

HERMENEUTICS AND EDUCATION

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
THE WORK OF EBELING AND RICOEUR  
AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Michael A. Threlfall

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## SYNOPSIS

Language and interpretation are fundamental and wide ranging issues in both hermeneutics and education.

This thesis is an attempt to explore:

- 1) the dimensions of hermeneutics through selected aspects of the German theologian Gerhard Ebeling and the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur; and
- 2) an attempt to appropriate appropriately these hermeneutical perspectives in the sphere of education in general, and Religious Education in particular.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### Hermeneutics and Education

This thesis is an attempt to link hermeneutics as a 'way of knowing' with education as a 'way of being practical'.<sup>1</sup> Language and interpretation are major and broad issues in both hermeneutics and education, therefore specific approaches to these areas have been adopted:

Introduction to and outline of hermeneutics.

Ways of knowing - Hermeneutics in Ebeling and Ricoeur.

Language: An exploration of the categories of authority, responsibility, challenge and understanding, in Gerhard Ebeling's 'Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language'.<sup>2</sup>

Interpretation: An analysis of Language and Discourse, the Matter/Notion/Model of the Text, Distanciation and Appropriation in the philosophical hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur.

Ways of being practical - Hermeneutics and Education.

Is it possible for the categories of Ebeling's theory of language fused with aspects of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics to be appropriated appropriately in the sphere of education?

The following quotation provides a focus for the whole discussion:

It is assumed that every educational choice is based upon a value commitment to some interpretative framework by those involved in the curriculum process.<sup>3</sup>

The thesis will be developed:

Section 1 will endeavour to:

- a) clarify the language and vocabulary of hermeneutics - Words;
- b) realise some general features about the nature and scope of hermeneutics: It's all a question of interpretation - Possibility and Problem;
- c) i) offer an example of interpretation: A biblical hermeneutic;  
ii) point to other theories of interpretation;
- d) ground the thesis in a particular interpretative theory: It's all a matter of interpretation - The task of hermeneutics.

Section 2 and Section 3 will consist of an exploration of two approaches to the debate concerning language, interpretation and hermeneutics by way of a selective exposition of those issues in the work of:

- a) Gerhard Ebeling, and
- b) Paul Ricoeur.

Ways of Knowing: A language hermeneutic appropriate to education?

Section 2: Gerhard Ebeling - theologian of the word.

Hermeneutics as the 'unity in language of past events with present decisions' (Gregor Smith). The centrality and importance of language as the 'power which creates understanding' (Ebeling). This statement will be explored by way of Ebeling's formulation of and the categories of his 'Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language':

- a) Boredom with language - Crisis.
- b) The jungle of language - Confusion.
- c) Theories of language - Scepticism.
- d) A theory of language with the widest possible horizon - Dimensions and Categories.

Ways of Knowing: A text hermeneutic appropriate to education?

Section 3: Paul Ricoeur - philosopher of interpretation.

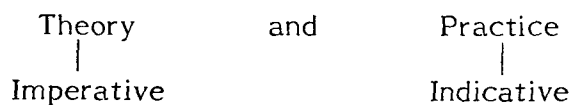
Hermeneutics as 'the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts' (Ricoeur).

- a) Foreword - a brief resume of some contemporary views on language: Linguistic criteria:
  - i) Structural linguistics;
  - ii) Logical linguistic analysis;
  - iii) Phenomenological philosophy of language.
- b) Selected key areas in Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics:
  - i) Language and Discourse: the hermeneutical function of distanciation;
  - ii) The Matter/Notion/Model of the text: the hermeneutical aim of appropriation.

Section 4: Ways of being practical: Hermeneutics and Education.

The relationship of the possibility and problem of hermeneutics to education. Is it possible for the categories of Ebeling's theory of language fused with aspects of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics to be appropriated appropriately in the sphere of education and particularly Religious Education?

- a) The scope of the curriculum: A fusion of horizons?



- i) Introduction: Imperative condition;  
Indicative context.
- ii) A philosophical educational hermeneutic; a theory of education. Philip Phenix - Mastery and Belonging.

- b) The content and arrangement of the curriculum
  - i) 'The Practical Curriculum' - School's Council Working Paper 70. The 'matter' of the text.
  - ii) A planned curriculum - The Avon Agreed Syllabus of Religious Education. The 'action' of the text.
- c) Curriculum critique: A conflict of horizons?
  - i) Choice, commitment and framework.
  - ii) Critique.
  - iii) Language/Text hermeneutic: Religious Education as an 'instance of discourse' - Implications.



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3. Manen, Max von(see 1 above), p.226.

## 1.1 THE LANGUAGE AND VOCABULARY OF HERMENEUTICS: WORDS

A Thesaurus is a vocabulary on a large scale, categorised by topics. With such an arrangement it offers a choice of words to fit any given context [which] gives a rich and accessible vocabulary, assorted, graded and labelled.<sup>1</sup>

## 520 Interpretation

**N.** interpretation, definition, explanation, explication, exposition, exegesis, epexegesis; elucidation, light, clarification, illumination; illustration, exemplification 83n. example; enucleation, resolution, solution, key, clue, the secret 460n. answer; decipherment, decoding, cracking 484n. discovery; emendation 654n. amendment; application, particular interpretation, twist, turn; construction, construe, reading, lection 514n. meaning; euhemerism, demythologization; allegorisation 519n. metaphor; accepted reading, usual text, vulgate; alternative reading, variant r.; criticism, textual c., higher c., literary c., critique, review 480n. estimate; critical power, critic's gift 480n. judgement; insight, feeling, sympathy 819n. moral sensibility.

interpreter, clarifier, explainer, exponent, expounder, expositer, exegete 537n. teacher; rationalist, rationalizer, euhemerist, demythologizer; editor 528n.

**Adj.** interpretive, interpretative, constructive; explanatory, explicative, elucidatory; expositive, expository; exegetical, hermeneutic; defining, definitive; illuminating, illustrative, exemplary; glossarial, annotative, scholiastic, editorial; lip-reading, translative, paraphrastic, metaphrastic; polyglot; mediumistic; co-significative, synonymous, equivalent 28adj. accurate; faithful 551adj. representing; free 494adj. inexact.

interpreted, etc. vb.; explained, defined, expounded, elucidated, clarified; annotated, commented, commented, edited; translated, rendered, Englished; deciphered, decoded, cracked.

**Vb.** interpret, define, clarify, make clear; explain, unfold, expound, elucidate 516vb. be intelligible; illustrate 83vb. show; act as guide, show round; comment on, edit, write notes for, annotate, compose a commentary, gloss, gloze, gloze upon; read, spell, spell out; adopt a reading. <sup>1</sup>

As can be seen, Hermeneutics and Hermeneutic are within the extremely broad category of Interpretation.

In the Concise Oxford Dictionary the meaning of hermeneutics/ hermeneutic is defined as 'being of interpretation ... especially of Scripture'. Hermeneutics is localised in the discipline of the exegesis of Scripture. The history of hermeneutics can be traced through this exegetical lineage, i.e. an attempt to make something clear.

A. C. Thiselton<sup>2</sup> points to this 'traditional history' of hermeneutics as the formulation of the general rules governing the interpretation of Biblical texts but he also gives the term a much wider and more contemporary reference. This has mainly been due to the profound influence of Schleiermacher - hermeneutics as the 'discipline of understanding correctly the content of the discourse of another person'.<sup>3</sup>

This wider and more contemporary reference of hermeneutics is traced through the work of such writers as Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Bultmann and Gadamer.

The term hermeneutics in this thesis will be given this wider and hopefully contemporary reference. Hermeneutics will be treated as a serious 'language game' (Wittgenstein) but it will not be reduced to a 'collection of rules' but that it 'must serve the understanding' (Ebeling) and that it may 'indicate the vectors which call for further development'<sup>4</sup> vis a vis Hermeneutics and Education. However, as will be seen:

Hermeneutics is not a well-defined field. In its broadest sense it means interpretation and generally suggests the idea of a text as that which is interpreted - but there is no unified or agreed upon criteria for interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

Because of its broadness hermeneutics is often seen as a confused area and a curious amalgam of various streams of thought but it is hoped that this thesis as a vocabulary on a large scale, categorised by topics and by its arrangement offers a choice of words that may be applicable to a given context: that context being education, and in particular, Religious Education.

Thus, the overall aim of this thesis is to attempt to give a 'weighted focus'<sup>6</sup> to hermeneutics and formulate a particular view of hermeneutics which is 'suggestive' rather than 'precise'<sup>7</sup> but a focus that may be appropriate to education and specifically an 'instance' of educational discourse, namely Religious Education/Studies.

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5. Ibid., p.6.
6. Ibid., p.14.
7. Ibid. cf. Introduction, pp.3-25.

1.2 THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF HERMENEUTICS: IT'S ALL  
A QUESTION OF INTERPRETATION: POSSIBILITY AND  
PROBLEM

Alphabets

From time to time we take our pen in hand  
And scribble symbols on a blank white sheet.  
Their meaning is at everyone's command;  
It is a game whose rules are nice and neat.

But if a savage or a moon-man came  
And found a page, a furrowed runic field,  
And curiously studied lines and frame:  
How strange would be the world that they revealed.  
A magic gallery of oddities.

(From 'Alphabets' by Herman Hesse, in "The Glass Bead Game".)

Whenever a man dreams or raves another man arises to give an interpretation and what was already discourse, even if incoherent is brought into coherent discourse by hermeneutics.<sup>1</sup>

Interpretation is the exploration and elucidation of meaning and this seems to imply the possibility of expressing anew in a different way that which is to be interpreted.<sup>2</sup>

It is significant that the word hermeneutics (Greek: hermen-euon, hermeneia) has its roots in the Greek mythological figure of Hermes: Hermes, the son of Zeus and May, who began his illustrious and varied career as a god by stealing some heifers but appeased his action by inventing the lyre to soothe the wrath of the gods. His natural talent as an appeaser and smooth talker led to him becoming the god of commerce. His realm was that of profit both lawful and unlawful, the patron of merchants, the guardian of roads and the god of travellers whom he guided on their perilous way. His reputation, based upon his ability to use subtle and persuasive words, grew, and he later became the god of eloquence. Hermes also conveyed messages to humans in their dreams. He carried the herald's wand or Caduceus and had wings on his sandals and shoulders, and thus conducted the spirits of the dead to the underworld. In short, Hermes straddled the crack of two worlds: the manifest and the hidden. He was a bridge, a mediator between two worlds, an interpreter.

There are always two worlds, the world of the text and that of the reader and consequently there is the need for Hermes 'to translate from one to the other'.<sup>3</sup>



The meaning of the word hermeneutics has developed in three main directions:

To put into words (express), to expound (explain) and to translate (interpret). The link between these three divergent meanings is a concern for the understanding of language by language, that is the achievement of understanding either by a statement which is to the point, an explanation which makes the meaning clear or an accurate translation. The same intention is present in each case: to enable language to achieve its full effect in carrying out its function. Thus hermeneutics does not set out to add anything to language but only to remove what prevents it being effective.<sup>4</sup>

The contours of the hermeneutical map are beginning to emerge; the worlds of Interpretation and Interpreter inhabiting the language realm.

Initially hermeneutics will be viewed as coterminous with interpretation; as the possibility of exploration and elucidation of meaning and as a theory of understanding appropriate to an attempt to translate or clarify that which is to be interpreted. It is hoped that this appropriate theory of understanding will lead to a hermeneutic with the 'widest possible horizon': vis a vis hermeneutics and education.

Hermeneutics is both imperative and indicative. By hermeneutics we state the necessity and inevitability of interpretation and by hermeneutic we are able to interpret. Hermeneutics is at one and the same time a necessary theory of understanding and is able to

provide a methodology appropriate to enable understanding to take place. Hermeneutics is both theory and technique.

<u>The need to interpret:</u> <u>(Imperative)</u>	In man's quest to understand himself, in his drive to examine and scrutinise the conditions of his existence, to come to grips with his world, he must inevitably <u>engage in interpretation</u> . <sup>6</sup>
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<u>The means to interpret:</u> <u>(Indicative)</u>	The nature of language and meaning, of action, of interpretation and subjectivity are issues of increasing concern to a wide range of contemporary disciplines. For philosophers, linguists, literary critics and social scientists the <u>clarification</u> of such issues has become an urgent and inescapable task. <sup>7</sup>
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Hermeneutics is the term which signifies the questions and principles underlying interpretation. However, hermeneutics is also problematic. It also signifies the problems and difficulties inherent in attempting to understand the language and the meaning of that which is to be interpreted.

Language itself is from the outset and for the most part distorted; it means something other than what it says, it has a double meaning; it is equivocal.<sup>8</sup>

and To interpret is to understand a double meaning.<sup>9</sup>

The task of hermeneutics is to set in motion the 'elements of a conviction'<sup>10</sup> (the 'Interpretational Imperative'<sup>11</sup>) but the conviction uncovers an 'internal aporia'<sup>12</sup>. There is always the 'Conflict of

'Interpretations' <sup>13</sup> in explication (*Auslegung*), in bringing out what is implicit to a notion there is always the possibility of illusion.

There are no general hermeneutics, no universal canon of exegesis, only disparate and opposed theories concerning rules of interpretation. There are two poles. On the one hand hermeneutics is understood as the manifestation and restoration of meaning addressed to me in the manner of a message, a proclamation, a kerygma, and on the other hand hermeneutics is understood as demystification, as a reduction of illusion. <sup>14</sup>

For Ricoeur, hermeneutics is willingness to suspect and willingness to listen. There is risk involved in interpretation. To become involved in the 'Hermeneutic Motion' <sup>15</sup> is to be at risk. By 'attempting to express anew in a different way that which is to be interpreted' one risks the clarification that may enlarge, modify or even correct one's view. To be involved in the hermeneutic situation (Imperative: theory; Indicative: technique) is to be at risk by participating in interpretation. The interpretation may be the interpretation of oneself.

This engagement of the interpreter with that which is to be interpreted (the hermeneutical situation) has been expressed in provocative and imaginative language in Chapter Five of George Steiner's book, 'After Babel'. <sup>16</sup> In that chapter, he outlines what he considers to be the situation of hermeneutics: the 'Hermeneutic Motion'. This situation, as motion would suggest, is ongoing and vital. <sup>17</sup> Interpretation is an 'act of elicitation' (Steiner), a process of clarification which leads to an 'appropriate transfer of meaning' (Steiner). The movement is towards the realisation of discourse through interpretation.

Time is bridged, distance is overcome and appropriation as 'remedy' (Ricoeur) occurs. The first 'phase' of the hermeneutic motion is that of 'Initiative Trust'. When we choose to interpret we venture a leap. We 'wager' (Ricoeur) on the significance of that which is to be interpreted. The initial situation of interpretation is primarily one of this initiative trust. We have an innate and initial confidence in that which is to be expressed, explained and interpreted, is of significance.

We move through the operative conventions of translation; using that which has gone before in order to make clear, to optimise on the experiences and knowledge of the past ... but ... the translator must gamble on the coherence, the symbolic plenitude of the world. <sup>19</sup>

The second feature of Steiner's Hermeneutic Motion is that interpretation is almost an act of 'Aggression'. It is incursive as by translating/interpreting we invade a text and presume by so doing to extract present meaning. The act of interpretation is therefore not neutral, it is an act whereby 'authentic being is comprehended when meaning is realised' (Steiner). By this 'incursive extraction' (Steiner) we become involved and there is the risk of being transformed. This leads to Steiner's third point; that the act of interpretation is 'Incorporative'. There is what he calls the 'sacramental intake'. Something is born out of the act of interpretation, an 'incarnation' occurs which affects our existence. We may be 'consumed' and/or 'converted'. Initiative trust, aggression and incorporation carry us forward to the fourth general phase of Steiner's Hermeneutic Motion and that is the metaphor of the act of interpretation being like a

'Piston Stroke'. Interpretation is continuous, never complete.

The a-prioristic movement of trust puts us off balance. We lean toward the confronting text. We encircle and invade cognitively. We come home laden, thus again off balance, having caused disequilibrium throughout the system by taking away from 'the other' and by adding, though possibly with ambiguous consequences, to 'our own'. The system is now off tilt. The hermeneutic act must compensate. If it is to be authentic it must mediate into exchange and restore parity.<sup>20</sup>

Between the utterance and interpretation of meaning through verbal sign systems on the one hand and the extreme multiplicity of variety of human tongues on the other, lies the domain of language as a whole.<sup>21</sup>

John MacQuarrie, in less dramatic phrases, outlines similar, general features of the hermeneutical situation. In Chapter Seven of 'God-Talk'<sup>22</sup> he points to six general characteristics with regard to interpretation. As a preliminary definition, he views interpretation as:

The exploration and elucidation of meaning and this seems to imply the possibility of expressing anew in a different way that which is to be interpreted.<sup>23</sup>

- i) The interpreter has already some kind of understanding. Interpretation is never without presuppositions and these presuppositions constitute the hermeneutical situation.
- ii) Circularity is involved in the process. The aim is for a new

understanding which may enlarge, modify or even correct one's view. The interpretation of a text may be the interpretation of oneself.

- iii) There is the need in interpretation to be familiar with more than one mode of expression, e.g. translation from one language to another:

The phenomenon of translation is the very heart of hermeneutics. In it one confronts the basic historical situation of having to piece together the meaning of a text, working with grammatical, historical and other tools to decipher that text.<sup>24</sup>

The general direction of interpretation is thus from the less familiar to the more familiar.

- iv) This will require a measure of sympathy and affinity between the interpreter and that which he is attempting to interpret. The aim in Gadamer's phrase is for a 'fusion of horizons'.
- v) It follows that there are rules in interpretation. There is thus a scientific element in interpretation. This may, for instance, take the form of philological questions of grammar and syntax merging into historical questions of context and culture.
- vi) The recognition of interpretation as an art as well as a science. In Fuch's phrase, 'the art of making transfer'.

Edward Schillebeeckx, in his book 'The Understanding of Faith'<sup>25</sup> also expresses these general features of interpretation in specific relation to:

The relevance of phenomenological hermeneutic principles to a theological interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

In the context of Schillebeeckx's outline, the 'significant discourse' (Schleiermacher) is that of the bible and he arranges these general features under three headings:

i) The need for a critically analysed pre-understanding

The whole complex of analysed presuppositions, which Heidegger has in my opinion, correctly called the 'hermeneutical situation' implies, at least theoretically, no prior decision about what the bible has to say to us, although it does throw light on the conditions of understanding under which contemporary communication with the Christian message is made possible. In this sense the past, scripture and the interpretation of the message throughout the centuries, is interpreted in the light of the present.<sup>27</sup>

ii) The movement of this process of interpretation is circular

Our point of departure is a definite pre-understanding, but our intention is to gain a new understanding. The meaning of the text has a reaction on our presuppositions, with the result that they are enlarged, changed or corrected. In this sense theological interpretation is at the same time critical self-interpretation.<sup>28</sup>

iii) Re-interpretation is only possible if the interpreter has other ways of speaking at his disposal

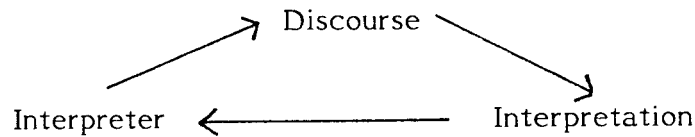
The most obvious example of this is, again, the mythological way of speaking. Just as pluralism in the interpretation of faith is diachronistically a fact, so too we must accept synchronistic pluralism in contemporary interpretations of faith which are nonetheless faithful to the gospel, although a number of criteria have to be borne in mind.<sup>29</sup>

The question of the involvement of the interpreter with that which is to be interpreted can be telescoped into the phrase, the hermeneutical circle. This is succinctly expressed in the following

maxim:

To understand it is necessary to believe,  
to believe it is necessary to understand.

