

## Paradigm Shifts: The Philosophical Hermeneutics of Friedrich Schleiermacher



WILLIAM R. OSBORNE  
*Ph. D. Candidate (Old Testament)*  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary  
Kansas City, MO 64118  
*rosborne@mbs.edu*

Hailed the “father of modern hermeneutics,”<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher’s influence on the school of biblical hermeneutics cannot be overestimated. Schleiermacher lived his life as a devotee of the Lutheran Church, serving as Reformed preacher at Trinity Church in Berlin for 25 years.<sup>2</sup> Amidst his career of prolific philosophical and ethical writing, he never deserted his passion to interpret and preach the Bible. Studying Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics, according to Karl Barth, is to “have the chance to get know Schleiermacher at his best and most brilliant, in his natural strength, on his home ground, for, to use his own expression, he was a virtuoso in the field whose method hermeneutics describes.”<sup>3</sup> The result of Schleiermacher’s study was nothing less than a paradigm shift for the field of hermeneutics.

This paper seeks to understand Schleiermacher “at his best,” while recognizing that significant shortcomings remain. To do so, the work will examine and explain: (1) the historical context that shaped Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics, (2) the philosophical system that undergirded his hermeneutics, (3) Schleiermacher’s hermeneutical method, and (4) his

---

<sup>1</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (rev. and enl.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 468.

<sup>2</sup> Berend Oberdorfer, “Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (ed. Erwin Fahlbusch *et al.*; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 4:852.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923/24* (ed. Dietrich Ritschl; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 178.

legacy. The study will conclude by briefly examining Schleiermacher's place within evangelical biblical interpretation.

## I. SCHLEIERMACHER'S CONTEXT

Born on November 21, 1768 in Breslau, Prussia, Schleiermacher entered into a long family history of Reformed pastors.<sup>4</sup> He was educated by the Moravian Brethren (lit. *Herrnhuter*) and, at the age of fourteen, experienced a dramatic conversion experience.<sup>5</sup> The penetrating influences of the Brethren are seen in a letter Schleiermacher wrote 20 years later while visiting his former place of education. He writes: "Here it was that for the first time I awoke to the consciousness of the relations of man to a higher world... Here it was that that mystic tendency developed itself, which has been of so much importance to me, and has supported and carried me through all the storms of skepticism."<sup>6</sup> During his two years studying at Niesky, Schleiermacher embraced the Pietism and experientialism that characterized the Moravian Brethren. These notions reverberate through Schleiermacher's *On Religion*: "[T]he true nature of religion is... immediate consciousness of the Deity as He is found in ourselves and in the world."<sup>7</sup>

In 1785 Schleiermacher traveled to Barby and enrolled in the theological academy of the Moravian Brethren. It was here that Schleiermacher's burning Pietism crashed into biblical criticism and Enlightenment theology.<sup>8</sup> The humanistic tendencies of the Enlightenment directly confronted Pietism's devotion to Jesus, namely his divinity and atoning sacrifice. Doubt descended, and Schleiermacher's Pietism fell on the hard concrete of enlightenment interpretations. He writes to his father in 1787: "I cannot believe that He, that called Himself the Son of Man, was the true, eternal God: I cannot believe that his death was a vicarious atonement."<sup>9</sup> This response served as the foundation to Schleiermacher's "understanding of Christianity centering not on atonement but on incarnation: Christ as mediator."<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Martin Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought* (trans. John Wall-hausser; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1973), 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Daniel E. Schleiermacher, *The Life of Schleiermacher as Unfolded in His Autobiography and Letters* (trans. Frederica Rowan; London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1860), 1:284.

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (trans. John Oman; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 101.

<sup>8</sup> Redeker, *Life and Thought*, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Life of Schleiermacher*, 1:46.

<sup>10</sup> Walter E. Wyman Jr., "Schleiermacher's Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 4:856.

