

THIRTY YEARS OF HERMENEUTICS: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS

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Professor Jože Krašovec has granted me a rare privilege, namely to offer "at least a short summary of your hermeneutical works." One could hardly volunteer such an enterprise, without just accusation of undue self-advertisement. However, I propose not simply to outline the content of these works, but to trace how they emerged from a developing context of ideas in teaching and research in hermeneutics in four universities of the United Kingdom. Further, in addition to a critical review of thirty years of work, I propose to offer some tentative comments about prospects for the discipline. Here the issue of the challenge of postmodern perspectives looms large, and readers may note parallels, although not necessarily full agreements, with the contentions of Professor David J. A. Clines, with whom I worked as a close colleague in the University of Sheffield from 1970 to 1985.¹

Professor Jože Krašovec mi je dovolil redek privilegij, namreč da ponudim vsaj kratek povzetek svojih del iz hermenevtike. Za kaj takega bi se težko odločil sam, saj bi lahko bil upravičen obtožb nepriner-nega opozarjanja nase. Vendar ne nameravam preprosto podati ortisa vsebine teh del, temveč zasledova-ti, kako so nastajala iz razvojnega konteksta idej o poučevanju in raziskovanju hermenevtike na štirih univerzah Združenega kraljestva. Poleg kritičnega pregleda tridesetih let dela nameravam dalje ponuditi nekaj poskusnih pripomb o obetih za to disciplino. Tukaj se grozeče kaže problem izziva postmodernih perspektiv in bralci lahko opazijo vzporednice čeprav ne nujno polna soglasja, s pogledi profesorja Da-vida J. A. Clinesa; z njim sem delal kot bližnji kolega na Univerzi v Sheffieldu v letih 1970-1985.

I

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I was teaching in the University of Bristol in 1967 when a student asked my advice about English-language books on hermeneutics. This seemingly innocent question initiated me into a fruitless literature search. Richard E. Palmer's *Hermeneutics* (1969) had not yet appeared, and Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* awaited translation successively in 1975 and again freshly in 1989 and 1993. I had already worked both on NT interpretation and on the philosophy of language, especially on Wittgenstein, and these interacted to make me discontented with the more

¹ David J. A. Clines, "The Postmodern Adventure in Biblical Studies," on pp. 1603-1616 in this volume.

ing *Kraftigeladen* in some causal sense, as "an objective reality endowed with mysterious power."¹¹ Zimmerli spoke of a world of curse or of blessing as "a missile with a time-fuse."¹² But Austin clearly drew a contrast between the causal force of *perlocutionary* speech-acts and the *institutional* force of *illocutionary* acts. A curse or a blessing could not be recalled not because it carries a mysterious *Kraftigeladen* word-magic, but because while the Hebrew-Christian tradition carries *institutional* procedures for eg "I bless," "I baptize," "I commit this body to the ground," it has no such procedure for "I unbless," "I unbaptize," "I uncommit this body out of the ground again."

During my Sheffield period from 1970 to 1985 my lectures on hermeneutics developed in several directions. Initially I set Palmer's book *Hermeneutics* (1969) and several others, especially on Bultmann and myth.¹³ The course included the origins and development of hermeneutics; the foundation of the modern discipline with Schleiermacher and Dilthey; Bultmann and demythologizing; Heidegger, Gadamer and the New Hermeneutic; functions of language with reference to Wittgenstein and to speech-acts in Austin; issues concerning theological context and the status of the Bible as scripture; an evaluation of narrative theory and the relation between hermeneutics and semantics. My concern for the multi-functional multi-level operation of language emerged in a short study on language in liturgy.¹⁴ Continuing work on semantics found expression in "Semantics and NT Interpretation" and another related paper.¹⁵ There I took up, for example, the theme of Wittgenstein and Ramsey that everyday vocabulary is used with a particular contextual logic. I drew on Austin to illustrate that such speech-acts as "I repent" or "I believe" are acts of repentance or of commitment or confession, not attempts to inform God of a content of which he is aware. This also found expression in my formulating the *stance expressed in acts* (not in mental calculation) which constituted "expecting" the Parousia.¹⁶ As Wittgenstein observes, we "expect" a guest when we tidy the house, check our table, and so forth, not when some abstract mental event of calculation occurs.¹⁷ Paul Ricoeur's most brilliant works, *Time*

and *Narrative* (Eng., 3 vols. 1984-1988) and *Oneself as Another* (Eng., 1992) were not accessible to English-speaking students until after my Sheffield period.¹⁸

