

APPROACHING THE WORD OF GOD: A STUDY ON SCHLEIERMACHER AND KARL BARTH

(The First Part of the Two Articles)

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Abstrak:

Teologi (refleksi iman akan sabda Allah) di zaman ini tidak dapat dilepaskan dari hermeneutika. Ulasan dan pengembangan sebuah teologi selalu berciri interpretatif. Oleh karena itu pula teologi perlu jelas dengan prinsip-prinsip yang mendasari pendekatannya sebagai bagian penting dari pertanggung-jawaban metodologisnya. Sementara itu hermeneutika sendiri sebagai ilmu masih terus berkembang. Paparan berikut ini akan mengulas dan mengevaluasi prinsip dan metode interpretasi yang dikembangkan oleh F. Schleiermacher dan K. Barth. Bagaimana mengusahakan sebuah refleksi iman terhadap sabda Allah khususnya yang dituangkan dalam Kitab suci secara *intelligible* bertanggungjawab dan komunikatif?

Key Words:

Hermeneutics, language, reality, Word of God, interpretation, experience.

1. Introduction

The term 'hermeneutics' comes from the Greek word: *hermeneia*. This word is related to Hermes, the messenger of gods in the Greek mythology. Hermes had a duty to explain all decisions and plans of the gods to human beings; that is to bridge the gap between the divine and human realms. Similarly, hermeneutics is concerned with the attempt to examine the relationship between the realm of a text, or a work of art, and the realm of the person who wishes to understand it.¹ As such, the Greek verb *hermeneuein* would mean to explain, to translate, or to express. The Swiss theologian and philosopher, Gerhard Ebeling (birth: 1912), has noted this three-fold signification, and attempted to co-ordinate it under the common rubric of 'interpretation'. In conventional theological usage, then, hermeneutics is used to denote the enterprise which identifies the principles and methods prerequisite to the interpretation of texts.²

I would like to discuss, here, the principles and methods of the interpretation of texts, as developed by Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Karl Barth (1886-1968). I would argue that their approach, in some extents, has some points of similarity to the effort made by Muslim scholars, such as Fazlur Rahman and Sayyid Qutb, about which I shall develop in the second part of my paper.

2. Schleiermacher and His Biblical Hermeneutics

2.1. Two Aspects of Hermeneutics

What does hermeneutics mean for Schleiermacher?³ Until now the earliest record of his idea on hermeneutics was to be found in the first edition of his so-called theological encyclopaedia (1811).⁴ In this work he said that hermeneutics is an art of interpretation. He designated it as a discipline which depends on principles as firm as those on any art. This initial conception of hermeneutics was described more fully in the first and second manuscripts. In the third manuscript, he finally came to the definition that hermeneutics is the art of understanding.⁵ As the art of understanding, hermeneutics deals with the phenomenon of thinking;⁶ and it has three levels. The first is almost entirely mechanical. We may find it in our daily lives. The second is based on a wealth of experiences and observations. This is practised in the school or university to give a wealth of information. The third is an artistic activity. What is important in this last level is to present in reputable scientific form the total range and foundations of the method. Consequently, understanding in the artistic level is not an easy process. Schleiermacher held, "The full understanding of a discourse, or writing, is an artistic achievement, and thus requires a doctrine of art or technique — which we designate by the term hermeneutics — and such a doctrine of art only exists insofar as its rules form a system based directly on clear principles drawn from the nature of thinking and language."⁷

Two aspects or dimensions of hermeneutics immediately appear. The first is related to language. Indeed, Schleiermacher said in the first manuscript that language is the only presupposition in hermeneutics. A similar idea is found in the second manuscript, where he stated that the work of hermeneutics has to do only with "members" of sentences. There is no understanding without language, and therefore, hermeneutics and rhetoric, however distinct, cannot be separated. The second is related to the person behind the text.⁸ The first aspect is objective, and called grammatical interpretation. The second aspect is subjective, and called psychological or technical interpretation.