As can be seen from these introductory remarks and quotations, the interpreter is necessarily involved in that which is to be interpreted. An initial presupposition of this thesis, with regard to hermeneutics, is of this circular movement of interpretation: the triadic nature of hermeneutics:



It follows that the interpreter must be necessarily involved to the extent that the apex of the triadic nature of interpretation is discourse and we must orientate ourselves to the text/discourse in such a way that 'the texts must translate us before we can translate them'.<sup>30</sup> If hermeneutics is seen as the 'theory of operations of understanding in relation to the interpretation of texts'<sup>31</sup> then an initial task of hermeneutics is to clarify this relationship of the interpreter to that which is to be interpreted. The first step in this clarification is to state that the hermeneutical situation is precisely that of the 'prior-understanding' (Bultmann) we bring to a text.<sup>32</sup> The underlying possibility and problem of hermeneutics, of the relationship of the interpreter to that which is to be interpreted, is expanded in A. C. Thiselton's book, 'The Two Horizons'.<sup>33</sup> In Chapter One he states that the 'modern interpreter no less than the text stands in a given historical context and tradition'. The responsibility falls upon



the interpreter to attempt to work out the area of his pre-understanding and thus decide upon the appropriateness of that pre-understanding. Hermeneutics could thus be more widely defined as:

the way in which we understand ourselves in relation to the past. Clearly this is bound to involve the present. We have to understand from where we are; we cannot do anything else. But, this present situation of ours is not as it were an empty vessel waiting to be filled with the findings of the past. It is not even a vessel filled with impurities, false views and prejudices or rebellious disinclination to hear the words coming from out of the past. Rather this present situation is for each one of us one in which we are already embedded, but in our own way, in the way peculiar to our own time and circumstances in the structures of traditions ... Hermeneutics as the unity in language of past events with present decisions.<sup>34</sup>

However, this wideness with regard to the nature of hermeneutics/interpretation as a discipline which is 'suggestive' rather than 'precise' (Ihde)<sup>35</sup> has led Morgan<sup>36</sup> to conclude that 'all meaning is hermeneutics'.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Palmer in Chapter Fourteen of 'Hermeneutics'<sup>38</sup> presents his 'Thirty theses on interpretation' where he suggests, for instance, that 'the hermeneutical experience is able to swallow up aesthetics' (Thesis 10), that 'the hermeneutical experience is a disclosure of truth' (Thesis 9), and 'hermeneutics transcends by conceptual knowing' (Thesis 12). Thus, if we are not careful the term hermeneutics could be used to describe almost everything and anything and the 'question of interpretation' could become an extreme

over generalisation which eventually becomes superfluous and too opaque a concept. With this in mind, the discussion will be cored as to the nature and scope of hermeneutics, by an example of one theory of interpretation: a biblical hermeneutic in the form of a brief exegesis of Mark 5:1-20. By outlining one example we are led to outlining other alternative and sometimes conflicting theories of interpretation.

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16. Ibid.
17. cf. Bultmann, R. (1955), Essays: Philosophical and Theological (SCM Press Ltd., especially Chapter 12 'The problem of hermeneutics').
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### 1.3 INTERPRETATION

It is constantly necessary to inhibit the over-hasty assimilation of the past to our own expectation of meaning. Only then will we be able to listen to the past in a way that enables it to make its own meaning heard.

REFERENCE - SECTION 1.3 - TITLE PAGE

Gadamer, H. G. (1975), The Historicity of Understanding  
(Critical Sociology, Ed. Commerton, Penguin, p.132).

### 1.3.1 An Example of Interpretation: A Biblical Hermeneutic

We can summarise these general and wide ranging remarks and quotations with regard to the features of interpretation and the interpreter by saying that the situation of hermeneutics is the fact of the necessity of interpretation and that the context for this is the relationship of the interpreter to that which is to be interpreted. The hermeneutical event is the possibility of 'the uptake of a meaning that transforms the understanding or self-understanding of the interpreter' <sup>1</sup> (Palmer) , and hermeneutics 'systematises and refines the human procedures of disclosure and appropriation' (Schleiermacher). A statement of interpretation as possibility and problem, however, needs more clarification. Therefore, the intention is to take an instance of language, a New Testament passage, Mark 5:1-20, and concentrate upon a specific text and attempt to apply these general comments to it as to the nature and scope of hermeneutics. Much of the work of hermeneutics has been related to the interpretation or exegesis of biblical texts. The proposal is to take Mark 5:1-20 'The Healing of the Gerasene demoniac' as an instance of 'significant discourse' and offer a 'way of looking' at the story according to the well-established tools of exegetical hermeneutics. A clear example of this model of exegesis can be found in Haller's article. <sup>2</sup>

Summarised, the 'Interpretative Task' is well defined. We discover:

- i) The text
  - Translation and examination of the critical apparatus;
  - Philological orientation;
  - The context;
  - Literary form and types.



- ii) The background - Geographic and historical references.
- iii) Word and Meaning - Exegesis of terms and verses;
  - Key terms;
  - Theological parallels;
  - Word and history.
- iv) Summarising - The content;
  - The central point of reference.

The aims of exegesis are thus:

- a) Understanding: the what of the text;
- b) Relating: the how of the text;
- c) Interpreting: the why of the text.

A brief application of Haller's model of text, background, word and meaning, and summary, could be:

#### The Gerasene Demoniac - Mark 5:1-20

In the verses prior to this story, Jesus is reported as having shown his miraculous powers in stilling the storm; the natural, elemental forces are stilled by his word. Jesus now travels across the lake and alights on another shore. As he steps down he is met by a man with an 'unclean spirit', a demoniac. The demoniac inhabits the tombs of the dead, he is uncontrollable, chains and fetters cannot bind him. He shrieks and gashes himself but runs out to meet Jesus with words of recognition. Jesus asks him his name, the reply includes a plea not to be sent out of the country. The spirits are exorcised and are sent into a herd of pigs, two thousand rush headlong over the cliffs and are drowned. Quite naturally the herdsman flees but crowds come to see. The sight that greets them is one of Jesus and the madman who is sat 'clothed in his right mind'. The people are afraid and they beg Jesus to leave. The

man wishes to go with him but is told to return to his own folk. As is usual with a Marcan narrative, the story finishes on a note of amazement.

The earlier form of this story appears to have ended at Verse 15. The story aims to stress the overwhelming power available to Jesus in his contest with demonic powers. As the story immediately prior ('The Stilling of the Storm') would suggest, it raises the question: Who can this be that such immense divine power is at his disposal?

This power is expressed in various ways. A case history is given; no natural power is effective against the man (3-5), the powers admit they have met their match (6-13). Jesus deals with them. A word of command suffices. The crowd testify to his divine power to the extent that they ask him to leave the district (the fear of his power rather than the fear of losing more pigs is the motive pre-supposed in Verse 17<sup>3</sup>).

The reality of the miracle is confirmed by the spirits leaving the man and going into the swine (even if 12-13 is a later addition). Here is the popular belief that spirits when exorcised got into mischief, e.g. upsetting a statue or jug of water.

It may be significant that the incident is set in a predominantly Gentile area. It is the first time Jesus is in Gentile territory and his presence routs and banishes uncleanness. The land is cleansed, ready for Christianising - Verses 18-20, the man is told to proclaim this fact. Does this tie in with the Gentile mission of the Early Church? Lightfoot<sup>4</sup> suggests this view but 'with great reserve and a keen sense of danger inherent in this form of exposition'<sup>5</sup>. The mission

is not in the story itself but contained in Verses 18-20.

Also there may be a definite link to Psalm 68:6, Greek psalter 67:7, 'God maketh the solitary to dwell in a house leading forth mightily them that are bound and also them that behave rebelliously and that dwell in tombs'. Man is restored by Jesus to that family and community which is proper to man.

The above (mainly from Lightfoot and Nineham) is a brief example that there are many interpretations of what the story is saying in its own context but it may be that 'it is not profitable to attempt rationalising versions as to what may have occurred'<sup>6</sup>. What the above may show is that the story, in New Testament terms, is 'significant discourse' (Schleiermacher) and that it is first a story, containing the element of power, that power is a reality and that therefore the events are significant. First a few textual points:<sup>7</sup>

- i) Gerasenes - a city close to the sea! The author is hardly familiar with Palestinian geography.
- ii) Tombs - a famous haunt of demons. Influence of Isaiah 65:1-4 on the story?
- iii) Verse 5 - Moffat translates, 'shreiked' and 'gashed himself'.
- iv) Worshipped - went down on his knees to, and the Gentile demon uses the Gentile way of referring to Israel's God. (Cf. Matthew 8:29), as here with the coming of Jesus the eschatological event has begun, he begs Jesus to spare him the torment that will come.
- v) Name (Wellhausen) - the demon refuses to give his name but gives his number instead. The military overtones to Jeremias

are the result of a linguistic misinterpretation - 'My name is soldier because there are many like me' (Mark 5:1-20).

The word **ligyona** is wrongly understood as Legion: a great number would account for 2,000 or so swine. Schweizer and Good News Bible translates as 'mob'.

- vi) '... out of the country' (Verse 10) - part of the essentially popular character of much of the gospel material and demons often asked favours for leaving a demoniac.
- vii) Two thousand. Jeremias - **telos** - a battalion - 2,048 men.
- viii) Verse 15 - a typical conclusion to this sort of pericope.
- ix) Verses 18-20 - again typical of Marcan style.
- x) Decapolis - a league of 10 cities.

Bultmann<sup>8</sup> maintains that the story is essentially intact in its original form. It exhibits an almost typical pattern of the exorcism of demons. There is:

- i) the meeting with demons;
- ii) a description of the dangerous character of the sickness;
- iii) the recognition of the exorcist by the demon;
- iv) the exorcism;
- v) the demonstrative departure of the demon which leaves a significant impression on the spectator.

(iv) and (v) show the devil being deceived, being 'defrauded of their lodgings' (Wellhausen). Bultmann also maintains that this pattern fits into the pattern of miracle stories generally:

- a) the critical nature of the situation;
- b) the case is presented to Jesus;

c) the performance of the miracle;  
the details of the story testify to the reality of the miracle and the crowd witness this expression of power. These miraculous deeds are not proof of his character but are signs of his messianic authority; his divine power: 'The miracles are, as it were, ... an automatic functioning'.<sup>9</sup>

Jeremias<sup>10</sup> points to Acts 10:38, where it says:

Now God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil; for God was with him.

A critical investigation of the story in Mark 5 leads to four results:

- i) By a literary-critical analysis, the content of the story diminishes and this serves to heighten the element of miracle.
- ii) When one is reading such a story Jeremias maintains that the reader must be sympathetic to the atmosphere of the environment and also to ancient man's powers of imagination. The miracle stories, especially in Mark, are essentially an aid towards depicting the glory and authority of its Lord in a language that was appropriate and therefore could be understood.
- iii) Form-critical analysis distinguishes a later Hellenistic stratum of tradition from an earlier Palestinian one. (Dibelius<sup>11</sup> says the story has an inner centre and all else is elaboration. The task of New Testament criticism is to distinguish between the two and acknowledge the stories as probable sermon illustrations.) Basically the narrative is simple and direct without concern for geography, chronology or biography - the story is about the authority and power of Jesus of Nazareth.

- iv) Therefore no matter how much we narrow the narrative down, what remains is a nucleus of tradition which stands out and is associated with the events of the ministry of Jesus, cf. Luke 13:32.

These thoughts are further taken up by Trocme<sup>12</sup> who says that Mark emphasises miracles by the spoken word or by physical contact. 'It is clear that Matthew and Luke have not the same love as Mark of miracle stories as a literary genre.' They are 'untamed documents' and 'sensational rather than edifying' and the stories are:

based upon a narrative outline plan of an extremely simple kind - in a word they are popular tales, obeying the instinctive laws that govern the genre almost anywhere in the world.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, in terms of exploring the text's own context, Eduard Schweizer<sup>14</sup> maintains similarly that this account of healing by Jesus is combined with a popular fairy tale about a 'defrauded devil'. 'A Jew might experience a certain pleasure in relating the story of how a tremendous herd of pigs was destroyed, since pigs were an "abomination to the Jews" '. There is then a deliberate humour attached to the story. It:

contains a popular story which describes at length the power of the adversary and the power of God. It is a recognition of Jesus by the supernatural powers. A call for men who are ready to proclaim what Jesus has done for them.<sup>15</sup>

We cannot stop here, or can we? On the above level certain rules have been adhered to and how the text relates to its own context has been briefly explored. We have suspended our judgement and been sympathetic to the story in that we realise it was written hundreds of years ago when the world was full of superstition, and beliefs about demons and their exorcism were rife. But, if it is that as in Schleiermacher's phrase the story is 'significant discourse' then there is a second question to be asked. Do we take seriously what the story is saying? It may be that all the preceeding, albeit brief, historical exegesis achieves is a formal, informational understanding based upon an observation of the past and not an encounter with the text which results in a mutual, participatory understanding of the text. On an 'observational' level the story is understood in its past context. On an 'encounter' level the story is understood in its power to speak to the reader's present reality.

Walter Wink<sup>16</sup> would challenge Haller's model on the grounds that his theory of interpretation, however well-meaning and thorough, exemplifies 'the bankruptcy of historical biblical criticism' and the method no longer 'accomplishes its avowed purpose'.<sup>17</sup> For Wink, the traditional, exegetical, historical, critical theory of interpretation is:

incapable of achieving what most of its practitioners considered its purpose to be: so to interpret the Scriptures that the past becomes alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation.<sup>18</sup>

Such a polemic note is also struck in Ricoeur:

... it is in this age of discourse that we wish to recharge language, start again from the fullness of language ... The same age develops the possibility of emptying language and the possibility of filling it anew. Beyond the wastelands of critical thought we seek to be challenged anew.<sup>19</sup>

And, although the historical/critical method is indispensable, it is insufficient to bring us to a:

post-critical moment of openness  
to the biblical summons.<sup>20</sup>

Wink traces this insolvency in relentless style in his brief but profound book. His methodology, his theory of interpretation, his hermeneutic is expressed in more radical and fundamental terms:

the dialectical hermeneutic proposed here is  
nothing other than a methodological elaboration  
of the truth of losing and finding one's life.<sup>21</sup>

This dialectical hermeneutic provides a 'new paradigm of biblical study' based on the use of the Socratic method of question and discussion in relation to, for instance, a gospel story, and this is enriched from the insights of religious depth psychology, especially the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung. (Examples of this 'new paradigm' are given in the appendix to the book.)

However, it is not the intention of this thesis to enter and detail the debate upon the 'conflict of interpretations' prevalent in Biblical hermeneutics, but only to point to the fact of the complex issues involved in the interpretative task and to show that there are



differing theories of interpretation with regard to a particular discipline, and thus a 'conflict' with regard to a particular text. The aim of exemplifying instances of conflicting theories is neither to state the rightness, authenticity nor validity of one theory over and against another, but that it is right, authentic and valid to be aware of one's own interpretative theory, one's own hermeneutic in relation to a particular discipline. For instance, in Religious Studies one could give a historical/critical account of the theories of interpretation, the different hermeneutical strategies that have been at work in that area of education (cf. of Gooderham, Smart, Holm, Grimmett, Hull, etc.) and choose one or an amalgam of what we consider to be the right, authentic and valid hermeneutic with regard to Religious Studies and Education.

Rather what this thesis attempts to do is point to the fact that it may be the case that not enough 'depth semantics' (Ricoeur) have gone into the implications of particular hermeneutical strategies and it may thus be realised that other strategies (e.g. the model/notion/fact of the text as discourse and action in the philosophical hermeneutics of Ricoeur and the categories of Ebeling's language hermeneutic) could lead to profound questions as to the rightness, authenticity and validity of, for instance, the aim in Religious Studies of trying to 'help pupils to understand what it means to take a religion seriously' and at the very least clarify the issues at stake in adopting a particular hermeneutical strategy. It may be that the adoption of an implicit/explicit diluted phenomenological hermeneutic, in place of a bible based or experiential hermeneutic, however well meaning, is 'bankrupt' and alternative hermeneutic strategies may have to be formed even to the extent of a hermeneutic of unbelief in the efficacy of 'taking

a religion seriously' in the context of a secular, state and compulsory school environment. (Section 4 is devoted to a discussion of Religious Studies as an instance of educational discourse).

### 1.3.2 Theories of Interpretation

The aim is now to put this into a perspective appropriate to this stage of the thesis, i.e. how we approach the question and matter of interpretation expressed simply as:

'what does something say?'

and, 'do we take seriously what it says?'

E. D. Hirsch<sup>22</sup> points to three predominant issues or stances that can be adopted in relation to interpretation and through these stances various theories of interpretation on hermeneutical strategies have evolved.

The first stance comes under the heading of 'Intuitionism'. The text is seen as an occasion for direct spiritual communion with a god, adopting the Pauline statement that the letter kills but the spirit gives life. The hermeneutic of the intuitionist is that it is possible to commune with and be in harmony with the intentions of the author.

The second stance of 'Positivism' states that the words of the text mean exactly what they say and the interpreter should ignore

'the ghost in the machine' (Koestler). The rules and canons of exegesis and instruction should be made clear. The hermeneutical stance in positivism is that meaning is an epiphenomenon. The meaning of the text is specified by a refined understanding of its linguistic rules and norms. However, Hirsch, through the work of Austin,<sup>23</sup> raises the question and fact of the potential plurisignificance of all word sequences. Words, and especially written words cannot be confined to one meaning, i.e. a statement contains an 'illocutionary force'. For instance, the sentence, 'You are going to London' could be understood as an assertion, a command, a request, a question, a complaint, or an ironic comment that in fact 'you' are going to Bristol.

Thirdly, the stance of 'Perspectivism' expresses 'skepticism regarding the possibility of correct interpretations'. Thus, a perspective is:

a visual metaphor that stresses the  
differentness of an object when it is  
looked at from different standpoints.<sup>24</sup>

Perspectivism is expressed, for instance, in a phonetics doctrine that states that no two persons pronounce identical speech sounds and no two persons experience the same meaning. Words express a 'linguistic symmetry' (Bazell). For instance, jacket and coat represent the same concept. There is also an 'indefinite plurality' of mental acts; for instance, you can view a tangerine from different angles: its texture, its colour, its taste, etc.

Hirsch's own stance in relation to intuitionism, positivism and perspectivism would seem to be that understanding cannot be

purely intuitive, it cannot be purely rule governed, and it cannot be merely some arbitrary mixture of the two. Intuition is open to correction and rules are open to change. For Hirsch, a general theory of interpretation must be that it is a theory that is capable of correction, a 'corrigable schema', and thus for Hirsch the 'process of understanding is itself a process of validation'.<sup>25</sup> And, further to this, although it is right to stress the interdisciplinary nature of the enquiry in hermeneutics this must not just be 'ecumenical' but also 'illuminating'.<sup>26</sup> Hirsch (as in Section 1.2) warns against hermeneutics attempting to embrace the whole of the philosophy of life and hermeneutics becomes a licence for the hermeneutics of distortion where interpretation is purely what the interpreter decides; as the 'night in which all cows are black' (Heidegger). However, it may be as Jeffner says, that although myriad interpretations of a text are possible:

different interpretations can be compatible  
with the same data without being theoretically  
meaningless.<sup>27</sup>

Jeffner, in his article<sup>26</sup> orientates a general theory of interpretation along the following lines. He marshals his theory of the operations of understanding, his general theory of interpretation; these are expressed diagrammatically overleaf.