In the late 1970s I began to see that Ricoeur and Habermas should be part of my hermeneutics course, together with an understanding of E. Betti. Ricoeur's *Freud and Philosophy* remained part of the constant central core, alongside Gadamer's *Truth and Method*¹⁹ and Bultmann's works. In the mid-1970s I added a fresh topic of Latin American Liberation hermeneutics, and by 1980 a further unit on Reader-Response Theory.

III

In the 1970s I wrote my most substantial work to that date, namely *The Two Horizons* (1980) which ran into some 500 pages. It has since that time gone through many re-prints and been translated into Korean (1990). How do the two horizons of the ancient text and of modern readers actively engage with each other creatively without merely bland, passive, domesticating assimilation? I began with Wink's illustration about the effects of the intervention of a long tradition which separated the two horizons historically, with effects which call for a creative hermeneutic of which Ricoeur would call suspicion and retrieval. I then surveyed the respective resources of the Continental philosophical traditions especially those of Heidegger and Gadamer and the more incisive, suggestive, work of Wittgenstein. I sought as a preliminary to explore the issues of historical relativism, which in the UK had been emphasized especially by Denis Nineham. I also addressed issues in theology including "pre-understanding," the relation between hermeneutics and theories of language. These preliminaries covered the first 140 pages.

I turned next to Heidegger. I explored the usefulness of Heidegger's notion of "situatedness" (*Da-sein*, being-there), and "horizon," which provisionally bounded possibilities of understanding. Much was of value, although I continued to query his equation of the cognitive with the secondary and derivative in all cases. Wittgenstein could have said that this might often reflect the case, but not necessarily always, and

¹⁸ P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* I-III (Eng., Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984-88), *Oneself as Another* (Eng., Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992).

¹⁹ P. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (Eng., New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 1970); H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Eng., London: Sheed and Ward, 1975 and revised 2nd Eng. ed. from 6th German ed. 1989 and 1993). J. Weinsheimer's fresh translation of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* contains numerous refinements over the earlier 1975 translation, which is scarcely surprising in view of Weinsheimer's excellent work *Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹¹ G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* I-II (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 85.

¹² W. Zimmerli, "Wortes Gottes," *RGV* VI (1962), col. 1810.

¹³ R. E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

¹⁴ A. C. Thiselton, *Language, Liturgy and Meaning* (Grove Liturgical Studies 2, Nottingham, 1975, 2nd ed. 1986).

¹⁵ A. C. Thiselton, "Semantics and NT Interpretation," in: I. H. Marshall (ed.), *NT Interpretation*, 75-104; idem, "The Semantics of Biblical Language as an Aspect of Hermeneutics," *Faith and Thought* 103 (1976), 108-120.

¹⁶ A. C. Thiselton, "The Parousia in Modern Theology: Some Questions and Comments," *Tynsidae Bulletin* 27 (1976), 108-120.

¹⁷ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (2nd ed., Eng. and Germ. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), sects 572-586; *Zettel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), sects 58-68; cf. A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: NT Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Carlisle / Paternoster / Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 383-384.

certainly not *a priori*, before *observing examples*. The most valuable resource to be derived from the earlier Heidegger is his notion of pre-cognitive "worlds," which Ricoeur would later develop as narrative-worlds of *possibility*.

I paid special attention next to those factors which decisively contributed to Bultmann's hermeneutics, and assisted in the due understanding and assessment of his work. I did not intend to imply that Bultmann was merely a conglomeration of "influences." But I identified at least nine or ten factors which drew Bultmann along certain lines of thought, not least his coupling of a Neo-Kantian theory of knowledge with a nineteenth-century version of Lutheranism. "Description" became linked with "law" and "works," while "address" related to grace and *kegygma*. Given further links with Jonas, Collingwood, Dilthey and others, an entirely coherent picture emerged, which even explained why Bultmann seemed unconsciously to operate with an ambivalent and ultimately self-contradictory notion of "myth." In the Church of England Doctrine Commission Report *Believing in the Church* (1981) I argued that the ambivalent word "myth" should be banned from theological discourse since it carried too many conflicting meanings.²⁰ Only if we can go back to Hegel and Strauss, and then distinguish their universe of discourse from distinct issues about "objectification" in the distinct tradition of Kant can even a provisional understanding of "myth" begin.

