this
world” (Reden SW, 4: 289).\textsuperscript{28} Such a concept, however, according to Schleiermacher,
is based on a false view of the universe and an individualistic seeking after personal
liberation from this world.

Schleiermacher, in keeping with his organic view of the universe, rejects such
individualism and other-worldly orientation. For him eternity is simply the realization that
we are all part of the eternal One. We must renounce individualism and realize the
corporateness of our existence: "Strive to eliminate your individuality here already, to live
in the one and all, strive to be more than merely yourselves so that you may lose little
when you lose yourselves; and when you have become one with the universe, and a
greater and more holy yearning arises within you, then we will talk further about the
infinity to which we will raise ourselves unfailingly through him” (ibid.).\textsuperscript{29}

Thus we may already see that Schleiermacher’s anthropocentric shift seeks to
overcome individualism, in the sense of egocentrism, through meditation. There is no talk,
as in the Puritan and Pietist vocabulary, of a radical change of disposition through divine
grace, unattainable by human efforts. Instead, awareness of the interconnectedness of the
universe creates a greater yearning toward the All and leads to selflessness.

Having established Schleiermacher’s hermeneutical universe and touched upon the
key term of God-consciousness (or feeling of absolute dependence), we must now turn to
observe the changes effected by Schleiermacher’s subjective starting point upon the
Puritan and Pietist hermeneutic we explored in the first part of this study. As we shall see,
Schleiermacher’s subjectivism not only significantly changes the nature of the dialogue

\textsuperscript{28} "Erinnert euch, wie es das höchste Ziel der Religion war, ein Universum jenseits und über der
Menschheit zu entdecken, und ihre einzige Klage, daß es damit nicht recht gelingen will auf dieser Welt”

\textsuperscript{29} “Strebt darnach, schon hier eure Individualität zu vernichten, und im einen und allen zu leben, strebt,
darnach mehr zu sein als ihr selbst, damit ihr wenig verliert wenn ihr euch verliert; und wenn ihr so mit
dem Universum....zusammengefllossen seid, und eine größere und heiligere Sehnsucht in euch entstanden
ist, dann wollen wir weiter reden über die Unendlichkeit, zu der wir uns durch ihn unfehlbar
emporschwingen.”
with the divine but also causes the loss of written revelation as the focus of Christian doctrine.

In order to assess the impact of Schleiermacher’s anthropocentric methodology I want first to describe in greater detail his application of “God-consciousness” to hermeneutics and then give some practical examples of how this subjectivist hermeneutics impacts on the applicatory dimension of interpretation.

6.3. God-consciousness

The most striking feature of Schleiermacher’s dogmatics is its subjective starting point. While former catechisms and confessions always presented the reader with information derived from revelation, objective external information conveyed to the human subject through divine grace, Schleiermacher consciously begins from the subjective impressions of the individual.

This starting point immediately alters the nature of faith. Schleiermacher’s concept of faith has no longer the balance of the Puritan ideal, which presented faith as both relational (personal trust) and propositional knowledge (revelational content). Instead Schleiermacher states that “faith, as the foundation of all ecclesiastical communities, is in itself neither a knowledge nor an action, but a certainty of feeling or of the immediate self-consciousness” (Christlicher Glaube I 14).³⁰

Without entering into a detailed analysis of this state of mind, one may say that the immediate self-consciousness (or God-consciousness) is reached when the individual realizes his or her absolute dependence on the universe. This dependence is in turn defined in terms of the self. For Schleiermacher, the self consists of a stable part, a given which remains the same from childhood to old age, and a mutable part, which changes

³⁰ “Die Frömmigkeit, welche die Basis aller kirchlichen Gemeinschaften ausmacht, ist rein für sich betrachtet weder ein Wissen noch ein Tun, sondern eine Bestimmtheit des Gefüehls oder des unmittelbaren Selbstbewusstseins.”
under the impressions of time and culture. The stable, individual part is associated with original self-activity, whereas the mutable part of the self is connected to receptivity, that is, our ability to learn and adapt. The feeling of absolute dependence is attained when one realizes that even the stable self, that core entity we associate with freedom of individual expression, is also dependent on the universum. When such a moment is reached, we become one with the All. Schleiermacher describes the ecstasy of such a moment in his Reden:

It is fleeting and transparent, like the first scent, with which the dew breathes upon the awakened flower, embarrassed and tender like a virgin's kiss, sacred and fertile like a bridal embrace...I lie at the bosom of the infinite world. In this moment I am her soul, because I feel all her powers and her never ending life, as if it were my own, in this moment she is my body, because I penetrate here muscles and limbs as if they were mine, and her innermost nerves move according to my sense and intuition like my own. (4: 254)

Schleiermacher describes this moment as "die höchste Blüte der Religion." "Could I create this moment for you", he addresses the reader, "then I would be a God" (ibid.). In stark contrast to the Reformed doctrine of communion with God, Schleiermacher's language and understanding of unity with the divine are reminiscent of the subject-object conflation found in much Renaissance Platonic mysticism, or in the more pantheistic forms of Romanticism. Like these religious experiences, Schleiermacher's God-consciousness is a fleeting moment. Anything may disturb this precious "Augenblick." Reflection in particular destroys such instances; therefore one must be mindlessly open to the

31 In Schleiermacher's lectures on hermeneutics, these two parts of the self correspond to the content (self-activity) and form (mechanical knowledge and style) of the author's writing.

32 "Flüchtig ist er und durchsichtig, wie der erste Duft, womit der Tau die erwachten Blumen anhaucht, schamhaft und zart wie ein jungfräulicher Kuß, heilig und fruchtbar wie eine bräutliche Umarmung...Ich liege am Busen der unendlichen Welt: Ich bin in diesem Augenblick ihre Seele, denn ich fühle alle ihre Kräfte und ihr unendliches Leben, wie mein eigenes, sie ist in diesem Augenblicke mein Leib, denn ich durchdringe ihre Muskeln und Glieder wie meine eigenen, und ihre innersten Nerven bewegen sich nach meinem Sinn und meiner Ahndung wie die meinigen."
impression of the universe. Schleiermacher’s understanding of an intuitive dialogue with the divine is indeed the reason for his aversion to propositions as expression of religion.

Like the Pietists, Schleiermacher wanted to set the notion of faith apart from both mere mental assent to doctrinal statements and moralism. Knowledge, action, and feeling must be combined, with feeling as the basis for the other two (ibid. 22). The common factor of all piety, Schleiermacher argues, is one of relational dependence of the divine: “The common factor of all expressions of piety, be they ever so different, whereby they distinguish themselves from all other feelings; the peculiar essence of piety is that we are conscious of ourselves as completely dependent, or, which says the same, as dependent on God” (ibid. 23). Schleiermacher believes that the definition of feeling as the recognition of dependence makes God-consciousness different from other emotions such as joy, sadness, etc. He also hopes that his definition will discourage those who erroneously think that knowledge about their dependence on God detached from a relational aspect constitutes genuine God-consciousness.

All this may sound like an insignificant reformulating of the traditional teaching that man is utterly dependent on God. In fact, Schleiermacher’s insistence on the relational aspect of faith is reminiscent of Owen’s concept of knowledge as relational. However, for Puritanism and for Spener’s Pietism, the quality of this relation is defined by the object of faith, i.e. God, who in turn is revealed by his word to the individual from the outside, and not from within. This revelation was stated through language in the form of propositionally qualifiable teachings (even if in narrative form) and it was conveyed cognitively, through the intellect. Schleiermacher, however, insists on the non-cognitive quality of his piety, and sets himself the seemingly impossible task to develop Christian doctrine from this non-cognitive element. God is first of all to be understood as the cause.

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33 “Das Gemeinsame aller noch so verschiedenen Äußerungen der Frömmigkeit, wodurch diese sich zugleich von allen andern Gefühlen unterscheiden, also das sich selbst gleiche Wesen der Frömmigkeit, ist dieses, daß wir uns unser selbst als schlechthin abhängig, oder, was dasselbe sagen will, als in Beziehung zu Gott bewußt sind” (23 § 4).
of the feeling of independence, but he cannot be defined, "...so that God denotes so far only that which co-determines this feeling, and by which we explain its presence, but that every other content of this concept has to be developed out of this basic foundation" (30). Schleiermacher is fully aware of his subjective methodology and its limitations, which he, nevertheless, regards as strengths. The givenness of God, the conception of him as a person, and perceptions of his attributes - these Schleiermacher declares impossible to be known (ibid.).

Throughout his work, Schleiermacher remains faithful to his methodology. The entire Christliche Glaube is a systematic description of the Christian self-consciousness. In contrast to traditional orthodoxy and to Rationalism, both of which set out from objective general principles and use the deductive method, his personal aim is to elucidate the contents of the Christianly pious soul. "His method broadly, is that of introspection, not of listening to God" (Mackintosh 62). For all practical purposes one may safely claim that Schleiermacher's text is not that of revelation, but the book of the self. Like Böhme before him, Schleiermacher turns to an inner light for the interpretation of human existence. As he puts it in his Monologen: "As often as I look into my inner self, I am immediately in the realm of eternity; I observe the Spirit's action, which cannot be changed by any world nor destroyed by time, in fact [the Spirit's action] creates word and time in the first place" (SW 4: 413). This sounds much like Böhme's earlier claim that the book of the self replaces the book of written revelation.

As Schleiermacher reconstructs theology from a subjective stance, several problems emerge. Both Puritan and Pietist theologians had insisted on interpretative freedom from creedal statements. Yet they unwaveringly stuck to the authority of the biblical text itself. Thus any suspicion regarding a creedal statement was brought before

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34 "So oft ich aber ins innere Selbst den Blick zurückwerfe, bin ich zugleich im Reich der Ewigkeit; ich schaue des Geistes Handeln an, das keine Welt verwandeln und keine Zeit zerstören kann, das selbst erst Welt und Zeit erschafft."
the court of the text for arbitration. Schleiermacher, however, has no such safety-check. His subjective standpoint and dislike of propositions greatly weaken the authority and centrality of the text. Thus although he defines faith as a relation and gives it a sense of utter dependence, he does not allow biblical revelation to qualify these categories. Thus both the object and the recipient of his faith are re-defined in terms meant to be less offensive to the modern reader. The radical biblical view of man's sinfulness and God's holiness are downplayed, partly through the use of new vocabulary to restate orthodox doctrines, partly through a redefinition of them intended to salvage Christianity for a skeptical age.

Another problem, which Schleiermacher does not address, is that of assurance. We remember that Perkins had counseled a return to the object of faith when doubts assailed the believer. One was to return to the written promises rather than listen to one's inner voice. However, Schleiermacher's concept is devoid of any such recourse to an external witness. Therefore the problem of assurance cannot be addressed by appeal to written promises. All that one can hope is to recapture the moment of God-consciousness through a quietistic waiting for its recurrence.

Schleiermacher believes that despite the brevity and indescribability of this at-one-ment with the universe, the echo of it in the soul can alter one's life, resulting in humility which leads to a love toward all of humanity:

When the World Spirit has revealed itself to us in majestic fashion, when have observed his actions according to such greatly conceived and marvelous laws, what is more natural than to be filled with genuine awe for the eternal and invisible? And when we have seen the universe, and look back to our own self, how this self dwindles in this comparison to the infinitely smallest thing, what is more natural to the mortal than true, genuine humility? If we also perceive our brothers in this viewing of the world also our brothers, and we realize how each of them is without difference in this sense exactly the same thing as we are, a particular representation of humanity (SW 4: 276).35

35 "Wenn der Weltgeist sich uns majestatisch offenbart hat, wenn wir sein Handeln nach so groß gedachten und herrlichen Gesetzen belauscht haben, was ist natürlicher als von inniger Ehrfurcht vor dem Ewigen und Unsichtbaren durchdrungen zu werden? Und wenn wir das Universum angeschaut haben,
Thus no longer is humanity created in the image of God, but rather in the image of humanity.\footnote{36}

Schleiermacher’s description of the effects that flow from the moment of merging with the universum is much longer, but the gist of it is this: All outward forms of religion over which we have fought throughout the centuries are really mere manifestations of one underlying spiritual phenomenon, one Geist which lies dormant in each human being. We really all worship the same God, the Welt-All; we just don’t realize it. If we would be awakened to this fact, that is, if we could attain to the immediate God-consciousness, all of humanity could live in peace.

Schleiermacher’s concept of God-consciousness shapes the entire construct of his hermeneutical universe. Biblical anthropology, theology and Christology are all re-read in terms of this one universalizing concept. Void of a revelational counterpoint, Schleiermacher freely dismisses former doctrines when he cannot square them with his basic presupposition. The next section of this chapter will chart the most important deviations from the former Pietist and Puritan concept of the human-divine dialogue.

### 6.4 Schleiermacher’s concept of sin: A dialogue without reconciliation

One of the foundational steps toward Schleiermacher’s subjectivist hermeneutic is his re-definition of original sin and human depravity. The reformed teaching on this

\[\text{und von dannen zurücksehen auf unser Ich, wie es in Vergleichung mit ihm ins unendliche Kleine verschwindet, was kann dem Sterblichen dann näher liegen als wahre, ungekünstelte Demut? Wenn wir in der Anschauung der Welt auch unsre Brüder wahrnehmen, und es uns klar ist, wie jeder von ihnen ohne Unterschied in diesem Sinne gerade dasselbe ist, was wir sind, eine eigne Darstellung der Menschheit.}\]

\[\text{The last sentence of the above quotation exposes a certain tension between the finite and the infinite in Schleiermacher’s system. He tries to construct a transcendence by imagining the collective universe as transcending its individual parts. Yet if there is no real ontological difference between the universe and its parts, then there is also no real transcendence. If the universe is composed of all that exists or is, that is of all beings, then both self-existent being and contingent being, both the finite and the infinite, are contained within the scope of this world. Schleiermacher hardly addresses the philosophical problems inherent in his concept of the universe. Unlike Heidegger who was haunted by the question why anything exists at all, Schleiermacher seems largely oblivious of the problems concerning self-existence, causality and ontological individuation posited by a monistic universe.}\]
subject sees an insurmountable barrier between God and man. That Schleiermacher himself did not believe in a rift between God and humanity is evident from a letter to his father:

“I cannot believe that the one who gave himself only the title of son of man was the true eternal God; I cannot believe that his death was a vicarious (substitutionary) atonement, because he never explicitly said so himself, and because I cannot believe that it was necessary, since God cannot possibly want to punish humanity eternally, which he obviously has not created for perfection but only for striving after the same, because they didn’t attain to perfection.” (Briefe, 42 as quoted in Dilthey GS, XIII/1, 30).37

From this basic position of unbelief, Schleiermacher proceeds to redefine the nature of the human divine dialogue.

Schleiermacher’s dialogical approach to hermeneutics stands or falls with his definition of sin. For Reformed Christianity the concept of original sin expresses the comprehensive fallenness of human nature. The Reformers illustrated this by stating that the mind, will, and affections are influenced by sin, so that nothing godly and pure can be produced by sinful human beings. This does not mean that humanity cannot achieve great things in the arts and sciences. Natural talent is God-given (Calvin II, ii. 16). However, when it came to understand things truly divine, "the greatest geniuses are blinder than moles" (Calvin II, ii, 18).

Both the will and the mind are affected by sin in such a way that only a complete regeneration by the power of divine grace can open the eyes of the sinner to things divine.

37 "Ich kann nicht glauben, daß der ewiger wahrer Gott war, der sich selbst nur den Menschensohn nannte; ich kann nicht glauben, daß sein Tod eine stellvertretende Versöhnung war, weil er es selbst nie ausdrücklich gesagt hat, und weil ich nicht glauben kann, daß sie nötig gewesen; denn Gott kann die Menschen, die er offenbar nicht zur Vollkommenheit, sondern nur zum Streben nach derselben geschaffen hat, unmöglich darum ewig strafen wollen, weil sie nicht vollkommen geworden sind."

It is important to note that the last sentence in the quotation shows Schleiermacher’s departure from the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith which guided the hermeneutic of Flacius, Perkins, Owen, Spener and Francke. As Luther discovered, God does demand perfection of human beings, who are completely unable to achieve it, in order to point them to Christ, whose imputed righteousness then allows a reconciliation between God and the individual.

38 John Grondin in his Sources of Hermeneutics correctly points out that dialectical and dialogical denote the same thing in Schleiermacher (7).
This event is so drastic that the Bible compares it to resurrection from the dead (Romans 6:13). Sin affects the whole person in such a way that, spiritually speaking, we are dead until regenerated by God. The Reformers realized that this radical concept set Christianity apart from Greek philosophy. Calvin discusses this point in his *Institutes* and distances himself from Plato, who described sin as ignorance (II, ii, 23; 25).

The Reformed understanding of sin can be summarized under three key aspects which follow from the premise that sin is a transgression against God, "an evasion of God that comes to expression in self-assertion and above all in lovelessness" (Thielicke 221). First, sin was perceived by the Reformers as a real event between two personal entities. Secondly, to know what sin is, we have to know who the God is against whom sin has been committed. Negatively, this means sin cannot derive from self-analysis. Sin is a relational concept, but self-analysis can only bring moral evil to light, and even that only according to a subjective relativistic standard (Thielicke 222). Thirdly, sin is as much an object of faith as is the God against whom one sins. In other words, we can suppress the sense and knowledge both of sin and of God (Rom. 1:18 ff).

In Schleiermacher, sin ceases to be an objective act of transgression, as it had been for the Reformers. In keeping with his general anthropocentric outlook, he contradicts all three of these fundamental tenets of a Reformed understanding of sin. As Thielicke puts it: "Since the concept of God is in [Schleiermacher] secondary to consciousness, sin cannot be understood as a history with God that transcends the self; it has to be developed out of the consciousness. This means that a sin that is not tied to the sense of sin is

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39 From verse 12: “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from life to death, and offer the parts of your bodies to him as instruments of righteousness.”

40 Calvin's reference is to Plato's *Protagoras* where Socrates seems to conclude in his debate with Protagoras that non-virtue, that is immoral behaviour, is caused by ignorance. See, The Dialogues of Plato (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).
unthinkable. Sin is the consciousness of sin. It can be spoken of only when the sense of it is present" (222).

Schleiermacher transfers sin to the subjective realm of consciousness. As a result there are no real objective formulations for sin as in the Mosaic law. Instead sin becomes whatever intrudes into the subjective realm threatening to obstruct God-consciousness. In other words, Schleiermacher holds to a view of sin somewhat akin to that of Plato, where notions of the good are memories of our pre-existence and immoral sentiments stem from forgetfulness of it. Thus it is not surprising that the key terms for an understanding of Schleiermacher's idea of sin are "to awaken" ("erwecken") and "to wake up" ("aufwachen").