A

B

Reality and the corresponding Understanding

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. That which we can predict and control (e.g. trains or aircraft).          | 1. Scientific and technical.  |
| 2. That which we can predict but not control (e.g. sun and planets).         | 2. Scientific but not technical.  |
| 3. That which we can neither predict nor control (e.g. love and friendship). | 3. a) Humanistic - our sphere expressed as, e.g. commitment'.<br><br>b) Religious understanding - dependent upon the 'Other' belief in a personal and powerful being. |

The basis for B is C: Experience:

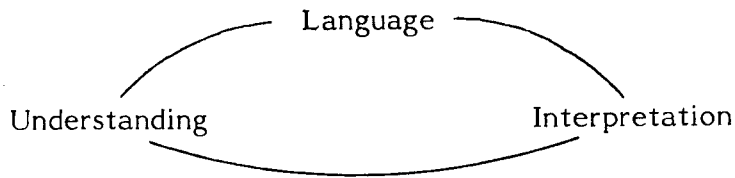
- the direction of our mental activity control;
- experience of reality that transcends our knowledge.

Jeffner asks the question, 'How are A, B and C related to a world-view which encompasses an all inclusive understanding of life?'.

For the believer:

God acts regularly in the normal course of nature, men have a capacity and right to clarify the laws according to which God governs nature; and man being entrusted with the development of creation, has a right to intervene in the material world. <sup>28</sup>

But, can we give absolute priority to religious understanding. No - if choice exists it is governed by a value-commitment to some 'interpretative framework articulated or presumed; the movement of interpretation is circular:



How do we judge the validity or reliability of experience? We resort to what Jeffner calls our 'own sense of adequacy' and for him a 'religious and all-inclusive commitment and understanding' need not be opposed to a scientific understanding of a part of reality but it is opposed to a 'scientific world-view and a scientific all-inclusive understanding'.<sup>29</sup>

It may be, in the context of the questions this thesis raises, that it is not a question of an arrival at, or there being a right interpretation, but that it is profoundly important to realise what is at stake in a hermeneutic. Careful attention must therefore be paid to the interpretative process employed if we are to clarify the implications of and the effects of a particular hermeneutic. We thus become aware of:

- a) the presuppositions of our choice - that which we bring to any situation: the context of interpretation;
  - b) how our commitment to that choice is expressed - meaningful action: the moment of interpretation; and
  - c) how we communicate that choice - a new expression: the reconceptualisation of experience from the past to the present.
- (See 1.0, quotation '... It is assumed ... process.'<sup>3</sup>.)

These questions (as previously mentioned) may take the specific form of choosing to educate pupils in religious studies.

- What are the presuppositions of that choice?
- How is that choice implemented and expressed?
- How do we know that what we consider to be appropriate understanding is achieved?

However, hermeneutics must not be reduced to a 'collection of rules' but it must 'serve the understanding' (Ebeling). The aim of hermeneutics as a methodology is an attempt to 'bring about a valid order through the acquisition of valid knowledge'.<sup>30</sup>

As can be seen from these general remarks on the nature of interpretation, the question of stating what is valid is a contentious, confused and complex issue. Heidegger has said that it is not breaking out of the circle, but breaking into the circle at the right level. Attempts have been made to break into the circle on many levels. Various major theories of interpretation, schools of hermeneutics, have emerged. These fall into six major areas or theories of interpretation.<sup>31</sup> Hermeneutics as:

- i) A theory of biblical exegesis.
- ii) A general philological methodology.
- iii) The science of all linguistic understanding.
- iv) The foundation of '**Geisteswissenschaften**' (all disciplines focussed on understanding man's art, actions and writings).
- v) The phenomenology of existence and of existential understanding.
- vi) Systems of interpretation that are reflective, recollective and iconoclastic.

These areas also provide a history of hermeneutics, an overlapping,

an evolution that culminates in (vi) above.

The intention of this thesis is now to core hermeneutics in an example of hermeneutics as coming to fruition in reflective, recollective and iconoclastic methods of interpretation.

But, we are not:

... going to risk everything by beginning with terms which are too general and an attitude which is too ambitious. We shall instead focus on a contemporary discussion which presents the problem in the form of an alternative. Even if ultimately this alternative must be surpassed, we shall not be in ignorance of the difficulties to be overcome.<sup>32</sup>



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24. Hirsch, E.D. (see 22 above), p.306.
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26. Ibid., p.312.
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28. Ibid., p.224.
29. Ibid., p.225.
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#### 1.4 THE TASK OF HERMENEUTICS: IT'S ALL A MATTER OF INTERPRETATION

What must the truth be now if  
people who thought as they did  
put it like that? <sup>1</sup>

#### 1.4.1 Problematic: Horizons - the Tradition of Hermeneutics

H. G. Gadamer <sup>2</sup> says that the 'hermeneutical condition is that of belonging to a tradition'. <sup>3</sup> Hermeneutics has evolved through the phases or tradition of hermeneutics being seen as the theory of biblical exegesis, a general philological methodology, the science of linguistic understanding, the foundation of a **Geistwissenschaften**, the phenomenology of existence and existential understanding through to systems of interpretation that are reflective, recollective and iconoclastic. In attempting to explicate the task of hermeneutics, we are involved in:

the anticipation of meaning, in which the whole is envisaged, becomes explicit understanding in that the parts that are determined by the whole, themselves also determine the whole. <sup>4</sup>

By construing the parts or phases of hermeneutics it is hoped to understand the whole. Thus, for Gadamer, 'understanding is essentially an effective historical relation' <sup>5</sup> and the:

working out of the hermeneutic situation means the achievement of the right horizons of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition. <sup>6</sup>

The source of the problematic, that of construing the horizon of hermeneutics which is appropriate to this thesis, bearing in mind the preceding wide ranging comments on interpretation, is to ask the question: 'what then is the task of hermeneutics?'. An attempt to clarify this question will be made by offering a specific perspective on hermeneutics.

Paul Ricoeur<sup>7</sup> attempts to bring about an 'effective historical relation' to the tradition of hermeneutics by 'construing' the parts in the 'context' of the whole.

What then is the task of hermeneutics? In 'Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences', Paul Ricoeur devotes a chapter to 'the task of hermeneutics'. In that chapter, Ricoeur describes the state of the hermeneutic problem and by reflecting on this state he hopes for an 'important reorientation' that has enabled hermeneutics to widen its horizons. He aims to place the investigation within a wider field of questioning and by relating a particular interest, he hopes to point to a common way of posing certain problems. Ricoeur adopts the following definition of hermeneutics:

Hermeneutics is the theory of operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts. So the key idea will be the realisation of discourse as a text; and the elaboration of the categories of the text will be the concern of a subsequent study .<sup>8</sup>

It is a major presupposition of this thesis that hermeneutics is able to provide us with an orientation, a way of looking at significant areas or discourse in education. That hermeneutics by its vocabulary and language is able to clarify certain issues at stake in education.

Ricoeur enlarges on this definition, and thus makes clear the present task of hermeneutics by charting a hermeneutical lineage under the headings:

- i) From regional to general hermeneutics;
- ii) From epistemology to ontology.

#### 1.4.2 From Regional to General Hermeneutics

Ricoeur sees the history of hermeneutics as dominated firstly by the tendency to widen the aim of hermeneutics in such a way that 'all regional hermeneutics are incorporated into one general hermeneutic'.<sup>9</sup> This deregionalisation becomes general but it also becomes 'fundamental'. The movement can be summarised as follows:

The first locus of interpretation is that of an orientation to the question of language. Language has the characteristic of polysemy; that is:

the feature by which our words have more than one meaning when considered outside of their use in a determinative context.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, an initial task of hermeneutics is a 'sensitivity to context' which in turn demands 'an activity of discernment'. For Ricoeur, this activity of discernment is properly called interpretation: a recognition of the construction of a 'relatively univocal message' on the 'polysemic basis of the common lexicon'. There is thus from the beginning a vast circle of exchanged messages and writing, providing us with a limited textual domain which Dilthey calls 'the expressions of life fixed by writing'. From this stems Ricoeur's major aim of the realisation of discourse as a text. This in turn means that specific techniques are required so that 'the chain of written signs can be raised to discourse' and thence we can attempt to:

discern the message through the superimposed codifications peculiar to the realisation of discourse as a text.<sup>11</sup>

Before Schleiermacher, hermeneutics was based in two historical traditions.<sup>12</sup> One is concerned with a philology of ancient texts, e.g. Aristotle's 'Peri Hermeneias',<sup>13</sup> and on the other level hermeneutics was seen as exegesis, and specifically, exegesis of the Biblical Old and New Testaments. These levels became subordinated in hermeneutics to the general problematic of understanding. The aim of this thesis is not to reduce hermeneutics to a 'collection of rules' but that it must 'serve the understanding'.<sup>14</sup> This problematic of understanding may be a generic term but it is complex. Hermeneutics as:

a discussion of the relationship between two poles which have to be held in tension in any hermeneutics, the tradition and the situation ... Both these poles are extremely complex.<sup>15</sup>

Schleiermacher's contribution to hermeneutics is significant. Briefly,<sup>16</sup> his view of hermeneutics was expressed as the discipline of handling correctly the discourse of another person, as uncovering the intention of the communicator (grammatical). Hermeneutics as the 'aggregate of observations' by which the interpreter is able to grasp the unity of the work in the psychology and development of its creator and so, in the dictum: to understand the author better than he understood himself (psychological).<sup>17</sup> Thus, if past literature is significant, what then is its continuing significance?

The Critical (grammatical - based on the characteristics of discourse common to a culture) and Romantic (psychological - interpretation addressed to the uniqueness of the writer's message) aspects of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical programme stem from the belief that:

'mind is the creative unconscious at work in gifted individuals'.<sup>18</sup> Ricoeur defines Critical hermeneutics as the wish of hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) to 'elaborate the universally valid rules of understanding', and Romantic hermeneutics (the art of interpretation) as an 'appeal to a living relation with the process of creation'.<sup>19</sup> Ricoeur recognises Schleiermacher as the 'founder' of modern hermeneutics but he is critical. An excess of grammatical interpretation (objectivity) gives rise to 'pedantry'; likewise an excess of technical or psychological interpretation (subjectivity) gives rise to 'nebulosity'.<sup>20</sup>

In the later Schleiermacher, the second strand of interpretation is given preference. However, the obstacle is still there - establishing an affinity with the author cannot be achieved by forgetting the context or the arrangement of the author's language. Ricoeur argues that it may be possible to overcome this obstacle by:

clarifying the relation of the work to the subjectivity of the author and by shifting the interpretative emphasis from the empathic investigation of hidden subjectivities towards the sense and reference of the work itself.<sup>21</sup>

A further development in the aporia of hermeneutics is to be found in the work of Dilthey, who subordinated the philological and exegetical problematic to the problematic of history. Ricoeur has stated that Dilthey is the interpreter of this pact between hermeneutics and history. The question of how to understand a text from the past is preceded by another question: how is an historical



interconnection to be conceived? <sup>22</sup> Dilthey's presuppositions could be summarised as:

- i) human nature is the same everywhere;
- ii) the totality of a work is understood from its parts and its parts from the whole;
- iii) the cultural context of a work is paramount;
- iv) the key to understanding is the fact of the structural coherence of the mind; and
- v) the study of this structure is possible. <sup>23</sup>

Thus, Dilthey poses the question: how is historical knowledge possible? Here we uncover another famous hermeneutical dictum - nature we explain, man we must understand. This is Dilthey's hermeneutical theme, namely the opposition between explanation and understanding. This opposition in contemporary hermeneutics for Ricoeur is 'disastrous'. However, Dilthey presupposed a capacity of man to transpose himself into the mental life of others. It follows, therefore, in the Diltheyan sense, that:

the foundation of the human sciences  
must be psychology, the science of the  
individual acting in society and in  
history. <sup>24</sup>

And, to quote further:

Knowledge of others is possible because  
life produces forms, externalises itself  
in stable configurations which are offered  
to others for deciphering ... The organised  
systems which culture produces in the form  
of literature constitute a secondary layer,

built upon this primary phenomenon of the teleological structure of the productions of life.<sup>25</sup>

From Schleiermacher through Dilthey we are now at the stage where hermeneutics can be represented as specific; its aim is to reproduce an interconnection and its method draws support from fixed expressions. Therefore it is not possible to grasp mental life in an immediate sense but it is necessary and possible to reproduce it. This is the possibility of hermeneutics in the Schleiermacher/Diltheyan line. This possibility can be realised through the explanation of texts. Hermeneutics thus consists of an attempt:

to establish theoretically, against the constant intrusion of romantic whim and sceptical subjectivism ... the universal validity of interpretation upon which all certainty in history rests.<sup>26</sup>

Man comes to know himself only by the detour of understanding which is always an interpretation. Hermeneutics in Dilthey is firmly anchored in the belief that the task of hermeneutics is to uncover not what a text says but who says it. The emphasis is away from the sense and reference of the text towards the lived experience expressed therein.

The following quotation points us towards a statement of the understanding of hermeneutics in the context of this thesis:

Life grasps life only by the mediation of units of meaning which rise above the historical flux ... to pursue this discovery it is necessary to renounce the link between the destiny of hermeneutics and the purely psychological notion of transference into another mental life; the text must be unfolded, no longer towards its author, but towards its immanent sense and towards the world which it opens up and discloses. <sup>27</sup>

#### 1.4.3 From Epistemology to Ontology

Dilthey's work concentrated upon the epistemological plane. Hermeneutics is one variety of the theory of knowledge. Hermeneutics in the conception of Heidegger shifted the debate onto the ontological plane. Ricoeur phrases this shift as a new question:

instead of asking 'how do we know?', it will be asked 'what is the mode of being of that being who exists only in understanding?'. <sup>28</sup>

For Heidegger, **Dasein** <sup>29</sup> points to the place where the question of being arises and it is part of its structure to have an 'ontological pre-understanding'. In the human sciences, the methodology is essentially derivative (epistemological grounding) but to uncover and display the centrality and question of being the concern is to unfold the foundation by clarification (ontological foundation). What is at stake is thus the deeper layer: what lies behind epistem-

ology? In the language of hermeneutics, hermeneutics is not a reflection on the human sciences but hermeneutics is **auslegung**, an explication of the ontological ground upon which these sciences can be constructed. The ontological problem is expressed, therefore, as the relation of being with the world (ontological interpretation) and not in the relation of being with another (psychological interpretation). It is by a reflection on 'being-in' rather than 'being-with' that the ontology of understanding begins; from the problem of method to the problem of being, understanding becomes 'worldly', thereby Heidegger depsychologises the other. Thus, hermeneutics (to return to an earlier sentence in this chapter) is an apprehension in the sense:

of a greater universality, which prepares  
the way for the displacement of episto-  
mology towards ontology, in the sense  
of a greater radicality.<sup>30</sup>

The condition of **being-in-the-world** is that of inhabiting a realm. This is the proper starting point, this condition of **being-in**, rather than **living-with** which is the **that** which renders situation, understanding and interpretation possible.

First, we must find ourselves. Understanding is initially expressed as the power-to-be. 'So understanding is not concerned with grasping a fact but with apprehending a possibility of being.'<sup>31</sup> This is crucial, for the methodology of hermeneutics (the understanding of a text) must presuppose the possibility of being indicated by the text - interpretation is a development of understanding so that what 'is' appears. The hermeneutical circle is not merely subject and object but takes on the profound nature of the statement:

What is decisive is not to get out of  
the circle but to come into it in the  
right way. <sup>32</sup>

The primary function of language is not just a medium of communication  
with others:

It is, therefore, necessary to situate  
discourse in the structures of being,  
rather than situating the latter in  
discourse. <sup>33</sup>

Discourse is the meaningful articulation  
of the understandable structure of  
being-in-the-world <sup>34</sup>

and the roots of a person's relation to speech for Heidegger, is not  
its production but its reception.

For Ricoeur, the difficulty with the Heideggerian analysis  
is perhaps a little similar to Baron Münchhausen trying to pull him-  
self out of a bog by his own pigtail! A philosophy:

which breaks the dialogue with the sciences  
is no longer addressed to anything but itself. <sup>35</sup>

From the ontological foundations expressed in Heidegger, Ricoeur  
moves on in his charting of the perspectives on hermeneutics (which  
he hopes will uncover the major task of hermeneutics) to the hermen-  
eutic phenomenology of Gadamer. For Gadamer, his concept of  
alienating distanciation is the 'ontological presupposition which sustains  
the objective conduct of the human sciences'. <sup>36</sup> The methodology  
of the human sciences implies a distancing which destroys the prim-

ordial relation of belonging. Gadamer divides the concern of the hermeneutic debate between this 'alienating distancing' and the 'experience of belonging' <sup>37</sup> into three spheres:

- The aesthetic sphere: The critical exercise of judgement is rendered possible by 'seizing' the experience of being.
- The historical sphere: The exercise of an historical methodology is possible because the consciousness of being is carried by traditions which precede a person.
- The sphere of language: We belong through language, by our 'co-belonging', to the things which the great voices of mankind have said.

Gadamer's synthesis of the 'hermeneutic experience' is convenient for Ricoeur in that it marks a circular route from epistemology to ontology and back to epistemological problems.

It is the consciousness of being exposed to history and to its action, in such a way that this action upon us cannot be objectified, because it is part of the historical phenomenon itself.\* <sup>38</sup>

This is the point at which we come to Ricoeur's present orientation to the problem and task of hermeneutics. <sup>39</sup>

An index of concerns:

- i) The history of effects is precisely what occurs under the condition of historical distance. It is the nearness of the remote ... it is efficacy at a distance ... thus there is a paradox of

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\* Hermeneutics expressed as the building of a bridge from tradition to situation.

otherness, a tension between proximity and distance. This is essential to historical consciousness. What therefore constitutes discourse and by what means can we analyse that discourse?

- ii) This dialectic of participation and distancing provided by Gadamer's concept of the 'fusion of horizons'. Communication at a distance between two different situated consciousnesses occurs through the fusion of horizons: the intersection of the distant and the open (Distancing and Appropriation).
- iii) The universal linguality of human experience. This means that one's 'belonging to a tradition[s]' passes through the interpretation of the signs, works and texts in which cultured heritages are inscribed (to include inscribed educational discourse) and which offer themselves to be deciphered. (Ebeling's categories of authority, responsibility, challenge and understanding as examples of the universal linguality of human experience.)

As a maxim: Mediation by language becomes mediation by the text.

As an axiom: What enables us to communicate at a distance (interpret) is thus the matter of the text; the explication of which is the problem and task of hermeneutics which belongs neither to its author nor to its reader. Being-in-the-world projected in the text offers the occasion for the endeavour of hermeneutics. Quite simply, the problem and task of hermeneutics can be expressed in two deceptively simple questions: What does something say? and Do we take seriously what it says?

The heart of the hermeneutical enterprise is the 'dynamic interaction'<sup>40</sup> between the text and the interpreter.

It is now the intention of the thesis to attempt to elaborate upon this theme of the interaction of text and interpreter by reference to the work of the German theologian of the word, Gerhard Ebeling, and the French philosopher of linguistics, Paul Ricoeur. By a selection and brief explication of Ebeling and Ricoeur, the hope is to outline a viable language (Ebeling) /text (Ricoeur) hermeneutic appropriate to education and specifically the implications of a language/text hermeneutic for Religious Education.



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13. See Section 2, Ebeling on 'Grammar, rhetoric and dialectic'.
14. Ebeling, G.(1963), Word and Faith (SCM Press Ltd., p.313).
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16. For a fuller commentary on Schleiermacher, cf. eg., R. R. Neibuhr (1965), Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion (SCM Press Ltd.) and Palmer, R.E. (1969), Hermeneutics (Northwestern U.P.).
17. Ibid., Neibuhr, R. R.
18. P. Ricoeur's definition in (see 7 above), p.46.