That same year, no longer finding support among the Brethren, Schleiermacher began studying at Halle University. There he was introduced to the biblical criticism of Johann Semler and devoted himself to the study of Greek philosophy and Emmanuel Kant under the tutelage of Johann Eberhard.<sup>11</sup> Schleiermacher was enamored with Kantian philosophy, and was thereby reluctant to succumb to the pressure of his father and uncle to take his first theology examination in 1790.<sup>12</sup> During the next few years Schleiermacher began publishing sermons. Martin Redeker comments that:

Although the dogmatic content and the form of speech still remained grounded in the Enlightenment and although Schleiermacher was seeking to follow the model of the Enlightenment preacher...the sermons nonetheless contain a deeper tone which suggests that the author was inwardly at the point of going beyond the Enlightenment.<sup>13</sup>

Schleiermacher finished his second theology examination, and in 1796 began preaching at a hospital in Berlin called the Charité.<sup>14</sup>

While in Berlin, Schleiermacher associated with young Romantic poets and writers, and authored two monumental volumes around the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century—*Speeches on Religion to Its Cultured Despisers* and the *Soliloquies*.<sup>15</sup> Bernd Oberdorfer states that these works “reflected his earlier influences (Moravian Brethren, Eberhard, Kant, Spinoza, Jacobi) and interests (religion, sociality, individuality), fusing all these areas into a dense, multifaceted combination of religion and modernity.”<sup>16</sup> The extent to which German Romanticism influenced these early works has been debated,<sup>17</sup> but there is no doubt “he believed in the creative power of human feeling and in the importance of lived experience, in contrast to the more cerebral rationalism of the Enlightenment.”<sup>18</sup> Schleiermacher’s

---

<sup>11</sup> J. Arundel Chapman, *An Introduction to Schleiermacher* (London: Epworth, 1932), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Redeker, *Life and Thought*, 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Schleiermacher, *The Life of Schleiermacher*, 133.

<sup>15</sup> Redeker, *Life and Thought*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Oberdorfer, “Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst,” 4:851.

<sup>17</sup> See Jack Forstman, *A Romantic Triangle: Schleiermacher and Early German Romanticism* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977); cf. Redeker, *Life and Thought*, 61.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 210.

skepticism and tension captured the *Zeitgeist* (“spirit of the times”) and produced both immediate recognition and reservation within the Lutheran Church. In 1804 he left to lecture as professor of theology at Halle, but returned to Berlin in 1807 and stepped into the pulpit at Trinity Church.<sup>19</sup>

Schleiermacher spent the rest of his life preaching regularly and lecturing at the Berlin University. His lectures at the University covered a broad range of topics, including: ethics, politics, history of philosophy, hermeneutics, theology, pedagogy, and aesthetics. Many of these lectures grew into published works like *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums* (1811; Eng. *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*), and *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt* (1831, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed; Eng. *The Christian Faith*). Like any great thinker, Schleiermacher progressed and developed new ideas during his career, but throughout his work (especially in hermeneutics), Schleiermacher's North Star was his desire to navigate a transcendental path between the two poles of Pietism and Enlightenment criticism.

## II. SCHLEIERMACHER'S PHILOSOPHY

Schleiermacher does not embrace any one particular philosophical system, but draws from others when necessary. Perhaps this is why Richard Brandt is quick to deny “that Schleiermacher was a first-rate philosopher.”<sup>20</sup> However, three philosophical influences dominate Schleiermacher's thinking: Immanuel Kant, Romanticism, and Baruch Spinoza.

To understand Schleiermacher, one must encounter Kant. Immanuel Kant shook the foundations of the European academy with his opus *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1788; Eng. *The Critique of Pure Reason*). In this work, Kant called into question the assumptions of *a priori* truths and humanity's ability to objectively know a “thing in itself” (*Ding an sich*) outside oneself.<sup>21</sup> Kant argued that a gap existed between what is knowable or perceivable (i.e. *phenomena*) and the “thing in itself,” which he referred to as *noumena*. We can only know that which comes to us in the form of *phenomena*. Schleiermacher states:

---

<sup>19</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 148.

<sup>20</sup> Richard B. Brandt, *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher: The Development of His Theory of Scientific and Religious Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), 201.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (trans. Joel Weinsheimer; New Haven, CT: Yale, 1994), 64.