The religious consciousness is merely dormant and needs to be awakened in the individual. As a result, sin is merely that which obstructs this process. Schleiermacher defines Christian experience as: "keine andere [Anschauung] als die des allgemeinen Entgegenstrebens alles Endlichen gegen die Einheit des Ganzen" (SW, 4: 386). Sin is anything which hinders this movement. This can be, for example, a tendency toward individualism which keeps us from realizing that we are part of an entire divine organism (ibid. 387). Sin is therefore that which keeps us from self-understanding, because it obstructs our enlightenment concerning the fact that we are one with the Welt-All. Schleiermacher's concept of sin as hindrance of higher development corresponds to his idea of misunderstanding.

Sin is in effect to misunderstand one's existence as part of the whole. Once again we can turn to Thielicke: "If we are to look in the Speeches for a term corresponding to ....sin, we should have to select misunderstanding. The cultured despisers of religion are in truth religious people reposing in the universum; the only thing is that they do not know it" (207). Thus what modern philosophical hermeneutics regards as Schleiermacher's greatest contribution, that of making misunderstanding the basic hermeneutic condition (TM 185; Frank 22-23; Grondin SH 7), is really his re-interpretation of the Christian
concept of sin. In contrast to Reformation theology, where sin is positively a willful rejection of God and disobedience to his objective law, Schleiermacher's sin can be thought of only as negation. Schleiermacher has thus greatly diminished the radicalness of the sin-concept as it was taught by the Reformers.

As a result, Schleiermacher's Christology is also different from that of the Puritans and earlier Pietists. We remember that as a young man Schleiermacher could not believe in the incarnation nor in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, because Christ himself did not expressly state these doctrines. Thus we see here a division between the importance of Christ's own words and that of the words of the Apostles that was foreign to the earlier theologians.\footnote{Flacius, Owen, Perkins and Spener had advocated that every interpretation be tested against the whole of the Bible, because they believed each book to be equally inspired. Schleiermacher, by contrast, makes an implicit difference between the historical Christ and the mythical Christ whose role as an atoning high priest was invented by the apostles according to their eschatological imagination.}

Schleiermacher's division between the true spirit of religion and its manifestations or interpretations, in this case by the apostles, is the foundation of much theological hermeneutics since Schleiermacher.\footnote{It has been argued that Schleiermacher's separation between the historical Christ and the Christ of experience was already foreshadowed by the later Moravian Pietists. The theologian Karl Barth, a very careful and insightful reader of Schleiermacher's works, sees in the latter's separation between history and revelation the true continuity between the later Pietism and Schleiermacher's theology. In his Göttingen Dogmatics Barth writes:}

Schleiermacher's comment that Christ did not understand himself to be on a mission to reconcile humanity to God is in itself startling given the textual evidence to the contrary, as in the gospel of John, for example. It is striking that in Der Christliche Glaube Schleiermacher does not touch upon the textual passages such as John 14:6-7, where Christ explains himself as a mediator between God and humanity.\footnote{The division between the written text and the real message of faith so characteristic of neo-orthodoxy, and the rift between the Christ of faith and the historical Jesus which still characterizes much scholarship in our day, can all be traced back to Schleiermacher's hermeneutic.}
But from the eighteenth century onwards everybody began to focus more zealously on the man Jesus of Nazareth, on the hero, the religious personality, his inner life so far as we may know it, his view of God and the world and life...in the living Jesus, not in the crucified and risen Jesus, as in Paul and the Reformers. Zinsendorf with his often repeated but in form and content rather dubious cry: 'I have only one passion and that is he and he alone,' and Schleiermacher in his Christology are at this point simply proponents of one and the same erroneous development. (90)

This development, in Barth's view, entails a regression from the word of God as actual locus of revelation toward the historical Jesus and an emotional preoccupation with him. "Divine inwardness" and a focus on Christ's passion on earth now precede the Bible which merely serves merely to proof-text these emotions, rather than determine the nature of faith. The result, according to Barth, is "a confusion of above and below, a deifying of the creature, which older theologians had wisely avoided. Even the sincere piety with which all this was done could not improve things" (ibid. 91). Barth's assessment of a growing immanentism within the later Pietist movement certainly applies to Schleiermacher.

For although Schleiermacher's discussion of Christ is characterized by a warm and zealous tenor reminiscent of earlier Pietist writing, Schleiermacher's Christ is not that of Reformed theology. He argues that the believer has to grasp Christ by faith (Christum gläubig ergreifen). However, this act does not have the nature of reconciliation as formerly discussed in Puritan/Pietist literature: "This act in no way requires the individual's being a former object of divine disfavour or wrath, because no such thing exists" (Der Christliche Glaube 2: 181). How different a view this is from the Puritan concept of sin. Thomas Watson, for example, states that

God was once a friend, but sin broke the knot of friendship; now God's smile is turned into a frown....But God's wrath is infinite, all other is but as a spark to the flame: wrath in God is not a passion, as in us; but it is an act of God's holy will, whereby he abhors sin, and decrees to punish it. This wrath is very dismal; it is this wrath of God that embitters afflictions in this life, for when sickness comes
attended with God’s wrath, it puts conscience into agony...Oh let us flee from the wrath of God! And wither should we fly, but to Jesus Christ? There is none else to shield off the wrath of God from us. ‘Jesus has delivered us from the wrath to come’ 1 Thess. i. 10. (A Body of Divinity 150)

The quotation from Watson features all the elements of human-divine dialogue according to Puritan theology. True self-knowledge in light of written revelation and expressed in the law-gospel dialectic always leads to realization of an ontological-spiritual rift between the reader and the divine. Christ is the only mediator, the only one able to bridge this gap.

Schleiermacher embraces a fundamentally different relationship between the human and the divine. In a key statement of his dogmatics he divests the concept of justification through grace by faith alone (Rechtfertigung) of its original meaning. Forgiveness of sin now merely means that “prior to it the individual stands in no particular relation to God, but is merely a part of the mass, out of which, through the continuous effect of the creative act which generated the saviour, persons emerge” (Der Christliche Glaube 2: 181).

Schleiermacher’s Christ is no longer at the center of creation, history, redemption and interpretation. In the Puritan/Pietist hermeneutic, Christ had initiated the story of redemption; in Schleiermacher he becomes merely the central character in a greater story, that of the All’s development toward God-consciousness. Christ becomes a mere human figure who possessed the immediate God-consciousness in full and complete measure (Der Christliche Glaube 2: 31ff.).

The reformulation of Sin and Christology allows Schleiermacher to introduce a broad dialogical element into his hermeneutics. Schleiermacher’s denial of sin in the

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43 “Zuerst, da mit der Sündenvergebung, und Kindschaft des Menschen ein Gegenstand des göttlichen Wohlgefallens und der göttlichen Liebe ist, daß er dieses nicht viel eher wird, als indem er Christum gläubig ergreift. Darin liegt aber keineswegs, daß er vorher ein Gegenstand des göttlichen Mißfalls oder Zornes sei, denn dergleichen gibt es nicht....Sondern der Ausdruck ‘überschen’, dessen man sich an einer andern Stelle bedient, hat hier seinen eigentlichen Gebrauch, indem der Einzelne vorher für Gott gar keine Person in dieser Beziehung ist, sondern nur ein Teil der Masse, aus welcher erst durch die Fortentwicklung des schöpferischen Aktes, aus dem der Erlöser hervorging, Personen werden” (Der Christliche Glaube II 181).
Reformed-biblical sense allows education to take on the role of sanctification. Whereas in Reformed hermeneutics regeneration and the constant aid of God's grace were necessary requirements for application (i.e. imitation of Christ), Schleiermacher can maintain with Socrates that virtue may be taught. That is, through hermeneutics, by reading great texts which are manifestations of God-consciousness, one may improve morally. Moreover, the dialectical method can be employed because such a concept rests on the foundation of moral improvement through knowledge. Since the divine spark is in each individual Schleiermacher can operate maieutically to release this unconscious knowledge.

Schleiermacher's thought constitutes a true turning point in the history of hermeneutics. The revolutionary aspect of his hermeneutics, however, is not his universalizing of the problem of misunderstanding, nor his replacing a supposedly merely technical hermeneutics of the Reformation with dialogical hermeneutics (TM 179). Both of these elements were present already in the hermeneutics of the Reformers, if not openly formulated, then in practice. The effects of original sin provided the grounds for a universal misunderstanding of spiritual things, and through Christ's offered redemption a truly dialogical hermeneutic centered upon the biblical text.

Rather Schleiermacher's importance lies in radical deviations from the hermeneutics of Puritanism and early Pietism. Despite his antipathy to Kant, he follows Kant in his radically anthropocentric assessment of reality, by interpreting all revelation and religion from a human existential perspective. By trying to find a zone for religion secure from the rationalist critics of his day, Schleiermacher removed religion into the noumenal realm. This allowed him to withdraw religion from empirical criticism. Moreover, in response to Kant's reduction of religion to moralism, Schleiermacher placed feeling before duty and re-emphasized the Reformational notion of a relationship to the divine, albeit in monistic terms. Hermeneutics was the tool by which the divine, manifested in the linguistic expressions of writing and speech, could be understood and the
experience of God-consciousness could be conveyed for the "Bildung" of humanity toward a higher telos.

Schleiermacher's attempt at unifying knowledge in the All had a tremendous impact on interpretation in three areas. These three areas are naturally interconnected, but we can separate them for the sake of analysis. Schleiermacher's organic Welt-All influences a) his interpretation of history, b) his view of the Bible as written revelation and c) the practice of general hermeneutics as expressed in his lectures on hermeneutics.

6.5 History and Progressive Revelation

Schleiermacher's conception of history is based on his Christology. Once again, as in all his writing, Schleiermacher's thought is guided by his refusal of both orthodox doctrine and rationalist teaching. For rationalism, Christ was merely a good teacher, whose doctrines were merely projections of what human reason would eventually have attained by itself, as Lessing, for example, teaches in his Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts (§ 4). For the orthodox, however, Christ was the incarnation of the deity in bodily form, being both man and God. In both Puritan and early Pietist theology, the incarnation was the ultimate fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah, to whose coming all of human history had looked forward. This Christ was the manifestation of God's love for humankind, the focal point of salvation history as portrayed in the Bible; and therefore he formed the main scopus of the Scriptures.

According to this account of history, God, for reasons known only to himself, chose one nation in the middle east from which the Messiah would come in order to

\[ \text{\footnotesize "Erziehung gibt dem Menschen nichts, was er nicht auch aus sich selbst haben könnte; sie gibt ihm das, was er aus sich selber habe könnte, nur geschwinder und leichter. Also gibt auch die Offenbahrung dem Menschengeschlechte nichts, worauf die menschliche Vernunft, sich selbst überlassen, nicht auch kommen würde, sondern sie gab und gibt ihm die wichtigsten dieser Dinge nur früher" (Gesammelte Werke 1: 1010).} \]
expand his spiritual kingdom later across the world. The important aspect in this interpretation of history is its continuity under the preservation of historical particularity. Both metahistorical considerations (i.e. God's overall plan of salvation) and particular historical events (i.e. all of Israel's history) retain their full weight and value. Applied to the biblical canon, this theory of history means that both Old and New Testament records bear witness to the same religion, the same faith and the same message of salvation.

The Reformers believed that this continuity rested on the doctrine of justification through grace by faith through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. John Calvin, for example, compared the Old and New Testament to the stages of one and the same painting, where the artist first sketches "in elementary outline" what is later "expressed in living and graphically printed colour." The intended portrait, however, is the same and so both testaments convey the same message: "It is to be noticed that the things which were shown to them [the patriarchs] are the same as those which are now set before our eyes. Both are shown the same Christ, the same justice, sanctification, and salvation. Only in the manner of the painting is there difference" (CC 20:132).

According to the Reformed view of history, there is only one particular form of religion which is acceptable to God, based on the teaching foreshadowed in the Old Testament and as clarified by Christ and his apostles. Schleiermacher has a completely different take on historical interpretation. Formally he follows the Judeo-Christian model of seeing history as a progressive development. However, in his view of history, historical events ultimately lose their inherent significance, as they are merely outward manifestations of an inward process. The key to Schleiermacher's view of history is once again his desire to shield the Christian religion from historical criticism. He does this by transferring historical occurrences of salvation history into the subjective consciousness of the believer. In this view, the supernatural elements of the biblical records become mere subjective re-interpretations of natural occurrences in the mind of the first-century believer.
In Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics, the driving force behind all of history is once again the universe with its telos of perfection. As the universe moves toward perfection, so does humankind, or it would if everyone could only realize their dependence on, and oneness with, the organism of the Welt-All as a whole. Revelation, in Schleiermacher's opinion, takes place when the universe acts on the consciousness of the individual, impressing upon it this sense of dependence. The message of this revelation is always the same; in fact, there is no message of a verbal, cognitively graspable sort, but a non-cognitive experience which then changes the ethical behaviour of the individual so touched. All historical forms of religion are therefore merely crude manifestations of the great spiritual pulse of the universe. The people who are somehow touched by the universe are heroes of faith, that is of immediate self-consciousness. However, these persons (Mohammed, Christ, etc.) do not impart their own talent through doctrine, but rather by creating an impression on their listeners, an impression which mirrors and conveys their own experience.

At this point Schleiermacher’s concept of revelation as non-propositional experience is directly connected to his concept of divinatory hermeneutics. For Schleiermacher argues that such an impression by the universum can only be shared as a whole. Since propositional statements (doctrine) may only inaccurately grasp experience and tend to fragment it, the religious teacher and author can never convey his experience cognitively:

If a system of propositions can be understood from their connexion with others, then nothing extra-natural was required for their production. But if they cannot, then they can, in the first instance, only be apprehended (we need only appeal for confirmation to the first principles of Hermeneutics) as parts of another whole, as a moment of the life of a thinking being who works upon us directly as a distinctive existence by means of his total impression on us, and this working is always a working upon the self-consciousness (The Christian Faith 50).
According to Schleiermacher, from the darkest time in history to the advent of Christianity, one and the same feeling of dependence was conveyed to religious leaders of all different religions. What happened was that the original experience was then, due to the fading memory, solidified into external forms (i.e. doctrine). 45 The teaching of Jesus, then, is merely one form of the same experience that was expressed more crudely in different religions and in pagan mythology long before his advent.

With Schleiermacher's view of history as background, we can now further elaborate his departure from Reformed hermeneutics by exploring two other notions which are important for hermeneutics, namely in the aspects of revelation and inspiration.

6.6. Schleiermacher's Reinterpretation of Inspiration and Written Revelation

We remember that for the Reformers and Puritans revelation always occurred through the voice of God either by his prophets or through written forms of prophecy. These organs of revelations were inspired by God, so that they uttered truths which often completely transcended their horizon and went against their own sentiments. Inspiration is thus confined to particular occasions, where God communicated his will through human language to the prophets and authors of the Bible. According to the Reformers, Christ was the only being who was permanently inspired, for in him dwelled "the fullness of the deity in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9).

In the Reformed understanding of Scripture, the inspired message is given in human language and therefore in statements that need to be cognitively grasped. In other words, the whole revelational culture of Judaism and Christianity manifests a primacy of the external word which needs to be internally applied. The Reformers taught that religious truth enters through the mind and then reaches the heart, which simply means

45 By external forms Schleiermacher does not mean tangible idols, but the putting of experience into writing. He fears the letter, which for him is the propositional expression of experience, and seeks the spirit, that is the pure, cognitively inexpressible experience.
that propositions or narratives must be read and understood before they can be appropriated and applied. And although the Puritan expositors recognized the colouring of the divine message by Middle-Eastern culture, they nevertheless maintained that such cultural shading in no way obscures the message which in its fundamentals rings loud and clear even for the unsophisticated reader.

Schleiermacher radically changes the Reformed concepts of inspiration and revelation in § 10 of The Christian Faith. Revelation, according to Schleiermacher, is never really anything new. If we recall his monistic system, then this statement makes sense, because since every human being is, at least potentially, part of the Welt-Geist, and since true religion is feeling that cannot be propositionally expressed, revelation can convey only the same feeling that was already ours in the first place. As Schleiermacher states it: "But this may again lead to the conclusion that no particular thing, since it always belongs to the world, can in itself be regarded as divine revelation" (Christian Faith 51).

Therefore the traditional concept of revelation, as a word brought to humankind from the outside, is highly problematic for Schleiermacher. Revelation no longer denotes an external inscripturated message. Rather, revelation comes to mean the awakening of a subconscious inner potential, not unlike an accident victim who recovers from a profound amnesia. Those who thus come in touch with the world spirit and experience revelation are usually outstanding religious figures and often the founders of new religions (ibid. 52).

The picture Schleiermacher delineates is this: Now and then at different times in human history certain individuals like Christ or Mohammed are acted upon by the universum and develop immediate self- or God-consciousness. This event changes them so that they stand out of the religious culture of their day, which in turn is nothing but an accretion of a former revelatory event. So each new religion marks a point in time when individuals become aware of their absolute dependence on the All, and their experience leaves such a profound impression on their followers that some of them, too, experience the same phenomenon, though perhaps to a lesser degree:
But though [revelation] transcends the nature of the circle in which it appeared, there is no reason why we should not believe that the appearing of such a life is the result of the power of development which resides in our human nature - a power which expresses itself in particular men at particular points according to laws which, if hidden from us, are nevertheless of divine arrangement, in order through these men to help others forward....Therefore when we designate these men as heroes, each in his own sphere, and ascribe to them a higher inspiration, this is what is meant: that for the good of the definite circle in which they appear they have been quickened and inspired from the universal fountain of life. And the fact that such men appear from time to time must be regarded as due to the working of a law if we are to maintain the higher significance of human nature at all. The case of such individuals is therefore analogous to that of the idea of revelation, which it is better to apply only to the region of the higher-self consciousness. (Christian Faith 63)

Schleiermacher’s concept of religions as historically relative self-expressions of the Weltgeist leads to a hermeneutical conclusion of enormous importance. The reader of the past, and of the Bible, must look beyond the cultural accretions and religious forms (forms always meaning propositional statements, i.e. doctrine) to the experience embodied in it. Each religion manifests in purer form the image of the World-All, and can so move the beholder more effectively to experience it. For biblical criticism this meant that the importance of Christ was not his doctrine, for indeed he could not reveal anything new, but his experience of God-consciousness. Everything which obstructed the conveyance of this experience, like Hellenistic and especially Judaic cultural elements, needs to be removed. These teachings are part of the Körperwelt which must be exposed by historical-grammatical criticism: "Was aber die Urkunden und Autographa der Religion betrifft, so ist in ihnen diese Einmischung von Metaphysik und Moral nicht bloss ein unvermeidliches Schicksal" (SW, 4: 264). Rather, the reader must split open the historical husk to find the diamond, that is, the true spiritual experience hidden in the text. As a consequence, Schleiermacher sees little use for the Old Testament.