Schleiermacher described the task of the grammatical aspect of interpretation as the art of finding the precise sense (*Sinn*) of a given statement from its language and with the help of its language. Furthermore, in the fourth manuscript, he divided the task of grammatical interpretation into two parts.⁹ The first is related to the text as a unity; it points to the text as a general view. The second is related to the text as personally delimited in its particularity. The task of the psychological or technical interpretation is to grasp the whole or unity of the work and the major features of its composition. It is also divided into two elements. The first is to discover the individuality of an author, and the other is to recognise with definiteness how this individuality is expressed.¹⁰

According to Schleiermacher, the tasks of the grammatical and the psychological or technical interpretation are in the same level. It would be incorrect to label grammatical interpretation the 'lower' and psychological interpretation the 'higher'. These two aspects of interpretation are complemented each other.¹¹ The act of understanding is thus only attained as a result of a dialectical or spiral oscillation between the grammatical and technical interpretation. Yet, these two dimensions or sides of interpretation cannot always coincide, because human knowledge of language is never complete. Consequently, hermeneutics is an unending task. Schleiermacher emphasised that a text can never be understood totally. Hermeneutics is thus never a total grasp; it is only an approximation.¹²

2.2. Principles in Dealing with the New Testament

Schleiermacher argued that any kind of texts, including the Bible and the classical antiquity, should be understood in the same way as any other spoken or written expression of human being. According to Schleiermacher, the customary belief that the Holy Spirit is not to be subjected to the rules of interpretation is simply erroneous.¹³ He even questioned the doctrine and practice of the Catholic Church which grants the right to interpret only to the clergy. Furthermore, the interpretation must be set in operation to deal with the grammatical and technical dimensions of the literature of the Bible. In the case of the New Testament,¹⁴ this means that the texts must be regarded in light of the nature and use of the Greek and Hebrew languages in the Hellenistic age. In addition, the texts must also be interpreted in light of the special message which the authors sought to communicate.

Concerning the grammatical interpretation, Schleiermacher argued that the New Testament was composed during the period of decay in the Greek language.¹⁵ The writers of the New Testament made more use of the language

of common life and not the classical Greek. They tended to ignore grammar or literature, and did not make full use of the richness of Greek. They did not introduce any new word for their religious concepts; they spoke from within the linguistic sphere of the Bible and Apocrypha. Schleiermacher realised that this idea seems to be related to a matter of judgement based on human feeling and intuition. Yet, according to him, this judgement of feeling can be accepted only if they are supported by philological and philosophical research. To minimise the problems, he offered a general principle, namely to form an initial perusal of the New Testament, and to compare it with the Septuagint, Philo, Josephus, and Diodorus, as well as Polybius.

Concerning the psychological or technical interpretation, Schleiermacher argued in the sixth manuscript that the authors of the New Testament must have their own point of view, and this must be related to the certain situation within which they wrote the Biblical texts.¹⁶ He said, for example, that Paul the Epistle developed his ideas more discursively, and so the entire train of thought must be comprehended as a unity. By contrast, John the disciple tended to dwell on a single idea and so put particular motifs side by side. In addition, Paul's formulation is more figurative, whereas John's is more historical. No doubt, in communicating this message, the authors of the New Testament wrote in terms of the linguistic and religious context in which they lived. They must have ranges of thought, literature and history by which the ideas were explicated. They must also have personal relationships to the audience to whom the ideas were directed. On the one hand, they must write in terms of a particular grasp of faith, and on the other hand, they transformed and even created new patterns of thought and ways of speaking according to their faith. For this, in interpreting the New Testament, we must take into account all those realities.

2.3. Significance and Criticism

Schleiermacher is considered as the founder of modern hermeneutics.¹⁷ He must be given credit for his effort to open the way for the development of philosophical hermeneutics. Schleiermacher's effort to develop a general philosophical hermeneutics, for example, has inspired Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) to take hermeneutics as the foundational theory for all the humanities, by distinguishing the task of the natural sciences, as "explaining (*erklären*) the natural phenomena" and the task of the humanities as "understanding (*verstehen*) the complexity of human life". The footprint of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics has appeared too in Martin Heidegger's reflection on human existence in the universe (*Dasein*), and Hans-Georg Gadamer's idea of the fusion of two horizons, that is to say the horizon of the text and the horizon

of the reader. In addition, Schleiermacher's distinction between text and style has prepared the ground for Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) to distinguish between language as system (*langue*) and language as performance (*parole*), and for Ricoeur to take into account the text's linguistic features and the individual interpreter's perspective, as the objective and subjective dimension in the act of interpretation. A special appreciation was also given to Schleiermacher by the modern theologian, Rudolf Bultmann, who particularly praised Schleiermacher for his realisation that a mere analysis of the formal constituents of a text does not yet lead to a real understanding of what the text means.¹⁸ Schleiermacher emphasised the need for some kind of perspective through which a text will be approached and understood, namely a courageous risk to know how the statement as a fact has emerged in the author's mind, and to sense how the thoughts contained in the statement will exercise further influence on – and in – the author.¹⁹ Bultmann stressed a similar argument, saying, "[N]o exegesis is without presuppositions, inasmuch as the exegete is not a *tabula rasa*, but on the contrary, approaches the text with specific questions or with a specific way of raising questions and thus has a certain idea of the subject matter with which the text is concerned."²⁰