In Gadamer I perceived the fundamental stance of *respect for the otherness of the horizon of the other*. He demonstrated the need to listen and to question, rather than to seek to "master" the other on one's own terms. This "mastery on one's own terms" characterizes what Gadamer and the later Wittgenstein view as the imperializing "general method" of science.²¹ Schleiermacher had perceived this in the context of nineteenth-century Romanticism, as the "strangeness" of the other which eludes "system." Even in the *Speeches* of 1799 Schleiermacher attacks "miserable love of system" on the ground that one's own rationalist system leaves no room for "otherness," since this does fit one's own prior expectations: cf. *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (Eng., London: Kegan Paul, 1893), 55. But Gadamer tends to underestimate Schleiermacher as too "psychological" and not yet sufficiently "historical" in the sense which Gadamer approves increasingly in Hegel, Dilthey, Yorck and Heidegger. In my earlier evaluation of Gadamer in *The Two Horizons*, as against a more mature reflection in *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (1992) I noted especially the contrast between Gadamer's more positive view of tradition and effective-history (*Wirktungsge-*

schichte) and the later Heidegger's more negative assessment of Western tradition since Plato.²² I did not at that stage note that what Gadamer calls "the primacy of the play over the player" and of "consciousness" (*Bewusstsein*) as a mere "flickering in the closed circuits of historical life" as pointing towards a postmodern view of selfhood. Rather, I stressed the hermeneutical importance of "pre-judgment" (*Vorurteil*) or in, a positive sense, "prejudices" (*Vorurteile*) within pre-given horizons, even if these horizons are not fixed, but *on the move*.²³ In contrast to postmodernity, I stressed Gadamer's acknowledgement of a certain stability in the role of communal judgments, "the classic" and traditions of tested wisdom, which laid the groundwork first for respect for the horizon of the Other as *other* and then in turn for a disciplined movement towards a fusion between the two horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) of past, (or text) and present (or reader[s]).²⁴ This could be achieved *not* by a *universal scientific method* (solely at the level of rational reflection) but by *hermeneutically trained judgment*.²⁵

In my later discussion of Gadamer (1992) I came to appreciate more clearly the dialectic between tradition or ontology and the variable, finite, contextually-conditioned contingencies of the actualization of the past in the present, which Gadamer ultimately derived from Hegel. In secondary literature on Gadamer the former is admirably stressed by Georgia Warnke, and the latter by Joel Weinsheimer (works cited in due course). In *The Two Horizons* I paid more attention to the potential value of Gadamer's for New Testament interpretation than to its subtle places in a philosophical tradition which sought, like Ricoeur, to wrestle with aspects of the context-conditioned in postmodernity without surrendering all hold on a relatively stable ontology.

Indeed in the fourth main part of my volume I perceived similarities between "hermeneutically trained judgment" in Gadamer and the patterns of regularity in the public domain of inter-subjective life which for the later Wittgenstein made possible public criteria of meaning by means of which language may *count* as performing this or that intelligible function within a given tradition or form of life. The later Wittgenstein, it seemed, presented an account of the particularities of context-variable meaning which simultaneously presupposed certain stable anchors within an inter-subjective public world. Like Gadamer, he rejected "the contemptuous attitude towards the particular case" or "craving for generality which is the method of science" as a blunt

²² A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, Eerster / Canis: Paternoster, 1980), 330-342.

²³ *Ibid.*, *The Two Horizons*, 295-300 and 304-310 (Korean, 454-462 and 469-476) (Korean, Seoul: Chungshin Publishing, 1990, 307-326).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, *The Two Horizons*, 305-308 (Korean, 470-475).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, *The Two Horizons*, 304-305 (Korean, 454-456).

²⁰ A. C. Thiselton, "Knowledge, Myth and Corporate Memory," *Believing in the Church* (Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, London: S.P.C.K., 1981), 45-78.