The problem which is immediately apparent in this subjectivist hermeneutic is one of restraint. According to what critical standard is one to distinguish between the
obstructing elements and the pure expression of experience in the text? For the only criteria in this endeavour are the subjective impressions of the interpreter whose own cultural baggage (be it a hermeneutic of unbelief and skepticism or a practice of piously reading doctrines into the text) determines the result of reading.

In this context, the concept of inspiration changes from its being a form of *deus dixit* to a state of consciousness. Schleiermacher is convinced, for example, that the apostles were moved by Christ to a high level of God-consciousness, and therefore all of their writings are inspired insofar as they reflect that experience. However, the writers of the New Testament are inspired only when they relate their original experience of absolute dependence. Anything else they say constitutes merely cultural accretions and must be ignored. The same is true for the writings of the Old Testament. Where the need for redemption (defined according to Schleiermacher) is shown and thus God-consciousness and Christian emotions are anticipated, the Scriptures are inspired. Schleiermacher's relative contempt for the Old Testament and the Jewish religion is grounded in his view of discontinuity between the Jewish and the Christian religion. "Accordingly we must assume that Christian piety in its original form cannot be explained by means of Jewish piety of that or of an earlier time, and so Christianity cannot in any wise be regarded as a remodeling or a renewal and continuation of Judaism" (Christian Faith 61).

Schleiermacher warns that Paul's references to Abraham and the Jewish religion should not be construed in a way that suggests a continuation of Judaic elements in Christianity:

But the promise to Abraham, so far as it has been fulfilled in Christ, is represented as having had its reference to Christ only in the divine decree, not in the religious consciousness of Abraham and his people. And since we can only recognize the self-identity of a religious communion when there is a uniformity of the religious consciousness, we can no more recognize an identity between Christianity and Abrahamic Judaism than between it and the later Judaism or Heathenism. (ibid. 61)
Thus whereas the pre-critical concept of progressive revelation with its unified view of the Old and New Testament valued the Jews as fellow pilgrims, Schleiermacher's departure from this concept devalues Judaism as a crude and uncouth form of religion. The notion of Judaism as a primitive spiritual-moral stage of the ever evolving human race was in the 20th century to form part of the platform of German anti-Semitism.

The Old Testament is useful for Schleiermacher only in so far as it contains a "husk" of some prophecies regarding Christianity, "so that we can find rendered with some exactness in Old Testament passages only those of our religious emotions which are of a somewhat general nature without anything very distinctly Christian" (62). Such emotions are also inherent in the contemplation of nature in a general way, while Christianity merely focuses them through its emphasis on redemption: "But the whole process of formulating our expressions concerning the religious self-consciousness is just as much a rational process as in the case of Nature; and the difference is merely that this objective consciousness is given at first hand only to him who is affected by Nature, while that (Christian) self-consciousness is given only to him who is affected by the Redeemer in the manner which is peculiar to his followers" (Christian Faith 66).

The writers of the gospel are also faulted by Schleiermacher for not always adequately relating Christ's experience, as in the case of the apostle John: "Schüler Johannis, der doch die Grundanschauung Christi nur sehr unvollkommen teilte" (SW, 4: 394; my emphasis). One may justly ask how Schleiermacher can correct the content of the basic views of Christ in John's account when cognitive criteria and propositional statements have been largely annihilated by his own system of thought.

The Bible, then, is merely another expression of religious experience. Its message is not the locus of revelation, as in Puritan theology, but the feeling it can trigger (a feeling that is already potentially the reader's own). In the Puritan/Pietist hermeneutic, Christianity is conveyed through a message (cognitive) from the outside, a communication from an ontologically different order of being. For Schleiermacher, the word ceases to be
a true medium of revelation. The reader is not understood as hearer and recipient of this word, but actually produces the divine spirit himself. Revelation has no cognitive-content, and the Bible thus loses its importance for the interpretation of human existence.

6.7. From Inspiration to the Importance of Language

We have so far considered Schleiermacher's transformation of interpretation regarding history and the Bible as revelation. Although I have already touched on the topic of inspiration, it is necessary to deal with this concept again, because Schleiermacher's interpretative rules are largely governed by it. The ground-breaking achievement he is usually credited with, that is, the universalization of hermeneutics, is directly linked to Schleiermacher's concept of inspiration as outlined above. Since inspiration is not a single moment of God's revealing his will through human language and agency but rather an instance of God-consciousness, and since this power lies within each human being, any human writing which expresses this energy may be considered divinely inspired.

Therefore, Schleiermacher's revolutionary approach, reading the Bible like any other book, is not based so much on his diminishing the Bible's status as on his raising other literature to the level of inspiration. The Holy Spirit, which for Schleiermacher is merely a manifestation of the World-All, inspires poets and other writers as well as apostles: "The holy scriptures have become the Bible out of their own power, but they do not prohibit any other book to be or become also a Bible, and whatever was written with the same power could easily be added [to the sacred writings]" (SW, 4: 395; italics mine).

46 "Die heiligen Schriften sind Bibel geworden aus eigener Kraft, aber sie verbieten keinem anderen Buche, auch Bibel zu sein oder zu werden, und was mit gleicher Kraft geschrieben wäre, würden sie sich gerne beigesellen lassen."
Schleiermacher argues further that those who want to establish a canon of Scripture limit the Holy Spirit (dem Heiligen Geist Grenzen setzen; ibid.). Such theologians want to adhere to the letter of religion, not to the Spirit, which they fetter (ibid. 396). For Schleiermacher the letter does not mean merely writing as such which freezes content into propositions, though he certainly means that as well. But Schleiermacher is opposed to any real content of religion, because his focus is pure experience of God-consciousness, as an effect of which the individual becomes a better person. External revelation is not really needed, since the program for goodness is already contained in the hard-drive of the universe and will inevitably unfold as humanity reaches increasingly higher stages of consciousness.\(^{47}\)

Schleiermacher's notion of inspiration serves as a direct link to his general hermeneutic rules. We have seen that, based on his monistic world view, he considerably widens the meaning of inspiration to encompass all manifestations of genius, i.e. of that spiritual link which resides in each human being as a reflection of, and connection with, the Weltgeist. All important aspects in Schleiermacher's hermeneutic, the linguistic, divinatory, dialectical or grammatical-historical dimensions of his thought, ultimately hinge on the notions of Weltgeist and immediate God-consciousness. It is in relation to one's approximation to the All that human progress and understanding are to be gauged.

Schleiermacher makes this abundantly clear in the "Schlußbetrachtungen" to his lectures on hermeneutics in the Winter of 1826-1827. For him hermeneutics is an all-encompassing project for the betterment of humanity. According to Schleiermacher, history backs up this assumption, because “an attentive observation of history also teaches that since the reviving of the sciences the occupation with interpretation contributed the more to the mental developments to all sides the more it dealt with the very principles of

\(^{47}\) Schleiermacher writes: “Die Grundanschauung jeder positiven Religion ist ewig, weil sie ein ergänzender Teil des unendlichen Ganzen ist in dem alles ewig sein muß; aber sie selbst und ihre ganze Bildung ist vergänglich” (IV 396).
Interpretation needs to concern itself with the manifestations of the Spirit in language and in writing. Schleiermacher distinguishes three gradations (Stufen) of interpretation, each step representing an increasing understanding of the impressions and reflections of the World-Soul in writing.

The first and lowest stage is mere historical interest (Geschichtsinteresse), where one is interested only in the event itself without trying to understand the grammatical or psychological dimensions of the text. The second stage of interpretation is motivated by aesthetic interests (künstlerisches oder Geschmacksinteresse). Here the reader may be pleased by the rhetorical fireworks of the text, or with its form. This is a very narrow focus, says Schleiermacher, and is mostly the occupation of the educated. The third and highest interest one can have in interpretation is the speculative-scientific in combination with the religious. By scientific (wissenschaftlich) is meant an exact and deep-reaching analysis of all aspects of the text: "The scientific examines the subject matter at its deepes root" (SW, 4: 205).

Both the scientific and the religious interest issue from the highest faculties of the human Spirit, and both make us realize the importance of language. Speech, we remember, is for Schleiermacher the manifestation of thought while it also shapes, to some extent, thought itself, because we think in grammatical language ("Wir können nicht denken ohne die Sprache"; ibid.). Therefore a good interpreter seeks to determine exactly how the writer, and even humanity in general, operate in the formation and use of language (ibid.).

But Schleiermacher’s thinking goes beyond a mere technical reconstruction. After all, language is the medium through which the Weltgeist seeks its expression: "Language

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48 "Eine aufmerksame Beobachtung der Geschichte lehrt auch, daß seit der Wiederauflebung der Wissenschaften die Beschäftigung mit der Auslegung, je mehr sie auf die Prinzipien derselben eingegangen ist, desto mehr zur geistigen Entwicklung nach allen Seiten hin beigetragen hat."

49 "Das wissenschaftliche faßt die Sache in der tiefsten Wurzel."
should picture the innermost thoughts of the Spirit” (SW, 4: 444). Language, therefore, is what guides the individual in his or her moral spiritual development, because we get in touch with the Weltgeist through language. Thus the technical aspect of hermeneutics serves as a conductor to the spiritual-psychological ‘pulse’ of the author. Both are closely connected: “Both are most closely interconnected, because language guides and accompanies the human being in his development” (ibid.). Therefore careful grammatical exegesis is required to get to the point where we resonate with the author’s expression of immediate self-consciousness. In short, hermeneutics is an important tool because language serves as the conveyer of immediate self-consciousness.

Schleiermacher believes that through this process, the reader will himself begin to recognize his role as part of a greater whole. His reasoning runs as follows: the Spirit of the All resides in every human being. As we develop a more thorough self-understanding and become more conscious of our dependence on the universum, such impressions of the Spirit will be expressed through language and in writing, especially by personages who possess immediate self-consciousness, the feeling of absolute dependence (i.e., who are inspired) to a greater degree than others. We recall that Schleiermacher also believed that greater consciousness of the universum would lead to a recognition of every individual as part of the whole and that God-consciousness would therefore guide us from a selfish, individualistic self-understanding, to a view where we would progress from "Mensch zu Menschheit" (SW, 4: 206).

The problem is, according to Schleiermacher, that only a very small part of humanity deals scientifically with texts and gets in touch with the Weltgeist. The large part adheres to a more lax interpretative practice. However, the fact is that every human being possesses the Spirit, even if in a dormant state. Therefore the religious

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50 “Abbilden soll die Sprache des Geistes innersten Gedanken.”
51 “Beides ist aufs genaueste verbunden, weil eben die Sprache den Menschen in seiner Entwicklung leitet und begleitet.”
consciousness is universal, and the more one awakens to one's religious consciousness the more one realizes one's full human potential. Thus the highest level of interpretation entails the reader's growing realization of his humanness through an increasingly awakening religious consciousness: "The lowest stage of interpretation is where the religious consciousness has not woken up. The more it awakens and becomes an all-perceiving one, the more the human being itself awakens" (ibid.).

Schleiermacher finally sums up his hermeneutic project by saying: "Thus everything which is a normal expression of the religious, i.e. which is somehow holy scripture must contribute to make this task a universal one" (SW, 4: 206; italics mine).

Thus we see that, for Schleiermacher, all great writing is inspired and religious. Therefore the interpretation of literature is able to aid humanity in its development toward God-consciousness. For Schleiermacher, accordingly, hermeneutics becomes not only the gateway to religious experience, but also the path toward the eschaton of a universal awakening to God-consciousness. It is for this reason that he can claim the "most universal interest" that depends on the task of hermeneutics: "Thus it is on the other hand the most general interest which depends on the hermeneutical task, and we will be able to claim with certainty that if the general religious interest falls flat, the hermeneutic interest would also be lost" (SW, 4: 206).

Schleiermacher does grant the New Testament a special role in hermeneutics, yet not because it is the only divinely inspired writing, but because its inspiration is of greater purity (ibid.).

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52 "Es ist die niedrigste Stufe [der Interpretation], wo das religiöse Bewußtsein noch nicht erwacht ist. Je mehr es erwacht und ein allgegenwärtiges wird, desto mehr ist der Mensch selbst erwacht."
53 "Alles also, was normaler Ausdruck des Religiösen, irgendwie Heilige Schrift ist, muß dazu beitragen, diese Aufgabe zu einer allgemeinen zu machen."
54 Schleiermacher, standing firmly within the philological-humanist tradition of his time, naturally assumes the Bible and the classical Greek and Roman authors to be the main body of great writing.
55 "So ist es doch auf der anderen Seite das allgemeinste Interesse welches an der hermeneutischen Aufgabe hängt, und wir werden mit Sicherheit sagen können, wenn das allgemein religiöse Interesse fallen sollte, würde auch das hermeneutische verloren gehen."
6.8. Dialogical and Divinatory Hermeneutics

In a series of subtle moves clothed in Christian vocabulary, Schleiermacher has replaced the sovereign deity and the role of the Holy Spirit in divine illumination with humanity. The Puritan and Pietist dialogue with the personal divine being has in reality become an inter-human dialogue. Schleiermacher’s anthropocentrism not only explains the pervasive psychologism of his writings, but also provides the basis for two key elements of his hermeneutic which endear him to modern philosophical hermeneutics, namely the notion of hermeneutics as dialogical and divinatory. Most commentators of Schleiermacher note the dialogical character and the notion of divinatory interpretation as the main contribution of Schleiermacher. Both are best understood as corollaries of his monism.

The dialogical character of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic is clearly linked to his idea of individualism versus universal harmony. The sin of individuality hinders us from seeing every human as humanity (den Mensch als Menschheit) and therefore stands in the way of character development that would lead to a harmonious view of reality. Schleiermacher points to the foundation of his worldview in the first part of his Reden: "You know that the godhead has, due to an immutable decree, forced itself to split its great creation even to the leve of the infinite, so that every particular existence consists of two opposing forces" (SW, 4: 213). According to this paradoxical principle, the entire physical world is based on the forces of repulsion and attraction.

Schleiermacher now deduces that the spiritual dimension of human beings is of the same structure: "es scheint mir, als ob auch die Geister, sobald sie auf diese Welt verpflanzt werden, einem solchen Gesetze folgen müßten" (ibid. 214). Thus every human soul is driven by two desires. One is physically and intellectually to control its...

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56 "Ihr wißt, daß die Gottheit durch ein unabänderliches Gesetz sich selbst genötigt hat, ihr großes Werk bis ins Undendliche hin zu entzweien, jedes bestimmte Dasein nur aus zwei entgegengesetzten Kräften zusammenschmelzen."
surroundings. The other is the yearning to expand the inner self, to share it with all other selves without ever being exhausted. Schleiermacher argues that just as in physics a balance of these two forces is necessary for stability, so spiritual well-being also depends on harmony between the two desires. Human misery, according to this theory, is caused by imbalance. The one who follows the instinct of control will never transcend his narrow horizon of acquisition and materialism. The other extreme will produce an idealist who never achieves anything practical. Such persons "schweben...um leere ideale herum, und ihre Kraft ohne Nutzen verdünnend und verzehrend kehren sie tatenlos und erschöpft auf ihren ersten Punkt zurück" (SW, 4: 215).

Those who can achieve a balance or constructive dialogue between these desires do so because the universe has disclosed itself to them. Their experience of that impression is now translated into art and writing: "so muß er nach jedem Ausfluge seines Geistes ins Unendliche den Eindruck, den es ihm gegeben hat, hinstellen außer sich, als einen unmittelbaren Gegenstand in Bildern und in Worten" (ibid. 217). This concretization of experience also helps the one so impressed to reflect on his encounter with the Welt-All. More importantly, however, through their writings, prophecies or artworks, these "high-priests of the universum" (wahre Priester des Höchsten) try to awaken humanity to the achievement of the same balance: "so strebt er den schlafenden Keim der besseren Menschheit zu wecken, die Liebe zum Höchsten zu entzünden" (ibid.).

Thus where the experience of such prophets is accessed through hermeneutics, education leads to true religion. Through art and writing, experience may be transmitted. Through philosophy and the sciences a person may begin to realize the interconnectedness of all existence and so be led out of his sinful tendency to view things only as particulars

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Schleiermacher says about the two desires: "Der eine [Trieb] ist das Bestreben, alles, was sie umgibt, an sich zu ziehen, in ihr eigenes Leben zu verstricken, und wo möglich in ihr innerstes Wesen ganz einzusaugen. Der andere ist die Sehnsucht, ihr eigenes inneres Selbst von innen heraus immer weiter auszudehnen, alles damit zu druchdringen, allen davon mitzuteilen und selbst nie erschöpft zu werden" (Reden 214).
All this happens in dialogue, by conversation or through the writing, of those who have experienced the unifying disclosure of the All. Education in the humanities, as well as in the other sciences, ultimately serves as an aid to a dialogue with the universe.

Here then lies the basis for Schleiermacher's dialogical hermeneutic. The dialogue consists in the fact that through experiences and learning our consciousness is made increasingly aware of the interconnectedness of things and is, through dialogue with other "inspired" human beings, sensitized to the right religious feeling. Schleiermacher's concept of interpersonal and inter-universal dialogue is also closely related to his idea of divinatory interpretation, because in interpretation this is manifested when we can grasp intuitively, that is, divine (*ahnen*), the genius of the author which connects us with him and the universum. In this sense, every good writing is inspired, because it partakes of the universal religious consciousness.