What we need to reflect on, furthermore, is Schleiermacher's emphasis to understand the mind behind the text, and to reconstruct in an imaginative way the text's original sense. This implies that an interpreter must know the intention of the author in producing a text. An interpreter must reach the sense of the text as intended by the author. But, in the case of the Bible, who is actually its author? If we believe that the author of the Bible is Holy Spirit, then how do we understand the 'mind' of the Holy Spirit? Even, if we say that the Books of the Bible were written by certain persons, such as John, Paul, Mark, and others – and the Holy Spirit is only the One who inspired them – how do we really know the intention of those human authors, whereas the 'distance' between the present and the past is indeed too faraway.

Another problem may arise here. We may remember that one of the keys to understand Schleiermacher's theology is his emphasis on 'feeling' or 'intuition'.²¹ In the case of hermeneutics, it would mean that an interpreter needs to have an empathy with the experience of the people who were related to the Bible! They would be the authors, the audiences, and even the individuals mentioned in the Bible, such as Jesus and His disciples. Then, how could we build our empathy with their experiences? We must have many difficulties to do so!

3. Karl Barth and His Biblical Hermeneutics

3.1. Theanthropology

Not all theologians, of course, agree with Schleiermacher's theory of hermeneutics. Karl Barth, for example, argued that Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is lacking in theological axioms.²² Barth regarded Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as ignoring the theological message of Biblical texts. Barth also criticised Schleiermacher's effort to make Biblical interpretation rely on general hermeneutics. According to Barth, such a kind of hermeneutics shows how Schleiermacher very simply and triumphantly dealt with the ancient doctrine of inspiration;²³ and thus may misunderstand and distort the self-revelation of the Word of God. Barth thought that since the Reformation all systems of thought tended to be anthropocentric. This was obvious with the revival of the humanism of the Stoa at the beginning of the eighteenth century, or a century later with Idealism, or, in its train, with Romanticism, and then with positivism of the bourgeois society and scholarship of the nineteenth century, and the nationalism of the same period, and a little later socialism.²⁴ In a larger or lesser degree, the 'Word of God' had been substituted by the word of human being.

The characteristic of Barth's theology is, certainly, not anthropocentric but theocentric. The axis of his theology is God Himself. As a result, he criticised any type of natural theology. Natural theology declares that human beings in themselves and as such, and therefore by nature and not by grace, possess a power to know God. Natural theology is thus based on human capacity and, fundamentally, differs from the revelation in Jesus Christ and from the exposition of Holy Scripture. Indeed, Barth denied any human identification with God.²⁵ He said, "God is in heaven, and thou art on earth. The gulf between God and human being is very wide, for God is the Wholly Other." If humanity is itself God, the appearance of the idol is inevitable; and whenever the idol is honoured, it is inevitable that human beings, feeling themselves to be the true God, should also feel that they have themselves to be the true God.²⁶

Barth's theology may rightly be called 'theanthropology', or *theologia viatorum*, namely the science of God as the God of man and of man as the man of God.²⁷ The subject of theology is and remains God Himself. Theology cannot be presented in the form of a system of human making, since it will never satisfy the natural aspiration of human thought and utterance for completeness and compactness. Consequently theology must always be 'on the way', and remain a human pilgrimage which is open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the Word of God is the sole source, basis and criterion of

Barth's theology. He argued that theology means *ministerium verbi divini*, a ministry of the Word of God, and nothing else.²⁸ The Word of God is the living Lord Jesus Christ Himself.²⁹ Barth built his theology on the foundation of revelation, and above all on the foundation of God's revelation in Jesus Christ as witnessed in the New Testament. By founding theology on revelation, he stressed the utter priority of God, and emphasized that all knowledge of God depends on God. When God is revealed, this means that God is really present to human beings, *Deus praesens*.³⁰ On the one hand, revelation would mean "giving signs"; it is thus still "mystery". God is unveiled by being present in veiling forms; and yet those forms are still different from God. Viewed apart from itself, it makes God a God hidden from men, and it makes man a man blind to God. On the other hand, revelation is an event; it happens from time to time. Revelation does not mean that a stone tablet has fallen from heaven with truth written on it. Revelation is not a recorded announcement but a living Word spoken into a particular historical situation. In sum, Barth emphasised that revelation is not a predicate of history, but history is a predicate of revelation.³¹