²¹ Part I of *Truth and Method* therefore sets in contrast the rationalist, individualist "method" of Descartes, which imposes its own universal grid onto "objects" of scientific knowledge as against the Roman *sensus communis*, the work of Vico, and later traditions through Shaftesbury and Reid, and in Germany after Hegel.

and inadequate instrument for issues of meaning.²⁶ We cannot ask "What is meaning?" outside a specific context-in-life or language-game for the criteria for an answer do not remain uniform. Indeed a major claim of this volume on the later Wittgenstein's work is in every major sense *profoundly hermeneutical*. The *activity* of communication is conditioned by a given *Lebensform* (form of life).²⁷

In addition to exploring the level of philosophy of language in the later Wittgenstein, I also examined the hermeneutics of some specific test-cases of conceptual grammar within the NT. In particular an understanding of "faith," "flesh" and "truth" as *polymorphous concepts*, "expecting" as an issue of *stance rather than mental state*, and of the conceptual conditions for *counting x as y* in the context of justification by grace, presented examples of hermeneutics of the Pauline epistles. In the interests of space, however, I discarded a mass of notes on Wittgenstein and the New Testament which may perhaps one day be developed to see the light of day.

IV

In retrospect, the article of 1982 on "The Morality of Christian Scholarship" owed more to hermeneutics than I perceived at the time.²⁸ The essay was commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury and edited by the Bishop of Birmingham for presentation to the Pope on the occasion of his visit to the United Kingdom. I argued that the two sets of constraints of intellectual integrity and loyalty to the Christian tradition to which a Christian scholar belonged reflected the sheer givenness of his or her commitment in life and thought to a plurality of communities and contexts. That this could be painful, I conceded. In principle one might reach a point when one would need to rank a priority, but although I had experience specific tensions and constructive conflicts, I had never experienced a conflict of principle. The attempt to hold together the social conditioning of criteria of knowledge with respect for rationality in the public would remain, in my view, a prerequisite for constructive hermeneutics.

During 1982-1983 I spent a year at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, where I worked on *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* (1985) with two literary theorists, Roger Lundin

and Clarence Walkout. Roger Lundin considered the relation between the aesthetic and the rational in the history of ideas, offering a critique of a shallow Cartesian approach for hermeneutics and literature. Clarence Walkout explored textual "worlds," partly in the light of Wolterstorff's philosophy, and the contribution of an "action" model. I tried to assess the value of action models, "worlds," and a trans-rational approach for interpreting the parables of Jesus, especially in terms of reader-response theory.²⁹ I have come to see how one-sided Reader-Response Theory is, and offered a critique which may partly have fallen between two schools. In fact, all three of us felt that a deadline made the research more rushed than we would have wished, and are currently collaborating to re-write virtually a new book which incorporates the better earlier ideas, perhaps under the title *The Promise of Hermeneutics: Reception Theory and Speech-Act Theory* are, to my mind, far more effective tools than Reader-Response Theory.

The period between 1985 and 1992 was punctuated only by minor articles. This was because I assumed the Principalship first of St John's College, Nottingham and then of St John's College in the University of Durham, where the work-load of administration, alongside teaching, was enormous. However, I began to write *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* during a four-month period of research leave at Durham. I enjoyed the seclusion of a small house which overlooked the sea at Marsden Bay, working round the clock on the material, apart from walks with my dog along the shore reflecting on the material.

V

Although reviews of *The Two Horizons* were generous, the widespread response was, in effect, to invite me to write a systematic volume setting out my own hermeneutics. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (1992) covers some 700 pages, commencing with the principle that biblical texts can transform readers, but readers also transform texts. Whereas my earlier major volume concerned *engagement* between two horizons, the theme of this still larger volume was that of *transformation*. Its subtitle is *The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*. This sub-title appears on the dust-jacket but not the title page of the first hard-back editions, but is rightly included on the cover of the American paperback re-print of 1997.³⁰ How does

²⁹ R. Lundin, C. Walkout, and A. C. Thiselton, *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans; Exeter / Carlisle: Paternoster, 1985), 79-114.

³⁰ A. C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London: Harper Collins, 1992, repr. Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992, repr. paperback, 1997 [currently being translated into Romanian]).