In Schleiermacher's view one needs to have a relation with the object of interpretation. A text cannot be approached in a detached way, as one presumes to observe the object of scientific investigation, because it is written by an author who participates in the whole of humanity and the universum. Furthermore, the author conveys the experience through language. In other words, the spirit of the author, which in great artists or prophets reflects the Spirit of the All, can express itself only linguistically. Therefore grammatical and psychological interpretation are inseparable if understanding is to be achieved: "Das Verstehen ist nur ein Ineinandersein dieser beiden Momente, des grammatischen und des psychologischen" (SW, 4: 302). Speech is expression of the Spirit by the spirit of the author through language. Grammatical structure forms the expression of Spirit and, in turn, the author's individual reflection of the Spirit (i.e. his spirit) shapes the use of the pre-existing linguistic structure, wherefore both form and content may express individual style.
After he has pointed out the interdependence between psychological and grammatical methods, Schleiermacher devotes the second and larger section of his lectures on hermeneutics to the aspect of psychological interpretation. Consistent with his world as outlined, Schleiermacher's hermeneutical project is to lead to an understanding of the interconnectedness of existence. Since every impression of the World-Soul on the writer is frozen into the language of his time, it is necessary for the interpreter to recapture the moment of writing at its inception. Since all of reality is interconnected, every expression of this whole can be understood only through a reconstruction of each aspect of the whole that contributed to the fixing of World Spirit in a text:

Every speech can furthermore only be understood through the knowledge of its general historical context, or through the knowledge of its specific historical situation. The science of history, however, is ethics. Now, language has its natural side; the differences of the human spirit are also conditioned by the physical of the human being and of the earth's body. And thus hermeneutic is not only rooted in ethics, but also in physics. (SW, 4: 138-139)

This passage shows again the basic structure of Schleiermacher's hermeneutic. Each communication contains two dimensions: an expression of Spirit (des Geistes) and the form in which that experience is expressed. Corresponding to these two aspects in every utterance are two hermeneutic qualities the interpreter must possess. Schleiermacher calls them variously extensive and intensive, masculine and feminine, comparative or divinatory. The divinatory (feminine/intensive) aspect denotes the intuitive quality of the interpreter, "which tries to directly grasp the individual [qualities of the author] by changing, as it were, into the other [person]"(SW, 4: 152).

58 "Jede Rede kann ferner nur verstanden werden durch die Kenntnis des geschichtlichen Gesamtlebens wozu sie gehört, oder durch die Kenntnis der angehenden Geschichte. Die Wissenschaft der Geschichte aber ist die Ethik. Nun aber hat die Sprache ihre Naturseite; die Differenzen des menschlichen Geistes sind auch bedingt durch das Physische des Menschen und des Erdkörpers. Und so wurzelt die Hermeneutik nicht bios in der Ethik, sondern auch in der Physik." We can see here how encompassing Schleiermacher's hermeneutic is. Even the natural sciences are included, because our physical condition, our being on the Erdkörper, influences how we inscripturate the impressions of the Weltgeist.

59 "welche, indem man sich gleichsam in den anderen verwandelt, das Individuelle unmittelbar aufzufassen versucht."
divinatory method is based on Schleiermacher's monism, which sees each human as being somehow linked to the rest of humanity: "[the divinatory method] rests first of all on the fact that every human being besides his being an individual possesses a sensitivity for others. This sensitivity in turn seems to rest on the fact that every one carries a minimym of everyone else in himself, and thus divination is stimulated by a comparison with oneself" (SW, 4: 154).

Here is the same principle as that which operates in the contemplation of the universe. Self-reflection or self-examination leads to the recognition of something of our own spirit in that of the author. Even the comparative method operates under the assumption that all the particulars can eventually be related to one unifying whole.

Still, the comparative(masculine/extensive) method operates on a more deductive level "[she] first posits the one to be understood as the general and then finds the particular by comparing him to others within the same general framework" (ibid.). Schleiermacher sees the lurking danger of uncontrolled subjectivism and warns that a constant oscillation between the divinatory and the comparative methods is required:

"Beide dürfen nicht voneinander getrennt werden. Denn die Divination erhält ihre Sicherheit erst durch die bestätigungende Vergleichung, weil sie ohne dies immer fantastisch sein wird" (ibid.).

Another important aspect of psychological interpretation is Schleiermacher's notion of Keimentschluß (germinal thought). Because the author is part of the same "universum" as the reader and therefore participates in the organic development of the whole, the entire direction of his work is already given in the genesis of the thought. Therefore understanding the moment of inception gives the reader the whole as an

60 "[die divinatorische Methode] beruht zunächst darauf, daß jeder Mensch außer dem, daß er selbst ein eigentümlicher ist, eine Empfänglichkeit für alle anderen hat. Allein diese selbst scheint nur darauf zu beruhen, daß jeder von jedem ein Minimum in sich trägt, und die Divination wird sonach aufgeregt [stimulated] durch Vergleichung mit sich selbst."

61 "[sie] setzt erst den zu Verstehenden als ein Allgemeines und findet dann das Eigentümliche [i.e. das Individuelle], indem man mit anderen unter demselben Allgemeinen Befaßten verglichen wird."
entrance point into the hermeneutical circle against which the particulars are then read: "Die erste Aufgabe war, denjenigen Impuls, der dem ganzen Akt des Schreibens zu Grunde liegt, richtig als Tatsache im Schreibenden zu verstehen" (SW, 4: 178).

To reconstruct this first determining moment in the author's life, the reader must reconstruct every possible historical and psychological circumstance in order to know the author better than he knew himself. Then, Schleiermacher is convinced, we may even determine which thoughts are germane to the original idea and which are not: "If we have complete knowledge about the author so that we know him as we know ourselves, we can then set ourselves the task to know not only what secondary thoughts he had, but also those thoughts he never had, or those he rejected and why he did so" (SW, 4: 182). Once again, this task is possible because there is common connection between all human beings such that if we examine our own way of production, we will be able to trace the process of thought and production in the author.

6.9. Practical Application of Subjectivist Hermeneutics

As Gadamer points out, Schleiermacher's hermeneutic makes important contributions to grammatical exegesis (TM 184). His great strength lies in his intensive occupation with the text. Familiarity with an author's historical situation, his life-task and passion, his style of writing, will certainly produce, to some extent, Schleiermacher's ideal interpreter. Gadamer sees the most important contribution, however, in Schleiermacher's psychological hermeneutics. Yet Schleiermacher's hermeneutic dependence on finding the Keimentschluß (germinal thought) of the author, which determines both form and content of a text, is also his greatest liability. Schleiermacher himself warns us against reading into

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62 "haben wir von dem Verfasser eine vollständige Kenntnis, so daß wir ihn kennen wie uns selbst, so können... wir uns die Aufgabe stellen, zu wissen, nicht nur, was für Nebengedanken dem Verfasser eingefallen, sondern auch, was ihm nicht eingefallen, und was, und warum er etwas zurückgewiesen hat."
a text, and the safeguard he builds into his system is the constant verification of the interpreter's intuitions against the text itself.

However, as Schleiermacher's own exegetical practice shows, the subjective impressions of the reader will finally prevail over the authority of the text. In his analysis of the biblical text, for example, Schleiermacher freely corrects the views of the biblical authors. It is thus possible that one is so convinced of a certain *Keimentschluß* that one also conforms the subsequent particulars of the text to it. In other words, as Schleiermacher pointed out himself, the danger is that interpretation becomes "fantastisch."

For example, in a sermon he preached sometime before 1826 entitled *The Effects of Scripture and the Immediate Effects of the Redeemer*, Schleiermacher demonstrates that content is less important than the reader's intuition and experience.

Schleiermacher chooses his text from the gospel of Luke (24:30-32) where the two disciples are met by the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus. He, whom they did not recognize until they supped with him, explained the Old Testament to them as prophetic writings concerning himself. Schleiermacher's sermon zeroes in on the disciples' words following this hermeneutic exercise: "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" From this text Schleiermacher wants to consider "the connection between the effects of the scripture and the immediate personal effects of the Redeemer" (Sermons 101).

Although most of the sermon sounds quite orthodox, teaching a balance between inner and scriptural revelation, Schleiermacher clearly emphasizes the primacy of the subjective consciousness over textual/doctrinal content. Even this tendency could be explained by interpreting it as a countermeasure against the rationalistic Christianity that Schleiermacher tried to combat. However, there are passages which show that Schleiermacher views not the text but the inner consciousness as the prime locus of revelation: "It may be said that there is a light sparked immediately in the human soul by
the Son of God - regardless of when or how it happens, so that we can easily dispense with God's Word if we have this illumination, since this is how Christ glorifies and reveals himself immediately in the soul with greater clarity and certainty (Sermons 112; italics mine). 63

The best way to illustrate Schleiermacher's different understanding of the Scripture's role is to compare his exposition of this passage in Luke with that of some Puritan commentators. When surveying the commentaries of Calvin and some Puritans on this passages, one is immediately struck by several differences. Schleiermacher, for instance, argues that it is the impression of Christ's personality which makes the heart burn within the disciples. In his exposition, it burns when they recognize him. If we remember Schleiermacher's teaching about the mediation of God-consciousness by great personalities, not through doctrine but through the impression they create, his interpretative focus is not surprising. John Calvin, by contrast, draws attention to the fact that it is the truth, rather than the person of Christ (though in his thought they are virtually identical), which causes the sensation the disciples experience. It is the power of the Word which is accompanied by this manifestation which is "the true fruit of heavenly teaching so that whoever may be its minister, to light the fire of the Spirit in men's hearts..." (CC 3: 238). 64

63 The reader of Schleiermacher's sermon will initially be impressed with the apparent care the author lavishes on the regulation of experience through the word. And it should be said, in all fairness, that I focus on those passages where Schleiermacher's non-orthodox elements shine through. It seems that in his sermons Schleiermacher appeared much more in line with the traditional Christian faith than in his other writings. However, if one is familiar with the Christian Faith and the Speeches, and places Schleiermacher's writing within the context of their teaching, many passages that appear innocent at first glance point toward the subtle changes Schleiermacher wrought on the original doctrines.

64 Calvin does admit, however, that in the case of the minister, it is not He but the Holy Spirit who works in the hearts of the person, whereas Christ "alone enjoys both properties, of speaking a word outwardly, and effectively shaping the heart, to obedience of faith. There is no doubt that He then engraved a singular impression on the hearts of the two men that they might at last realize that in speaking He had breathed a divine warmth into them. Though the Word is always fire, a peculiar and unusual kind of fiery vigour produced itself then in Christ's speech, as a shining witness of His divine power" (ibid. 239).
The Puritan Matthew Poole focuses much more on the fact that the two disciples of Christ did not believe that Christ had risen. Thus Poole picks up on a detail Schleiermacher simply ignores. For Poole, the burning in the hearts of the disciples is the result of their conversion experience which had been ushered in through the doctrinal evidence of the Scriptures. He says: "Let the patrons of the power of man's will to believe, or perform any action spiritually good, tell us (if they can) what could hinder these disciples' actual believing the resurrection of Christ, but the impotency of their wills, God not yet pleasing to influence and assist their wills actually to believe what they had the greatest propensions and inclinations imaginable to have believed" (Commentary on the Holy Bible 3: 274).

Furthermore, Poole deduces from the exclamation: "Did not our heart burn within us?" that this experiential quality is given by Christ only in conjunction with the doctrinal content of the Scriptures: "We ought so to speak in our preaching, so to open and apply the Scriptures, as our discourses may have a rational tendency to make the hearts of our hearers to burn them, not to make them dead and sleepy, and cold or lukewarm; and then to know that it must be Christ's work to inflame them, when we have said all that we can" (ibid., 275).

The Puritan Matthew Henry even more explicitly ties the "burning" to doctrinal content and preaching. First he points out that "[t]hey found the preaching powerful, even when they knew not the Preacher." This is a strong contrast to Schleiermacher's assertion that it was the realization of Christ's identity which caused their hearts to burn. He then adds: "See here (1) what preaching is likely to do good - such as Christ's was; plain teaching, and which is familiar and level to our capacity...and scriptural preaching - he opened the scriptures, the scriptures relating to himself." The preacher should follow Christ's example and "show their people religion in their Bibles, and that they preach no other doctrine to them than what is there; they must show that they make that [the written
word] the fountain of their knowledge, and the foundation of their experience" (SW 4: 484).

Schleiermacher, by contrast, rejects propositional truths altogether. It is after all doctrine, according to him, which causes nothing but trouble in the church: "Besides, consider how many difficulties one finds in interpreting the Word of scripture. It comes from a remote time, deals with strange customs, and was written in a language only slightly related to our own. What risky scope for human caprice opens up there! How many sad examples do we see in which caprice actually has been exerted on scripture to make dead and dull what reflects the true essence of Christianity most brightly, or to read into scripture something not in accord with the original spirit of Christian faith" (Sermons 111; italics mine). The italicized words in this sentence betray Schleiermacher's tendency to interpret Scripture in light of his assumption that the essence of Christianity is the experience of God-consciousness, something which cannot be described in propositional terms.

Schleiermacher's exegesis often shows that he squares the Scriptures with his preconceived notion of a monistic universe. This is especially evident when traditional doctrines are preached on during practical occasions. In one of his funeral sermons, for example, Schleiermacher twists a certain passage completely to bolster his own notion of salvation and the after-life. The sermon is called Our Comfort in Bereavement and was preached at a funeral service in 1823 from John 6:39-40: "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Schleiermacher construes Christ's saying as pertaining to two groups: "The Redeemer, then, distinguishes those souls who, by believing in him in the highest and most particular sense of the word, gave themselves to him, from those who were given to him only of the Father" (198). This first group includes all those baptized into the Christian
(presumably Lutheran Protestant) church. Those are the ones given to God, and His Spirit will certainly work in them, "perfecting them even after death if they have not become Christians so that they will be raised up" (199). In every child born, Schleiermacher argues, even without baptism, lies already a dormant divine seed (200). If they die, none of them will be lost to the Father; all are his possession. Schleiermacher is convinced that even adults who have not come to Christ are like children who have not fully developed their god consciousness:

They have remained children in this higher self-knowledge that leads all people to the feet of God's Son as penitent sinners and causes them to believe in him when they see him. They have remained children in this knowledge of themselves, and in this striving after the goal that God has set before them....And it is as such children that they now depart this earthly life. But the Lord will not lose even them, for the Father gave them to him. He will awaken them, too, at the last day, so that the work that has not progressed further on earth might be resumed and further pursued in the hereafter, according to the divine decree for each individual soul and the measure of what must be brought to it and must cooperate in it itself. (205)

Schleiermacher talks repeatedly of those who "have not yet come to a complete consciousness of themselves or their highest destiny" (207). The second group are those who are conscious of their religion and in that sense enjoy eternal life on this earth already (205-206). It is obvious that Schleiermacher's teaching diverges widely from the orthodox concept of original sin and the radical difference between the human and the divine taught by the Reformers. The same Schleiermacher who had warned against mere outward doctrinal faith assures his parishioners in this sermon that even those 'external professors' will make it into heaven. Such statements are possible only if the traditional doctrines of eternal life and punishment, and therewith the nature of the human-divine relationship, have been substantially changed.
More importantly, however, Schleiermacher tends to ignore his own cautions regarding "fantastische Auslegung" and reads his doctrine into the text. We know, from his Speeches as well as from the Christian Faith and his Sermons, that Schleiermacher had no taste for a God whose holiness demanded the condemnation of sinners. As we saw earlier, sin is to him more a state of mind, a consciousness which is ignorant of its own potential, not, as the biblical text conveys it, rebellion against God. The universal salvation Schleiermacher construes out of the passage at hand is based on his personal bias against a God who would punish sinners, as he had confessed to his father years earlier upon his escape from the Brüdergemeinde.

6.10. Practical Application

For the Puritan and Pietist tradition, applicatory hermeneutics meant that the reading of the text has an active moral dimension. The reading of Scripture and of devotional literature is meant to drive the reader into action. As Matthew Henry puts it: "In a word, [we] must walk closely, consistently, courageous, and constantly, in the faith and practice of the gospel" (Commentary VI 726; italics mine). Even meditation is never an end in itself. The Puritan Nathanael Ranew (1602-1678) wrote in his manual on mediation: "For all duties and holy performances there is great necessity of meditation, in some due measure, for a due, wise, warm, lively, and spiritual acting them, acting from the right principle of grace within, by the right rule, eyeing every word, and to the right mark and end, salvation: real and vigorous performing in this sort must have some good allowance of pondering what we are to perform" (Solitude Improved by Divine Meditation 192). Meditation and the reading of the text constitute a fountain for action. Ranew

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65 Schleiermacher states regarding the fear of God: "For this reason we cannot even use the preaching of God's wrath - the fear of divine punishments - as a preparation to drive people, so to speak to Christ....Faith based on fear must perish together with the old self" (Sermons 157). Even for the believer, a notion of fear of God to quench sin has no value: "We are now in a ministry of reconciliation, not of fear, and to preach God's wrath is to depart from the "proper Spirit of Christianity and return to the old situation that existed before God gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (Sermons 157).
exhorts, "keep this fountain open and still running; this is the water to drive the mill, the wind that moves the sails, the spring in the watch that carries all the wheels, and keeps them going" (ibid. 195).

Likewise, the Puritan Lewis Bayly (1565-1631) opens one of the most popular practical works of the seventeenth century, The Practice of Piety (ca. 1600), with these lines: "Whoever thou art that lookest into this book, never undertake to read it, unless thou first resolvest to become from thine heart an unfeigned Practitioner of Piety" (1).

The Puritans' felt need to translate reading into practice is further evidenced by Henry Scudder's manual for Christian life, The Christian's Daily Walk: "You are commanded to walk as Christ walked, 1 John ii.6; and it concerns you so to do, if you would approve yourself to be a member of his body: for it is monstrous, nay impossible, that the head should go one way, and the body another" (24). William Perkins sums up the general Puritan attitude when he says: "The body of Scripture is a doctrine sufficient to live well....Theology is the science of living blessedly for ever" (177). Such applicatory hermeneutics was, of course, not peculiar to the Puritans and Pietists. John Calvin, for example, implemented social welfare programs in Geneva based on biblical principles, while in other parts of Europe rulers resorted to martial means to control poverty (Graham 66-94).  

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66 First published in the early 1600s (the exact date is unknown, but is estimated to be 1611), The Practice of Piety was printed in its second edition in 1612 in an amplified form. By 1643 it had reached its thirty-fourth English edition; by 1714, its fifty-first English edition; by 1792, its seventy first English edition. Throughout these centuries, The Practice of Piety appeared in most European languages, including Dutch (1620), French (1625), German (1629), and Polish (1647). New England Puritans even translated it into the Indian language used in Massachusetts (1665).