19. Ibid., p.46.
20. Ibid., p.47.
21. Ibid., p.47. cf. Section 3 - The Model of the Text.
22. Ibid., p.48.
23. See MacKnight (1978), Meaning in Texts. The Historical Shaping of a Narrative Hermeneutics (Fortress Press).
24. Ricoeur, P.(see 7 above), p.49.
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30. Ricoeur, P.(see 7 above) p.48.
31. Ibid., p.56.
32. Heidegger, M.(see 29 above) p.195.
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## 2.0    **WAYS OF KNOWING: A LANGUAGE HERMENEUTIC APPROPRIATE TO EDUCATION?**

### **GERHARD EBELING - THEOLOGIAN OF THE WORD**

- Hermeneutics as the 'unity in language of past events with present decisions'. (Gregor Smith)
- The centrality and importance of language as the 'power which creates understanding'. (Ebeling)

An exploration of Ebeling's formulation of and the categories of his 'Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language'. <sup>1</sup>

With man as the filter through which the word must pass, or, if you like, arbiter of the meaning of the word, it is inevitable that he will censor out what he does not wish to hear and audit only what he is predisposed to hear. <sup>2</sup>

REFERENCES - SECTION 2.0

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(See References - Section 2.1, 1.)
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## 2.1 GERHARD EBELING - THEOLOGIAN OF THE WORD

Gerhard Ebeling is a theologian who is extraordinarily sensitive to the nuances, the precision and the power of words. To read his work is to find the eye focusing repeatedly on carefully selected words, each of which embodies by means of meticulous explication major themes in his thought.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this section is to 'focus' upon 'carefully selected words' which exemplify 'major themes' in both theology and education. Although, as the title of Ebeling's work, 'An Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language' would suggest, the emphasis is on theological, it is hoped to show that the formulation and categories of his argument lead to the possible and problematical link between hermeneutics and education. Indeed, Ebeling hopes his theological theory of language will lead to a 'hermeneutic with the widest possible horizon'. <sup>2</sup>

The horizon in terms of this thesis is the relationship between certain 'hermeneutical perspectives' <sup>3</sup> as explored in Sections 2 and 3 of this thesis, and aspects of education, in particular Religious Education. Before this relationship can be established it is necessary to offer a brief outline of Ebeling's argument in his 'Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language'.

On Page 11 of this seminal but difficult work, Ebeling states in his 'letter in place of a preface' that the book (a course of lectures) was first given the 'pretentious' title 'A Theological Theory of Language'. However, he felt a strong note of reservation and was prompted to retitle in the sense of an 'experiment': thus the word 'Introduction'. The book is restricted to the style of a 'meditation'. <sup>4</sup> Its concern is with the very general and wide ranging nature of language and understanding. Ebeling focuses language and understanding in a theological context. His hope is that after reading we will cling all the more firmly to the view that:

the mystery of reality and the mystery of  
language form an inseparable unity which

we always encounter together. <sup>5</sup>

The problems and questions which confront this introductory formulation of his theological theory of language are classified under four headings:

1. Boredom with language.
2. The jungle of the problem of language.
3. Scepticism about a mere theory of language.
4. Basic questions of a theological theory of language.



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1. Forstman, H. Jackson (1968), 'Language and God: Gerhard Ebeling's Analysis of Theology' (Interpretation, April 1969, p.187).

Apart from the many articles and his very recent 3-volumed Systematic Theology (not yet available in English translation), Ebeling's major works that are available in English are:

The Nature of Faith (1961, Collins).

Word and Faith (1963, SCM Press Ltd.).

Theology and Proclamation (1966, Collins).

Luther (1970, Collins).

Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language (1973, Collins).

The Study of Theology (1978, Collins).

2. Ebeling, G.(1973), Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language (Collins, p.156).
3. cf. Gooderham, D. (1982), 'Dialogue and Emancipation: New Horizons in the development of Religious Education' (in British Journal of Religious Education, Autumn 1982).
4. Ebeling, G.(1973), Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language (Collins, p.9).
5. Ibid., p.13.

### 2.1.1 BOREDOM WITH LANGUAGE

Ebeling is speaking in a theological context of the Reformation form of Christian language. Confidence in the 'word' he claims has largely disappeared to the extent that there is almost an 'allergic reaction' to the phrase 'word of God'. This reaction, he maintains, is understandable if the phrase is interpreted in a 'narrow and rigid', 'literalistic and fideistic' sense which leads to:

a flight into inward life and an individualistic understanding of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

As with all phrases or catchwords in theology these may be traceable to understandable reactions but this slogan 'boredom with words' is not merely a reaction to a theological concept which has become outmoded. This slogan represents a basic theme going through recent history in theology. Namely that 'assent is no longer freely given to the tradition of Christian language'.<sup>2</sup> Ebeling supports this statement by pointing to three major areas of concern in the context of this negation of assent to the tradition of Christian language.

Christianity and Culture. Man's agreement with and to the phrase 'word of God' was never automatic:

The believer has always owed his faith to a miracle, to a radical change of mind which overwhelms him.<sup>3</sup>

The 'word of God' came as an adversary. Its involved expression

for Ebeling as a Protestant practising theologian is the certainty of justification by faith. For Ebeling, this certainty does not change but what have changed are the 'conditions of understanding'.<sup>4</sup> He illustrates this change by arguing that for hundreds of years Christian language was fully accepted and was a determinative element in general education. Christian language was, for example, 'coextensive with the intellectual environment in which people lived'<sup>5</sup> and 'corresponded to a universal understanding of reality' and existence was understood in terms of Christian language as this life was 'savoured, sustained, interpreted and overshadowed by eternal life'.<sup>6</sup> However, much of this was 'inherited assent' and to a large extent remained unquestioned. Independent judgement and decision came to be seen as non-conformity. Change took a long time and many factors were at work which concerned the dissent with the tradition of Christian language. The most fundamental was the tension which arose between this tradition and the perceived scientific experience of the universe. All the factors in the change, Ebeling believes, have established the 'linguistic pluralism which is characteristic of the modern age'.<sup>7</sup> As Ebeling sees it, the content of faith has been adapted to the general cultural situation of a particular age. This is precisely the possibility and problem of hermeneutics - the relationship or interpretation of the past with the present.

In a significant section of the book (pp. 21-23), Ebeling focuses the hermeneutic argument:

The easy operation of deleting certain elements in Christian language so that assent to that language can be achieved may be a response to a genuine need, e.g. the debate about demythologising, but for Ebeling this is to reduce the intent and force of that language.

To trim our dialogue to fit a particular text is an 'illusion' and does 'violence' to that text. The historical context of every utterance cannot be ignored but a mechanistic methodology of separation, a kind of hermeneutic seive just to separate the 'religious wheat' from the 'historical chaff' is not the true goal of interpretation. The true goal of interpretation, for Ebeling, is not a formal, informational understanding, but a mutual, involved understanding: the interpreter, if he is attempting to answer the twofold hermeneutic question - 'what does something say' and 'do we take seriously what it says', involves us per se in the hermeneutical circle. I believe in order to understand, I understand in order to believe. Ebeling expresses this as a question as to whether:

the spirit preserved in the letter can once again become spirit through the letter and yet in a certain sense against the letter, by creating the presence of the spirit which has the power of making present? <sup>8</sup>

Thus, Ebeling establishes the primacy of language for his theory:

language itself is ultimately nothing other than the power which creates understanding and brings people to understand each other. <sup>9</sup>

The question, in this context of assent to or negation of Christian language, is, under what conditions has this understanding of the tradition of Christian language come about? If the claim of Christian language is a 'matter of life and death and concerns all men', how can this be 'tied to certain educational conditions without being contradictory in itself'? <sup>10</sup> The present day situation is one of a breach between the tradition of Christian language and general

education and we must:

explicitly emphasise that if an interpretation which endeavours to understand seriously desires to test the possibility of assent, it must come to terms with the whole complexity of the present day experience of the world. For true assent cannot come about if artificial limits are placed on the confrontation which takes place within it. <sup>11</sup>

(Expressed in the terms of this thesis [Section 4.2] is it possible to study what it means to be religious in a compulsory state school educational context and take seriously the claims of that religion? as 'to have religion is something different from the possession of a knowledge of religious things'. <sup>12</sup>)

The hermeneutical situation is thus the question of the interpretation of Christian language in the educational context of the modern age. The 'changed situation' on one level has led to a 'boredom with words' and on another level has clouded the issues at stake in the 'assent to or the negation of the tradition of Christian language'. (What is the place in educational terms of a hermeneutic in terms of belief or unbelief and the diluted phenomenological presuppositions of the study of religion?) Expressed another way, the 'changed situation' is that the tradition of Christian language is no longer interpreted as it was, i.e. assent to the word is no longer miraculous; it is now apparently acceptable to adopt the tradition of Christian language in the sense and character of a conscious educated orientation to the 'word'. Ebeling asks, does this therefore do full justice to the claim and tradition of Christian language? The fact of the blossoming of academic Christianity has

been a blessing but also a curse. This double emphasis of theology as faith and theology as education points to the context of Ebeling's initial formulation of introducing a theological theory of language as being that 'people become tired of using a language with which they have a troubled relationship'.<sup>13</sup>

This crisis of language, particularly in Christianity, is apparent as people are inhibited or uncertain about the use of Christian language. There is a sensitivity to, almost a suspicion of those who add a Christian or religious trimming in a secular context yet the same people seem to readily and feel the necessity to use such language at, for example, weddings and funerals.

People have come to accept that Christian language is in use only as something spoken by the competent specialist and which he helplessly or fearfully offers them, but not as a language which is used with a spontaneous, creative life of its own.<sup>14</sup>

Practical action: Because of this 'troubled relationship' with regard to language and Christianity, there has been, according to Ebeling, a shift of emphasis in Christianity from words to action. Some

make so much of practical action that the relevance of words is overlooked and there is a flight from responsibility for words to practical action.<sup>15</sup>

However, apparent opposition between 'word' and 'deed' must not lead to 'polemical exaggerations'. The fact is that the two are 'interwoven' and 'inseparable'.

Action is dependent upon language: it requires a previous judgement formulated in language. It is subject to a later judgement expressed in language. Although word and deed are inextricably linked there are differing views about this relationship. Ebeling points to theology as **scientia speculativa** or **scientia practica** in Thomas Aquinas and his 'expected' emphasis on 'speculation'. For Luther, the primacy must be given to practice. For present day theology the problem is still a tangled one. Ebeling says that there:

must be clear criteria in order to judge  
in every given case whether theology  
is still at work at its proper task. <sup>16</sup>

Therefore an attempt must be made to clarify what it is.

What then is the proper subject matter of theology? As with other disciplines as to what is 'the subject matter' there is a 'polyphony of astonishing complication' in that there is a multiplicity of statements on this matter. Language is subject to history and language and by its very nature it is ambiguous. Therefore Ebeling asks how is it possible to reach agreement about theological statements and to test them and the phenomenon itself? There is on the one hand the 'historical variability of language' and the 'religious and metaphysical intangibility of theological' statements. For Ebeling the heart of the problem is centred around the clarification of two questions:

What is the concern of history?

What is the concern of faith?

Faith is the proper subject matter of theology. For the scholastics, God is the **ratio formalis** - the point of view from which

everything else is considered which may occur in theology. Luther gives a polarising definition: guilty and lost man and the justifying and redeeming God. The subject matter of theology is the orientation to the problem of the situation of man in the sight of God. Therefore the issue becomes 'practical' in a fundamental sense, i.e. the restoration of a 'disturbed and indeed destroyed relationship'.<sup>17</sup>

Schleiermacher proposes that John 1:14 ('The word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father') is the basic text of the whole of dogmatic theology. For Ebeling, Schleiermacher is emphasising Christianity as a faith in which everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth. That Christianity is a faith completely orientated to life, life in the light of the incarnation. Therefore, for Ebeling, especially as a convinced Protestant theologian, the subject matter of Christianity is clear: to show the inner structure, the relationship of God, man and Jesus. What then are the criteria to see whether Christianity is dealing with its proper subject matter? The three main criteria Ebeling states in answer to this are:

That the theme of Christianity must point to -

- The presence of the hidden: language transcends the present.

Christianity loses touch with its theme  
when statements about God no longer  
seem indispensable to it.<sup>18</sup>

- The situation in which words are spoken: Language is the mediator.

Theology loses touch with its theme when it  
abandons the category of the individual.<sup>19</sup>



- The changing of the world: Language is the medium of interpretation.

Theology loses touch with its theme if  
it is not concerned with that which  
completely changes the world. <sup>20</sup>

Thus 'boredom with language' is expressed as

The crisis of language:

Manifestation	Implication
The coherent structure of understanding has broken down, e.g. Christianity and Culture - The problem of words and deed. (cf. ' <u>distanciation</u> ' in Paul Ricoeur, Section 3.)	Language has become isolated from its basis in experience. What therefore is the subject matter of theology and what are the appropriate criteria for this decision? (cf. ' <u>appropriation</u> ' in Paul Ricoeur, Section 3.)

The task, for Ebeling, is that a theological theory of language must study the phenomenon of boredom with language in a comprehensive analysis of all the different areas of present day life.

For instance, in modern literature we see that:

it is a moving fact that in an age which seems to concentrate exclusively on obtaining technological control over the world, there is a powerful and basic need to grope toward the intangible in language, to sum up one's own experience in words and as it were set up refuges of language to which people of our age can take flight. <sup>21</sup>

We also see in politics and economics the emphasis of the use of language being upon manipulation, propoganda and advertising. Much of this is, for Ebeling, an 'instrument of power of the first rank' and yet it is the 'cause of a rapid loss of speech' and the 'disappearance of a confidence in language'. Language is becoming subject to a 'continuous shrinking process' and it is often 'sketchy' and 'lacking in expression!'.<sup>22</sup>

## REFERENCES - SECTION 2.1.1

1. See References to Section 2.1, No. 1 - Ibid., p.15.
2. Ibid., p.17.
3. Ibid., p.17.
4. Ibid., p.18.
5. Ibid., p.19.
6. Ibid., p.19.
7. Ibid., p.20.
8. Ibid., p.22, and this theme of letter and spirit echoes in his book on Luther:

This distinction between an understanding based purely on the outward meaning of a text and an understanding based on its inner significance, between remaining satisfied with the lifeless letter and going on to penetrate the living spirit of a text has become a general hermeneutic principle.

(G. Ebeling (1970), Luther [Collins] )

8. Again:

We must rather lay special emphasis on the necessary mutual relationship between one's understanding of history and one's understanding of one's self. The effect of this relationship is greater, the more what we find expressed in history touches the basic problems of our existence.

(Luther, p.22)
9. Ebeling, G.(1973), Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language (Collins, p.23).
10. Ibid., p.23.
11. Ibid., p.27.
12. Ibid., p.28.
13. Ibid., p.33.

14. Ibid., p.36.
15. Ibid., p.37.
16. Ibid., p.43.
17. Ibid., p.48.
18. Ibid., p.54.
19. Ibid., p.56.
20. Ibid., p.58.
21. Ibid., p.79.
22. Ibid., p.79.

## 2.2 THE JUNGLE OF THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE

The problem of language can  
apparently be addressed only  
by means of more language.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2 THE JUNGLE OF THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE

For Ebeling there is much academic overproduction especially in the field of language. Many disciplines are involved in the 'whirlpool' of 'debate' on the theory of language, but:

in spite of an astonishing degree of similarity  
in the themes they discuss there is not, on the  
whole, a corresponding exchange of ideas  
between disciplines ... there is very often  
'a very one-sided selection'.

Be that as it may, there are certain common problems in relation to this 'jungle'. Ebeling delineates these problems:

It is difficult to orientate to the problem of language and understanding as it is a fact that difficulties are faced initially as there are thousands of languages and dialects in the world and:

every language has its own power of expression  
which can only imperfectly be reproduced in  
translation.<sup>2</sup>

Added to this is the fact that within one language different languages can exist. Ebeling examples:

- **group** languages, e.g. royal courts, private school slang and church language;
- **specialist** languages, e.g. technical language of mathematics, chemistry and physics. Understanding is ensured by means of a standard and very often esoteric terminology;
- **ontological** differences are apparent in the understanding of reality, e.g. a magical or a mythical understanding as seen in the language of primitive peoples and, language is often outside the strictly linguistic sphere, e.g. body language.

As well as the abundance of languages and the differences within a language orientation attempting to formulate a theory of language means clearing a way through the jungle of the 'confusing abundance' of ways of looking at language.

Language must be sought out where it is used and experienced as a living utterance and a necessity of life.<sup>3</sup>

In this jungle there are polarities apparent in examining language as a living process.

**Potentiality and Act:** Language is never complete and there is always a considerable gap in one's own technical knowledge with regard to language. Ebeling attempts to bring together the potential for language and the act of language by setting out what he considers to be admittedly broad but fundamental questions with regard to language. (From p.91)

**What is the event of language ultimately concerned with?**

**What is it that makes man ultimately dependent upon language?**

**How do the utterances of language come into being at all and how do they achieve their aim?**

**What hampers understanding or even makes it impossible?**

**What are the conditions for the utterances of language to be understood?**

**How far is this affected by the situation in which the event of language takes place?**

**What is achieved by language and by language alone?**

Ebeling brings to light other polarities apparent in the 'jungle of the problem of language'.

The individual is drawn into the life of the community by language. Language is an 'inherited characteristic'. It is acquired and imparted in the context of the child's environment. The individual cannot learn language apart from the community in which he or she is found. This participation is expressed by Ebeling as the 'gateway of the initial I-Thou relationship' and the person becomes 'well practised in the traffic regulations of language'. Man's speech is often imitative. For instance, he speaks in the language and tradition of his time. For Ebeling the emphasis of the 'community' imparting language to the 'individual' is less on the **form** of language and more on the **situation** of language. There is thus, as the individual grows, the polarity/tension between the community and the individual. Here is to be found the question of the appropriateness of language and the responsibility for the use of language. The communication of meaning through language becomes complex and although there may be a standard currency in the **form** of language, the **situation** of language varies. Language itself possesses many phrases even for defining the act of speaking on the basis of its relationship to its situation - for example, 'to ask, to complain, to mock, to lead, to exhort, to comfort, to insult, to blame, to acknowledge, to praise'. <sup>4</sup>

Another major tension which exists in language is that of **Identity** and **Difference**. Ebeling supports Heidegger in the fact of the radical primacy of language as the 'house of being'. Language can engender feelings of difference - of alienation, of shyness, of feeling uncomfortable, of being deeply wounded and the deep seated fear of being misinterpreted and being rejected. Language also has the power to achieve understanding and assent. People speak



from the heart, they feel affinity, empathy and rapprochement - language has the power to establish harmonious relations and it has the power to destroy. Therefore, the possession of a common language is no guarantee of understanding. A major characteristic of language is its ambivalence. The kingdom of truth and the kingdom of lies are both realised possibilities. 'From the same mouth comes blessing and cursing' (James 3:10).

For Ebeling the theme of language is human existence as a whole and the problem of language cannot be neutralised. The problem of language is twofold:

- How can man understand himself?
- How can man understand others?

The fourth polarity is that of **language** and its **subject**. The 'mirror' view is an exact correspondence between language and its subject is, for Ebeling, naive. Language is open to interpretation:

For the very openness of language to the influence of the context assumes that the hearer can exercise understanding as an intellectual act carried out by himself. <sup>5</sup>

The hearer, in order to understand, has to do something himself. Language does not merely describe; it brings about an encounter. The apprehension of the subject, the perception of an individual is unique, and this of course brings about a tension. Again for Ebeling it raises the profound problem of the truth and verification of statements.