3.2. Understanding the Word of God as Attested in the Bible

Barth argued that the Bible is a witness to divine revelation. It is based simply on the fact that the Bible has "answered" the mystery of the revelation of God, revealing the lordship of the triune God. In his opinion, this statement contains two important realities. As such, witness is not absolutely identical with that to which it witnesses. A real witness is different from the divine revelation itself. It is thus important to make distinction between the Bible as such and revelation. The Bible as a witness to divine revelation means that the Bible becomes a human expression of God's revelation; it is a witness of revelation which is really given, and really applies, and is really received by us, just because it is a written word, and, in fact, a word written by men like ourselves, which we can read, hear and understand as such.³² In its true humanity, we cannot attribute to the Bible as such the capacity in such a way to reveal God to us, because it is always there as a sign, as a human and temporal word, and therefore also as a word which is conditioned and limited. And yet, Barth argued that, in such limitation, the Bible is not distinguished from revelation. Through the Bible, revelation 'comes' to us. Thus, the Bible mediates and accommodates a revelation to us. If we have really listened to the Biblical words in all their humanity, and if we have accepted them as a witness, then we have obviously not only heard of the lordship of the triune God, but also received that it has become for us an actual presence and event.

For this, in dealing with the Bible as a real witness of divine revelation, we must always keep these two things separate and give them their due weight.³³

It is commonly accepted that, in its humanity, the Bible should be read, understood and expounded historically. The demand for a 'historical' understanding of the Bible necessarily means, in content, that we have to take it for what it undoubtedly is and is meant to be: the human speech uttered by specific people at specific times in a specific situation, in a specific language and with a specific intention.³⁴ According to Barth, however, we must also remember that the Bible, as human speech, points away from itself. Understanding the human speech does not only mean that we need to have a cognition of the word as such. In the various prefaces to *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth gave notes on the idea and practice of the historical-critical method. His notes were so critical that he was misunderstood and accused of being an 'enemy' of the historical-critical method'.³⁵ He recognised that the historical-critical method is both necessary and justified. And yet, he did not agree when it is merely understood as no more than a reconstruction of the text, a rendering of the Greek words and phrases by their precise equivalents, a number of additional notes in which archaeological and philological material is gathered together, and a more or less plausible arrangement of the subject-matter in such a manner that it may be historically and psychologically intelligible from the standpoint of pure pragmatism. For this, we must understand the Bible, through and beyond history, into the spirit of the Bible, namely the Eternal Spirit itself.³⁶ In sum, we must understand the Bible only in the light of what is said by the Bible, and therefore let the Bible speak for itself.³⁷

Barth said that an interpreter should listen to the human speech of the Bible through which God's Word might reveal itself. The reason is obvious; 'God's revelation in the human speech of the Bible not only wants, but can make itself said and heard.'³⁸ Yet, how do we know that God's revelation can and make itself heard? Barth answered, "We believe in and with the Church that Holy Scripture, as the original and legitimate witness of divine revelation, is itself the Word of God."³⁹ In his matter, to say the Word of God is to say the work of God and the miracle of God. The Bible is undoubtedly expressed in human words, but it is as such always wrapped in the darkness and light of its mystery.⁴⁰ When Holy Scripture becomes the Word of God, then this is itself a miraculous event of God's freedom. We must thus recognise and accept it in faith, because outside faith there is no certainty. Faith is related to obedience, and obedience implies freedom. Barth emphasised that freedom under the Word of God is the freedom of all Christians, so 'each individual who confesses his or her acceptance of the testimony of the Bible must be

willing and prepared to undertake the responsibility for its interpretation and application.⁴¹ The interpretation of the Bible is, indeed, the concern of the whole Church; and yet all Christians must accept a necessary and fundamental form of all scriptural exegesis, namely the freely performed act of subordinating all human concepts, ideas and convictions to the witness of revelation supplied to us in the Bible.