67 Calvin, himself a man of few means, often inveighed against the unwillingness of the rich to follow God's command to help the needy. Commenting on 2 Cor. 8:15 he wrote: "Let those, then, that have riches, whether they have been left by inheritance, or procured by industry and efforts, consider that their abundance was not intended to be laid out in intemperance or excess, but in relieving the necessities of the brethren." Graham concludes: "This adds up to a social and economic ethic of concern. Human solidarity is such that anything which contributes to the impoverishment of part of society is ipso facto evil. Whether this brands Calvin as a social revolutionary depends on the definition of the term. But clearly he is a Christian who has read in his Bible both the Hebrew concern for the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the sojourner, and the concern of Christ for all oppressed" (The Constructive Revolutionary, 71).
Spener echoes the Puritan teaching when he says that not only “his own support and gain, but also the glory of his God and the welfare of his neighbour should be the object of all that [the Christian] does in his station in life” (Pia Desideria 60). In the same vein Francke admonishes his listeners that faith needs to translate into action: “Just as the experience increasingly strengthens faith, so love to one’s neighbor is increasingly strengthened and multiplied through faith” (Vom rechtschaffendem Wachstum des Glaubens 283).

In contrast to this hermeneutic of application, Schleiermacher’s program, although it contains ethical concern, does not show the same urgent concern for practical application. We have already stated that Schleiermacher sharply distinguished religion from mere morality, yet the fact remains that religious people have to act in the world. For the Puritan this action was determined by his relationship to the divine, and through reading and interpretation of the Bible. Freedom from sin translated into the freedom to social action. Where is the connection between religion and morality in Schleiermacher? This correlation is presented by Schleiermacher in his Soliloquies (Monologen), published sometime in 1800. This work is the ethical counterpart of the religious Reden, but was much less significant and influential (Thielicke 211).

Schleiermacher begins with the observation that those who live in ignorance of their potential toward a higher existence are unfree, bound by their finitude: “The human being knows nothing but his existence within time and its fluent change from the sunny height to the terrible night of destruction” (SW, 4: 403). The mechanics of life and death are the only fixed points of human existence from this point of view, and existence that is nothing but bondage to the material aspects of life. Freedom from this is achieved

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68 “Je mehr nun die Erfahrung den Glauben stärcket/je mehr stärcket und vermehret sich auch durch den Glauben die Liebe...gegen den Nechsten.”

69 “der Mensch kennt nichts als sein Dasein in der Zeit, und dessen gleitenden Wandel/hinab von der sonnigen Höhe in die furchtbare Nacht der Vernichtung.”
only when one turns the gaze inward and becomes conscious of one's participation in the 'universum':

Freedom and Eternity exists only for him, who knows what world is and what human being, who clearly solves the riddle how both are to be distinguished...What they call world is human being to me and what they call human being is world to me. World to them is always preeminent, and the spirit merely a small guest in the world...To me, spirit is the first and only thing...to me everything is only the great common body of humanity. (410-411)

For Schleiermacher, those unconscious of the universum or the Welt-Geist residing within them are enslaved to the spirit of the age, to natural egotism, and to individualism (ibid. 407). Hence Schleiermacher summons them to turn to the depths of their own humanity where finite temporal being is rooted in the eternal and where we realize that we are members of humanity. This is the "moral virtuosity" wherein we find humanity in ourselves and thus discover that individuals represent it microscopically. This return to the basis of existence is what religion also seeks, so that here is the link between religion and ethics. It is a link, however, that does not necessitate the urge for practical application as in the Calvinist and Puritan hermeneutic. As Thielicke points out, in Schleiermacher, "religion and ethics seem finally to be linked only at the level of motives, not of programs of action. They meet only in the basic sphere of anthropology, where our self-understanding is at issue" (211). Thus for Schleiermacher, contemplation of the universe rather than ethical activism is the central and most blessed occupation, a quietism which can do splendidly without moral action.

Also striking, in contrast to the Puritan and Pietist hermeneutic, is the absence of any struggle or striving for moral action. A sense of repentance, a break with the selfish

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70 "Nur für den gibt Freiheit und Unendlichkeit, der weiß, was Welt ist und was Mensch, der klar das große Rätsel, wie beide zu scheiden sind gelöst....Was sie Welt nennen ist mir Mensch, was sie Mensch nennen, ist mir Welt. Welt ihnen stets nur das erste, und der Geist ein kleiner Gast nur auf der Welt...Mir ist der Geist das erste und das einzige...mir ist das alles nur der große gemeinschaftliche Leib der Menschheit."
past and a turn toward ethical action is foreign to Schleiermacher's quietism. Whereas self-examination in Puritan and Pietist thinking would inevitably show us to be at odds with God's ethical imperative, Schleiermacher's "Selbstansschauung" will instead find us in harmony with the moral sentiment (he never really clarifies its content) of the All. Again, the reason lies in Schleiermacher's anthropology which has no place for sin and the fall.

In Puritan and Pietist thinking, by contrast, concrete moral action was an inseparable part of the new creation in Christ. As Steven Charnock put it: "It is as impossible for the new creature to sin by the influence of habit, as for fire to moisten by the quality of heat, or water to burn by the quality of cold. It is as impossible for that habit to bring forth the fruits of sin, as for the sun to be the cause of darkness or a sweet fig-tree to bring forth sour fruit" (The Nature of Regeneration, WSC 3: 119).

The Puritans saw the Christian life as a pilgrimage toward heaven, where each step mattered toward the final goal, the celestial city. Thus the immanent (behaviour pleasing to God in this world) has direct import for the infinite and transcendent. As Bunyan has so graphically depicted it in The Pilgrim's Progress, by-ways, short-cuts and regressions are to be avoided on this journey. In Schleiermacher's system, however, eternity and complete happiness are already achieved in the here and now, because they are states of mind, not outward objective and palatable realities: "So oft ich aber ins innere Selbst den Blick zurückwende, bin ich zugleich im Reich der Ewigkeit; ich schaue des Geistes Handeln an, das keine Welt verwandeln und keine Zeit zerstören kann, das selbst erst Welt und Zeit erschafft...jegliches Tun soll begleiten der Blick in die Mysterien des Geistes, jeden Augenblick kann der Mensch außer der Zeit leben, zugleich in der höheren Welt" (ibid., 413).

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71 This does not mean that Puritans taught perfectionism. As Charnock immediately observes, "Yet as there is darkness in the air, though the sun be up, by the interposition of thick clouds, so is there darkness in the new creature from the habit of sin in the soul, which is not only a lodger, but an unwelcome inhabitant: Rom. vii.20, 'Sin that dwells in me' still, and acts according to its nature, though much overpowered and weakened by degrees by that habit of grace" (ibid.).
The conclusion of the Soliloquies shows in hymnic style what a happy fulfillment of life, beyond all gloom of sullen ascetic duty, this return to our origins brings with it. Eternal youth and joy gush forth from a sense of inner freedom and its work. The author has grasped this and will never let it go. He can laugh as the light of the eyes fades and silver hair rises up among the gold. Nothing that can happen troubles him. The pulse of his inner life remains strong even to death (4: 471).

We seen, then, that Schleiermacher is much more interested in religious and psychological navel-gazing than in moral action. His teaching is stoic in the sense that the reality of evil is transcended by a certain mental state. Along with the decline of the theological concepts of human depravity and the need for regeneration to provide unselfish moral impulses goes a decline of practical ethical application. The root-problem is that Schleiermacher has virtually eradicated any doctrine of sin. His basic premise of teleological development toward the good built into the cosmos allows him to locate the original sources of both religion and ethics within every human being.

Even in those passages where he does talk about sanctification and the “good works of the born-again,” his refusal to acknowledge any objective rule derived from the biblical text deprives his attempt at Christian ethics of any binding rules (Der Christliche Glaube 2: 203 ff). Schleiermacher has very little use for specific commandments. The Puritans and Pietists tirelessly cited Christ’s words that “those who love me will keep my commandments.” They defined these commandments as the duty to love God and one’s neighbour as oneself. Schleiermacher doesn’t think much of such externally imposed commands. The law can neither serve to confront readers with their sinful state before God, nor is it useful for those who have become Christians. The law is useless, because it
doesn't “lead from a person's external acts back to the inner disposition” (Der Christliche Glaube 2: 205).  

    Faithful to his subjectivism, Schleiermacher actually separates Christian ethics from dogmatics. Christian ethics should drop any imperative form, and rather be purely phenomenological, by merely describing, and not prescribing, the already present Christian way of life (ibid. 206). Thus Schleiermacher's anthropocentrism shies away from any external, binding ethical norm. Biblically, the Reformers and their Puritan and Pietist heirs were certainly more faithful to the text when they claimed with Paul that faith does not nullify the law, but rather encourages the believer to uphold it (Rom. 3: 31).

    When the Puritan turned to examine himself, he saw deviation from an external moral standard, natural selfishness that could be overcome only by divine help and a close personal relationship with the deity through Christ. Schleiermacher, however, obliterates the distinction between the object of knowledge and the inquirer. The Puritan turned the eyes inward to arrive at self-knowledge in light of the external word. Schleiermacher finds both light and knowledge within. For him God-consciousness is self-knowledge. Thus he flattens the former Calvinistic epistemological circle by removing a truly “other,” external source of knowledge, which may serve as a corrective to human interpretation of the universe.

    This then, is Schleiermacher's ingenious appeal to a universal religion removed from empirical evidence and rationalistic critique. As we progress from individual consciousness to one corporate consciousness through individual spiritual progress, Schleiermacher's paradise is ushered in:

    The closer each one comes to the universe, the more each one communicates himself to others, the more completely they become one, no one retains a mere individual consciousness, but everyone shares that of the other at the same time.

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72 “Schon um die Erkenntnis der Sünde zu bewirken, reicht es [das Gesetz] für die im Stand der Heiligung Begriffenen nicht zu, indem es an und für sich nicht von der äußeren Handlung auf das Innere des Gemütes zurückführt.”
They are no longer merely human beings, but also humanity, and disclosing
themselves, triumphing over themselves, they are on the way to genuine
immortality and eternity. (4: 352)

6.11. Conclusion:

Schleiermacher is an important link in the narrative of hermeneutics I am trying to
establish. Although the basically monistic and Neo-Platonic framework of his system is by
no means original, his reinterpretation of traditional Christianity in terms of that
framework is the link in the history of hermeneutics between the Reformed hermeneutics
of the Puritans and early Pietists on the one hand, and both liberal theological
hermeneutics and the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer on the other.

Schleiermacher retains the Pietist aversion to abstract knowledge, but loses the
erlier interplay between subjective reader-response and external revelation. His concept
of a monistic interconnected universe serves as the foundation for his hermeneutics. As a
result he changes a) the traditional theory of inspiration from a God-directed specific
influence to a general principle; b) the idea of progressive revelation of one essential
message to a concept of progressive human spiritual development of successive
manifestations of God-consciousness, with Christ being the supreme model of such human
achievement; and finally, c) the biblical anthropology which was heavily dependent upon
the concept of original sin and human depravity to an idea of sin as mere forgetfulness of
one's potential God-consciousness.

The results of these foundational changes are far-reaching. For the reader,
hermeneutics no longer requires an attitude of humility toward the biblical text. The fact
that each human being is an exact microcosm of the whole and in that sense part of the

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73 "Je mehr sich jeder dem Universum nähert, je mehr sich jeder dem andern mitteilt, desto vollkommener
werden sie eins, keiner hat ein Bewußtsein für sich, jeder hat zugleich das des andern, sie sind nicht mehr
nur Menschen, sondern auch Menschheit, und aus sich selbst herausgehend, über sich selbst
triumphierend sind sie auf dem Wege zu wahren Unsterblichkeit und Ewigkeit." One of Schleiermacher's
many problem's is the tension in his system between the maintaining of an individual identity as a unique
reflection as well as a manifestation of the All, and the telos of a complete dissolution of individuality for
the higher purpose of the God-consciousness for the attaining of a universal brotherhood.
divine puts the reader and the author on the same level. There is really no normative external standard, as there was with the Puritan deity; instead, author, reader and the divine are part of the same system. In effect, the God of the Puritans is already dead and has been replaced by the Welt-All. As a result, the reader focuses no longer on one author God, or the Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures equally, but rather on particular authors who express the experience of oneness with the universe most purely.

Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics remain Christocentric, because it is through laying hold of Christ that one is empowered to higher levels of God-consciousness. However, Christ is no longer seen as the necessary bridge between man’s sinfulness and God’s holiness. The otherness of God is effectively denied, and man’s sinfulness redefined as a low state of consciousness.

Schleiermacher’s dominating interest in subjective experience conveyed by the author renders a cognitive understanding of the text ultimately useless. In Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic, the author is the window to the Weltgeist. Didactic writing may point to the interconnectedness of things and broaden the horizon, but the ultimate piece of art is that which conveys experience and leads others to experience the World-Soul in the same way as the author.

For biblical hermeneutics, Schleiermacher’s interpretation theory leads to a crisis of the Word. Helmut Thielicke observes that since, for Schleiermacher, we are not the recipient of the word, as in Christian theology, but rather the producers of divinity, all of us are, in this sense, divine (Modern Faith and Thought 274). Schleiermacher’s immanentism does not allow an external Word from an external source to address the reader. The predictable consequence is that the text does not really assert itself over against the reader, but rather, as we have seen in the case of Schleiermacher’s own exposition, it is dominated by the reader, who reads his own experience into the text. Thus hermeneutically Schleiermacher’s greatest weakness is that by rejecting an objective
transcendent divine he entrenches a subjectivism into hermeneutics whereby the text itself loses its power to speak.

Finally we find that the question of human nature plays a tremendous role for modern hermeneutics. Schleiermacher's concept of inwardness would be impossible if every human action was in fact tainted inevitably by an inherent egocentrism. It will therefore be interesting to see if Gadamer's hermeneutic is consistent with the reality of evil and if Gadamer retains Schleiermacher's dream of humanity's moral improvement based on bringing out our inherent goodness through dialogue.

This, then, is what we also have to look for in Gadamer's hermeneutic. Is there, as in the Puritan practice of life-application, a real interest in application? Is the text's message taken seriously and is there a unity between reading and implementation? Or does the erosion of traditional hermeneutics with its external revelation and the turn to a reliance on the human finite horizon ultimately cause a hermeneutic of self-referentiality that lacks the moral confidence of precritical hermeneutics? To answer these questions we now turn to our concluding chapter.
Chapter 7
The Silent Universe: The Struggle against Subjectivism

Introduction:
I want to end my narration of the hermeneutical story from a theological perspective with a brief look at the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Charles Taylor, because they are concerned about the danger of subjectivism which causes a lack of applicatory confidence in current hermeneutical philosophy. For example, in his later works, Gadamer tries to work out an applicatory program for his philosophical hermeneutics. Charles Taylor shows similar concern in The Ethics Of Authenticity by pointing out the dangers of modern individualism. The affinity between the two writers is evident in another essay, The Politics of Recognition, in which Taylor appeals to Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons as a model for intercultural dialogue (67).

It is because of their related concern for a retrieval of ethics, for moral norms of social interaction, that I have chosen Taylor and Gadamer as representatives of the silent, non-theistic universe, in which they try to overcome the dangers of subjectivist hermeneutics. My argument is that both writers yearn for something they cannot legitimately claim within their hermeneutical framework, namely ethical norms from which one may derive moral confidence and by which an evaluation of culture and tradition is possible. I will end this chapter by pointing out, with the help of Richard Baxter, that the Puritans were aware of the subjectivist dilemma posed by a silent universe, and regarded their hermeneutical framework as the only solution to this problem.

7.1. Gadamer: A Secular Luther?
I once attended a lecture on hermeneutics during which Gadamer was referred to as a “secular Luther,” because of his debt to theological concepts for the explication of his hermeneutics, a debt evident throughout his works. Grondin tells us, for example, that the
concept of the “inner word,” which Gadamer employs to point out the intended meaning behind every linguistic utterance, is derived from Augustine. Moreover, in the last part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer develops his view of language from the Christian concepts of incarnation and the Trinity (418).

Similarly Gadamer’s epistemological insight that “all understanding is in the final analysis self-understanding” reminds us of the first half of Calvin’s epistemological circle. Yet Gadamer lacks the word of God as the transcendent standard by which a purely subjectivist self-understanding may be counterbalanced. Gadamer does, however, use the Christian concept of self to illustrate his hermeneutical self-understanding through language. He argues that just as “faith’s self-understanding is not man’s possibility, but a gracious act of God that happens to the one who has faith,” so also hermeneutical self-understanding “only realizes itself in the understanding of the subject-matter and does not have the character of a free self-realization” (*The Scope of Hermeneutical Reflection* 54; italics Gadamer’s). Thus Gadamer borrows from the language of pre-critical hermeneutics to stress that in the hermeneutical process something happens to us from the ‘outside’; in short, he seeks to escape the dangers of subjectivism.

The subject-matter Gadamer refers to may be any text, including the larger ‘book’ of human existence. Gadamer may well be titled a secular Luther in the sense that he fully understands his hermeneutical project to accomplish what was formerly achieved by pre-critical hermeneutics, namely the mediation between the finite and the infinite:

To be sure, classical metaphysics’ concept of truth - the conformity of knowledge with the object - rests on a theological correspondence. For it is in their creatureliness that the object and the soul are united. Just as the soul is created to encounter beings, so the thing is created true, that is, capable of being known. An enigma that is insoluble for the finite mind is thus solved in the infinite mind of the

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1 The important point for Gadamer is that “The inner mental word is just as consubstantial with thought as is God the Son with the Father” (*TM* 421).
2 That Gadamer wants to overcome subjectivism is clear from his claim about Betti: “That he can conceive the problem of hermeneutics only as a problem of method shows that he is profoundly involved in the subjectivism which we are endeavoring to overcome” (*TM* 513; italics mine).
Creator. The essence and actuality of the creation consists in being such a harmony of soul and thing. Now philosophy certainly can no longer avail itself of such a theological grounding and will also not want to repeat the secularized versions of it, as represented in speculative idealism with its dialectical mediation of the finite and infinite. But for its part, philosophy may also not close its eyes to the truth of this correspondence. In this sense, the task of metaphysics continues, though certainly as a task that cannot again be solved as metaphysics, that is, by going back to an infinite intellect. *Hence we must ask: are there finite possibilities of doing justice to this correspondence?* Is there a grounding of this correspondence that does not venture to affirm the infinity of the divine mind and yet is able to do justice to the infinite correspondence of soul and being? *I contend that there is.* There is a way that attests to this correspondence, one toward which philosophy is ever more clearly directed - *the way of language.* *(The Nature of Things 75, italics mine)*

Thus Gadamer seeks to substitute his hermeneutical universe, bereft of the infinite intellect, for that of pre-critical interpretation which possessed an extra-human perspective through divine revelation. The "harmony of soul and thing" which he mentions refers to the fact that in pre-critical hermeneutics meaning was based on the notion of a universe in which both the objects and the observer were created purposefully by a common creator. Gadamer refuses to accept such a premise (although he never gives any reasons for his categorical refusal of such a position). Instead, he wants to explain the existence of truth and meaning from an anthropocentric, finite point of view. In his attempt to explain the correspondence between soul and being, Gadamer flattens even more the former Calvinistic hermeneutical circle that had already been shorn of its true transcendence by Schleiermacher.