A thing is something that can affect the sense organs and can subsist through a manifold of sense impressions... In every thought some object outside thought is assumed. To think means not only that there is determinate thought, but that there is a relation of it to something assumed to be outside it.<sup>22</sup>

While acknowledging Kant's distinction, Schleiermacher did not, however, dispel all sense of correspondence between thought and being. He writes:

Finally, some will argue that there cannot be any relation of thought to being, for the two are absolutely separated. But in self-consciousness we experience the reciprocal change of each through the other in reflection and volition, and no one can really believe that the two move along without any connection.<sup>23</sup>

Schleiermacher's example of self-awareness as proof of the connection between thought and being is not coincidental. If a chasm exists between the thoughts of a reader and the phenomena of a text, where might one find correspondence between the two? The *verstand* ("understanding" or Kant's "thoughts of judgement") of the individual. Thus, he is sometimes charged with reducing theology to anthropology.<sup>24</sup> Jean Grondin astutely captures this development:

In the distinction between phenomena and things in themselves lies one of the secret roots of Romanticism and the emergence of hermeneutics. If every approach to the world (or, say, to a text) involves a subjective interpretation or viewpoint, a philosophical investigation trying to be fundamental must begin with the interpreting subject.<sup>25</sup>

It is here, in the subjective viewpoint of the individual, that the influences of Romanticism emerge. Schleiermacher "shares with the spirit of

---

<sup>22</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher's Dialektik: Unterstützung der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (ed. I. Haipern; Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1903), 491, translated and quoted in Brandt, *Philosophy of Schleiermacher*, 202.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>24</sup> J. B. Webster, "Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst," in *New Theological Dictionary of Theology* (ed. S. B. Ferguson, D. F. Wright, and J. I. Packer; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 620.

<sup>25</sup> Grondin, *Introduction*, 64.

Romanticism a distrust of how much can be achieved by rational argument and reflection alone,<sup>26</sup> but he does not fully commit to the wholesale-transcendentalism popularized by the Romantic writers like Friedrich Schelling. Understanding is possible, but never complete. Schleiermacher believed that understanding required both sensory experience and deductive categories—a higher-level synthesis of the parts to the whole. Therefore, understanding could not be obtained solely in the common-sense realm of scientific knowledge and individual particulars. However, neither could it be separated from empirical data and reason. The result for Schleiermacher was a dialogic exchange between the individual and the perceived outside world.

Baruch Spinoza, a Jewish philosopher in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, greatly influenced Schleiermacher's concept of the universal and the individual. Spinoza proposed a monistic, pantheistic metaphysical system that is perhaps suggested in Schleiermacher's theology of a fully immanent deity. Brandt writes, "The central conception of Schleiermacher's whole system is his idea of the 'universe,'"<sup>27</sup> and he followed Spinoza's idea of the universe as an infinite system, or Infinite Being. The fundamental metaphysical and psychological reality is the tension between the finite and the Infinite (infinite being capitalizes to represent some ethereal concept of deity). Consequently, Schleiermacher denied the existence of noumenal individuality. "The upshot of his discussion is that there can be no inference from phenomenal individuality to noumenal individual substance."<sup>28</sup> This notion corresponds with what we have seen so far. The individual stands in the gap between the phenomenal world constrained by individual sense experience and the transcendent realm of infinite unity. Schleiermacher writes:

The contemplation of the pious is the immediate consciousness of the universal existence of all finite things, in and through the Infinite, and of all temporal things in and through the Eternal. Religion is to seek this and find it in all that lives and moves, in all growth and change, in all doing and suffering. It is to have life and to know life in immediate feeling, only as such as existence in the Infinite and Eternal... Yet, religion is not knowledge and science, either of the world or of God. Without being knowledge, it recognizes knowledge and science. In itself it is an affection, a revelation of the Infinite in the finite, God being seen in it and it in God.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 210.

<sup>27</sup> Brandt, *Philosophy of Schleiermacher*, 71.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>29</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 36.

Consequently, true piety has nothing to do with dogma. One can powerfully “feel” his or her dependence upon the Infinite and know nothing of the doctrines of creation, providence, or inspiration.