The use of language, it must be affirmed, imposes not merely the condition that it should be correct in itself, in terms of language, but above all the condition that it be true. Consequently any statement of language requires verification, which can only be done by a critical confrontation between language and its subject, however such a confrontation may be defined in detail. <sup>6</sup>

### **The possession of language and the authority to use it:**

Quite simply, 'linguistic skill does not guarantee a convincing and authoritative use of language'. <sup>7</sup> The question is under what conditions does this become acute and perceptible? It refers back in part to the other polarities in the jungle of the problem of language, vis a vis:

- Potentiality and Act
- The Community and the Individual
- Identity and Difference
- Language and its Subject.

Ebeling brings this section together by citing the 'rich, expressive images' of the account of the three friends coming to Job (Job 2:11-13). What words are possible in such a situation? Can language change the situation? Will the language speak? No language seemed initially appropriate as the friends were silent for seven days and seven nights. The ultimate implication of such silence is death. Ebeling uses death as a 'test case for the problem of language'.

... it is a question of examining the vanishing point of all experiences, in which language is of no use to us, because the whole structure of understanding has collapsed and there is no possibility of breaching the gap through language.<sup>8</sup>

Ebeling further examples a 'clear and unequivocal case': that of the woman caught in adultery. 'What do you say about her?' the Scribes and Pharises ask Jesus. Does Jesus have to submit to the authority of the law and so lose the authority of the gospel? The answer Jesus gives is that 'anyone who takes seriously the authority of the law should be the first to submit himself to it'.<sup>9</sup>

These extreme instances: Job's suffering, the existential incomprehensibility of death and the question of Jesus' authority, point for Ebeling to the very profound responsibility of the fact of 'using words raises the question of the right to utter them'.<sup>10</sup> The possession of language and the authority to use it is summed up by Ebeling as the fact that:

language lives by what a person has to say, and dies when a person has nothing more to say.<sup>11</sup>

How do we decide upon the priorities of what should be uttered? How do we decide what is the right and appropriate thing to say at a particular time? Do we therefore need a specific theory of language that covers all the difficult and interconnected themes uncovered in the crisis of language and expressed by such words as 'boredom' and 'jungle'?

## REFERENCES - SECTION 2.2

1. Ebeling, G.(1973), Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language (Collins, p.81).
2. Ibid., p.83.
3. Ibid., p.89.
4. Ibid., p.95.
5. Ibid., p.100.
6. Ibid., p.103.
7. Ibid., p.104.
8. Ibid., p.110.
9. Ibid., p.111.
10. Ibid., p.112.
11. Ibid., p.116.

## 2.3 SCEPTICISM ABOUT A MERE THEORY OF LANGUAGE

In the sphere of the problem of language  
when each term is considered more closely,  
the appearance of a clearly delineated  
phenomenon dissolves into a constant  
motion.<sup>1</sup>

REFERENCE - SECTION 2.3

1. Ebeling, G.(1973), Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language (Collins, p.129).

### 2.3.1 SCEPTICISM ABOUT A MERE THEORY OF LANGUAGE

In this third chapter Ebeling begins to clarify his response to the question of whether a specific theory of language is necessary and possible. Firstly, through tracing **forms of a theory of language handed down from antiquity.**

The basis of the inheritance of general education from antiquity lies in the **trivium** - grammar )

- rhetoric ) language

- dialectic )

and the **quadrivium** - arithmetic )

- geometry ) numbers

- music )

- astronomy )

Language is learned through communication and the instruction in the grammar of language is a secondary feature but:

grammar undoubtedly has the nature  
of an elementary theory of language<sup>1</sup>

as grammar by definition is concerned with the need to stand back from language as it is directly spoken. Grammar leads to a high degree of awareness of language, it is able to act as a guide as to the correct use of language, it makes possible the analysis of complicated sentences, it provides the criteria for dealing with difficult translation and leads to understanding the logic of a language. However, Ebeling feels that:

the way in which language is interpreted on the basis of its grammatical rules and the schematic pattern into which they force the life of the

language can in some circumstances restrict  
and be a burden to thought <sup>2</sup>

and therefore:

is there not a necessity to supplement the  
limited function of a grammatical theory  
of language by theories of language of a  
different kind? <sup>3</sup>

In antiquity **rhetoric** provided just such a supplement. Rhetoric reflects upon the use of language in the concrete sense. It pays attention to the 'process' of language and therefore is not in 'suspense' as grammar but is concerned with the way in which practical use is made of language. Rhetoric's importance has lain in its responsibility for the use of language in public speaking. The question is one of the way to influence opinions especially in politics and law. For Ebeling the use of rhetoric in antiquity has changed. It would seem that the use of public language is increasingly becoming:

all a matter of technique, which is closer to the  
feel for mass psychology of the advertising agent,  
fully informed of the results of market research,  
and to the cunning of the copywriter, rather than  
to the lofty moral qualities which form part of  
the traditional definition of rhetoric as the  
'science of speaking well on public matters, to  
convince people of what is right and good'. <sup>4</sup>

Expressing classical rhetoric in summary form a work of  
linguistic art uses <sup>5</sup>:



A	B
<u>A synthesis of the content of thought - <b>res</b></u>	<u>Its formulation in words - <b>verba</b></u>
and	
The teaching of A was dealt with under:	The formulation is treated under the heading of <b>elucutio</b> which translates the ideas of Aii) and placed in order in Aiii).
i) the understanding of the subject to be treated - <b>intellectio</b> ;	
ii) the possible ways the synthesis could be developed - <b>inventio</b> ;	
iii) the most suitable ordering of those ways with regard to the aim of the speech - <b>dispositio</b> .	

A and B are dealt with under the **aptum**, i.e. the suitability of the speech in terms of its inner harmony and its external context. This above summarised structure:

based on a distinction between word and content places great importance upon the subject - the **res**. A proper knowledge of the subject is a basic condition of the art of public speaking ... the words arise out of one's own involvement with the subject.<sup>6</sup>

However Ebeling is firm in his view that rhetoric went no further than 'matters of form' and the involved 'scheme of categories' led to the good construction of the speech but often it 'remained without effect'. Thus for Ebeling, although a form of a theory of language based in **grammar** and supplemented by **rhetoric** touched upon as to how:

language should be used in practice, how it can carry conviction - that is, what the conditions are for it to be effective - the rhetorical theory of language failed to carry through its treatment of this theme to a conclusion.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst **grammar** concerned itself with language as an abstract system and **rhetoric** concerned itself with language as concrete individual speech **dialectic** addresses itself to language in the process of dialogue. The **dialektike techne** is the art of conducting a discussion. In antiquity the emphasis of this theory was on disputation, an argument, and not just in conversation.

Statement is followed and taken up by response and this in turn calls for a reply ... Progress takes place when thesis and antithesis lead to a new statement with its own content ... the dialogue thus reaches a higher level ... the synthesis, which in turn sets the process of dialectic on course again.<sup>8</sup>

Ebeling's title in terms of 'scepticism' is becoming clearer. The opening quote of this section suggests that the close consideration of each term does not lead to a clearly delineated phenomenon but the problem of a theory of language is that of fluidity, ambiguity and constant motion. This theme of constant motion continues as Ebeling states that the use of language is not limited to the rules of logic. Dialogue depends upon context and presuppositions: utterances are subject to limiting conditions.

One cannot say everything at once. Things have to be set out in order, and this can only ever be done with particular nuances of meaning and never in an exhaustive and definitive fashion.<sup>9</sup>

It would seem therefore that every utterance requires qualification and this could lead to a 'set of strict rules' for language instead of a 'theory' of language which is comprehensive. To Ebeling the basic principles of Aristotelian logic through to the Hegelian revolution in the understanding of logic fail to take into account the need for a theory of language to be comprehensive. For Ebeling the true concern of language is not in its grammatical, rhetorical and dialectical sense and usage, as a logical theory of language handed down from antiquity, but rather we must attempt to discover a theory of language which speaks to the real problems with which language has to deal. Namely:

in the sphere of the contradictions which  
are concealed in life itself.<sup>10</sup>

In the second section of this chapter, Ebeling concentrates upon this dilemma of a theory of language taking into account these 'contradictions'. Is it possible that the sphere of hermeneutics may be able to offer insight and be a more useful starting<sup>point</sup> (rather than a grammatical, rhetorical and dialectal theory of language) in attempting not to answer the dilemma of contradictions in life but to clarify those contradictions?

In his thoughts expressed in this section, Ebeling takes a limited look at the relationship of **Hermeneutics** and **Linguistic Analysis**. To a large extent, the development of these two traditions of looking at language are in fact geographical. The tradition of hermeneutical enquiry is more 'firmly rooted' in German and French speaking areas and the approach of linguistic analysis has found a 'fertile ground' in the Anglo-Saxon world with 'its dominating

tendency to an empiricist attitude to reality'.<sup>11</sup> Alongside this is the concern of the former with humanities and the latter with the natural sciences. Ebeling admits to the dangers of over simplifying the differences and although the two approaches would suggest a polarity there is for Ebeling a 'good deal of common ground in the questions they pose'.<sup>12</sup>

The binding factor is the 'concern for understanding'. However Ebeling is of the opinion that the approach of linguistic analysis is limiting as it is fundamentally language looking in upon itself. On the other hand, hermeneutics is best understood as a concern for a theory of language with the 'widest possible horizon' as it sets out to:

repair the breakdowns which interfere, either within language itself or outside it, with the process of conveying understanding which language itself is meant to bring about.<sup>13</sup>

The need, for Ebeling, is to use language in such a way as to clarify the use of that language as not a 'mere metaphor' but as a 'living reality'. The aim of hermeneutics is to uncover and make clear the fundamental interpenetration of language and life. The most difficult thing with regard to language is to 'stand back from it sufficiently to question critically what is taken for granted in it'.<sup>14</sup> How can a theory of language transcend the distinction between theory and practice? Ebeling focuses the problem in two albeit general but fundamental questions:

How can a significant use of language be achieved in our present age?

And, How can a common mind amongst the people of our time be achieved through language?

Language must therefore attempt to harmonise and bring about a unity but how can the boundaries of that task be made clear? Ebeling quotes Jean Claude Piquet's essay on the 'Problem of Language':

the crisis of our time is not caused by our inability to speak but our no longer knowing what we should speak about.<sup>15</sup>

For Ebeling, the fundamental problem is precisely the problem of language as being one of crisis. This radical crisis is focused upon the phrases boredom with language, the jungle of the problem of language, and scepticism with regard to a mere theory of language. However, an exploration of these headings leads Ebeling not to an impasse but to begin to formulate his way of dealing with the contemporary problem of language. The analysis of these phrases elicits four key areas which can be enlarged and perhaps form the basis for a theory of language which may in the terms of this thesis speak not only to theology but to education.

The four main indicators to the dimensions of the problem of a 'comprehensive theory of language', a hermeneutic 'with the widest possible horizon' are summarised under the following headings:

**The authority to speak.**

**The responsibility for language.**

**The challenge to understanding.**

**The achievement of mutual understanding.**

Ebeling's pattern of the exposition of these four areas is primarily to view language as a living process concerned with truth,

to outline the manifestation of that process and to attempt to define the verification of that process. (One of the aims of this thesis is to attempt to appropriate the 'indicators' of authority, responsibility, challenge and understanding in the context of teacher and taught. As the initial question of the thesis states, how far can these categories be appropriated appropriately in the sphere of education and specifically in religious education? The hypothesis is that we may interpret Ebeling's theological theory of language along a similar hermeneutical are so that his dimensions become co-extensive with education, i.e. education must also view language as a living process concerned with truth, it must therefore attempt to outline its manifestation and verify the expression of that process.)

However, before enlarging upon this hypothesis, let us continue in Ebeling's theological context. As a starting point for his theory of language 'with the widest possible horizon' Ebeling takes as his starting point the polarity of **speaking** and **listening**. The situation can be expressed in what appears to be an empty and meaningless phrase, **I am saying something to you**. Ebeling proposes to use this phrase as an empty formula:

in order to consider the possibilities it offers,  
the requirements it assumes, the dangers it  
conceals and the extent to which we can look  
for any way out of our difficulties in this  
framework.<sup>16</sup>

The following is a summary of Ebeling's exploration of that formula.<sup>17</sup>

**a) The speaker as the subject of the process of language: the authority to speak.**

This 'I' is not an individual isolated from every context. The 'I' brings presuppositions through experience. The basis of the use of language is the two way movement of apprehension and utterance. Therefore attention must be paid to the breakdowns which occur in this two way movement. Every observation about the 'I' in the process of language boils down in the end to the question:

**What ultimately gives authority for the use of language?**

**b) The act of utterance: responsibility.**

The verb is governed by the speaker. It binds the sentence into a unity. All the relationships within the sentence are drawn together into one. The verb points to the power of language - things can happen through the process of language which cannot be reversed.

The focus is thus upon the **responsibility for language.**

I	am saying	something	to you.
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**c) The object of the statement: the challenge to understanding.**

What is the relationship between the form of language and the content of language. Language does not directly invite the speaker and person/s to whom he is speaking. The encounter always takes place within the context of a particular matter. This relationship encounter is complex. The purpose of a spoken utterance is to set the listener into action in the direction of understanding. What is said provokes thought.

**It is a challenge to understanding.**

**d) The person addressed: mutual understanding.**

The question of the identity of the listener ... may be specific, may be anonymous, may be one, may be many, may be past or may be present. Also the listener is not a tabula rasa but an extremely complex context. The text - in this case the speaker. The context - in this case the listener.

**The fruitful but dangerous tensions which arise from the discrepancy between the text and context are the principal occasion for the endeavours of hermeneutics. Thus the problem of mutual understanding becomes the problem of power and authority.**

e) **Verification**

The process of language is the meeting point and essence of what is at stake in life. a), b), c) and d) are the way in which and the extent to which the process of language is concerned with truth.

- a) Authority: a person must be true to himself. The verification of language as self-verification. The truth which frees man to use language without self-contradiction.
- b) Responsibility: awareness of the situation of language and what it requires.
- c) Challenge to understanding: what we have to speak is the truth.
- d) Mutual understanding: the aim of language is to make the community between men in the complexity of life a true one.

Thus for Ebeling, even at the risk of being 'banal' the phrase - the one thing that is true is love.

To base a doctrine of language on  
this statement is to move towards  
a theological theory of language.



REFERENCES - SECTION 2.3.1

1. Ebeling, G.(1973), Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language (Collins, p.131).
2. Ibid., p.134.
3. Ibid., p.135.
4. Ibid., p.142. Ebeling quotes Hispalensis.
5. Ibid., summary from pages 142-144.
6. Ibid., p.143.
7. Ibid., p.144.
8. Ibid., p.146.
9. Ibid., p.149.
10. Ibid., p.153.
11. Ibid., p.154.
12. Ibid., p.155.
13. Ibid., p.157.
14. Ibid., p.161.
15. Ibid., p.166.
16. Ibid., p.167.
17. Summary from Ibid. pages 166-180.

## 2.4 BASIC QUESTIONS OF A THEOLOGICAL THEORY OF LANGUAGE

To ask for an explanation is to  
ask for a theory.

And      Theorising is the linking of observations  
to generalisations. A successful  
explanation is one which succeeds in  
subsuming the puzzling particular  
under a general proposition or to put  
it another way round, in deducing the  
particular from the general.<sup>1</sup>

Ebeling continues with the previous pattern in his book by contrasting various distinctions within general headings. These are:

- 1) The special characteristics of a theological theory of language.
- 2) Criteria of a theological theory of language.
- 3) Outline of a theological theory of language.

As must be re-emphasised, Ebeling's general considerations about language have led to a **theological** theory of language. However, in Ebeling's theory, it is essential for this contact between general and theological to be maintained. The task, of a theological theory of language,

is to reflect upon the mutual relationship of the language of the general experience of the world to that of theology; to test the necessity and truth of the latter against the preponderance of the former and its claim to be autonomous and self-sufficient, and in this way to **initiate a mutual process of criticism between the two forms of language.**<sup>2</sup>

The intention is not to isolate the general from the particular but to provide a relational link between the two. For Ebeling there is the fear that theology may be reduced to being a part of a discipline and so deprived of its autonomy, i.e. a general theory of language judges theology. However, it must be maintained that theology is subject to general criteria. If it is claimed that Christian faith is comprehensively understandable then it should be able to defend its cause in the light of the experiences of the world.

A theory of language of a general kind must be based upon 'concrete issues' and its concern must be with 'specialist aspects'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, these two aspects of general and particular must, for Ebeling, complement each other. The theory of language in the general sense points towards and calls attention to basic questions. For instance, what is the purpose of language? (cf. questions posed in Section 2.2 with regard to language.) These basic questions with regard to language being the power which creates understanding resulting in a theory of language which may initially be expressed in general terms but this theory can then be communicated in a particular instance of discourse. In Ebeling's book, the particular instance is the subject matter of theology. In the context of this thesis, the particular instance is the possibility and problem of the appropriate appropriation of Ebeling's dimensions in his theological theory of language in education (general) and in Religious Education (particular).

Ebeling's second contrast is with a **theological theory of language and theology as the theory of the language of faith**. The consequence and relevance of Ebeling's particular formulation is to the language of faith:

For this provides theology with its  
object and poses its task<sup>4</sup>

especially, as Ebeling has outlined previously, 'when theology faces a crisis of language'.<sup>5</sup>

For Ebeling, this crisis is catastrophic if theology loses sight of the fundamental claim that Christian theology is:

dependent upon the Bible as the source and norm of the language of faith - even though there have been great differences in the way this dependence has been understood and used.<sup>6</sup>

Ebeling's hermeneutical strategy in dealing with symbolic expressions of boredom, confusion and scepticism is one of **encounter** rather than **observations**. For Ebeling the Bible itself is a:

living proof that the language of faith is of its nature deeply rooted in the language of the world.<sup>7</sup>

Interpretation is along the hermeneutical arc of clarification, participation and appropriation in and through distance (cf. Section 3, Aspects of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics). The movement of interpretation is towards 'mutual understanding'.

It is by interpreting that we can hear again. Thus it is in hermeneutics that the symbol's gift of meaning and the endeavour to understand by deciphering are knotted together.<sup>8</sup>

There is thus 'the uptake of a meaning that transforms the understanding or self-understanding of the interpreter'.<sup>9</sup> Interpretation is one of encounter and for Ebeling, the encounter with the text of theology (the Bible) first and fundamentally is an **acoustical event**.

As a commentator on Ebeling evocatively states,

The human situation is one of man as a linguistic situation, word as such is encounter with mystery.<sup>10</sup>

Thus for Ebeling a theological theory of language is not and does not provide 'a set of rules' which are in themselves restrictive and merely provide

practice in the phraseology and vocabulary of a particular language.<sup>11</sup>

This can and does happen, Ebeling believes, in certain denominational or devotional languages or the languages of ecclesiastical schools of thought. The resultant is for Ebeling 'extremely unpleasant ... indoctrination, intolerant censorship and almost ludicrous imitation'<sup>12</sup> occurs. In other words, the hermeneutics of distortion. However, Ebeling says that sometimes a consensus has existed and the 'gift of a common language enjoyed in liberty'<sup>13</sup> is the resultant. What a theological theory of language must do is to constantly refer back to the paradox of existence, to mystery, and theology is first and foremost, for Ebeling, an encounter with mystery. A theological theory of language must:

exist in the form of an encounter in the midst of the confusion of languages present in the world.<sup>14</sup>

Word is reciprocal dialogue with the experience of the world and language is an act of evocation which for Ebeling is expressed in his theological theory of language which he claims celebrates the hermeneutics of mystery, possibility and participation rather than detached, uncommitted analysis of the human

situation.