Within this framework, Gadamer wants to accomplish some form of transcendence. He cannot avail himself of God, neither does he want to repeat Schleiermacher's monism. We remember that for Schleiermacher, in spite of his protestations, God became not much more than the whole of all parts constitutive of the universe. Gadamer certainly embraces no such monism. However, he too embraces a dialectic of part and whole, yet within the confines of human finitude. And within this
dialectic, language occupies just as central a role for the mediation between the finite and
infinite as it had played in Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics. In fact, as we have seen in the
above quotation, in Gadamer’s hermeneutics language replaces God in his functions both
as revelator of truth and as mediator between the finite and the infinite.

We remember that for Schleiermacher language, as the conduit of the Weltgeist’s
self-expression, is the means by which the interpreter’s consciousness is opened to a
holistic view of the universe through the reading of ‘inspired’ writings. The reader should
come to understand himself as being interconnected with the greater whole. Gadamer,
though in a less mystical way, also believes that language mediates between the finite and
the infinite and so enhances our self-understanding. He argues that self-understanding is
to be conceived of “in terms of religious experience. Inherent in it is the fact that the false
paths of human self-understanding only reach their true end through divine grace. That is,
only thereby do we reach the insight that all paths lead us to our own salvation. All
human self-understanding is determined in itself by its inadequacy” (Scope of
Hermeneutical Experience 54). For Gadamer, as for Schleiermacher, it is language
which mediates between the individual and the universe: “The mediation of finite and
infinite that is appropriate to us as finite beings lies in language - in the linguistic character
of our experience of the world” (ibid.)

Thus despite Gadamer’s claim to the contrary, he presents us with a secularized
version of Schleiermacher’s monism: All human beings live in history and are formed by
history and language. Each individual experience is transcended by the collective sum of
all experiences and traditions of other human beings in the past and in the present.
Gadamer takes from Schleiermacher the sentiment that “every experience is an element of

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3 Gadamer demonstrates his apotheosis of language also in the following statement: “For language does
not really stand alongside art and law and religion, but represents the sustaining medium of all of these
manifestations of the spirit...[Aristotle] pointed in the direction of that correspondence of soul and world
that comes to light in the phenomenon of language as such and is independent of the forceful
extrapolation of an infinite mind by which metaphysics provided this correspondence with a theological
foundation” (The Nature of Things 76-78).
infinite life” (TM 68). He continues: “Every experience is taken out of the continuity of life and at the same time related to the whole of one’s life” (ibid. 69).

Now we know that Schleiermacher could make these claims because he believed in a mystical interconnectedness of all human beings. In his view, the impressions of the Welt-All helps to overcome our natural subjectivistic tendencies. Schleiermacher wants to think in terms of Menschheit rather than in the category of Mensch. Gadamer likewise seeks to overcome the subjectivity Western thought inherited from the anthropocentric orientation of enlightenment philosophy. He wants to establish some form of transcendence, fully realizing that otherwise the creation of meaning resides entirely with the subject:

It makes a difference whether a limit is experienced from out of the subjectivity of the act of meaning and the domineering character of the will or whether it is conceived in terms of the all-embracing harmony of beings within the world disclosed by language. *Our finite experience of correspondence between words and things thus indicates something like what metaphysics once taught as the original harmony of all things created, especially as the commensurateness of the created soul to created things.* (The Nature of Things PhH 82; italics mine)

In a movement of progressive secularization of the hermeneutics of the Puritans and Pietists through Schleiermacher we have now arrived at a thoroughly secular concept of inter-human dialogue. While Schleiermacher’s reflections on the creation account still appeals to a mystical Welt-Geist in his struggle for transcendence, in Gadamer knowledge and truth are limited to the anthropocentric sphere. In other words, there is no revelation from the outside. Language mediates, but it does not convey impressions of the Weltgeist. Instead the eternal Weltgeist has turned into finite human experience and tradition: “The mediation of finite and infinite that is appropriate to us as finite beings lies in language - in the linguistic character of our experience of the world. It exhibits an experience that is always finite but that nowhere encounters a barrier at which something
infinite is intended that can barely be surmised and no longer spoken...it is tradition that opens and delimits our historical horizon” (The Nature of Things PhH 80-81). Thus Gadamer’s mediation between the finite and the infinite, at least from a pre-critical point of view, is really a correspondence between our immediate experiences within the finite human sphere and the collective experiences within the still finite human horizon(s).

One other example, Gadamer’s reflections on the nature of truth, will help to clarify my thesis. In two essays (Truth in the Human Sciences 1953; What is Truth 1957) Gadamer wants to show that the scientific idea of truth as verifiable knowledge does not apply to truth in the human sciences. Yet this different truth is not inferior but simply different. This truth derives its authority not from its empirical evidence, but rather from the insight of the “great tradition of human history in which we stand.... To stand in tradition and to heed it is clearly the way of truth that applies in the human sciences” (Truth in the Human Sciences 28-29).

The next step in Gadamer’s argument concerning the nature of truth is the realization that truth in the human sciences may be corrupted by the games of “economical and social power” which inevitably exert their corrupting pressure on the parameters and results of research (ibid. 30). Gadamer argues that perhaps no other insight has destroyed the enlightenment apotheosis of the self more thoroughly than “the most ominous experience that humanity in this century has had, [namely] that reason itself is corruptible” (30). According to him, however, the strength of the human sciences lies precisely in the collapse of the enlightenment ideal in that modern scholars’ advantage is the full recognition and constant awareness of “their own finitude and historical conditioning in scholarly work” (ibid. 31). The humanities have a great responsibility in so far as their findings and teachings have a direct impact on education, families and society as a whole.

4 “For everything pertaining to memory, imagination, tact, artistic sensibility, and world experience that applies here is obviously of another kind than the equipment which the researcher in the natural sciences requires, but it is not an inferior type of instrument, one that simply cannot be supplied, but one that grows when one places oneself in the great tradition of human history” (Truth in the Human Sciences 28).
Gadamer points out that the research of human sciences is constantly threatened by “the manipulation of opinion through a controlled public realm in the modern world,” through mass media and the like (ibid.). Its task is to maintain the truth against all of those pressures. However, one may ask how truth can be asserted against the internal and external corrupting forces when tradition, the very thing which corrupts, is also the source of truth? In short, Gadamer’s problem is not all that far removed from the Protestant-Catholic debate about authority and truth in the Reformation: If truth lies within tradition, how can one judge tradition itself? It is one thing to be aware of one’s tradition, but it is an entirely different matter to deduce from such awareness a corrective unless one already has a certain ethical standard by which criticism and correction are possible. Does one not need an external standard, independent of tradition, which would grant true transcendence, such as, for example, divine revelation?

At this point Gadamer’s clear and concise style degenerates into vague and oracle-like statements. He asserts that truth is, at times, somehow within the findings of the human sciences. However, in the human sciences truth may not be distinguished from falsehood but by the means of logoi, speeches. It becomes increasingly apparent that Gadamer seeks some form of transcendence, but his flattened universe limits his search parameters to human tradition, which, however, according to his own admission, is marked by dynamics of power and corruption.

Gadamer’s ‘solution’ to this problem is based on the Platonic model of truth as remembrance. David Carpenter in his essay Emanation, Incarnation, and the Truth-Event in Gadamer’s Truth and Method interprets Gadamer correctly when he argues that

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Gadamer directs our attention to a fundamental truth about Being: Being is self-representative; it makes itself available for our understanding and therefore we understand. This speculative structure of Being, its self-expressiveness, which the Neo-platonic tradition conceived of as the self-diffusiveness of the Good, and expressed in the fundamental metaphor of emanation, is a basic presupposition of Gadamer's entire enterprise. With it stands or falls his description of understanding as an event of truth. (Hermeneutics and Truth 98)

This is Gadamer’s adoption of the Heideggerian legacy that Being reveals itself. It is also in this context that Gadamer’s notion of understanding as a gift which one receives much as the Christian (at least in the Reformed view) is given faith, makes sense. Gadamer’s notion that truth is aletheia, the unveiling or unconcealing of something is also a remnant of Heidegger’s notion that Being reveals itself to us. The important point for Gadamer is that these ‘revelations’ are somehow a gift and do not spring from our subjective consciousness. In his attempt to overcome subjectivism Gadamer argues that truth understood as mere self-understanding “does not yield an adequate horizon of interpretation” (“Heidegger and Marburg Theology,” PhH 208).

Another way in which Gadamer wants to assure that truth is not merely subjective is to deny our possession of it. We cannot possess truth because we can never attain to the whole picture of human existence. Therefore truth can never repose in man-made propositions which aspire to ‘freeze’ experiential nature of the self-revealing of Being into abstract statements.6

Gadamer’s well-known concept of the Fusion of Horizons can also be interpreted in light of Heidegger’s idea that truth is a language event, an experiential unveiling of Being. Gadamer chooses the example of historical research to explain what truth is. In engaging with the past, we are addressed by something that goes beyond mere propositions. In Schleiermacher’s (and Böhme’s) terms it is not the letter of history, but

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6 “The form of the sentence is not well-suited to express speculative truths. For the truth is the whole....I believe one can say in principle: There can be no proposition that is purely and simply true” (What is Truth 42).
rather its spirit, which addresses us and conveys truth in a non-propositional sense. When this happens in a fusion of horizons between past and present, one experiences a “communication [that] is no longer the transference of knowledge through compelling proof, rather it is a type of commerce from existence to existence” (What is Truth 42).

However, Gadamer does not want merely to replace a scientific notion of propositional truth with existential truth. Rather, he wants to overcome the notion of subjectivity through the concept that something which he calls truth addresses himself to us, much as the Word of God addresses itself to the listener in a sermon. Though Gadamer is not entirely explicit regarding what is actually conveyed in this truth event, it is something that comes from outside. Gadamer credits Heidegger with this insight, which goes beyond “the problem area of subjectivity” (What is Truth 4).

The fusion of horizons is Gadamer’s alternative to objective scientific truth, and also constitutes his attempt to overcome subjectivity. The canvas in tradition, on which all human beings stand reveals not so much knowledge as it does experience. This “hermeneutical experience,” the “hermeneutical event proper is not language as language, whether as grammar or as lexicon; it consists in the coming into language of what has been said in the tradition: an event that is at once appropriation and interpretation. Thus here it really is true to say that this event is not our action upon the thing, but the act of the thing itself” (TM 463). Being expresses itself through language and addresses the reader or

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7 This notion of a non-propositional truth which nevertheless is not at the whim of our subjective manipulations and interpretations constitutes the link between Gadamer and the New Hermeneutic as becomes evident in Gadamer’s view of Scripture as outlined at the end of his essay The Problem of Self-Understanding: the message of salvation in the Bible is not really cognitively graspable. The theological intentions of the New Testament writers are not really important, for “the proclamation of the gospel speaks through all these mediations in a way that is comparable to the repetition of a legend or the continual renewal and transformation of mythical tradition by great poetry.” Instead, the “real event of understanding” is not the confronting word of God, but rather some existential address that goes beyond the mere grammar of the Word (On The Problem of Self-Understanding 58). One could, in fact, understand Gadamer’s whole hermeneutical system as a secularization of neo-orthodox hermeneutics.

8 “This structure of the hermeneutical experience, which so totally contradicts the idea of scientific methodology, itself depends on the character of language as event that we have described at length” (TM 436).
listener. Gadamer uses the comparison of hearing versus writing to underscore the
irresistibility and givenness of the language event, “the primacy of hearing is the basis of
the hermeneutic phenomenon.” According to Gadamer, one can avert one’s eyes from a
certain object, but one may never “hear away” (ibid. 462). Gadamer thus speaks of a
dialogue between “tradition and its interpreter,” in which subjective manipulation is
overcome by the fact that tradition has its own voice by which it addresses itself to the
reader or listener (TM 461).

To sum up: Gadamer, through the adoption of Heidegger’s notion that existential
truth reveals itself through language, wants to overcome the anthropocentrism of the
enlightenment which has failed to keep its promise of continuous human improvement. In
historical research, for example, this means that in our engagement with the texts from the
past, grammatical and textual research leads to a fusion of horizons, in which we are
addressed by something which goes beyond the letter, an addressing truth-event which
should guard against the corrupting dynamics of power at play in hermeneutical
endeavours. In this event we are somehow able to filter the right from wrong in tradition
and profit from these insights.

I find Gadamer’s concept unconvincing because it tells us in essence that
somehow, through ‘commerce’ with finite human tradition (the whole of which is the
infinite in Gadamer’s system) we are able to recognize the good, that is normative
horizons of significance crystallized and filtered out by the non-propositional truth-event.
However, again the question of the Reformers forces itself upon us: “How can we guard
against tradition when the source of our insights is the canvas of tradition and when, upon
Gadamer’s own admission, reason is corruptible?” What Gadamer is really appealing to,
in my opinion, is a truth that is somehow ‘out there’ and that can be released through
dialogue. Thus Gadamer is not so much a secular Luther as a secular Schleiermacher,
whom he follows in conceiving truth according to the Platonic idea of a maieutically
released entity, which resides within us, or, as in Gadamer's case, which dwells in the whole of human tradition.

The shortcomings of the notion of truth as a unveiling of insights from tradition becomes especially evident when Gadamer goes beyond mere description of the conditions of understanding to the applicatory dimension of hermENEUTICS. In examining Gadamer's ethics I am trying to show two things: first, his implication that we possess not only a notion of the Good, but also a willingness to implement it; and, secondly, his belief that by entering into dialogue with the past and others through the medium of language, our individualistic preoccupation may be overcome and foster some kind of transcendent human solidarity of values.

7.2. Gadamer's Practical Philosophy

Gadamer's practical philosophy is based on Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics, particularly on Aristotle's idea of phronesis. Gadamer establishes a link between hermeneutical interpretation and moral knowledge in Truth and Method: "If the heart of the hermeneutical problem is that one and the same tradition must time and time again always be understood in a different way, the problem, logically speaking, concerns the relationship between the universal and the particular. Understanding, then, is a special case of applying something universal to a particular situation. This makes Aristotelian Ethics of special importance for us" (312; italics his). The link is that just as hermeneutics can understand a text from the past only by immediately applying it to a concrete present situation, so also ethics are formed only through interpretation, that is, by concretizing them in a particular situation. In other words, the common link between interpretation and moral knowledge is their need for application.

To put it another way, for Gadamer knowledge in the human sciences and moral knowledge are alike experiential. Moral knowledge is not a theoretical knowledge in the sense of unchanging mathematical truth, but knowledge of an "acting being" who is
"concerned with what is not always the same but can also be different. In it he can discover the point at which he has to act. The purpose of this knowledge is to govern his action." In this respect, then, the human sciences stand closer to moral knowledge than to "theoretical knowledge" (TM 312-317). Similarly, an interpretation of the text must be related to a concrete situation. Thus when interpretation has the character of application, it is really closer to moral reasoning than to the technical implementation of pre-existing rules:

We too, [like Aristotle], determined that application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning...The interpreter seeks no more than to understand this universal, the text, - i.e., to understand what it says, what constitutes the text's possessive meaning and significance. In order to understand that, he must not try to disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand at all. (TM 324)

Matthew Foster in his book _Gadamer and Practical Philosophy_ shows how Gadamer's writings have expanded from the recognition of an affinity between _phronesis_ and interpretation in 1960 to the identification of philosophical hermeneutics and practical philosophy. Gadamer announces this in a 1978 essay _Reason in the Age of Science:_

To the extent that hermeneutics brings the contribution of the sciences into this context of mutual agreement that links us with tradition...that is efficacious in our lives, it is not just a repertoire of methods...but philosophy. It not only accounts for the procedures applied by science but also gives an account of the questions that are prior to the application of every science, just as did the rhetoric intended by Plato. These are the questions that are determinative for all human knowing and doing, the greatest of questions, that are decisive for human beings as human and their choice of the good. (137)

Gadamer's comments regarding the difference between theory and practice as they concern moral knowledge are in line with the views of the Puritans and Pietists: Moral knowledge is not really ever abstract but must be practically experienced. The Puritans
insisted that though one can learn moral knowledge, it becomes real only when lived. Unlike precritical hermeneuts, however, Gadamer (like Schleiermacher) denies the cognitive dimension of moral knowledge: "Moral knowledge can never be knowable in advance like knowledge that can be taught....there can be no anterior certainty concerning what the good life is directed toward as a whole" (TM 321). Rather it is the concrete situation which decides what is right (ibid. 322).

Yet where is the knowledge of correct ethical behaviour found? Reluctantly, but out of necessity, Gadamer admits that goodness is somehow "out there" as an inconcrete ideal: "For what Aristotle shows here is true of all man's ideas of what he ought to be, and not only of the problem of law. All these concepts are not just arbitrary ideals conditioned by convention, but despite all the variety of moral ideas in the most different times and peoples, in this sphere there is still something like the nature of the thing" (TM 321; italics mine). A little later on in the text Gadamer implies, again with Aristotle, that goodness resides in some general form within the individual: "A person who is overwhelmed by his passions suddenly no longer sees what is right to do in a given situation. He has lost his self-mastery and hence his own rightness - i.e. the right orientation within himself - so that driven by the dialectic of passion, whatever this passion tells him is right seems so." Gadamer concludes: "For moral knowledge contains a kind of experience in itself, and in fact we shall see that this is perhaps the fundamental form of experience, compared with which all other experience represents an alienation, not to say a denaturing" (TM 322; italics mine).

Gadamer contends that the human sciences contain a certain kind of knowledge, a knowledge that is like moral knowledge, inaccessible to methodology and really unteachable. By implication, then, it must be experienced; and here Gadamer, like Schleiermacher, concentrates on the subjective pole of experience. In the final analysis Gadamer cannot, as he intended, overcome subjectivism. Of course it is legitimate for Gadamer to appeal, phenomenologically so to speak, to the fact that there are good
actions and that traditions help to preserve virtues and moral standards. But the ground of these standards is lacking when an extra-human standard is absent. In the silent universe there can be no binding argument against a destructive 'redefinition' of moral ideals, as had occurred, for example, under National Socialism.