### III. SCHLEIERMACHER’S HERMENEUTICS

Unsatisfied with the prior scientific and philological focus of hermeneutics, Schleiermacher sought to systematize a universal method of hermeneutics. If, as Schleiermacher states, “Hermeneutics is a part of the art of thinking, and is therefore philosophical,”<sup>30</sup> why should different types of writing require different hermeneutics? He goes on to say:

Hermeneutics does not apply exclusively to classical studies, nor is it merely a part of this restricted philological organon; rather, it is to be applied to the works of every author. Therefore, its principles must be sufficiently general, and they are not to be derived solely from the nature of classical literature.<sup>31</sup>

Schleiermacher makes no distinction between reading Plato and the Apostle Paul.<sup>32</sup>

In seeking to create a universal hermeneutic, Schleiermacher builds upon the same dialectic forces that shaped his metaphysics—piety and rationalism. Hermeneutics that are scientifically driven, and focused only on grammatical and philological aspects of the text, Schleiermacher called “grammatical interpretation.” The canons of grammatical interpretation seek to root the text into a context, i.e. historical, literary, or cultural. The first canon gives primacy to the language of the original author and original audience, and the second states “every word in a given location must be determined according to it being-together with those surrounding it.”<sup>33</sup> This method of interpretation is necessary and good, but insufficient by itself. Schleiermacher believes that grammatical interpretation alone will lead to “quantitative misunderstanding” when the inter-

---

<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts* (ed. Heinz Kimmerle; trans. James Duke and Jack Forstman; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977), 97.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>32</sup> “Inspiration, as an infusion into the mind, should not influence the work of interpretation. If in the case of the Bible, as in every other case, the goal of hermeneutics is to understand the texts as their original readers understood them, the fact they are inspired does not affect the interpretation at all,” *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

preter is presented with concepts like poetry or allegory. This type of language requires a greater knowledge of the "personality" behind the text, or the author's "style" (style being a technical term that includes thought, language, and organization).

Schleiermacher used the phrase "psychological interpretation" (or also technical interpretation) to describe holistic interpretations that seek out the personality and style of the author. Psychological interpretation seeks "to understand the discourse as a presentation of thought. Composed by a human being and so understood in terms of a human being."<sup>34</sup>

Schleiermacher holds that both methods must be employed, and one must not replace the other. "These two hermeneutical tasks are completely equal, and it would be incorrect to label grammatical interpretation the 'lower' and psychological interpretation the 'higher' task."<sup>35</sup> The goal of hermeneutics, for Schleiermacher, is to enter into the world of the author. However, even when these hermeneutical principles are followed, the interpreter will never attain complete understanding of a text. Both grammatical and psychological interpretation involve "construct[ing] something finite and definite from something that is infinite and indefinite."<sup>36</sup> Since the interpreter can never attain complete knowledge using either form, "it is necessary to move back and forth between the grammatical and psychological sides, and no rules can stipulate how to do this."<sup>37</sup> This back-and-forth relationship between the whole and its parts is Schleiermacher's hermeneutical circle.

The interpreter must enter the circle through psychological interpretation. "By its very nature the hermeneutical operation dictates that the interpreter begin by considering the overall organization of the work. Hermeneutics must begin with an overview of the whole."<sup>38</sup> The interpreter must have some basic shared understanding with the text (e.g., know the language, basic grammar and syntax, and provenance). Anthony Thiselton equates this preliminary psychological interpretation with the hermeneutical concept of pre-understanding.<sup>39</sup>

In working through this hermeneutical circle of grammatical and psychological interpretation, the interpreter must employ what Schleiermacher calls divinatory knowledge and comparative knowledge. Comparative knowledge ("masculine principle") analyzes and compares information, and divinatory knowledge ("feminine principle") understands

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>39</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 155.