At this point, Ebeling becomes more specific and outlines his **Criteria of a Theological Theory of Language**. Ebeling, as the title of this section states, is a theologian of the word. For Ebeling, his theology is firmly rooted in Christian theology and his statements on the language of faith are expressed in the context of Christianity and the tradition of the language of Christian faith. Thus, for Ebeling's **Introduction** to his theological theory of language, which we must remember is introduced as a meditative piece of writing, has as an essential task:

to interpret the tradition of Christian language on the basis of the distinction between the language of faith and the language of religious tradition<sup>15</sup>

and the language of faith is a 'struggle for the right use of the word "God" '.<sup>15</sup> For Ebeling this 'right' use is radically rooted in the belief of 'Jesus as the embodiment of the criteria of the language of faith'.<sup>16</sup>

Ebeling makes broad and demanding statements in this final chapter in his book, but although his expression is Christocentric, he believes that some fundamental criteria of a language of faith show a connection with fundamental aspects of language, vis a vis

- a) The obligation to tell the truth expressed in what Ebeling calls the 'startling phrase' - 'to do the truth'.<sup>17</sup>
- b) The obligation to love expressed as an 'obligation to love for the sake of truth' and that truth for Ebeling is

radically expressed in Jesus of Nazareth.

- c) The expression of a) and b) is the context of the language of faith because 'truth is distorted' and 'love fails'.

The ultimate paradox of language, as the power which creates understanding, is that language is at one and the same time destroyer and deliverer. Ebeling believes that a hermeneutics expressed in a theological theory of language within the categories of authority, responsibility, challenge and understanding and formulated in the dimensions of a Christocentric commitment uncovers the true power and function of language, i.e. the use of the power which creates understanding:

it gives expression in words to what is concealed, not in addition to and alongside what is perceptible by the senses, but 'in, with and beneath' the phenomena of reality.<sup>18</sup>

Ebeling's final pages (pp.204-211) are a final meditation upon his commitment to and a belief in Jesus as the power who creates understanding and Jesus as the One who ultimately reveals the authority of, the responsibility for, the challenge to and the understanding by which the Word (God) is revealed, and this means the possibility and problem of participation in this mysterious encounter.

The aim, in the context of this thesis, is not to procure and reappropriate Ebeling's theological theory of language and write it as a palimpsest in terms of education in general and Religious Education in particular. There is the risk, as indicated at some length in Section 1, of 'intruding' into a text and doing



'violence' to that text, by presuming to interpret the language/discourse of that text into an appropriation in a present context by the reader's prejudice rather than the possibility of the text 'opening up a world' (Ricoeur). (Ebeling himself is very aware that these 'prejudices' as in the final chapter he asks the questions:

Was our general analysis of the process of language secretly shaped by the theological point of view we were to adopt later?

And

Were our conclusions merely what had already been presupposed? <sup>19)</sup>

What this thesis presumes to appropriate, to attempt to express anew, is the claim that a fundamental analysis of the use, process and power of language may be necessary and vital in Religious Education. This analysis may provide a 'weighted focus' which is 'suggestive' rather than 'precise', i.e. an ongoing language hermeneutic within the categories and dimensions of Ebeling's theory of language (authority, responsibility, challenge and understanding). In the context of the 'focus' quote:

it is assumed that every educational choice is based upon a value commitment to some interpretive framework

then the claim here is that choice and hence the chooser and the resulting commitment, in an educational context, of that choice in the curriculum must be aware of and be prepared to 'reflect critically' upon the particular hermeneutical strategy employed. The claim here is that if it is presupposed that religion is an available and universal phenomena and that it is legitimate

and possible to study that phenomena, factually, experientially, implicitly or explicitly in education, then it is necessary to attempt to clarify the possibility and problem of that task. There may be a sense in which the language of education is a language of faith in the sense that certain claims are made on the basis of what is considered to be worthwhile and meaningful experience. And it may be that:

Nothing can credibly be proposed as the language of faith which cannot honestly be defended by the person who speaks. One cannot sacrifice the subjective awareness of truth to an alleged objective truth. Still less can the question of truth be left in abeyance for the sake of any consideration, however easy to understand from a human point of view. This honesty, in which the speaker accepts personal responsibility for what he says must be coupled with the decisive will for the truth which seeks for clarity in regard to what has to be said, and is not afraid of revealing uncomfortable facts.<sup>20</sup>

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14. Ibid., p.191.
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17. Ibid., p.197.
18. Ibid., p.202.
19. Ibid., p.196.
20. Ibid., p.197.

3.0    **WAYS OF KNOWING: A TEXT HERMENEUTIC**  
**APPROPRIATE TO EDUCATION**

**PAUL RICOEUR - PHILOSOPHER OF INTERPRETATION**

- Hermeneutics as 'the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts'.<sup>1</sup>

Selected topics in the thought of Paul Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics:

- i)    **Language and Discourse:** the hermeneutical function of distancing.
- ii)   **The Matter/Notion/Model of the text:** the hermeneutical aim of appropriation.

REFERENCE - SECTION 3.0

1. P. Ricoeur (1981), Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences  
(Cambridge University Press, p.43).

### 3.1 FOREWORD

The intention of this foreword is an attempt to prepare the way for the language and vocabulary of aspects of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics by way of a brief resume of some contemporary views on language.

In **structuralism** or **structural linguistic analysis** the matter discussed and the subjects speaking are bracketted off from one another. There is a sharp distinction drawn between language viewed as an institution (**Langue**) or language viewed as an event or an instance of discourse (**Parole**).

In structuralism language is regarded as an autonomous closed system of signs, with the inevitable consequences that its semantics have to be analysed **synchronistically** according to the structure of language at a given moment not **diachronistically** according to the course of its development.<sup>1</sup>

The major presupposition of a purely structural approach is that all the elements of language can be classified according to certain rules. This is not to say that the critical tools of structuralism have no place in the domain of hermeneutics. It may be, for instance in theological hermeneutics, that:

a structural and primarily synchronistic analysis of the key words contained in the bible has thus to precede theological hermeneutics. Expressed in another way the condition of theological hermeneutics is structural analysis ... If this contextual structure is overlooked contextual meanings are made independent and elevated,

falsely, to the level of universal concepts  
used to support this or that! <sup>2</sup>

This, in Schillebeeckx's view can lead to a distorted  
hermeneutic where the:

confusion of theological realities and  
linguistic phenomena easily produce  
unjustified generalisations. <sup>3</sup>

A theory of interpretation based on pure structuralism makes  
hermeneutics into a reductionist theory. A reduction merely to  
context and syntax by which language is a closed system of lexical  
signs and codes. From Ricoeur's viewpoint this places a too dominant  
a dependence on language as institution (*langue*) and this in turn  
leads to a hermeneutic based upon a mere semantic analysis of  
double meaning. In Ricoeurian terminology 'alienating distancing'  
is enforced and not overcome and in Ebeling's view it may be that  
a purely structuralist approach leads to a 'formal understanding'  
and not one of 'participatory belonging' to the text. It is hoped  
to show that both Ebeling and Ricoeur are committed to constructing  
as 'comprehensive a theory as possible of the interpretation of texts'. <sup>4</sup>

The main presupposition of **logical linguistic analysis** is the  
a priori acceptance of the meaningfulness of the text and not that  
of understanding and interpreting the text. In linguistic analysis  
the meaningfulness of the text has to be proved by logical analysis.  
The first question is the critical question of meaning and the meaning  
is validated through the logical law of non-contradiction. The validity  
is universal if the period and the point of the proposition are not  
changed. Contemporary linguistic analysts are aware of the relation:

of a closed logical system and of the fact  
that logical thought is not a timeless network  
that can be stretched above the empirical  
and changing world.<sup>5</sup>

The main thrust of the positivist argument in the context  
of our subsequent view of aspects of Ricoeur's philosophical  
hermeneutics is, is the hermeneutic problem meaningful or meaningless?  
As with a structuralist hermeneutic logical linguistic analysis is  
also a reductionist theory of hermeneutics. It is:

a reduction which bypasses the content  
and confines itself to logical, formal and  
structural rules.<sup>6</sup>

What logical linguistic analysis does ask of hermeneutics  
is that an interpretive theory must apply itself clearly to the context  
in which the discourse arises and on what level does the logical  
meaningful status of such discourse express itself? For example,  
in the context of theology (a 'disclosure situation') the theologian  
will attempt to give an account of what he is saying. The question  
how do you know is one that will be constantly borne in mind as  
the truth of revelation is expressed as man's interpretation in faith  
and 'we can attempt to assess them according to their humanly,  
intelligible meaning'.<sup>7</sup>

This criteria of the philosophy of linguistic analysis stands  
then on the 'threshold' of the hermeneutical problem and does not  
make a 'direct contribution' to that problem. From the point of  
view of a statement of the task and problem of hermeneutics, i.e.  
the theory of operations in their relation to the interpretation of



texts, linguistic analysis clearly offers assistance with regard to the question of meaning and in the correct use of language.

**Phenomenological linguistic analysis** also begins from a reductionist standpoint. Judgement about reality is suspended (**epoche**), albeit in a sympathetic imaginative context (**eidetic**). What is at stake is the structure of the phenomenon itself. Thus the phenomenology of language attempts to:

throw light on the relationship between language as a system of signs and the verbal event as an intentionality ... it tries to answer the question how is language as an institution used in a meaningful verbal event? <sup>8</sup>

Language is seen as fulfilling a mediating function, i.e. it offers meaning. Therefore we should be clear as to what the language is referring to and what it is representing. Language on the phenomenological plane is seen as offer of meaning, self-expression and communication.

With these broader categories of meaning, self-expression and communication in mind, the intention is now to turn to attempt to analyse and comment upon some key aspects of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics.

First, some brief biographical details.

Paul Ricoeur (1913 - )

Student at the Sorbonne during the 1930's - influenced by Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers and Marcel.

Prisoner in Germany during the Second World War.

1947 - 'Karl Jaspers and the philosophy of existence'.

'Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers'.

Commentary and translation of Husserl's 'Ideen I'.

1948 - Chair in the History of Philosophy, University of Strasbourg.

1950 - 'Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and Involuntary'.

1957 - Chair in General Philosophy, University of the Sorbonne.

1960 - 'Finitude and Guilt - 1) Fallible Man

- 2) The Symbolism of Evil'.

1965 - 'Freud and Philosophy: An essay on Interpretation'.

1966 - Dean at Nanterre.

1969 - 'The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics'.

1970 - University of Lorraine.

1973 - Nanterre and part-time professorship at the University of Chicago.

Director of the Centre for Studies in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics in Paris.

1975 - 'The Rule of Metaphor'.

For a more complete list of Ricoeur's work, dissertations, articles and commentaries on Ricoeur, see Bibliography, pp.183-190 in

D. Ihde (1971), Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (Northwestern University Press, Evanston).

A recent essay on some relations and connections between the different Ricoeurian ideas can be found in 'Essays on Biblical Interpretation', especially 'Paul Ricoeur on Biblical Interpretation', Lewis S. Mudge and Ricoeur's reply to Mudge, pp.1-47.<sup>9</sup>

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### 3.2.1 LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE:

#### THE HERMENEUTICAL FUNCTION OF DISTANCIATION IN PAUL RICOEUR

Paul Ricoeur is a prolific writer and thinker who has made major contributions in many areas of philosophy. His work often 'traverses a field of complex allusion'<sup>1</sup> and the reader has to come through the many 'philosophical thickets'<sup>2</sup> contained in the arrangement of his work. To emphasise the diversity and depth of his work, Reagan points to the fact that Ricoeur

has written on phenomenology, existentialism, symbolic religious language, psychoanalysis, politics and metaphor. He has produced a phenomenological study of freedom, a long detailed account of the symbols of evil, an extensive and profound study on Freud and psychoanalysis and a virtual encyclopaedia on metaphor.<sup>3</sup>

With this range and depth of Ricoeur's thinking, it is with some trepidation that one approaches his work, especially the presumption of selecting aspects of that work which are considered to be appropriate to the concern of this thesis. However, Ricoeur himself, in his writings, testifies to written and inscribed discourse 'opening up a world' and pointing to 'possibilities' which the reader may appropriate appropriately at a particular moment in time.<sup>4</sup> By a selective outline of some key aspects of Ricoeur's work, it is hoped that a coherent image of the hermeneutical problem may emerge. The aim in short is to 'schematise aspects of Ricoeur's work in terms of my hypothesis'.<sup>5</sup>

The first task is to attempt to offer a synopsis rather than a critical analysis of his arguments. This critical analysis may occur when an attempt is made to appropriate his text hermeneutic in the sphere of education but bearing in mind that

any consideration of Ricoeur's thinking must necessarily at the outset restrict itself in some way, or lose coherence, unless such a treatment goes on at great length. Consequently this treatment will be specific and narrow, keeping in mind that a full treatment of the evolution from one phase of his treatment to another would require a more explicit treatment of the continuity from one phase to another.<sup>6</sup>

In 1981, J. B. Thompson edited and translated a series of essays under the heading 'Paul Ricoeur. Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences'. Also in the same year, Thompson published his dissertation, 'Critical Hermeneutics: The Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas'. It is mainly from this material, especially the translated essays in 'Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences', that the following selective outline and consideration of aspects of Ricoeur's work comes.

As previously mentioned, Ricoeur's concern is with comprehensiveness. Interpretation and the problem of hermeneutics are always confronted with and where possible should enter a dialogue with counter disciplines. As

the sense of the text is taken seriously in the midst of other constructions of the human condition that enter into a dialogue with it.<sup>7</sup>

It is thus a major presupposition of this thesis that education is a 'construction of the human condition' and it is the claim of this thesis that it is necessary to formulate a dialogue between hermeneutics and education. This may best be achieved by a selective concentration on issues in both disciplines. To reiterate the question posed at the beginning of the thesis: is it possible, through a selective exposition of Paul Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics and a recognition of the potential application of Ebeling's categories - his theological theory of language, to be appropriated appropriately in the sphere of education?

#### **Language and Discourse: The hermeneutical function of distancing**

For Ricoeur, language is that 'area where today all philosophical investigations cut across one another'.<sup>8</sup> In an essay, 'Philosophy and Religious Language'<sup>9</sup>, Ricoeur sets out his fundamental assumptions with regard to language and discourse. The focus of the article as the title states is on Religious Language, but the intention is to widen these assumptions into statements about language in general and so an attempt to appropriate his thoughts on language in education vis a vis the dialogue of hermeneutics with education.

Religious language or religious discourse presents an occasion for Ricoeur's concern with the philosophy of language. This concern for Religious Language points to two major presuppositions in Ricoeur's thinking; namely - a concern to expand the field of hermeneutics from a mere semantic analysis of double meaning to a concern for understanding in general, especially as indicated in 'contemporary culture by the struggle between reductive, suspicious approaches to human

experience and more trusting, prospective methods'.<sup>10</sup> And secondly, that

the critique of the object and the subject, implicit or explicit in the hermeneutics of suspicion, when combined with the idea of all language being a closed system of signs, calls into question the very notion that we can say anything at all about the world or our own reality.<sup>11</sup>

In the article, 'Philosophy and Religious Language', Ricoeur states three clear but deceptively simple assumptions in terms of Religious Language. Firstly, that a religious faith may be identified through its language as an example of 'discourse'. Whatever ultimately is the nature of religious experience it comes to language and is articulated in language, therefore the appropriate point of interpretation is to enquire into the linguistic expression of that experience. Secondly, this discourse is not senseless. At its least it is meaningful for the community of faith, providing the basis for that community's self understanding. Therefore, it becomes a vehicle for the communication of that community's faith. Thirdly, philosophy is implied in this enquiry as the discourse is presumed to be not merely meaningful but it claims in some sense to be true, i.e. by religious language's mode of discourse it is believed that new dimensions of reality and truth are disclosed. Also, by the motion of ongoing interpretation within the community of that religious discourse a new formulation of truth is constantly required as the context for religious discourse is an interpretation of a past event (religious experience) articulated in the present by religious language.

In the context of this thesis, these assumptions may be initially qualified in similarly broad terms. Education provides an occasion of discourse, and therefore:  
Education may be identified through its language, therefore it is appropriate to enquire into its linguistic expression.

It is further presumed that the language or the discourse of education is not senseless, it is meaningful for those involved in the educational process.

Thirdly, that philosophy is implied in this enquiry as the discourse of education is presumed to be not merely meaningful but it claims in some sense to be true. By education it is believed that new dimensions of reality and truth are disclosed and that by interpretation within the educational community new formulations are appropriate for the present.

These assumptions are crystallised in the 'focus quote' -

It is assumed that every educational choice  
is based upon a value commitment to some  
interpretative framework by those involved  
in the curriculum process.<sup>12</sup>

It is a further supposition of this thesis that, as with religious language, educational discourse may be clarified by philosophical hermeneutics.

The emphasis of this clarification is on the methodology of hermeneutics as against the methodology of linguistic analysis. That linguistic analysis starts with the statements of that discourse and religious discourse is reinterpreted in conceptual terms with



the help of speculative theology. For Ricoeur, this is too narrow a base. On the other hand, for Ricoeur, the methodology of hermeneutics attempts to get as close as possible to the 'originary expressions' of that discourse. The document of faith, the Bible, does not contain metaphysical, speculative theological statements but the statements are embedded in the literary genres of narratives, prophecies and proverbs. These are the originary expressions of religious faith and the first task of hermeneutics is to identify these originary modes.

The first task of a biblical hermeneut is to identify the different modes of discourse which taken together constitute the finite field of interpretation within the boundaries of which religious language may be understood.<sup>13</sup>

There is thus a profound intention in the work of hermeneutics. To attempt to overcome distance and cultural differences (distanciation) and of matching the reader to a text which has become foreign (appropriation). If this match occurs (Ebeling's 'mutual understanding') then the text could be said to be appropriated into the present comprehension a man is able to have of himself. This, as Pellaeur suggests, is that

the reference (and hence the meaning) of a text is not so much a matter of the author's intention or the original setting as of the world the text projects or proposes for our self-understanding and imaginative appropriation. **The world of the text is a world that we might inhabit.** Hence interpretation aims at unfolding this world for us and exploring its implications.<sup>14</sup>

What then, is the main trait of discourse? It is that of **distance** and the interpretive task is an attempt to overcome that distance. Ricoeur claims we can begin the interpretive task by asking the question: What is the relationship of what is said and the event which the discourse states in written language?

Ricoeur enlarges on his conception of language and discourse in an essay, 'The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation'.<sup>15</sup> The major aporia lies in the antinomy between 'alienating distanciation' and 'participatory belonging'. This antinomy establishes an untenable alternative:

on the one hand, alienating distanciation is the attitude that renders possible the objectification in the human sciences; but on the other hand, this distanciation, which is the condition of the scientific status of the sciences, is at the same time the fall that destroys the fundamental and primordial relation whereby we belong to and participate in the historical reality which we claim to construct as an object.<sup>16</sup>

Ricoeur rejects this alternative and attempts to overcome it by an orientation to the fact, that for him, the dominant problematic is that of the text. The text is more than a **particular case of intersubjective communication** - it is the **paradigm of distanciation in communication**.<sup>17</sup> This **paradigm** is explored on five fronts. First, however, some general comments upon **distance** and **discourse**.

In written discourse there is a distance between the discourse and the speaker. Written language is an inscribed interpretation of a prior interpretation of the event. There are therefore textual

difficulties in terms of the **inner structure** and the **outer referent** of the discourse. These difficulties point to further distancing features:

- discourse and its relationship to the initial occasion and situation of the event revolves around questions of literary genre. What are the prevalent modes of language used at the particular initial instance of discourse?
- What is the impact of the discourse on its first audience?