²⁶ L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books. Preliminary Studies for the Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958, 2nd ed. 1969), 18; cf. A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 370-379 (Korean, 566-580).

²⁷ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (2nd ed. Germ. and Eng. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 19; cf. Zettel (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), sect 173; idem, "Bemerkungen über Frazers *The Golden Bough*," *Synthese* 17 (1967), 233-253.

²⁸ A. C. Thiselton, "The Morality of Christian Scholarship," in: M. Santer (ed.), *Their Lord and Ours* (London: SPCK, 1982), 20-42.

biblical material interact with readers in such a way as to effect a transformation of stance, without itself undergoing change and distortion in the very process?

Inevitably the study had to begin with comparing the different entailments of "reading," "interpreting" and "understanding" as aspects of the more value-neutral term "hermeneutics." Each of the other three terms carries with it a specific "grammar" to do with literary theory or with theories of truth or understanding. The nature of texts and textuality also demanded attention. Logically I placed a discussion of semiotics and deconstruction next, but in terms of ready communication this "difficult" area should perhaps have been postponed until later. Chapter I had begun with a simple model of speech-act theory. A covenant or a legal will can change a person's life when it becomes operative.

Some reviewers stated that I traced various models of hermeneutics in historical sequence. This is only partly true. I wished to clarify some popular misunderstandings of the hermeneutics of Origen, Gnosticism, Luther, Calvin and Lyndale and included these under "Pre-Modern Interpretation" and "The Hermeneutics of Enquiry." Luther's notion of *claritas scripturae* must be viewed in three specific contexts, including his pleas for action in the face of controversy about scepticism and Erasmus's tendency to urge suspense of judgement in the face of uncertainty. Luther urges that the interpreter has enough to go on, to take one step at a time.

The heart of the argument is to assess the role of ten different models of hermeneutics. Schleiermacher's "Hermeneutics of Understanding," for example, is generally undervalued because few appreciate its complexity and its explicit recognition that where emphasis falls in hermeneutics, often reflects a decision of strategy. Ahead of his time, he anticipates Saussure's distinction between language-as-a-system (*la langue*) and language as an inter-personal event (*la parole*). Ahead of his time, Schleiermacher discusses not only what gives rise to utterances or to texts, but also their content and their effects.³¹ I turned to Pauline material for a test-case in relation to Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Betti.³²

I remain convinced that "the Hermeneutics of Self-Involvement," including speech-act theory, sheds a flood of light on the subject. In particular I drew on John Searle's philosophy of language to explain the transforming effects of the biblical writings (or relevant examples from them) as *promise*. By contrast, while brilliantly perceiving that the biblical writings were not primarily value-neutral description, Bultmann drew on models in Kantian and Heideggerian thought which proposed a *false either/or* concerning description and address. Searle, following Austin, perceives that the logic of

³¹ A. C. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 204–236.

³² *Idem*, *New Horizons*, 237–260.

illocutionary speech-acts, including acts of promise, direction and commission, *presuppose states of affairs* rather than either eliminating or describing them. I argue that this insight is essential for a hermeneutic of the Christology of the Synoptic Gospels. The status of Jesus as Christ is *presupposed but not declared* in such effective illocutionary acts as forgiving, liberating, promising, commissioning and commanding.

It would be tedious to map out the second half of the book over the next three or four hundred pages. I attempt a re-appraisal of Gadamer, Ricoeur, Habermas, Rorty, and Latin American, Black and Feminist Hermeneutics. I examine the impact of social pragmatism, narrative theory, reader-response theory and contextual relativism. However, this is to lay foundations for proposals about the respective validity and relevance of ten specific hermeneutical models for different aspects of the biblical writings in relation to different aspects of human life today. I draw on life-worlds and directedness which may embody reconstruction; existential disruptions which initiate active reading; narrative worlds and subversion; symbols and "productive," multi-level, reading; reader-response and deconstruction; socio-critical, ideological reading; criteria of "relevance" in social science; and the relation between "believing" reading and pluralism.³³

VI

Some further work since 1992 has tended to major on the role of speech-act theory for hermeneutics.³⁴ However, my main work has concerned the hermeneutics of selfhood and the problem of manipulation in a post-modern climate. In the book *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self* (1995) I have accepted the strictures of Nietzsche and his postmodern successors that too often in religion and in hermeneutics appeals are made to "truth" when all that occurs is a rhetorical strategy of persuasion and power. However, I do not accept that this applies to *all* religion or to *all* interpretation. To argue this is to move from a valid hermeneutic of suspicion and ideological critique to a universal scepticism and indeed cynicism.