The principle of Barth's Biblical hermeneutics is thus 'subordination'.⁴² As such, subordination means the liberation of our ideas, thoughts and convictions from the images and certainties which we ourselves have formed about God, the world, and ourselves. This principle of Biblical interpretation lies in the content of the Bible itself, namely Jesus Christ as the name of the God who deals graciously with the human being, the sinner. Consequently, the source of the Biblical hermeneutics comes from the Bible itself; and thus Biblical hermeneutics must be protected against the totalitarian claim of a general hermeneutics. Three practical steps must be taken into consideration here.⁴³ The first is the process of observation, namely the way to establish the fact, and so to distinguish the real from the unreal, or the certain from the uncertain. The method of source-criticism, including literary-historical investigation, lexicography, grammar, and syntax, is certainly very important. The second step is the process of reflection, namely the way to 'go along with the text'. This is the moment of the transition from the picture observed to the picture contemplated. Barth realised that no one can reflect on a text without certain philosophical keys, and yet the Bible must be still necessarily the subject, and not the object of the criticism.⁴⁴ The third step is the process of appropriation. Here, we are concerned with the process of assimilation and application of the text, namely the process to transpose the centre of our attention from the system of our own concerns and questions to the scriptural word itself.

3.3. Significance and Criticism

Barth's theology, according to Hartwell,⁴⁵ represents a Copernican turn in the history of human thought about God, the universe and human being. Barth has revolutionised the theological climate that prevailed since the Reformation, by again making God, and not human being, the starting point, centre and goal of theological thought. No wonder, Professor Torrance called Barth 'the greatest theological genius that has appeared on the scene for centuries'.⁴⁶ Undoubtedly, Barth's theology vertically starts from above. It is entirely based on the axiom of God as the Wholly Other (*totaliter aliter*). And yet, there is a slight shift from *The Epistle to the Romans* to *Church Dogmatics*, because the former work is based on the axiom of God as God, whereas the later work, on the axiom of God as revealing Himself in Jesus Christ. Barth's theology of the Word of

God seems to make God very distant and transcendent, and to ignore the Divine immanence. It must be remembered, however, that Barth's theology is intended to combat any type of rationalism. By insisting on the Wholly Other, it does not mean that Barth would deny God's immanence in the World, because according to him, God cannot be understood apart from humanity, nor humanity apart from God. He thus emphasized the concept of God's *togetherness* with humanity, God with us;⁴⁷ and consequently God is inseparable from human beings and the universe.

In relation to Barth's hermeneutics, Jeanrond argued that the hermeneutical question for Barth arises primarily from the ultimate material question of theology, namely what the Word of God is and who I am in relation to the Word of God.⁴⁸ In this case, Jeanrond categorised Barth as developing a macro-hermeneutics rather than a micro-hermeneutics.⁴⁹ Similarly, according to Eberhard Jungel,⁵⁰ Barth's hermeneutics was a hermeneutics of revelation and not a hermeneutics of signification. Barth was not concerned with semiotic problems in the process of text-interpretation. He was more concerned with the attempt to protect Biblical texts from any uncritical claim of the historians and exegetes, those who pretended to have understood texts when they have analysed them as historical documents. Barth's attempt was certainly legitimate. Yet he seemed to forget that texts can only begin to witness to something when they are read. There is no possibility of a shortcut to the sense of the Biblical text without participating in and through the text itself. There can be no critical macro-hermeneutics without critical micro-hermeneutics. Without such a process, Barth's criterion for Biblical interpretation, namely God is God, or God as revealing Himself in Jesus Christ, remains indeed mere positivism, as Bonhoeffer had suggested.⁵¹

In addition, Barth did not help us to grasp how we can disclose the message of the Bible for our contemporary time. He did not deal with the cultural problems which are conditioning the reading context. His proposition on macro hermeneutics may not only have failed to appreciate the importance of the humanity of God, but also the basic hermeneutical condition in which we recognise the difference between God and human beings. For this, Jeanrond gave his comments, "The radical distinction between God and the world, in Barth's idea, has made it difficult for Barth to address the double need of theological hermeneutics, namely the need to develop an adequate theory of text-interpretation, and at the same time to develop an adequate theory of world-interpretation. Both influence each other. The latter provides the context in which the former works and the former participates in the establishment of the latter."⁵²

Barth's proposition on Biblical hermeneutics may also leave us in doubt on how we know and recognise the Word of God.⁵³ If the Word of God is not the actual letter of the Bible, and if the Bible is only the witness to the Word of God, then how can we know the Word of God? Apparently, Barth himself was aware of this problem. In his *Church Dogmatics*, he asked himself, "How is the Word of God to be recognised?"⁵⁴ Barth reminded us that we have no natural faculty by which we can recognise the Word of God. His emphasis is, thus, the self-revelation of God in His Word, and the self-interpreted Biblical text, as well as the obedient witness to the self revelation of God in His Word. This can be easily misunderstood as if Barth would give no room for human reason to participate in understanding the Word of God as attested in the Bible. In sum, Barth would be regarded as denying the universal self-revelation of God in human reason and conscience.