For the Puritans, certainly, there was no doubt that, in light of human depravity, the absence of God in human existence would eventually lead to moral chaos. They had an inkling of what would happen if the human mind became the only standard of knowledge: "If you take away God, you take away conscience, and thereby all measures and rules of good and evil....If there be no God, then the natural consequence is that there is no supreme government of the world: such a notion would cashier all sentiments of good, and be like a Trojan horse, whence all impurity, tyranny and all sorts of mischiefs would break out against mankind" (The Existence and Attributes of God WSC 1: 78).

Thus Gadamer's hermeneutical system fails to guard against subjectivism because it appeals to our inner sense of ethical responsibility but without providing a transcendent standard which would lend binding content to an ethical program. The only guard against subjectivism is Gadamer's hope that through hermeneutics the collective sphere of human tradition will address itself to the reader and convey a sense of what is right. As Terry Eagleton states in his assessment of Gadamer, much depends on what or whose tradition we are talking about (Literary Theory 73). Why should one accept as normative the Greeco-Roman and Judeo-Christian tradition to which Gadamer refers? As Taylor puts it, in the silent universe we are "condemned to create our own values" (Malaise 68); and even though we may certainly avail ourselves of the traditional values, nothing obligates us to do so. If there is no accountability to a higher authority than that of human tradition, then neither is there a binding reason why the anti-Semitic and Darwinian-eugenicist notions of Nazism cannot be defended as a valid moral standard.

Since Gadamer includes ethics within hermeneutics as an interpretative rather than a prescriptive science, the weakness of his unfounded appeal to interpretative good will
and inherent goodness may be exposed in both. The weakness of Gadamer’s hermeneutical project has been exposed by Derrida as the “underlying structure of good will” (Dialogue and Deconstruction 51). In their Parisian encounter Derrida points out in his Three Questions to Hans Georg Gadamer that any ethic ultimately needs to appeal to an “unconditional axiom” which would “stand beyond any kind of evaluation whatsoever and beyond all value, if a value implies a scale and a comparison” (ibid. 52). Derrida argues that, either in the interhuman dialogue or in any dialogue with a text, Gadamer’s axiom that one always seeks understanding is a wistful reminiscence of metaphysical times (ibid. 53).

Gadamer’s answer to these criticisms is a mere repetition of his position that one should not seek to overpower one’s dialogue partner but that one seeks instead “as far as possible to strengthen the other’s viewpoint” in order to reach an understanding (Reply to Jacques Derrida D&D 55). Gadamer tries to correct Derrida by saying that his notion of the good will has “nothing to do with ethics” but merely pertains to the idea that in any given conversation one always seeks to understand the other. According to Gadamer, Derrida’s very questions are a sign that he himself is no exception to this rule.

In other words, Gadamer charges Derrida with willful misunderstanding. But does this not prove Derrida’s point? In the created universe of Puritan and Pietist theology the “good will” was a gift of divine grace, and the content of the Good prescribed by divine revelation. In Gadamer’s and Derrida’s silent universe of postmodernity, however, the self-creation of values makes Derrida’s position as legitimate as that of Gadamer, whose yearning to overcome anthropocentrism is simply assumed without any theological or metaphysical grounding and thus has no other basis than wishful thinking.
7.3. Charles Taylor and the Desire for Horizons of Significance

One interpreter of Gadamer’s thought, Matthew Foster, argues that Gadamer’s “underlying structure of good will” is meant to bridge the gap between scientific facts and ethics which prevails in Western thought as dominated by the methodology of the sciences. Foster acknowledges the current paralysis of moral confidence and locates its source in the strong doubt concerning the scientific world view “whether universals and particulars can justifiably be connected - precisely the premise on which practice most depends” (Gadamer and Practical Philosophy 7). In science, Foster goes on to explain, the universals which are applied in practical judgment are considered unverifiable and thus invalid, in short, they are beliefs, not facts. Thus, in light of scientific belief, “confidence in the possibility of meaningful moral application of universals to particulars cannot be justified” (ibid.). Hence the morality dilemma stubbornly persists. Either we accept that we are a-moral beings, in which any discussion about morality is useless, or we must try to mend the divorce between fact and value by finding a moral framework into which the particulars can be integrated in a meaningful way.

We have seen that Gadamer’s solution to this problem is an extra-scientific experiential knowledge conveyed through language out of the larger canvas of human tradition. Yet as it turns out, Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics do not seem helpful here because they find no genuinely transcendent grounds to provide a larger horizon of significance which could integrate the particulars of either the natural or the human sciences.

Another attempt to solve this moral dilemma is Charles Taylor’s quest for horizons of significance, that is, larger transcendent constructs which lend value to our experiences.

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9 There are good grounds for this assumption, as we have seen in Gadamer’s essay Truth in the Human Sciences, where Gadamer points out the need for a moral enframing of both natural and human sciences. Also in the preface to Truth and Method Gadamer declares his philosophy of hermeneutics to be “concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method wherever that experience is to be found, and to inquire into its legitimacy” (xii).
and serve as moral guidelines: “I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter....Only when I exist in a world in which history or the demands of nature, or the needs of fellow human beings....or the call of God matters crucially can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial” (Malaise 41). It is my argument that though Taylor analyses the problem of subjectivism more acutely than Gadamer, he nevertheless also fails in his attempt to provide moral confidence through larger horizons of significance. Like Gadamer, Taylor tries to import ethical concepts (in his case recognition and tolerance) from the precritical framework into the silent universe, but fails to do so convincingly, because he lacks the former’s foundation.

Taylor’s contribution to our understanding of the ethical dilemma of contemporary philosophical hermeneutics consists in his astute analysis of modern Western culture. Taylor diagnoses a progressive “slide into subjectivism” from precritical to modern times and defines this movement in terms of three major symptoms: the ascendancy of selfish individualism (loss of communal view), the rise of instrumental reason (in the form of pragmatism and utilitarianism) and, finally, the loss of political and individual freedom resulting from the other two. Taylor is quite frank about the fact that pre-critical hermeneutics possessed a framework which lent meaning to all three of these areas. The created universe gave meaning to human identity, a notion Taylor wants to explore further in coming works: “There is a large element of hope. It is a hope that I see implicit in Judeo-Christian theism (however terrible the record of its adherents in history), and in its central promise of a divine affirmation of the human, more total than humans can ever attain unaided” (Sources of the Self 521).

Taylor also admits that the pre-critical framework gave science a moral dimension which needs to be retrieved to counter the abuse of science by utilitarian principles. He credits especially Puritanism with the “affirmation of the ordinary life, the sense that production, and reproduction, of work and the family, is what is important for us.” (Malaise 104; Sources of the Self 266 ff.) What set the science of pre-critical
hermeneutics apart from modern practice is "that the thrust behind this new science [of Bacon and his contemporaries] was not only epistemological but also moral." Bacon, argues Taylor, criticized the Aristotelian framework of science because it lacked an applicatory dimension "to relieve the condition of mankind," a dimension Puritanism provided (Malaise 104). We need, Taylor insists, a "moral background in benevolence" that can justify the application of technology and reason (ibid. 106).

Finally, Taylor argues that the third area, the political arena, also demands transcendent horizons of significance. If there is no greater communal purpose which a state and its populace establish for themselves, then all our democratic institutions cannot prevent a degeneration of political mechanisms into means of fragmentation. Taylor argues that under the free domination of self-centered subjectivism judicial rights and procedures are increasingly abused by self-serving interest groups (Malaise 113). In turn these tendencies "breed anthropocentrism," that is, self-centered narcissistic behaviour (Malaise 59). Yet the moral enframing of science, a greater communal vision, and the recognition of unnegotiable moral values so necessary for Taylor's brand of "substantive liberalism" are all to be derived from the silent universe, for we can no longer return to the precritical framework (ibid. 69), since no one believes it any more (ibid. 83).

Taylor suggests two avenues for the retrieval of greater horizons of significance. One appeal, not unlike Gadamer's, is to tradition in order to achieve a common understanding of the good life: "coming to understand the moral sources of our civilization can make a difference, in so far as it can contribute to a new common understanding" (Malaise 101). For example, Taylor argues, if we retrieved the sources for instrumental reason, that is, Christianity, which wanted to employ technology for the

10 In his essay The Politics of Recognition Taylor identifies himself as an advocate of substantive liberalism. This political orientation, as opposed to procedural liberalism (which purports to be value free), does acknowledge itself to be a faith which contains certain unnegotiable moral values, such as the right to life, which overrule the contrary interests of individual members of society in those areas (pp. 62 ff.).
improvement of human society according to binding moral norms, then we would have a reason for helping victims of hurricanes and famines (Malaise 104).

In other words, Taylor acknowledges the existence of a modern moral crisis and argues for a dimension that transcends the human self. Without a common purpose carried by moral values conducive to a "practical and universal benevolence," human society will degenerate further and further into self-centeredness (ibid.). However, the same criticism that applies to Gadamer also holds true for Taylor’s appeal to tradition: why should a certain tradition or ethic be more binding than another? What if a person is pleased with an increasing egocentricity? What speaks against the pursuing of such a goal over that of a universal benevolence? In short, in full recognition of our modern subjectivist dilemma, Taylor, like Gadamer, yearns for the binding moral foundations of the pre-critical universe but finds nothing that would do the same job in a silent universe.

Much like Gadamer, Taylor assumes the inherent good-will of humanity to seek out neighbourly love rather than domination. This is particularly evident in the last section of The Malaise of Modernity, where he argues that only a common moral purpose can overcome the self-serving political fragmentation of modern society. Taylor argues that we need a common moral vision to enframe technology with benevolent purpose and to stop political disunity. Only then can a further slide into subjectivism be halted. However, to implement fruitful moral resources from the past in order to form such a purpose (which already requires a standard for the differentiation of good tradition from bad), we need democratic action. That is, we need to agree democratically on a common purpose. Yet Taylor has just told us that democracy functions only properly in the context of a common purpose. In short, Taylor’s ‘solution’ suffers from the same circularity as Gadamer’s appeal to tradition - circularity recognized in the Reformation debate over the authority of the Scriptures: tradition cannot appeal to itself as judge and arbiter of values. Thus tradition, in the final analysis, does not present firm moral ground on which one could construct a program of ethical activism, such as that of Spener, for example. It is
not that Taylor is wrong in advocating universal benevolence, only that he has no binding foundation for doing so.

That the moral horizon needs to have a binding authority is clear from the instances Taylor and Gadamer cite in which human beings must overcome petty differences and resort to common moral action, as in the face of ecological threats. For example, in a series of essays concerning ethical problems Gadamer defines practical application (Praxis) as that which promotes a common purpose against one's own selfish inclinations. However, at one point in the essay Was ist Praxis?, he seems for the first time to be shaken in his confidence in human goodness and asks if there can be sufficient decency without religion that would allow a society to exist: "Does enough common purpose remain for the State and Society to exist - so that, for example, a witness might tell the truth in a court because he adheres to the law although no religiously sanctioned vow binds him to do so?" (Works IV 225).

This musing leads Gadamer to the admission that only a binding common purpose can assure practical application, i.e. moral action. Though Gadamer finds that we are far removed from such a common consciousness (dem gemeinsamen Bewußtsein), he suggests that an economic disaster or the global nuclear threat could possibly foster the "solidarity" necessary for binding moral action (ibid. 227). Taylor likewise refers to inescapable ecological threats as motivations for solidarity (Malaise 90). Are not these

11 Collected in volume four of his Works under the title Zu Problemen der Ethik, these essays comprise a time period of 20 years, 1963-1982.
12 "Das sind charakteristische Formen von 'Praxis.' Man 'handelt' nicht indem man nach freiem Gutdanken Pläne ausführt, sondern hat es miteinander zu tun und bestimmt die gemeinsamen Angelegenheiten durch sein Tun mit" (Was ist Praxis? 225).
13 "Man mag vielleicht fragen: Ist diese vielleicht vorhandene Restgemeinsamkeit genug, aufgrund deren Staat und Gesellschaft überhaupt existieren können - etwa daß vor Gericht ein Zeuge mitunter noch die Wahrheit sagt, weil er die Rechtsordnung achtet, auch wenn ihm kein religiös sanktionierter Eid mehr bindet?"
14 Taylor, however, goes further than Gadamer by admitting that to stave off ecological disaster for reasons of survival is in the final analysis completely egocentric and does not really provide grounds for inferring the higher purpose of human life he seeks: "Restrain is shown as necessary for human welfare. This is true and important enough, but it is not the whole story. Nor does it capture the full extent of our
examples admissions that human beings need a higher transcendent authority for the applicatory dimension of hermeneutics? And is not in fact an ecological punishment by nature the same as the eternal judgment of the pre-critical hermeneutics? Thus it seems that philosophical hermeneutics has to resort to external force after all to ensure moral application, whereas in pre-critical hermeneutics moral action need not be based on fear, but could flow equally from an attitude of gratefulness toward the divine.

7.4. What about Faith?

Since the purpose of this study is to integrate pre-critical thinking into the current hermeneutical debate, it seems appropriate to close with a pre-critical hermeneut: Richard Baxter (1615-1691). Pre-critical hermeneutics with its appeal to divine revelation is commonly thought of as matter of faith that militates against the obvious facts of human existence. Grondin, for example, defines biblical faith as belief in a truth that is contrary to fact. For him faith “appeals to an experience of truth that indeed cannot be metaphysically demonstrated and which one attains only by means of faith. The believer is asked to rely upon a promise of truth, but without being able to hope for proofs or absolute assurances, and instead renouncing them” (“Hermeneutics and Relativism” Festivals of Interpretation 49, italics mine). That such a view of faith is strongly influenced by effective history, that is, by an neo-orthodox reading of the Bible, and that the pre-critical view of faith is much less naive than Grondin alleges becomes clear when we listen to Baxter’s account of human knowledge and faith.

While Grondin’s reading of faith tends toward the Gadamerian and Schleiermachian proclivity for non-propositional knowledge, Puritan epistemology allows for a balance between the experiential element of knowledge and that of propositional content. In precritical hermeneutics, knowledge can be expressed in propositions or intuitions here, which often point us to a sense that nature and our world make a claim on us” (Malaise 90).
proclamations. Yet at the same time, knowledge so obtained can never be detached and objective in a scientific sense. Richard Baxter has outlined the quality of human knowledge and its degrees of certainty in a treatise entitled *A Treatise of Knowledge and Love Compared* (1689). Here Baxter clearly lists the limitations (due to our finitude) of human knowledge in the created universe:

> We know something certainly of many things, even of all sensible objects. But we know nothing perfectly and comprehensively; not a worm, not a leaf, not a stone, or a sand, not the pen, ink or paper which we write with; not the hand that writeth, nor the simplest particle of our bodies; not a hair or the least accident. In every thing nearest us, or in the world, the uncertainties, and incognita are far more than that which we certainly know.... the order and relations of things to one another is so wonderfully unsearchable, and innumerably various, as quite surpasseth all human understanding. (PWRB 4:568)

Like Gadamer and Taylor, Baxter thoroughly distrusts scientific knowledge that is detached from any practical purpose. Such learning is “like a puppet play, or the raising of dust” (560). Furthermore, Baxter also realizes that finite, human knowledge is always mediated and conditioned by language and tradition:

> For young men must have teachers; they cannot begin at the foundation and yet every one learn of himself, as if none had ever learned before him: he is like to have but a slow proficient that maketh no use of the studies and experience of any that ever learned before him. And he that will learn of others, must receive their notions and words as the means of his information” (ibid.)

Learning happens through language, yet all human language, argues Baxter, is “so woefully ambiguous, that there is scarce a word in the world that hath not many senses; and the learned world never came to agreement about the meaning of their common words, so that ambiguity drowneth all in uncertainty and confusion”(561). Thus Baxter realizes fully the historical and social conditioning of human knowledge. He believes with Gadamer that “no human apprehension here [in the contingent world] is absolutely perfect”(563). Thus human knowledge cannot attain absolute certainty; “therefore all our
subjective certainties are imperfect." Infallibility is possessed only by God (564). Yet we may know things, even things about God, with a partial certainty.

Baxter maintains that faith must be grounded in some degree of evidence. In other words, he strongly rejects the fideistic understanding of truth advanced by Grondin as the New Testament concept of faith. Rather for Baxter, faith, like all knowledge, corresponds to and yet transcends the historical and evidential. Since God has both made the world and outfitted humanity with the faculty to perceive it, faith also participates in the historical: “For we are men before we are Christians, and we have sense and intellects before we have faith: and there is not Christianity but on supposition of sense and understanding” (564). To divorce faith from the historical, to embrace a faith which is entirely against all senses and reason may sound pious, Baxter argues, but is also insults the God-given intellect of humanity: “God can make a man [human being] to be no intellectual creature; but thereby he maketh him no man: for to be a man, and not intellectual, is a contradiction. And so is it to be men, and yet to have no sense nor intellect [which] can truly perceive sensible objects as before qualified. Therefore they [who divorce faith from empirical knowledge] unman all the world on pretext of asserting the power of God” (565).

If we divorce faith from empirical knowledge, Baxter asks acutely, how can we still trust the word of God, which is after all a written document? How can we then determine the content of the message? (ibid.). Baxter warns against two extremes. First (and contrary to Grondin), the biblical definition of “faith as the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1) does not at all mean that “objects of faith had no ascertaining intellectual evidence” (567). It is of course true, Baxter admits, that divine revelation often does not have evidence in the empirical sense, but possesses evidences of equal power, namely through the credibility of its testimony. Baxter thus repeats Owen’s view that the human understanding is designed “to believe evident truth on the testimony of the revealer, because this testimony is sufficient evidence.” In short, to say “I will believe,
though without evidence of truth is a contradiction or hypocritical self-deceit; for your will believeth not; and your understanding receiveth no truth but upon evidence that it is truth” (567). Like Owen, Baxter thus affirms that “evidence is an essentiating part of the intellect’s act” (ibid.).

Yet at the same time, Baxter goes on to say, faith can never be pure and without doubt. In other words, faith is never infallibly certain, for it is never free of doubt; “yea, no man on earth then attaineth to such certainty, because that every man’s faith is imperfect” (567). For Baxter, the overwhelming majority of our knowledge comes to us by faith, that is, based on other people's testimony. Even in so-called historical knowledge, we depend on the word of others. How do we know if we can trust such testimony? For “those parts of history which depend merely on the credit of men’s wisdom and honesty, and are so merely of human faith, must needs be uncertain....how shall strangers and posterity know when they read a history whether the writer was an honest man or knave, a man of credit or an impudent liar? Both may be equal in confident asserting, and in the plausibility of the narrative” (569).