through intuition and relationship.<sup>40</sup> It is important to understand that both comparison and “divination” are used in *both* grammatical and psychological interpretation. In psychological interpretation the reader compares the parts of a work in an effort to discover the author’s theme or train of thought. The same reader must also “divine” how the individual theme and style of the author fits within the historical and cultural setting of the work. The role of comparison is self-evident in grammatical analysis, but the more illusive role of divination, Schleiermacher describes stating: “Whenever we come upon a gifted author [*genialer Autor*] who has for the first time in the history of the language expressed a given phrase or combination of terms, what do we want to do? In such instances only a divinatory method enables us rightly to reconstruct the creative act.”<sup>41</sup>

Schleiermacher holds that the interpreter must seek out the world of the author. He writes: “Before the art of hermeneutics can be practiced, the interpreter must put himself both objectively and subjectively in the position of the author.”<sup>42</sup> Once fully engaged in the world and context of the author, the interpreter may “understand the text at first as well as and then even better than its author.”<sup>43</sup> Unless the interpreter enters into the world and mind of the author through a subjective rapport—as one might have in other relationships—misunderstanding is unavoidable. Lawrence Schmidt comments: “So, although one cannot actually place oneself in the thinking of the author, one can guess or intuit how the author thought by comparison to how one thinks oneself since human beings are similar.”<sup>44</sup>

Clear similarities exist between Schleiermacher’s metaphysics and his hermeneutics. True piety, as mentioned above, is the subjective experience of the finite depending upon the Infinite. That individual’s self-awareness of the Infinite bridges the gap between particular sense experience and the transcendent whole. “Schleiermacher believed thinking truly exhibits the moral, historical character of human existence because it is an activity that always involves an awareness of the relatedness of

---

<sup>40</sup> Thisleton, *Hermeneutics*, 156.

<sup>41</sup> Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, 192. See Thisleton, *New Horizons*, 225 for a helpful illustration of the distinction between comparison and divination verses grammatical and psychological.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>44</sup> Lawrence K. Schmidt, *Understanding Hermeneutics* (Stocksfield Hall, England: Acumen, 2006), 24.

the individual to the community of consciousness.”<sup>45</sup> In like manner, hermeneutics represents the dependence of the finite upon the Infinite. The interpreter is bound by the particular expressions presented by a text or dialogue, and is therefore dependent upon the infinite possibilities that lie within the constructs of grammar and the author's contextualized intentions. Hermeneutics, like true piety, bridges this gap by subjectively projecting the finite into the world of the infinite.

#### IV. SCHLEIERMACHER'S LEGACY

It is sometimes difficult to witness the direct effect of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics because they have been so deeply integrated into modern methodologies. Indeed, his discussion of the hermeneutical circle—groundbreaking at the time—almost seems rudimentary to modern day hermeneutics students. However, Schleiermacher's universal hermeneutics radically shifted the direction of theories of interpretation that would follow.

Schleiermacher's student and biographer, Wilhelm Dilthey, followed his hermeneutical methods by highlighting the human individual and “lived experiences” as the main hermeneutical category.<sup>46</sup> Similar to Schleiermacher's notion of the Infinite, or community of consciousness, Dilthey believed that human existence was characterized by a “connectedness” that is expressed through language, culture, and institutions.<sup>47</sup> Dilthey carries Schleiermacher's psychological interpretation to its logical conclusion. Grant Osborne writes: “Interpretation for [Dilthey] involves the union of the subject and object in a historical act of understanding. Dilthey called this the ‘rediscovery of the I in the Thou,’ by which he meant that a person discovers his or her self in the act of reading.”<sup>48</sup> Schleiermacher and Dilthey's focus on the significance of the individual interpreter within an infinite nexus of consciousness continues to be seen in intertextual studies. Literary scholars like Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes argue that every text is infinitely related to other texts. Consequently, for Kristeva and Barthes, the notion of intertextuality refers not to a hermeneutical method but to a hermeneutical *reality* of existential connectedness. Anthony Thiselton argues that in Schleiermacher's notion of infinite features of language, one can see the early development of the Ferdinand de Saussure's “distinction between *la langue* (or the

---

<sup>45</sup> Richard R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 80.

<sup>46</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 247.

<sup>47</sup> Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 162.