It would seem to be that the text/the discourse (as for Ebeling and his 'comprehensive theory of language with the widest possible horizon') has also for Ricoeur to be viewed as a whole, as a hierarchy of topics. Written discourse is an autonomous object which is at a distance from the authorial intentions, from its initial situation and from its primitive audience. As Ricoeur says:

The experience as experienced, as lived,  
remains private, but its sense, its meaning  
becomes public. <sup>18</sup>

Yet,

We are able to give a non-psychological,  
because purely semantic, definition of the  
utterer's meaning. No mental entity need  
by hypothesised or hypostasised. The  
utterance meaning points back towards  
the utterer's meaning thanks to the self-  
reference of discourse to itself as an event. <sup>19</sup>

Therefore, although written discourse is open to an infinite range of interpretations the claim of hermeneutics (as presupposed in this thesis) is that hermeneutics is able to:

use distancing as both the obstacle and the instrument in order to re-enact the initial event of discourse in a new event of discourse which will claim to be both fruitful and creative.<sup>20</sup>

The new event of discourse is the occasion for the endeavour of hermeneutics. The direction of that occasion and endeavour is circular.<sup>21</sup> The interpretation of that discourse both from the past to the present and from the present to the past, is expressed in new language as the claim is that the interpretation lays claim to being both meaningful and true. Discourse is '**realised as event but understood as meaning**'.<sup>22</sup> To support this conviction, Ricoeur adopts the following hermeneutical methodology in relation to language and discourse.\* His exploration is on five fronts. Firstly:

**The realisation of language as discourse:**

Spoken discourse expresses the conditions of the dialectic of the two poles of **event** and **meaning**. Discourse as **event** is signified by the realisation that:

- a) **it is temporal and in the present;**
- b) **it is self-referential;**
- c) **it has therefore a time and a subject; and**
- d) **it is the occasion for address.**

Discourse is understood as **meaning**. We wish to understand

- a) **the meaning which endures, which is parallel to**
- b) **the meaning intended in the discourse.**

This articulation of the linguistics of discourse as event and meaning

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\* i.e. Ricoeur's paradigm of distancing as contained in Chapter 4 of 'Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences'.

is the:

core of the whole hermeneutical problem. Just as language, by being actualised in discourse, surpasses itself as system and realises itself as event, so too discourse by entering the process of understanding, surpasses itself as event and becomes meaning ... the very first distancing is thus the distancing of the **saying in the said.** <sup>23</sup>

But what is **said**? Ricoeur's hermeneutic is based on the linguistics of discourse or messages by which language opens up a world and challenges the reader or listener to attempt to understand (diachronistic) as against the linguistics of language or codes by which language is a closed system of lexical signs and codes with the consequence that its semantics have to be analysed according to the structures or rules of language (synchronistic). Ricoeur develops this emphasis on the development or direction of language in that of understanding diachronistically as against synchronistically by appealing to the theory of speech-acts.\* Discourse is made up from various layers or levels of the speech act. For instance, in telling someone to 'close the door', the first layer is that of:

- i) The **locutionary** or propositional act **of** saying. The action of doing is related to two variables - you and the door.
- ii) The **illocutionary** act of what we do **in** saying. In this instance, the illocutionary act is with the force of an order rather than a statement, wish or promise.

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\* cf. J. L. Austin (1962), 'How to do things with words', Oxford University Press, and R. Searle (1969), 'Speech Acts: An essay in the philosophy of language', Cambridge University Press.

- iii) The **perlocutionary** act of what we do **by** the fact that we speak; i.e. the fact of giving an order provokes certain consequences.

Thus, by the meaning of the act of discourse in what is said we must:

understand not only the correlate of the sentence, in the narrow sense of the propositional act, but also the correlate of the illocutionary force and even that of the perlocutionary action. Insofar as these three aspects of the act of discourse are codified and regulated according to paradigms and hence insofar as they can be identified and re-identified as having the same meaning.<sup>24</sup>

Ricoeur's second feature of distancing is to view discourse as a **work**. A work has certain features.

It is - a finite and closed totality;  
- codified as a literary genre;  
- given uniqueness by its style.

Viewing the work in these categories of totality, production and labour, genre and style, underlines the fact of language, expressed in written discourse, as becoming the 'object of a praxis and a techne'.<sup>25</sup>

Hermeneutics thus becomes:

the art of discerning the discourse in the work;  
but this discourse is only given in and through  
the structures of the work.<sup>26</sup>

Thirdly, Ricoeur explores the concept of distancing in terms of **the relation of speaking to writing**.

Writing renders the text autonomous with respect to the intention of the author. What the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant; henceforth textual meaning and psychological meaning have different destinies.<sup>27</sup>

Does writing fix the work to the extent that what was intended is lost? Is the fact of discourse as fixed in writing subject to what Gadamer calls the 'nuance of decline'? Ricoeur suggests that because of this initial distancing, i.e. the distance between the author's experience and his fixed expression in writing the work (the world of the text) may 'explode' the work of the author. Thus:

An essential characteristic of a literary work is that it **transcends** its own psycho-sociological conditions of production and therefore **opens** itself to an unlimited series of readings, themselves situated in different socio-cultural conditions, i.e. the text is able to 'decontextualise' itself and thereby be 'recontextualised' by the act of reading.<sup>28</sup>

The reader is not detached because of the distance between him and the writer and Ricoeur claims that this distance presents the situation and therefore the possibility of a meaningful interpretation. Reading therefore has an emancipatory effect. The text creates an audience, it is autonomous. Consequently:

distancing is not the product of methodology and hence something superfluous and parasitical; rather it is constitutive of the phenomenon of the text as writing.<sup>29</sup>

The reader may adopt a 'formal understanding' (Ebeling) and what is inscribed may be explained along a detached, informational line merely answering the question What does the text say? This may be apparently achieved by analysing its structure, presuming upon the intention of the author and thus the reader presumes merely to explain the author's world. However, relating to the text along the hermeneutical arc of taking seriously what it says involves the reader in an attempt to 'mutually understand', to participate in the reality of the text. This is the precise **possibility and problem** of hermeneutics as presupposed in this thesis. Hermeneutics understood as:

the way in which we understand ourselves in relation to the past. Clearly this is bound to involve the present. We have to understand from where we are; we cannot do anything else. But this present situation of ours is not as it were an empty vessel waiting to be filled with the findings of the past. It is not even a vessel filled with impurities, false views or prejudices or rebellious disinclination to hear the words coming from out of the past. Rather this present situation is for each one of us one in which we are embedded but in our own way, in the structures of tradition. <sup>30</sup>

The realisation of language as discourse, of viewing discourse as a work and exploring the relationship of speaking to writing, leads Ricoeur to his fourth and fifth features of the concept of distanciation. **The world of the text and self understanding in front of the work.** In short, hermeneutics is not the search for the psychological intentions of another person concealed behind the text. It is neither not merely the dismantling of the structures of a text, however



necessary this may be. Ricoeur boldly states that:

**to interpret is to explicate the type  
of being-in-the world in front of the  
text.** <sup>31</sup>

For

what must be interpreted in a text  
is a proposed world which I could  
inhabit and wherein I could project  
my ownmost possibilities. <sup>32</sup>

Understanding ourselves through the text brings us to the  
problem of the subjectivity of the reader. The question of self-  
understanding in front of the text. The text is the bearer of meaning  
but the condition of meaning is that it is in the form of an address;  
it is for someone. This is the problem of the appropriation of  
the text:

its application to the present situation  
of the reader. <sup>33</sup>

For Ricoeur, the concept and explication of distanciation has  
abolished the possibility of 'any trace of affective affinity with  
the intention of the author'. <sup>34</sup> Interpretation is not merely making  
the text contemporary or congenial; it is understanding '**at and  
through distance**'. <sup>34</sup> For Ricoeur, interpretation is not in one's  
response to the author of the text but a response to the **sense**  
of the text.

Ultimately, what I appropriate is a proposed world. This is not behind the text, as a hidden intention, but in front of it, as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals ... thus ... it is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity of understanding but of exposing ourselves to the text ... receiving an enlarged self ... a proposed existence corresponding to the proposed world ... the self is constituted by the 'matter of the text'.<sup>35</sup>

Thus interpretation is a question of validity, not merely one of verification. A question of the text opening up a new dimension and not merely reinforcing our prior understanding. We have to relate to the text in the sense of its implications for us and we do violence to the text by supposing that we can intuitively verify the intention of the author by presupposing we know that intention, thus denying the possibility of expressing anew that which is to be interpreted, i.e.

self understanding formed by the **matter of the text** and not merely by the prejudices of the reader.<sup>36</sup>

To summarise:

The mode of discourse is language. Language is the power which creates understanding and by its implication necessitates questions as to the nature and use of language. In Ricoeurian terms, language is realised as discourse, as event and meaning and understanding discourse is fundamentally one of understanding in and through distance. The features of distance are distance between what is said and the event, between the discourse and

the speaker, between its inner structure and its outer referent, between discourse and the initial situation and the discourse and its first audience. The dimensions of this distancing are unfolded in the process of interpretation, i.e. the text uncovers the problems of understanding, intentionality, of intended meaning and acquisition. The text, although a totality, is thus a hierarchy of topics and is therefore open to an infinite range of interpretations. Interpretation has as its condition the fact of distancing but understanding (appropriation) comes in and through the realisation of distancing. The Matter/Notion/Model of the text is considered in terms of delineating the hierarchy of topics involved in discourse (distancing) but has its realisation in the self understanding of the interpreter. The twofold moment of the 'Hermeneutic Motion' (Steiner, cf. 1.2) for Ricoeur, is the dialectical relationship of explanation and understanding and he states that:

in explanation we explicate or unfold the range of propositions and meanings, whereas in understanding we comprehend or grasp as whole the chain of partial meanings in one act of synthesis. <sup>37</sup>

This 'one act of synthesis' brings Ricoeur to enlarge upon appropriation as considering the **text as meaningful action**.

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4. cf. Ricoeur (1981), Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences, ed. J. B. Thompson (especially essay on 'Appropriation', pp.182-197).
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cf. Ricoeur, P. on the hermeneutics of distortion as in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, and also Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of the "second naivete"' as exemplified in his essays on 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation' and 'The Hermeneutics of testimony' (from Essays on Biblical Interpretation, SPCK, 1981).
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13. Ricoeur, P. (1974), 'Philosophy and Religious Language' (from the Journal of Religion, Volume 54, No. 1, January 1974, p.75).
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18. Ricoeur, P. (1976), Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth, Texas Christian University Press, p.16).
19. p.13.
20. Ricoeur, P. (1974), 'Philosophy and Religious Language' (Journal of Religion, Volume 54, No. 1, January 1984, p.75).
21. cf. an important essay in terms of Ricoeur's hermeneutical stance, 'Preface to Bultmann' (in Ricoeur, P. (1981), Essays on Biblical Interpretation, Ed. Lewis, Mudge, SPCK, pp.49-73, and in particular Ricoeur's view of the hermeneutical circle:  
  
"it is the circle, constituted by the object that regulates faith and the method that regulates understanding. There is a circle because the interpreter I exegete is not his own master. What he wants to understand is what the text says and the task of understanding is therefore governed by what is at issue in the text itself ... This is why the movement of interpretation is circular: to understand the text it is necessary to believe in what the text announces to me but what the text announces is given nowhere but in the text." (Ibid., p.59)
22. Ricoeur, P. (see Note 15), p.137.
23. Ibid., p.134.
24. Ibid., p.135.
26. Ibid., p.138.

27. Ibid., p.139.
28. Ibid., p.139.
29. Ibid., p.139.
30. Gregor-Smith, R. (1970), The Doctrine of God (Collins, 1970, p.31).
31. Ricoeur, P. (see Note 15), p.141.
32. Ibid., p.142.
33. Ibid., p.143.
34. Ibid., p.143.
35. Ibid., p.144.
36. Ibid., p.144.
37. Ricoeur, P. (1976), Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Texas Christian University Press, p.72).

3.2.2 THE MATTER/NOTION/MODEL OF THE TEXT:  
THE HERMENEUTICAL AIM OF APPROPRIATION

Distanciation as estrangement.

Appropriation as remedy.<sup>1</sup>

To understand is not to project oneself  
into the text; it is to receive an  
enlarged self from the apprehension of  
proposed worlds which are the genuine  
object of interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

REFERENCES - SECTION 3.2.2 - TITLE PAGE

1. Ricoeur, P. (1976), Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Texas Christian University Press, p.89).
2. Ricoeur, P. (1981), Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences (Cambridge University Press, p.182).



As was stated in the opening paragraph of Section 3.2.1, Ricoeur's work often 'traverses a field of complex allusion'. His most recent work has been concerned with Interpretation Theory and the Theory of Discourse, Metaphor and Religious Language, Narrative and Temporality and exploring the relationship between Originary and Reflective Modes of Discourse.<sup>1</sup> When reading Ricoeur's work, especially this later material, in connection with his philosophical hermeneutics, there is often the feeling of overlap and sometimes repetition. However, it is perhaps best remembered that his work is often 'suggestive' rather than 'precise' (Ihde) and it is hoped to suggest certain implications of Ricoeur's paradigm of text and text interpretation in Section 4. The intention here is to attempt a selective synopsis of Ricoeur's text hermeneutic.

Ricoeur's definition of hermeneutics is the 'theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the theory of the operations of understanding,

must encompass both the structures of language and the use of language sufficiently to account for both the event of saying something and the systematic means by which it is said. In short it has to be able to **link an event and its meaning**.<sup>3</sup>

This link was explored in the previous section by an attempt to outline Ricoeur's concept of the hermeneutical function of distanciation. If the goal of interpretation is to 'bring together, equalise, render contemporary and similar', to 'make one's own'

that which was 'initially alien' then this goal is attained only insofar as interpretation '**actualises the meaning**' for the present reader.<sup>4</sup> This concept of the hermeneutical aim of appropriation as 'actualising' the event of interpretation means considering the Matter/Notion/Model of the Text as meaningful action. By interpreting we act upon the text. The text in Ricoeurian terms 'explodes' the work of the author and the text 'proposes' a world which projects the possibility of appropriating in present action the matter of the text. Henceforth:

self-understanding is formed by the matter  
of the text and not by the prejudices of  
the reader.<sup>5</sup>

Ricoeur outlines his Matter/Notion/Model of the text in the direction of appropriation through the following consideration of 'meaningful action considered as text'.\* His methodology is to posit two questions:-

- 1) To what extent may we consider the notion of text as a good paradigm? (Initially this will mean a brief repetition of Ricoeur's views on language and discourse. However, in his essay, Ricoeur himself repeats these views as he feels the necessity to emphasise the link between distanciation and appropriation, i.e. the dialectical relationship of

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\* The following is a synopsis of Ricoeur's essay in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, especially Chapters 5, 7 and 8 (Cambridge University Press). For further reference:

cf. Ihde, D. (1971), Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (Evanston, Northwestern University Press).

Reagan (ed.) (1979), Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (Athens, Ohio University Press).

Thompson, J. B. (1981), Critical Hermeneutics. A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jurgen Habermas (Cambridge University Press).

explanation and understanding.)

And -

- 2) To what extent may we use the methodology of text interpretation as a paradigm for interpretation in general? (attempted in Section 4: Implications).

- 1) The Paradigm of Text

Discourse is viewed as language event. The basic unit of discourse is the sentence therefore it is the linguistics of the sentence which supports speech as an event. Ricoeur repeats the four major traits of discourse, from the linguistics of the sentence, leading to the elaboration of the hermeneutics of the event and the discourse and the resulting appropriation of that which is to be interpreted.

Firstly, **discourse** is realised temporally and in the present, whereas the **language system** is virtual and outside of time. Secondly, **discourse** refers back to the speaker. 'The instance of discourse' is self-referential, whereas the **language system** lacks a subject. Thirdly, **discourse** is always about something. It refers to a world which is described, expressed or represented. The 'symbolic function'\* of language is realised in discourse, whereas the **language system** lacks a world. Fourthly, it is in **discourse** that all messages are exchanged. Discourse has an audience, whereas the **language system** is only the condition for communication.

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\* cf. a penetrating and profound essay by Ricoeur (1967), 'The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought', Chapter 13, in edited Gunn, G. B. (1971), Literature and Religion, SCM Press Ltd.

How, then, asks Ricoeur, are these four traits actualised in spoken and written language? He contrasts, in the context of the above four traits, the features of oral and inscribed discourse. It may appear that these contrasts are in a sense obvious; however, if we are taking seriously the journey of interpretation through its various phases, Ricoeur's hermeneutical map needs to be charted. The 'phases' (Reagan) could be expressed as follows:-

**Discourse:** what is the nature of the process which produces a text?

**Distanciation:** does the text fulfil its disclosing or revelatory claim?

**Appropriation:** what happens when we receive it?

The following chart is offered to precis and highlight Ricoeur's contrast of written and spoken language. Ricoeur's headings are used.

<u>Discourse</u>	<u>Oral</u>	<u>Inscribed</u>	<u>Implication</u>	<u>Meaningful Action</u>
Trait 1: Temporal and in the present.	A fleeting event. What we want to fix is what disappears.	Writing as 'coming to the rescue' from the 'weakness' of oral discourse: remedy to our memory.*	What we write, what is inscribed, is the noema of the speaking. It is the meaning of the speech event, not the event as event.	The fixation of action. Action constitutes a delineated pattern which is open to interpretation according to its inner connections
Trait 2: Self-referential.	Immediate characteristic. Verbal meaning and intention can be conjoined in conversation. A finite horizon.	Verbal meaning and the mental intention are dissociated. The text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author.	What the text says now matters more than what the author meant to say. The intended meaning has 'broken its moorings' to the psychology of its author.	The autonomisation of action. An action leaves a 'trace', a 'mark'. These patterns are in some sense 'documents' of human action and similarly are open to interpretation.

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\* Ricoeur refers to the myth in Plato's Phaedo. Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences (Cambridge University Press, p.199).

<u>Discourse</u>	<u>Oral</u>	<u>Inscribed</u>	<u>Implication</u>	<u>Meaningful Action</u>
Trait 3: Symbolic function.	The dialogue only refers to the situation common to the interlocutors, i.e. an ostensive reference.	The references are opened up. A possible world we might inhabit. 'Projecting a world'.	Writing frees us from the visibility and limitation of our situation: a new dimension of 'our-being-in-the world' is unfolded.	Relevance and importance. An action goes beyond its relevance to its initial situation. E.g. the relation between cultural phenomena and their social conditions.
Trait 4: Audience and response.	Interlocutors are equally present.	Unknown and universal audience.	The narrowness of the dialogical relation 'explodes'.	Human action as an 'open work'. New references and fresh relevance is received from human action. 'Practical interpretation' through 'present praxis'.

2) The Paradigm of Text-Interpretation

For Ricoeur, the main implication of this paradigm is that it:

offers an fresh approach to the relation  
between explanation and understanding  
in the human sciences.<sup>6</sup>

This 'fresh approach' of Ricoeur is supported by J. B. Thompson.<sup>7</sup>

His study of Ricoeur and Habermas falls into three main areas: Problems of Action, Interpretation and Truth. He regards Ricoeur as 'infusing' a much needed interest in language. Language conceived as a medium in which aspects of being are expressed and disclosed.

