

## Hermeneutics

pr

1. Hermeneutics and exegesis are concerned with the interpretation of texts: hermeneutics is concerned with the general principles involved; exegesis with their application to particular cases.

2. They are concerned with interpretation, with saying what was meant. The question, then, is the question for intelligence, *quid sit*, and not the question for reflection, *an sit*. One can know what an author means and still disagree with him.

Still, though *quid sit* and *an sit* are distinct, it need not follow that they are independent. One can fail to understand the meaning of a text because one thinks it means what one agrees with; and one can fail to understand it because one fails to understand a position with which one disagrees.

3. Interpretation expresses an act of understanding, but the understanding may be of the common sense type or of the scientific type.

Dilthey, *verstehen und erklären*, as basis of distinction between *Geistes-* and *Natur-wissenschaften*.

More fundamentally two modes of understanding with two corresponding modes of conception and expression, description and explanation, things for us and things themselves.

Euclid understood Euclidean geometry perfectly but he did not explain it perfectly.

4. Text as statement about an object.

Primarily we understand, not the words, but the thing by means of the words: *intelligimus non verba sed rem per verba*.

Primarily the meaning of a text is plain and *per se* hermeneutics is superfluous. But for any of a number of reasons the meaning may not be plain, and then the task of hermeneutics begins.

Not everything needs an exegesis, for the exegesis itself is more words and, if everything needed an exegesis, the exegesis would need an exegesis, and so too would the exegesis of the exegeses, etc.

The basic rule, then, is to know the thing that the author is talking about; on this, below §

Knowledge of the things provides a basic means of correcting misinterpretation: if the author is speaking of *X'* and the interpreter supposes him to be speaking of *X''*, it sooner or later appears that the author is talking nonsense; the controversialist stops at this point; the interpreter goes beyond it by looking for an *X'* that would reveal the author to be talking sense.

The meaning of a religious text can be extremely plain and extremely opaque. Lc 24, 25-27.32. Act 28, 24-27: *Aure audietis et non intelligetis*. Newman: *cor ad cor loquitur*.

5. Text and context.

A meaning is intentional: the whole is revealed only through the parts; but the parts at the same time are determined by the whole. Hence the Hermeneutic Circle: one knows the parts only by knowing the whole that is unfolded through the parts; and one knows the whole only by knowing the parts through which the whole is communicated.

Contextus contextendus is a particular context as an object of inquiry and investigation. It is the context of Pauline thought, of Thomist thought, of Napoleonic thought, as worked out by a presentday contemporary exegete, theologian, historian.

The result of the effort will be not Paul's context, Aquinas's context, etc., but what Mr. X considers to be Paul's context, etc.

In other words the result will be a context known within a contemporary contextus contextentis. So there arises the question of the relations between the text and the interpreter.

Further the result may be merely an understanding of Paul's context or it may be an explanation of Paul's ~~context~~ context.

Normally, the exegete arrives at an understanding of St. Paul but makes no effort towards an explanation of the Pauline context; the exception is Bultmann who derives from Heidegger "existentials", i.e., categories capable of expressing non-theoretic living, and employs them to ~~a~~ fix in explanatory fashion basic elements of meaning in the Pauline context.

Is the Catholic exegete to take advantage of Morel and to approach Pauline interpretation with categories derived, not from the apostate Heidegger, but from the mystic, John of the Cross?

the Finally, there are differences in the contexts under investigation. There is in St. Paul no effort to set forth a theoretic system, but there is in Aquinas. Hence, the effort of explanation of ~~a~~ Pauline context has to be in terms of "existentials," while the effort to explain the Thomist context can rest, at least to a notable extent, on its relations to the absolute context.

a Again, both Paul and Aquinas are involved in history, though not so entirely as is Napoleon. Now we speak of a historical context, but we must bear in mind that, apart from the intentions of divine providence, it is simply a contextus contextendus. It may be regarded as the goal of historical inquiry, but it cannot be regarded as context that already has been the context of some human mind: the context of a battle is not the plan of either general, not the fragmentary experiences, insights, judgements, of any of the participants, but a "what ~~a~~ went forward" thought: human intentions and efforts but also beyond them and often despite them.

## 7. Text and Interpreter.

The relations of text and interpreter are enormously complicated by the problems of cognitional theory.

For a naive intuitionism, interpretation is a matter of seeing what is in the text and not seeing what is not in the text. ~~X~~ To achieve that high goal of objectivity, all one has to do is rid oneself of preconceptions, prepossessions, prejudices, to eliminate any tendency to have a thesis that is to be established, to let the words of the author speak for themselves, and to let the author be his own interpreter.

By and large, the foregoing view of interpretation is just so much mythical nonsense.

All that is there to be seen is marks on paper. Anything over and ~~ex~~ above marks on paper in the order they are found in the text, is derived from the experience, memory, understanding, and