Much of the book concerns the self-defeating, self-contradictory nature of claims to transpose all truth questions into power-questions. If this approach is valid, what is being put forward is *not an argument but yet another power-bid*. This also radically impinges on the hermeneutics of selfhood. The human self is more than a

³³ *Idem*, *New Horizons*, 558–620.

³⁴ For example, A. C. Thiselton, "Christology in Luke, Speech-Act Theory, and the Problem of Dualism after Kant," in: Joel B. Green and M. Turner (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 453–472. Cf. further "Authority and Hermeneutics," in: P. E. Satterthwaite and D. F. Wright (eds.), *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 107–142.

mere Humean construct composed of postmodern forces of gender, race, social class, and vested interest. These do indeed play a strong part, as Marx, Freud, Foucault and others urge. But, with Ricoeur, I argue that suspicion and social constructivism do not provide the whole picture. I add to my title the sub-title *On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise*, and attempt to offer a theology of promise which may perhaps re-centre the de-centred self.³⁵

VII

These issues lead to a tentative reflection on the prospects for hermeneutical enquiry. I argued in 1995 that two major paradigm-shifts have occurred in the history of biblical interpretation, each of which has served to break the spell of a prior controlling model. First, the quest for freedom from the dominance of ecclesial and dogmatic concerns may be associated with the era of J. S. Semler and a background of Enlightenment rationalism. However, this new-found freedom soon hardened into a second paradigm in which a specific type of reconstructionist historical hermeneutic once again imperialized enquiry: "The quest for freedom ends in constraint: the historical method becomes institutionalized into a universal paradigm."³⁶

This, in turn, has led to a more recent paradigm-shift. This is "the reactive quest for freedom" which recognizes that, in R. Morgan's words, "Interpreters choose their aims."³⁷ However, whereas the earlier historical paradigm at least had the merit of establishing *rapprochement* with a text's author and an insight of the factors which led up to the text and characterized its first communication processes to its own generation of readers, now, under a regime of hermeneutical pluralism, some define "success" in terms of defending some specific modern or postmodern ideology (Feminist or Black hermeneutics), others seek success in terms of textual effects (reader-response theory, or pietism), others in terms of stages of undefined "edification" (social pragmatism, Rorty).

How does this avoid hermeneutical anarchy? How does it avoid the very processes of manipulation that hermeneutical enquiry first arose to avoid? One widespread strategy is to make everything depend on ethics. D. Patte's work offers one example among many others.³⁸ Patte tends to give the game away when he urges "In order to be ethically responsible, we must assume responsibility for our choice of one

reading as the other that is most significant for us."³⁹ In practice, this tends to be "multidimensional and androcritical." But whereas Dilthey, Gadamer, Apel, Jauss and other major theorists perceive the scope of history as a guiding perspective for hermeneutical enquiry, Patte seems to privilege a "political correctness" that is symptomatic of white male guilt in the mid 1990s. This is already regarded by many as, if not passé, at least rapidly on the move.

My former colleague David Clines rightly perceives the shift from a simple modernity to the multi-faceted power-interests of post-modern stances as of critical importance for prospects in hermeneutics. The question remains, however, whether hermeneutics in the end shares the pluralism of postmodern attitudes, or an internal grammar which refuses to settle for the kind of pluralism which *either* cannot arbitrate between competing goals and interests *or* insists that only ethical criteria can arbitrate between religious, cultural, or theological interests. For the dilemma of postmodernism is that no single ethical value-system can be privileged without ceasing to be "postmodern." Moreover, in practice we end up either with an illusory tolerance that makes "political correctness" no less than fundamentalists (Rorty, Fish and Cupitt) or with a tame "political correctness" which is transparently a specific cultural response to a specific stage of cultural development in the 1980s and 1990s.