Due to his hermeneutical principle of 'subordination', Barth was misunderstood and accused as a biblicist. On this point, he answered, in his preface to the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*, that his attempt was just to wrestle with the scandals in modern thought..., because he has discovered precisely in these point the characteristic and veritable discernment of Paul [the Epistle].⁵⁵ His primary intention was thus not to rely literally on the letter of the text, but to keep to the spirit of the text. Barth himself strongly condemned any kind of effort to identify the letter and the spirit of the Biblical text.⁵⁶ And yet, Barth's attempt to protect Biblical interpretation from any threat of modern thoughts has misled him in understanding Bultmann's reflection on hermeneutics. He considered Bultmann as becoming a victim of philosophical thought, for the belief that there can be no exegesis without presuppositions.⁵⁷ According to Barth, presuppositions in any approach to the texts would need to be seen as determining the understanding of those texts, and any theological programme which starts from outside the determination of faith must be rejected. The question is: 'Would presuppositions always determine the meaning?' Barth seemed to forget what he said in the second step of his Biblical hermeneutics that no one could reflect on a text without certain philosophical keys.

4. Concluding Remarks

Schleiermacher's theology is characterised by the combination between 'the empathetic experience', 'the relation to history' and 'the critical analyses in the Enlightenment style'. In this perspective, hermeneutics is defined as the art of understanding. Concerning the Biblical texts, he proposed to approach and understand them in the framework of general hermeneutics. In this matter, he

invited the interpreter to empathise with the experience of the author in producing a text. Here, he pointed out two aspects of hermeneutics, namely the grammatical and the technical or psychological interpretation. The first is objective, and the second is subjective. Yet both of them are in the same level. The understanding of the Bible, therefore, must be attained as a result of the dialectical process of the grammatical and technical or psychological interpretation. In addition, Schleiermacher was totally aware that the process of understanding as an artistic activity is never a total grasp; it is only an approximation. Hermeneutics is, accordingly, an unending process.

On the one hand, we have to realise that Schleiermacher's theory of hermeneutics is not without problems. One of the main problems is undoubtedly related to the technical or psychological interpretation. It seems very difficult to achieve Schleiermacher's emphasis on the attempt to understand the original sense of the text, that is to say the meaning as intended by the author. The problem will be more complicated if we deal with the authors of the Books of the Bible. On the other hand, we have to acknowledge that Schleiermacher has given an important contribution to the development of hermeneutics. Through him, hermeneutics was no longer under theological and literary disciplines. It has now its own autonomous discipline. Moreover, his theory of hermeneutics has had a big impact on the development of Biblical exegesis. The fact that Biblical exegesis now applies the historical-critical method and literary analysis must certainly be credited to him. No wonder, he is considered as the father of liberal Protestant theology.

In relation to Barth's theology, it can be said that, as such, it comprises both thought and action, since 'knowledge of God' is at once 'service of God'. Barth founded his theology on the revelation of God, namely the incarnation and the presence of the eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Consequently, the task of theology is always related to the ministry of the Word of God. In this perspective, doing Biblical hermeneutics must be certainly inseparable from the ministry of the Word of God. Concerning the Word of God as attested in the Bible, however, he mentioned two things. On the one hand, Holy Scripture is distinctive from divine revelation; it is only the human speech about God's revelation. On the other hand, Holy Scripture is in unity with revelation; it is based on divine revelation and thus identical with the very Word of God.

Just as his theology, Barth's Biblical hermeneutics is characterised as 'theocentric'. According to him, the Bible must not be approached and understood in the framework of general hermeneutics as Schleiermacher insisted on. This means that the attempt to approach and understand the Bible using the historical-critical method is not enough. It must be approached and

understood beyond history into the spirit of the Bible, namely the Eternal Spirit itself. Biblical hermeneutics must not be governed by what is in the mind of the interpreter, but on what is revealed by God in the Bible. An interpreter, therefore, must let the Bible speak for itself, under the principle of subordination. This also means that an interpreter places himself or herself beneath the Word of God which is superior to him or her. Concerning the process of Biblical hermeneutics, he proposed three practical steps. The first is to observe the *sensus* and structure of the Biblical text so that an interpreter may obtain a picture of what the author said. The second is to reflect on a Biblical text with the help of certain philosophical keys. The third is to assimilate the concerns and questions of the interpreter with God's purpose. Total obedience is therefore the only adequate human response to the Word of God.