<sup>48</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 468.

potential reservoir of language as a system) and *la parole*, word-use or language-in-action.”<sup>49</sup>

Schleiermacher’s emphasis on subjectively entering into the world of the author prepared the way for later existential, anthropocentric interpreters like Rudolph Bultmann. However, even those not willing to go the extremes of Dilthey and Bultmann have still found benefit in Schleiermacher’s seminal notion of the implied author. Studying a text is not the same as studying a biography about the author. Rather, it is examining a persona created by the author in the text.<sup>50</sup> This persona may be the same or different from a narrator.

Moving away from existential interpretations, Hans Gadamer criticized Schleiermacher’s subjectivity, but employed his idea of the hermeneutical circle in a more historically grounded fashion. Gadamer supported a similar notion of pre-understanding (or “prejudice”) on the part of the interpreter, and that “horizon,” or pre-understanding was constantly being confronted by the “horizon” of the text.<sup>51</sup>

E. D. Hirsch Jr., in his work *Validity in Interpretation*, lauds Schleiermacher’s distinction and articulation of the comparative and divinatory methods. He writes:

Despite his metaphorical imprecision Schleiermacher is worth quoting for another reason. He suggests that the female divinatory function and the male comparative function are the two principal forces not only in interpretation but in human knowledge generally. The implications of that insight stretch beyond the currently fashionable discussion of the opposition between scientific and humanistic cultures and their respective “methods.” What is at stake is...the right of interpretation (and implicitly all humanistic disciplines) to claim as its object genuine knowledge.<sup>52</sup>

These two categories provide interpreters and thinkers with a critical process of validation that can process judgments. This process cannot be defined in detail, but it is important to understand that every act of interpretation “comprises the having of ideas and the testing of them.”<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 157.

<sup>50</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 204.

<sup>51</sup> Schmidt, *Understanding Hermeneutics*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1967), 205.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 206

## V. SCHLEIERMACHER EVALUATED

Schleiermacher's methods mark a sharp turn in the philosophies of Enlightenment-driven interpretation. It was not that his positions differed greatly from common anti-supernatural interpretations, but the change is witnessed in his questioning the over-confident claims of modernity. According to Schleiermacher, the school of hermeneutics could not build upon the shaky assumptions of common sense when trying to grasp the essence of human understanding. Hermeneutics and epistemology are intimately related, and thanks to Schleiermacher, presently no thoughtful treatment of the former can ignore the latter. His emphasis on objectively and subjectively entering into the world of the text or "behind" the text is helpful. Some, like Gadamer, rightly argue that Schleiermacher overemphasized psychological interpretation. However, Schleiermacher did not believe that psychological interpretation was sufficient without a historically rooted grammatical interpretation. Schleiermacher's canons of grammatical interpretation are still seen in variant forms in modern hermeneutical discussions of context, grammar, and syntax.<sup>54</sup> It is commonly accepted that biblical interpretation is both an art and a science, and Schleiermacher played a critical role in moving the discussion in that direction.

Despite these contributions, Schleiermacher's philosophical convictions present problems. The denial of a transcendent God has obvious ramifications on Schleiermacher's view of inspiration. Karl Barth comments on this issue: "Whether inspiration is present is a result and not a presupposition of exposition...Grammatically and psychologically, then, we are to deal with everything at a purely human level, and here, too, everything must be according to the universal rules."<sup>55</sup> Therefore, since inspiration is a *product* of interpretation, one may encounter more of it at an art museum than in reading the Old and New Testaments. Schleiermacher believed that hermeneutics begins with, and always includes, the possibility of misunderstanding.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, why should one assume that the words of God are any different? Indeed, no such assumption should be made *if* Schleiermacher's view of God as entirely immanent is correct. Unfortunately, Schleiermacher's philosophy shaped his view of God more than the biblical texts he so carefully studied.

Schleiermacher's zeal for the church is to be commended, and his apologetic tone appreciated. His commitment to epistemology and expe-

---

<sup>54</sup> Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 35 – 93.

<sup>55</sup> Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, 182 – 83.

<sup>56</sup> Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics*, 110.

rientalism led him to ask the right questions of his contemporary systems, but too often they proved to be false guides in providing him with answers.