The presidential paper for the Society of Biblical Literature delivered by Phyllis Trible in 1994 illustrates how rational criteria, conceptual differentiation, and theological truth-claims readily become "deconstructed" and "erased" in the semiotic play of postmodern feminist hermeneutics.⁴⁰ There is no real difference, it appears, between Elijah and Jezebel except for transitory differences generated by the specifics of theological contexts, but unmasked by the *political* (ethical?) processes of de-ideologization and deconstruction. But here the third paradigm threatens to make the same mistake as the second. Whereas the second threw off dogmatic theology only to sell itself into bondage to history, the third throws off the bondage of history and theology only to find itself captive to *politics*: to the politics of gender, race, class and perhaps even commercial funding.

Hence the more creative and authentic prospect for hermeneutics, in my view, is to engage once again more seriously with the problem of *manipulation*. In this specific sense authentic ethics and authentic theology speak with one voice. William O'Neill's study *The Ethics of Our Climate: Hermeneutics and Ethical Theory* (1994) relates hermeneutics to ethics in ways which overcome mere contextual pragmatism.⁴¹

³⁵ Idem, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation*, 125.

⁴⁰ P. Trible, "Exegesis for Storytellers and Other Strangers," *JBL* 114 (1995), 3-19.

⁴¹ W. O'Neill, S. J., *The Ethics of Our Climate: Hermeneutics and Ethical Theory* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1994), 81-148.

³⁵ A. C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995).

³⁶ A. C. Thiselton, "NT Interpretation in Historical Perspective," in: J. B. Green (ed.), *Hearing the NT: Strategies for Interpretation* (Carlisle: Paternoster; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 13, cf. 10-36.

³⁷ R. Morgan, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 287, cf. 7, 8 and 171.

³⁸ D. Patte, *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: A Re-evaluation* (Louisville: Westminster and Knox, 1995).

For him, ethical enquiry, as in Gadamer, is *rooted in ontology and the wisdom of history (prónésis)*. It draws on the more profound, less pragmatic, insights of Habermas, Gadamer, MacIntyre, and especially Rahner, on issues of self-transcendence.⁴² Here Gadamer's former pupil Hans Robert Jauss leads the way to paths which acknowledge major paradigm-shifts and the dilemmas of hermeneutical pluralism, but place the present era in the history of traditions and of the reception of texts.

Open and creative hermeneutics which follows Schleiermacher, Betti, Gadamer and Ricoeur in respecting the other as genuinely "other," and not to be assimilated into my own historical, moral, or political interests, will share Jauss's concern about continuities and disjunctions in the history of the reception of texts, and will locate the present within that broader ongoing history.⁴³ "Differences" then appear not as mere illusion to be deconstructed or erased, nor as options between which no criterion for decision and ranking can be found, but as different responses to different questions within a different agenda. Jauss draws on the logic of question and answer found in R. G. Collingwood and in Gadamer. Jauss affirms "the coherence of literature as an event ... mediated in the horizon of expectations of literary experience of contemporary and later readers, critics and authors."⁴⁴ His acceptance of radical paradigm-shifts in hermeneutics avoids naive objectivism, and gives due recognition to the opening up of new perspectives and new horizons.⁴⁵ But these differences "raise to consciousness the history of ... reception ...," which relates in turn to changing horizons of expectation and transformation. In this sense, like Richard Bernstein he seeks a path "beyond objectivism and relativism."⁴⁶ Further, as we noted in Wittgenstein's exploration of the logical grammar of "expectation," this does indeed relate to a *stance* or to *action*. In this respect the prospects for hermeneutics do indeed entail ethical action and ethical responsibility. But this in an ethic of non-manipulative respect for the other, alongside intellectual and theological integrity. It does not entail the mere assimilation of some passing "political correctness," or the so-called ethics of a self-contradictory postmodern pluralism which abandons criteria of truth, in favour of general "acceptability." I have tried to wrestle with the transposition of truth-questions into power-questions and with the replacement of rational argument by manipulative rhetoric in *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self* (1995).⁴⁷

⁴² *Ibid.*, 107–115.

⁴³ H. R. Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Eng., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25–28.

⁴⁶ R. J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

⁴⁷ Cited above, at the end of section VI.