We may see from Baxter’s description of knowledge that pre-critical hermeneutic epistemology was not at all unaware of the problems connected with epistemology. He saw clearly that when it comes to human knowledge, our finitude binds us to perspectivism. No unity, Baxter was convinced, will ever come about through agreement concerning knowledge: “I know that ignorance and weakness of judgment is the common calamity of mankind; and there is no hope of curing us by unity in high degrees of knowledge” (586). Even the knowledge derived from divine revelation was perceived not as detached scientific knowledge, but as relational knowledge. Yet pre-critical hermeneutics can claim moral confidence because, in dialogue with the divine, human weakness can always be called to account before an eternal unchangeable law, flowing from the goodness of the creator. Received as a gift, the divine communication sparked a
gratitude which prompted the social activism so characteristic of the Puritan and Pietist hermeneutic.

7.5. Conclusion

What then are the implications of the findings in this study for the discipline of hermeneutics and its theological and philosophical branches? Put differently, what kind of story emerges for the development of hermeneutics if read from a theological and theocentric perspective? It has been said that the history of hermeneutics did not develop teleologically (Grondin; IPH 3). It is of course true that any history is, at least to some degree, a construction (ibid.). However, told from the theological perspective I have adopted, the story of hermeneutics does show a pattern of decline. As we have seen, even secular philosophers like Charles Taylor perceive the development of Western Culture in terms of loss in the areas morality, the purpose of existence, and the consequent loss of freedom accompanied by political apathy.15

In terms of theological hermeneutics, the decline may be measured by the degree of departure from the theology of the Protestant Reformation. The biblical hermeneutic of Flacius, Perkins, and Owen centers on the divine word which introduces an external perspective into the finite horizon of human existence. Schleiermacher, by contrast, begins with the religious consciousness of the self. In doing so he does not move entirely outside the Reformed paradigm of theology, which has always posited an innate knowledge of God in every human being. Such, Calvin insisted, is the nature of the *imago dei*.16 The

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15 Taylor says: "These, then, are the three malaises about modernity that I want to deal with in this book. The first fear is about what we might call a loss of meaning, the fading of moral horizons. The second concerns the eclipse of ends, in face of rampant instrumental reason. And the third is about a loss of freedom" (Malaise 10).

16 "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. This we take to be beyond controversy. To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty" (Institutes I.i.1.) And also in I.i.3: "Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a sense of divinity which can never be effaced is engraved upon men's minds. Indeed, the perversity of the impious, who, though they struggle furiously, are unable to extricate themselves from the fear of God, is abundant testimony that this conviction,
strong view of sin prevalent in Reformation theology denied the possibility of arriving at proper knowledge of God without the Bible. Sin made the cognitive faculties unreliable for the reception of divine truth, though certain aspects could be gleaned from natural theology, so that no one could deny the existence of God and his main attributes.\(^\text{17}\)

Reformed theology uses the natural religiosity of humanity as a proof for the existence of God, as does Schleiermacher in the *Reden*, but is more consistent in seeing that taking sin and its noetic effects (even in the believer) seriously, demands dependence on divine revelation for reliable information about the spiritual state of humanity.\(^\text{18}\) It is, however, this very foundation of God’s special revelation through the words of Christ and the prophets that Schleiermacher’s anthropocentric approach calls into question.

Though his intention was to make Christianity palatable to the modernist septic, in choosing the human consciousness as a starting point not only for the skeptic (a step which is defensible for the purpose of apologetics), but also for the development of his systematic theology (!), Schleiermacher’s thought marks a decisive departure from the hermeneutics of the Reformation. The result, at least according to my reading of Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith*, is to deprive Christianity of its distinctive doctrines by flattening them in an attempt to make them appealing to a broader audience. As I have tried to show, this decline is evident in Schleiermacher’s Christology, his historical-critical

\(^{17}\) Here the Reformers followed Paul’s declaration in Romans chapter 1:20: “For the invisible qualities of God, his divine power and eternal nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse.”

\(^{18}\) There have been claims that Schleiermacher does, in fact, take human depravity seriously. Nicola Hoggard Creegan in his recent article “Schleiermacher as Apologist: Reclaiming the Father of Modern Theology,” states that Schleiermacher “does not underestimate sin” (Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World. Timothy R. Phillips & Dennis L. Okholm. Eds. (Downer’s Grove: Intervarsity, 1995) 71. Creegan claims this is demonstrated by Schleiermacher’s insistence on the need for conversion from “the state of sinfulness to the corporate world of blessedness” (ibid. 72). The insistence on conversion, however, cannot possibly be a sign for belief in human depravity in the Calvinist sense, since even Pelagius and Arminius insist on the need for conversion. The important difference lies in the nature of this conversion, and the role and effectiveness of Christ’s atonement in this process. Since Schleiermacher has a very weak view of Christ and the atonement, his belief in human depravity is not as close to Calvin’s as Creegan seems to believe.
undermining of the Scripture's reliability, his view of the Holy Spirit's role and many other aspects. Thus, as Helmut Thielicke put it, Schleiermacher's system effects a "crisis of the Word," which "ceases to be the true medium of revelation, of God's self-declaration" (Thielicke 206). Therefore Schleiermacher not only severely weakens the qualifying standard for the very Christian experience he values so much, but he also paves the way for a silencing of the divine voice.

In terms of philosophical hermeneutics, there are several important conclusions which may be drawn from the findings of my thesis. Concerning the integration of pre-critical hermeneutics into the current debate, it seems that a genuine integration of philosophical and precritical hermeneutics is impossible. On a fundamental level, the silent universe espoused by the hermeneutics of Gadamer is irreconcilably opposed to the Christian theism of the theologians examined in this study. However, if one is willing to conceive of integration in a less fundamental sense, one will find that the precritical thinkers can be integrated into the current debate in the sense that they address the issues of facticity, tradition, meaning, and moral values raised by postmodern hermeneutical thought. For example, I have tried to show the erroneousness of Grondin's assertion that precritical hermeneutics failed to problematize the notion of understanding. Theological hermeneutics as I have presented it is convinced that all understanding is related to God, insofar as in this view humankind was created with cognitive faculties which correspond to reality. For the theologians represented in this study, there is, however, a special problem in that proper understanding of the propositions set forth in the Bible is linked to a moral dimension. True understanding, these writers insist, is only possible through change of heart, in which the influence of original sin is remedied, so that all scriptural truths are grasped not merely as abstract ideas, but rather as truths that have full currency only within an intimate relationship with God, expressed in the biblical concept of Christianity as family relation or sonship (Romans 8:15). For the Reformers, being a believer is never a static experience, but one that requires constant dialogue with God through the
Scriptures. This sanctification consists of a continuous re-orientation of the mind and should ideally affect one's life toward neighborly love, charity and social action. We have seen how John Owen meticulously traces the psychological effects of sin on the faculty of understanding both in the believer and the unbeliever. Thus to say that precritical hermeneutic consists of mere technical rules is demonstrably false.

Moreover, as the writings of Richard Baxter show, serious recognition of human finitude and historical embeddedness is not a new insight discovered by the hermeneutics of facticity. From the very first theologians, from Augustine to Flacius, Calvin and the Puritans, the blindness of humanity toward the larger picture of life and the uncertainty of human reason and knowledge have been fully recognized. As especially Baxter’s writings show, the admission of human finitude does not require the denial of God, of knowledge about God, or of a created universe.

Nor is the Christian theism of the writers examined a hindrance to tolerance, dialogue, or conversation, issues considered vitally important in philosophical hermeneutics. In fact, as the writings of Owen show, tolerance of others should be the result of theological hermeneutics, since truth, if indeed connected to its originator God, is a living, self-authenticating truth which does not depend on the helping hand of an inquisition or similar forcible means for its propagation and survival. In a real sense, therefore, dialogue with God should serve as a foundation for the openness to and conversation with even those who do not adhere to the same beliefs. Gadamer’s hermeneutic, for all its insistence on dialogue and conversation, has no real foundation, nor authority which commands respect and willingness to listen to others. Here the issues of authority and tradition are closely connected. Flatly stated: The pre-critical hermeneut has an authoritative demand from God to love his enemy. This command transcends any tradition or cultural-historical norm which would encourage the contrary. Philosophical hermeneutics, by contrast, though it stresses the openness to the voice of the other, lacks any authoritative foundation for its claim. Consistent thinkers of postmodernism, such as
Derrida, recognize that there is no obligation to listen to the text. In fact, radical postmodernists often see the connection between theology with its insistence on textual authority and ordinary textual work much more clearly than the moderate Gadamer.

One might argue that the Biblical text was, however, a special case by reasons of inspiration and illumination (the Holy Spirit’s aid in interpretation) which do not apply to an ordinary author’s work. While this claim is true, the idea of biblical hermeneutics is nevertheless linked to the general interpretation of texts. First, the basic interpretative issues of authorial intent and the reconstruction of meaning are the same in biblical hermeneutics and literary criticism. Secondly, however, it seems that in fact the notions of a text’s authority, its authorship and meaning in some way derive from theological textual practices. If that is true, and some postmodern thinkers think that it is, then it would be natural to ask how the developments of biblical hermeneutics and secular textual criticism are connected. As one answer to this question, to which I have pointed in my section on Gadamer, but which undoubtedly needs further exploration, is that postmodern literary criticism represents the tail end of a long and steady departure from a precritical worldview. In other words, developments in literary criticism can be seen in context of hermeneutical-philosophical shifts constituted a reaction against, or a move away from Christian metaphysics. This means that theological-philosophical changes, paradigm shifts in world-views, will affect the practice of interpretation generally, that is, of texts and the ‘text’ of human existence.

Michael Foucault, for example, links the notion of authorship to the Christian tradition of exegesis (“What is an Author” Textual Strategies 150).¹⁹ According to

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¹⁹ Foucault writes: “It seems, for example, that the manner in which literary criticism once defined the author - or rather constructed the figure of the author beginning with existing texts and discourses - is directly derived from the manner in which Christian tradition authenticated (or rejected) texts at its disposal. In order to “rediscover” an author in a work, modern criticism uses methods similar to those that Christian exegesis employed when trying to prove the value of a text by its author’s saintliness” (150). Within the Christian tradition, the notion of revelation of an author’s mind and the ability to read and understand that revelation is founded on the notion of God’s communication. Just as the author of the
postmodern critics, the notion that the author’s own intention and meaning may be conveyed through language is a theological notion which impedes and constrains the proliferation of multiple meanings. Roland Barthes argues that “[w]e know that a text consists not of a line of words, releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God), but of a multi-dimensional space in which are married and contested several writings, none of which is original: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture” (“The Death of the Author” Critical Theory since Plato 1132).

In short, with the death of God the notion of authorship also vanishes. As our culture moves philosophically away from the transcendent and works out the implications of the anthropocentric turn to subjectivism, textual practices reflect this change. As a consequence, no external revelation as to the human condition or evaluation of values is possible. God as the source of insight is replaced by a recycling of human opinions: “succeeding the author, the scripitor no longer contains passions, moods, sentiments, impressions, but that immense dictionary from which he draws a writing which will be incessant: life merely imitates the book, and this book itself is but a tissue of signs, endless imitation, infinitely postponed” (ibid.). With genuine transcendence removed, the whole which was constituted by divine-human communication has now been reduced to a mere inter-human communication.

Moreover the notion of an author’s meaning and therefore interpretation as such becomes irrelevant: Once the author is dead, a text becomes entirely futile. To assign an Author to the text is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final signified, to “close the writing.” Barthes realizes well the connection between textual and metaphysical interpretation: “Thereby literature (it would be better, from now on, to say writing), by refusing to assign to the text (and to the world-as-text) a ‘secret,’ i.e. ultimate meaning,

Scriptures conveys his mind through the text, so the human author transfers his thoughts and intention intelligibly through language.
liberates an activity we may call countertheological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to halt meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostasis, reason, science, the law” (ibid.). Here we see how clearly a proponent of postmodern literary theory sees the consequences of the anthropocentric turn. Barthes’ statement “the birth of the reader must be requited with the death of the author” is not a mere dramatic hyperbole. Rather it is also shows the connection which always exists between literary criticism and metaphysics.

More importantly for our study, however, the insights of postmodern criticism into the connection between literary theory and hermeneutics give new importance to the struggle of Flacius and other Protestant theologians to guard the Scriptures as the foundation of theology. At the heart of the debate was basically the same issue as that expressed by Barthes: does the authority lie with the text, or with the reader? Biblical theologians made it clear that the authority of the Bible depends on its divine authorship. Against the Catholic argument for tradition, they pointed out the need for a recognition that the Bible has God as its author. John Owen, for example, argues that unless the authority of the Scriptures is self-evident by the imprint of its divine author, we accept it on the basis of tradition. Once a theocentric view is thus changed into an anthropocentric approach to the text, a vicious circle of subjectivity is entered into whereby one believes the Bible to be divine extra-human knowledge on the basis of human tradition (The Divine Original of Scripture, WJO 16:331-32).

Thus just as Flacius and Owen saw clearly that a certain theological presupposition animated the Roman Catholic biblical criticism, so current literary criticism and hermeneutics are animated by the same reluctance to relinquish the authority of the self in order to listen to the voice of the other. Yet such submission is vital for any genuine dialogue. As the history of hermeneutics unfolds, the tendency toward subjectivism and empowerment of the reader gains the upper hand. Though Gadamer urges the reader to listen to the horizon of the past, such an appeal without the framework of transcendence
provided by pre-critical hermeneutics, depends on the reader’s good-will; for in the silent universe, in the final analysis, power lies with the reader.

In my description of Gadamer’s hermeneutic in the context of a continuous shift toward subjectivity I have tried to clear the Puritan and Pietist hermeneutic of misconceptions and to reveal some of modern philosophical hermeneutics’ own prejudices. Both systems lay claim to universality. Both hermeneutical schools stress the importance of application. Yet moral confidence, so important for practical application, cannot grow out of a hermeneutic of facticity which allows no transcendent revelation. To use a colloquial expression, one cannot have one’s cake and eat it too. Either one inhabits the silent universe, condemned to the tragedy of the self-creation of values and accepts the fact that there is no decisive argument against those who regard the universe as mere raw-material for their desires and ambitions, or one returns to a theocentric perspective, where a binding divine law allows a hermeneutical circle which draws on information and moral legislation that transcend the merely finite human horizon. This is, of course, not to say that somehow the practitioners of Christianity are automatically better people than non-Christians. History shows that often the reverse has been true. In other words the story of decline is not so much one of moral degeneration as it is about the degeneration of the moral norms for positive behavioural patterns. To put it another way, at least theological hermeneutics has a reason and mandate for charity, love and dialogue which is universally binding, while, as Derrida rightly claims, no such binding reason exists in the non-theistic universe.

In light of Baxter’s remarks cited in the last chapter of this thesis, I believe a first step toward a dialogue between pre-critical and philosophical hermeneutics is to admit that both operate on faith. As I have attempted to show, for example, Gadamer’s and Taylor’s attempts to overcome subjectivist hermeneutics rest on assumptions for which their own frameworks provide no foundation. They rely, to put it in pre-critical terms, by faith, on a certain ethical good will in human nature to seek the good without compelling
reasons to do so (nor, in fact, can Gadamer’s notion of the good transcend cultural-communal boundaries). Once such an admission is made, one can then proceed to investigate with an open mind which hermeneutics has a better foundation for moral action. In the areas of dialogue, biblical interpretation and, perhaps most importantly, ethical application, current hermeneutical thought is greatly weakened, if not rendered ineffective, because of its anthropocentric perspective.

The Puritan and Pietist framework, by contrast, has a strong foundation for ethical application. These precritical thinkers possessed a moral foundation which current philosophical hermeneutics has lost. This, of course, does not mean that these men and women were better human beings than the advocates of philosophical hermeneutics. Indeed, their own theology would prohibit such a claim. Nevertheless, they believed they had a strong incentive and foundation for moral behaviour. Perhaps times lie ahead in which Gadamer’s desire for mutual respect and dialogue will be rejected by those who fail to see any moral obligation to share his desire. At that moment, literary studies as well as ethics will need authoritative guidelines. Perhaps to some extent, this time has already arrived with the increasing prevalence of Nietzschean-Derridean deconstructionism and its antipathy to authority. If there ever arose a renewed interest in moral metanarratives, then theological hermeneutics and its representatives of the past would be a good place to start afresh. In that sense, it is my hope that this study, with its narration of hermeneutical history from a theological perspective, may prepare the way for a renewed dialogue and enhanced mutual understanding between philosophical and theological hermeneutics.
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Abbreviations:

AGP Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Pietismus
BW Martin Luther: Bondage of the Will
CC Calvin's Commentary
FWA Frankes Werke in Auswahl
GS Gesammelte Schriften of Hans Georg Gadamer
IPH Grondin: Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics
PhH Gadamer: Philosophical Hermeneutics
SW Schleiermachers Werke
TM Gadamer: Truth and Method
WJO Works of John Owen
WSC Works of Steven Charnock
Works Works of William Perkins

Primary Sources:


---. *Lectiones Praeneticae, oder oeffentliche Ansprachen an die Studiosos Theologiae auf der Universitaet zu Halle in dem so genannten Collegio Praeneticco*. Halle, 1726.


---. Der Friede Gottes. Frankfurth am Mayn: Johannes Bauern, 1717.

---. Die Evangelischen Lebenspflichten. 1688. Frankfurth am Mayn, 1707.

---. Natur und Gnade oder der Unterschied der Wercke so aus natürlichen kräften und aus den gnaden-würkungen des heiligen Geistes herkommen und also eines äusserlich erbarn und wahrhaftigen Christlichen gottseligen lebens nach der regel des Götlichen Worts. Frankfurth am Mayn, 1705.


---. Sendschreiben An Einen Christeyerfrigen ausländischen Theologum, betreffende die falsche aussgesprengte aufflagen wegen seiner Lehre und sogenannter Collegiorum Pietatis, mit freulicher erzehlung dessen was zu Frankfurth am Mayn in solcher sache gethan oder nicht gethan werde. Frankfurth am Mayn, 1677.

---. Sprüche Heiliger Schrifft welche missbraucht zu werden pflegen, kürzlich, aber gründlich gerettet. Franckfurth am Mayn, 1693.

---. Christliche Verpflegung der Armen. Frankfurt and der Oder, 1697.


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