Indeed, Barth limited himself to the defence of a particular form of Biblical hermeneutics. He refused to accept the legitimacy of other theories of hermeneutics. No wonder, he is usually categorised as following the track of 'neo-orthodoxy'. Yet Barth's Biblical hermeneutics is not without problem. The main question here is certainly related to the way how to know God's purpose in a certain text. There must be many difficulties to know what is really intended and meant by God. It seems that such a difficulty is identical with what is found in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. The question on Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is how to understand the mind behind the human author, whereas the question on Barth's hermeneutics is how to understand the 'mind' behind God. After all, we still need a kind of practical technique to deal with the 'human' aspect of 'sacred' texts.

The debate between Schleiermacher and Karl Barth in understanding the sacred texts can undoubtedly remind us to the approach developed by Fazlur Rahman and Sayyid Qutb. And yet, on this point, we have to wait till the next volume of *Orientasi Baru. In shâ'a Allâh!*

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Endnotes:

- 1 Cf. Jeanron, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 1.
- 2 McAuliffe, "Qur'anic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir," in A. Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, 47.
- 3 According to Kimmerle, Schleiermacher's manuscripts on hermeneutics were written at various times: 1) "The Aphorisms of 1805 and 1809", 2) "The First Draft from the Period between 1810

- and 1819", 3) "The Compendium of 1819", 4) "The Separate Exposition of the Second Part (1820-1829)", 5) "The Academy Addresses of 1829" and 6) "The Material Notes of 1832-1833". Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 22-26.
- 4 Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, p. 28.
 - 5 What is important in hermeneutics is the process of understanding and not the explication or presentation of that which has been understood. According to Schleiermacher, the latter would be only one special part of the art of speaking and writing. Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 95-97.
 - 6 Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 97. This also means that hermeneutics has a philosophical status. Questions are thus very philosophical: What is human understanding? How does it happen? How is a text to be understood? How does understanding itself occur?
 - 7 Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 35.
 - 8 Schleiermacher said, in the first manuscript, that the attempt to understand what is related to the person behind the text would constitute three processes. Firstly, it is to understand what the author and the reader have in common. Secondly, it is to understand the author when the interpreter, as a reader, reconstructs him. Thirdly, it is to understand what is distinctive about the reader that leads the author to consider him as someone special and different. Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 44, 50, 80.
 - 9 Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 162. In another manuscript Schleiermacher also said that the two tasks of grammatical interpretation are to determine the essential meaning from a given usage, and to ascertain an unknown usage from the meaning. Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 76.
 - 10 In this matter, the unity of the work, its theme, is regarded as the dynamic principle impelling the author. The basic features of the composition are regarded as the distinctive nature of the author, revealing itself in that movement. Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 162, 147.
 - 11 Since it is impossible to have a complete knowledge of the language and a complete knowledge of the person, then it is necessary to move back and forth between the grammatical and psychological sides. Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 99-100.
 - 12 This interpretative approximation can be guided, however, by certain rules in order to safeguard the critical and responsible character of the hermeneutical process, namely the objective and subjective reconstruction of a given statement. The objective reconstruction can be operated through a comparative method, by comparing what is already understood with what is not yet understood, while the subjective reconstruction can be done by taking into consideration the inner movement in producing thoughts. The relationship between those two operations lies in the notion that any part of a text can be understood only by means of an understanding of the whole, and that for this reason every explanation of a given element already presupposes that the whole has been understood. Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 41, 80, 111, 193-195.
 - 13 Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 67.
 - 14 Schleiermacher said that the New Testament writings are usually divided into historical and doctrinal books. Schleiermacher, F., *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. Mackintosh, 594.
 - 15 According to Schleiermacher, all languages pass through three stages of development, namely origin, maturity and decay. The period of decay in the Greek language can be detected as early as the time of Alexander. Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, 123.
 - 16 Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, 227.
 - 17 Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, 15.
 - 18 Jeanrond, W., *Theological Hermeneutics*, 139.
 - 19 Schleiermacher, F., *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscript*, 83. See also Jeanrond, W., *Theological Hermeneutics*, 47.
 - 20 Jeanrond, W., *Theological Hermeneutics*, 139