Summary

Anthony C. THISELTON THIRTY YEARS OF HERMENEUTICS: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECTS

During the period 1967–1977 I prepared inter-disciplinary courses on hermeneutics which went beyond "biblical interpretation" in the more traditional sense. In particular the criteria used by J. L. Austin to identify "performatives" differed from the logic of performative language within the pre-cognitive linguistic "worlds" of E. Fuchs and G. Ebeling (1970). Work on persuasive definition and semantics (1973), on blessing and cursing as speech-acts which depended on institutional states of affairs (1975), the operative of speech-acts of liturgy (1975) and Wittgenstein on the grammar of "expecting" (1976) constituted the subjectmatter of research explorations during this period.

The Two Horizons (1980) focused on how texts from the past engage with horizons of readers today. This volume brought together conceptual tools from linguistic philosophy (especially Wittgenstein), Continental European traditions (especially the earlier and later Heidegger and Gadamer) and issues in biblical and theological studies (including Bultmann, Fuchs, Pannenberg and others). During the 1980s various research articles appeared, including a collaborative book in which I explored reader-response theory and parables.

New Horizons in Hermeneutics (1992) focused on how texts transform readers, and on how readers transform texts. In the light of a series of models drawn from Schleiermacher, Betti, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Liberation and Feminist hermeneutics and the debates which surround Habermas, Rorty, Fish, Derrida and postmodernity, I aimed to formulate ten models of reader which revealed different merits in relation to different goals. However, hermeneutics defeats its purpose if it breeds manipulative anarchy. Hence *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self* (1995) begins with Nietzsche and Foucault and explores a hermeneutic of selfhood in the light of the "modern vs. postmodern" debate and of Christian theology.

The prospects for hermeneutics are mixed. Many move towards a pluralism which appears to generate tolerance but in practice leaves only "political correctness" as a single stable marker within a sea of anarchy. Just as, in turn, the imperialism of dogma, rationalism and history were thrown off, only to enter into bondage to a new paradigm, the pluralism of postmodernity has its own seductive illusions. We need to look for pathways which offer stable markers, while recognizing the contingencies and relativities of the subject. If, R. Jauss's development and reception theory and increasingly sophisticated understandings of illocutionary and perlocutionary speech-acts may well offer advances which facilitate both aspects of the hermeneutical task. If appeal is made to ethics, this should be something more solid than the passing fashion of a socially-constructed political correctness. As Gadamer insists, hermeneutics is not to be degraded into a mere political tool.

Povzetek

Anthony C. THISELTON TRIDESET LET HERMENEVTIKE: POGLED NAZAJ IN UPI ZA PRIHODNOST

V letih 1976–1977 sem pripravjal interdisciplinarni tečaj hermenevtike, ki je segel čez »svetopisensko razlago« v boji tradicionalnem smislu. Vsebinska raziskovanja v tem obdobju so bila peselna merila, ki jih je J. L. Austin uporabil pri prepoznavanju »performativov« in so se razlikovala od logike performativnega jezika v prekgovornih jezikoslovnih »svetovih« E. Fuchsa in G. Ebelinga (1970). V tem obdobju je sestavljalo predmet raziskovanja delo o prečipitvi opredelitvi in semantiki (1973), blagoslovu in preklestvu kot govornih dejanjih, ki so odvisna od institucionalnega stanja (1975), o delovanju govornih dejanj v liturgiji (1975) in Wittgenstein o slovnični »priznavanju« (1976).

Dve obzorji (1980) obravnava predvsem, kako besedilo iz preteklosti lahko »pripita« na obzorje današnjih bralcev. V tem zvezku so zbrana predvsem konceptualna orodja iz filozofije jezika (posebno Wittgenstein), celinska evropska tradicija (posebno zgodnji in poznejši Heidegger in Gadamer) ter vprašanja svetopisemskih in teoloških študij (vključno z Bultmannom, Fuchsom, Pannenbergom in drugimi). V 80. letih tega stoletja je izšla vrsta raziskovalnih člankov, vključno s skupnim delom, v katerem sem raziskoval teorijo odziva bralcev in prilike.

Nova obzorja hermenevtike (1992) se koncentrirata predvsem na to, kako besedila »spreminjajo« bralce in kako bralci »spreminjajo« besedila. V luči vrste modelov, vzetih iz Schleiermacherja, Betti, Gadamerja, Ricoeurja,