- 21 Schleiermacher, F., *The Christian Faith*, 6.
- 22 Barth, K., *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, ed. Ritschl and transl. G. Bromiley, 183.
- 23 Barth, K., *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, p. 183. One of Schleiermacher's theorem on the inspiration of Scripture says, "The individual books of the New Testament are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the collection of them took place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." Schleiermacher, F., *The Christian Faith*, 597.
- 24 Green, C. (ed.), *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, 175.
- 25 Barth, K., *The Epistle to the Romans*, 10. Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, 113.
- 26 Cf. Hartwell, H., *The Theology of Karl Barth: an Introduction*, 13. Green, C. (ed.), *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, 118.
- 27 Hartwell, H., *The Theology of Karl Barth: an Introduction*, 41.22.
- 28 McConnachie, *The Barthian Theology*, 39.
- 29 In his First Article of Barmen, Barth said that Jesus Christ, as He is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one word of God whom we have to hear, and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death. Green, C. (ed.), *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, 149. Here Barth offered his teaching of the threefold form of the Word of God. The first form is the human Jesus of Nazareth. The second form is Holy Scripture as the witness to Jesus. The third form is the witness of the Church. It is in those three forms that the Word of God is revealed, written and proclaimed to every Christian. Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 98.
- 30 God's revelation is thus identical with the incarnation of the eternal Word, Jesus Christ. It is the event when God became man, or the Word became flesh, or the Word became time. In this matter, Jesus Christ entered into a historical time and a temporal present, namely a present with a past behind it and a future in front of it. Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 50.
- 31 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 28, 52, and 58.
- 32 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 463-464.
- 33 Firstly, it is the limitation element of the Bible, that is its distinctiveness from revelation, in so far as it is only a human word about revelation. Secondly, it is the positive element of the Bible, that is its unity with revelation, in so far as revelation is the basis, object and content of this word. In this second sense, we may say that the Bible is the very Word of God. Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 463.
- 34 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 464.
- 35 Barth, K., *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6. 9.
- 36 He also said, "We cannot free ourselves from the texts in which its expectation and recollection are attested to us. We are tied to these texts. And we can only ask about revelation when we surrender to the expectation and recollection attested in these texts." Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 492. Cf. Barth, K., *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1.
- 37 He said, "By genuine understanding and interpretation, I mean that creative energy which Luther exercised with intuitive certainty in his exegesis; which underlies the systematic interpretation of Calvin ..., how energetically Calvin, having first established what stands in the text, sets himself to re-think the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent." Barth, K., *The Epistle to the Romans*, 7.
- 38 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 471.
- 39 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 502.
- 40 For Barth, to say the Word of God is also to say the Word of God; it is therefore to speak about a being and event which are not under human control. Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 527.
- 41 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 661.
- 42 Through 'subordination', the fog and the shadow of our intellectual life have been broken and dissolved, so that the Word of God becomes clear again to us. Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 716.

- 43 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 722-740.
- 44 Some points must be taken into consideration here: 1) we have to be aware of the essential distance between our own scheme of thought and the determinative thought of Holy Scripture, 2) the role of our key of thought serves only as a hypothesis, 3) the use of a specific mode of thought we bring with us cannot in any way become an end in itself, 4) in using some sort of key of thought, there is no essential reason for preferring one of these schemes to another, 5) the use of a scheme of thought is legitimate and fruitful when it is determined and controlled by a Biblical text. Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 730-735.
- 45 Hartwell, H., *The Theology of Karl Barth: an Introduction*, 179-180.
- 46 Hartwell, H., *The Theology of Karl Barth: an Introduction*, 179.
- 47 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, 3-20. See also Green, C. (ed.), *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, 52.
- 48 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 187.
- 49 Jeanrond, W., *Theological Hermeneutics*, 130. Macro-hermeneutics means the interpretation of the universe. Here, the universe and its history could be regarded as 'text'. Micro-hermeneutics means the interpretation of individual expressions of a linguistic or artistic nature. Both are certainly related each other. Jeanrond, W., *Theological Hermeneutics*, 4.
- 50 Jeanrond, W., *Theological Hermeneutics*, 133, 136.
- 51 Jeanrond, W., *Theological Hermeneutics*, 135. Barth's Biblical hermeneutics shows as if God's revelation in His Word will be positively 'unveiled' in and by itself. There is an impression here that the Word of God can be 'disclosed' without any human effort.
- 52 Jeanrond, W., *Theological Hermeneutics*, 137.
- 53 McConaichie, J., *The Barthian Theology*, 303.
- 54 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 194.
- 55 Barth, K., *The Epistle to the Romans*, 11-12.
- 56 Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 506.
- 57 Here Bultmann also used the term 'pre-understanding'. He said, "Hence it is evident that each interpretation is guided by a certain interest, by a certain *putting of the question* It is evident that the questioning arises from a particular interest in the matter referred to, and therefore that a particular understanding of the matter is presupposed. I like to call this a *pre-understanding*." Bultmann, R., *History and Eschatology*, 113.

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