Language is viewed as a practical medium  
through which individuals participate in the  
world.<sup>8</sup>

Thompson's approach is comparative, i.e. Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology and Habermas' critical social theory. (Thompson's form of a 'thematic exposition' followed by a 'constructive critique' has been adopted in terms of this thesis. A thematic exposition of Ebeling and Ricoeur's work will lead to what is hoped as a constructive critique in terms of the implications of the appropriation of their ideas in the sphere of education and specifically, Religious Education.)

In terms of its hermeneutical lineage, Dilthey's<sup>9</sup> model of the relationship of explanation and understanding was based upon a dichotomy. For Dilthey any model with regard to explanation is borrowed from another region of knowledge. Namely the inductive logic of the natural sciences. For Dilthey, the maxim nature

we explain and man we must understand means that the foundation of the Geisteswissenschaften\* is preserved by interpreting along the hermeneutical arc of understanding a foreign psychic life through the 'fixed expressions' of history.

For Ricoeur, in terms of a methodology, the objectification of the status of discourse is a better starting point than the methodology of the natural sciences, i.e. Ricoeur's view of hermeneutics as theories of interpretation that are reflective, recollective and iconoclastic.<sup>§</sup> Ricoeur still relies on the dialectical character of the relationship between explanation and understanding but his paradigm of text-interpretation he believes provides a possible solution for the methodological paradox of the human sciences. The paradigm's main features from the status of the text itself point to the following characteristics. These four characteristics constitute the 'objectivity' of the text.

1. The fixation of the meaning.
2. Its dissociation from the mental intention of the author.
3. The display of non-ostensive references. And
4. The universal range of its addressees.<sup>8</sup>

As in the paradigm of text, it is hoped that a synopsis is appropriate to clarify Ricoeur's dialectic of explanation and understanding which will be explored further in Section 4.

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\* cf. Section 1.4.2 From Regional to General Hermeneutics.

§ Section 1.4.1 Problematic Horizons: The Tradition of Hermeneutics.



First dialectic: **From understanding to explanation.**

To understand a text is not to rejoin the author. This leads to the problem of the right understanding and this may be 'construed' by 'making good guesses'.<sup>10</sup> Rules cannot be made for validating guesses but there are methods. This of course points to the aporia of hermeneutics that essentially:

The judgement of importance is a guess.

The localisation and the individualisation of the text is still a guess.

And

The text may be reached from different sides

therefore

a specific kind of onesidedness is implied in the act of reading.<sup>11</sup>

For Ricoeur these enigmas confirm the guess character of interpretation.

However, Ricoeur supports Hirsch's view that although the text ultimately retains its enigma we attempt to validate the interpretation if our presupposed hermeneutic is an openness to the text and not an attempt at a verification which concludes a closed and final meaning; i.e. diachronistic – language in terms of its development and not synchronistic – language as a closed system of signs. The aim of validation as against verification is:

to show that an interpretation is more probable  
in the light of what is known of something  
other than showing that a conclusion is true ...  
... it is a logic of uncertainty and of  
qualitative probability.<sup>12</sup>

As Ricoeur intends, the realisation of text in terms of inscribed discourse being plurivocal, and open to several constructions or interpretations leads him to argue for the plurivocity of interpretation in terms of human action. The claim for instance, in Religious Education, could be to aim to 'make sense' as to what is the nature of religion. A hermeneutic, a methodological interpretive framework, is employed to make sense of the claim of choosing certain texts - either instances of inscribed discourse or instances of human action and being committed to those claims in terms of a planned and what is considered to be effective curriculum. However, like legal utterances, all interpretations (e.g. in the sphere of Religious Education):

may be challenged and the question 'what can defeat a claim' is common to all argumentative situations. Only in the tribunal is there a moment when the procedures of appeal are exhausted. If there is any last word ... we call that violence.<sup>13</sup>

From understanding to explanation is a dialectical process and this process of interpretation is an 'adventure'<sup>14</sup> which is ongoing and vital, i.e. theories of interpretation which are reflective, recollective and iconoclastic rather than presumed 'right' interpretations. This still leaves the possibility, albeit an enigma of 'good' interpretations.<sup>15</sup> 'The art of making transfer'

(Fuchs) as against a supposed set of rules to be rigidly adhered to in the process of interpretation.

**Second dialectic: From explanation to understanding.**

In reading we may remain in a 'state of suspense' with regard to a 'referred-to world' or we may 'actualise the potential' <sup>16</sup> of the text in a new situation. Ricoeur attempts to show that explanation requires understanding in the context of word and deed. It is 'action' that results if attempting to understand a text is to 'follow' its movement from sense to reference, from what it says to what it talks about'. <sup>17</sup> If the instance of interpretation is ongoing and vital it may be that the constituted action is in the context of personal commitment to that which is to be interpreted. And, as the model of text-interpretation shows,

understanding has nothing to do with an immediate grasping of a foreign psychic life or with an emotional identification with a mental intention. Understanding is entirely mediated by the whole of explanatory procedures which precede it and accompany it. The counterpart of this personal appropriation is not something which can be felt, it is the dynamic meaning realised by the explanation which we defined earlier with the reference of the text, i.e. its power of disclosing a world. <sup>18</sup>

From explaining to understanding personal commitment (the action upon a text) in the sense of mediating a possible world) is not excluded or denied but qualified in the sense of

legitimate personal involvement in that which is to be interpreted. This is what Gadamer calls the 'fusion of horizons': the world horizon of the reader is fused with the world horizon of the writer. The

ideality of the text is the mediating  
link in the process of horizon fusing. <sup>19</sup>

Expressed as broad but fundamental questions in the context of this thesis:

Is education preparation for an event? Explanation is gradual and evolving until understanding occurs.  
Or, is education an event which celebrates the present which becomes the past which becomes that which is to be interpreted?  
To understand is to educate and to educate is to understand.  
The question and problem is not the recognition of the hermeneutical circle but in education, and specifically in Religious Education, that of breaking into the circle at the right, authentic and valid point in a compulsory, secular and state system.

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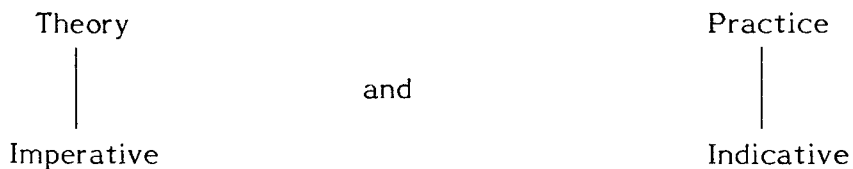
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5. Ibid., p.144.
6. Ibid., p.206.
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8. Ibid., p.2.
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10. cf. Hirsch, E. D. (1967), Validity in Interpretation (Yale University Press). Hirsch's theories of interpretation were discussed in Section 1.3.2 - Intuitionism, Positivism and Perspectivism.
11. Ricoeur, P. (1981), Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences (Cambridge University Press, p.211).
12. Ibid., p.212.

13. Ibid., p.215.
14. cf. Reagan (ed.) (1979), Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (Athens, Ohio University Press) especially Zaner, R. M., 'The Adventure of Interpretation'.
15. cf. Ross, W. D. (1930), The Right and the Good (Oxford Clarendon Press).
16. See note 11, p.215.
17. Ibid., p.218.
18. Ibid., p.220.
19. See note 14, p.93.

#### 4.0    **WAYS OF BEING PRACTICAL:** **HERMENEUTICS AND EDUCATION**

The relationship of the possibility and problem of hermeneutics to education. Is it possible for the categories of Ebeling's theory of language fused with aspects of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics to be appropriated appropriately in the sphere of education and particularly Religious Education?

#### **THE SCOPE OF THE CURRICULUM: A FUSION OF HORIZONS?**



The following model, it is hoped, serves two purposes.

1.    As a summary thus far; and
2.    As a basis for an application of the model in education and in particular, Religious Education.

## LANGUAGE

The power which creates understanding

DISCOURSE	INTERPRETATION	
The focus of language	HERMENEUTICS	
The matter of that which is to be interpreted	The interpreter	The person to whom the interpretation is offered
The hermeneutical situation	The hermeneutical problem	The task of hermeneutics

## MEANING

## EXPRESSION

## COMMUNICATION

## HERMENEUTICAL THEORY

Ways of knowing

"The theory of operations of understanding in relation to the interpretation of texts"

## CHOICE

## ANALYSIS

## FRAMEWORK

"The unity in language of past events with present decisions"

Ways of being practical

## HERMENEUTICAL THEORY

CLARIFICATION	RELATING	UNDERSTANDING
The what of the text	The how of the text	The why of the text

## Context

## Conditions

## Consequences

(RICOEUR)

## DISTANCIATION

## APPROPRIATION

## LANGUAGE

The use of the power which creates understanding

LINGUISTIC criteria	and	TEXTUAL criteria
The authority to speak?	-	The comprehensibility of the utterance?
The responsibility for language?	-	The truth of the propositional component?
The challenge to understanding?	-	The correctness and appropriateness of its performatory component?
The achievement of mutual understanding?	-	The authority of the speaking subject?
(EBELING)		(HABERMAS)



#### 4.1.1 THEORY AND PRACTICE: IMPERATIVE CONDITION INDICATIVE CONTEXT

In the preceding sections a selective but systematic investigation of hermeneutics has been attempted. Through a study of the vocabulary, nature, scope and task of hermeneutics an overall view was established. Namely, hermeneutics as the operations of understanding in relation to the interpretation of texts and that the implication is a theory with the widest possible horizon which will lead to a common way of posing certain problems. Especially, the problem, process and centrality of language to attempt to interpret a work/discourse/text. This centrality of the problem of language was explored in Ebeling's introduction to a theological theory of language. The problem of interpretation and in particular the Notion/Model/Matter of the text was explored by reference to some aspects of Paul Ricoeur's work. Thus, hermeneutics in Ebeling and Ricoeur was presented as a 'way of knowing'. The intention of this final section is to attempt to orientate the possibility and problem of hermeneutics to possibility and problem in education as a 'way of being practical'. As a question, is it possible for the categories of Ebeling's theory of language (authority, responsibility, challenge and understanding) fused with aspects of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics (discourse, distanciation and appropriation) to be appropriated appropriately in the sphere of education vis a vis Religious Studies?, i.e. Religious Education as an occasion for the endeavour of hermeneutics. In this first part of the final section a fusion of these horizons will be attempted on two fronts.

- i) a clarification of the concepts of ways of knowing with ways of being practical - by way of exemplifying an instance

of theory and practice in education. The instance of this theory and practice in education will be through some aspects of the work of Philip Phenix, and in particular, his 'Philosophy of Education' and his subsequent realms of meaning;

- ii) the implication of this clarification is that we must pay 'critical attention' to the philosophies of knowledge in which interpretation is grounded and thus 'reflect critically' on these distinct ways of knowing (presumed in education) in relation to ways of being practical (practised in education), i.e. the rightness, authenticity and validity of appropriating a particular educational hermeneutic.

This contrast of ways of knowing with ways of being practical is the first point in this concluding section that deserves clarification. Fundamentally, ways of knowing contrasted with ways of being practical could be summed up as the former being an attempt to 'raise questions as to what is the case' and the latter to 'raise questions as to what should be done'.<sup>1</sup>

However, the contrast between theory and practice in both hermeneutics and education is not clear cut and the distinction between theory and practice is not just one distinction but a

shifting set of contrasts made to serve different,  
though possibly equally valid purposes.<sup>2</sup>

The concern of this final section is that contrasts and distinctions will appear as the possibility (the theory of operations of understanding) of hermeneutics is explored alongside the problem of hermeneutics (that of interpreting a text) and related to the parallel issues of

the possibility and problem of religious education. The aim has been to develop a theory or view of hermeneutics with the intention of relating that theory to a particular instance of educational discourse, in this case, Religious Studies. This discussion is not to merely state whether the particular discourse is theoretical or practical or theoretical and practical, but rather these selected views of hermeneutics are

theories, which in their structure can serve the clarification of practical questions, are designed to enter into communicative action. Interpretations which can be gained within the framework of such theories cannot be directly effective for the orientation of action, rather they find their legitimate value within the therapeutic context of the reflexive formation of volition.<sup>3</sup>

The ways of knowing (Ebeling and Ricoeur) are reflections on the interrelationships of the way in which they see both the centrality and importance of language and the attempt to interpret their views on the interpretive situation (the hermeneutic circle). Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, theory and practice are not separate but are the two poles of the hermeneutical arc. The context of that theory and practice being Religious Education. Theory is conjoined with practice by the act of interpretation as the 'art of making transfer' (Fuchs). The theory, in this case, the possibility and problem of Religious Education provides the link, expressed as a way of knowing encompassing ways of being practical as this is its implication:

On the one hand, it investigates the constitutive historical complex of the constellation of self-interests, to which the theory still belongs across and beyond its acts of insight.

On the other hand, it studies the historical interconnection, in which the theory, as action-orientated, can intervene.<sup>4</sup>

Imperative condition (Knowing)

The hermeneutical situation into the necessity of interpretation.

Indicative context (praxis)

The hermeneutical problem leading to being able to interpret.

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An inaugural lecture, Birmingham University.
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#### 4.1.2 A PHILOSOPHICAL EDUCATION HERMENEUTIC: A THEORY OF EDUCATION

Most of the major world religions have a source of what is believed to be authoritative in sacred literature. In Christianity, the Bible is its Scripture, its sacred writing, and it forms a source which can be consulted. Its text, its totality, contained in the Old and New Testaments, can be separated and construed into the parts that make up its whole.

Education does not contain canonised, authoritative and sacred writings which provide a central and home base for interpretation. Christianity has its Bible, but education presents its literature in forms of research and theorising which 'present a complex of alternative, contradictory and partial theories'.<sup>1</sup> This may also be true of Biblical Studies, but Biblical Studies **at least** has the Bible. Educational studies has 'education' and that is a concept which is difficult to define. The intention is to 'localise' education in this thesis by reference to Religious Studies. In the context of the quote 'it is assumed that every educational choice' etc., is where an opinion is expressed on the significance of a particular form of discourse in education. The basis of that choice is upon the opinion that the discourse is significant and that concentration on that discourse may point to an educational hermeneutic that has resulted in what is intrinsically believed to be meaningful action, i.e. curriculum practice.

Philip Phenix is considered to be in many circles an exemplary and significant theorist in terms of education. For instance, his

discourse is considered 'significant' in that it could be claimed the phenomenological implicit/explicit hermeneutic as expressed in Jean Holm's book, 'The Teaching of Religion' is based upon a prior understanding of and an assumption of Religion as a 'realm of meaning' that is perceivable, knowable and containing features which can be observed, studied and understood.

Phenix has written widely on many aspects of education and is also presently involved in contemporary developments in education, for instance, through the Journal of Curriculum Theorising: The Reconceptualists. In his Philosophy of Education (in Part 1)\*, Phenix expresses in general and wide ranging terms his concept of education: 'The scope of the curriculum'. The aim of education is summed up in the two words 'mastery' and 'belonging' (cf. Hirst and Peters - academic and social). Through 'mastery' a person will realise his 'essential humanness' and by realising this essential humanness through education, the person will be able to participate in full in a 'meaningful, civilised order'. Phenix treats these aims systematically under the headings of depth, participation, extensiveness, coherence and essentials. The philosophy of education is grounded, as a 'way of knowing' by way of participating in the universal deposits of knowledge that mankind already has, i.e. through the educational process. We organise, interpret, clarify and criticise these 'ways of knowing', these realms of meaning (symbolics, empirics, aesthetics, synoetics, ethics and synoptics) in such a way that a person will

- 
- \* 1. Education in school.  
2. Education in nature, family, job and community.  
3. Theory of knowledge.  
4. Fundamental questions about the nature of man and the cosmos.

realise his essential humanness by a mastery of these realms. The medium for this transmission is by way of education. The culmination of this transmission is the curriculum. In Phenix's view, education and thus the scope of the curriculum, is based upon his belief in human nature which has the ability and the capacity to function by way of:

- 1) Using symbols (language).
- 2) The ability to abstract and generalise.
- 3) The creation and perceiving of interesting objects.
- 4) The ability to relate to each other personally.
- 5) Making judgements of good and evil.
- 6) Re-enacting the past.
- 7) Seeking the ultimate.

Education has the awesome task of analysing, evaluating and synthesising these capacities of human nature through a mastery of and a belonging to the expressions of that human nature in the available 'realms of meaning'. Education aims to maximise meaning through a competent understanding of those realms of meaning. Therefore the curriculum should be so rich and broad as to provide for learnings in all six realms and no one realm can be perfected without the aid of the other. The journey of education through organising, interpreting, clarifying and criticising these realms of meanings should result in mastery and belonging.

The philosophy of education is thus seen as a way of looking at knowledge we already have. The scope of the curriculum (curriculum concerns) is thus all aspects of human nature and the curriculum is organised accordingly by clarifying, interpreting and criticising that knowledge on the basis of choice as to what is worth knowing.



Education aims for the 'transformation and fashioning of language to achieve greater clarity and depth of understanding'.<sup>2</sup> The method of education (curriculum practice) is first and foremost by way of dialogue with the 'treasures of knowledge' we have.

Phenix's methodology, in the Introduction to his 'Philosophy of Education', is that he is guided by suggesting some of the factors and alternatives rather than giving a definite set of solutions, i.e. 'discussion outlines' rather than 'exhaustive treatments'. Thus, he claims his book does not use a 'systems approach' and ideas and arguments are not put in the context of advocacy. It is neither a history of ideas as the ideas are considered on their own terms and the general methodology of the book is from the more specific and concrete to the more general and abstract aspects of education, i.e. an inductive approach. Thus, to summarise from Phenix's Introduction, the aim is transformation through language to 'clarity'; the method is one of dialogue - questioning, and the fundamental level of this enquiry is to go back to 'basic premises' and 'underlying assumptions' - knowledge deposited in the past.

Education, for Phenix, is a means of 'perpetuating' culture from generation to generation. It thus aims to 'widen' one's view of life, 'deepen insights' into relationships and 'counteract' the provincialism of customary existence, i.e. to engender an integrated outlook. A philosophy of the curriculum assumes:

- 1) a comprehensive outlook;
  - 2) that a person is essentially an organised totality;
  - 3) that society is dependent upon principles of community
- therefore curriculum is seen as a basis for the growth

of community;

- 4) the comprehensiveness of the curriculum gives added significance to each of the component segments.

These assumptions necessitate and form the basis for what Phenix considers to be the desirable scope, content and arrangement of the curriculum. The scope, content and arrangement of the curriculum is derived from certain considerations about human nature and knowledge. His main argument is that:

human beings are essentially creatures who have the power to experience meanings. Distinctively human existence consists in a pattern of meanings. Furthermore general education is the process of engendering essential meanings.<sup>3</sup>

However, the path of education is not smooth. The values, purposes and achievements are fragile and give way to futility, frustration and doubt. The context of this general education, in Western society, is that of modern, industrial civilisation. The marks of this are, for Phenix:

- 1) Expressions of criticism and scepticism.
- 2) A pervasive depersonalisation and fragmentation of life because of our complex, interdependent society.
- 3) The mass of cultural products.
- 4) The rapid rate of change which leads to impermanence and insecurity.

The curriculum should therefore be designed to counteract the above. The goal of a philosophy of the curriculum is to analyse the nature of meaning but 'meaning' takes different forms, so Phenix maps out these six realms of meaning that education should orientate to and thus organise and interpret these realms of meaning as they

provide the scope, content and arrangement of the curriculum.

Phenix identifies the:

irreducible minimum to which every pupil should have a right of access, which should reflect the complex diversity of human nature and the capacity schools have to contribute to every aspect of personal and social growth. The minimum curriculum should be broad and stimulating.<sup>8</sup>

This will be satisfied, for Phenix, through a comprehensive and integrated study of the six realms of meaning. These six realms of meaning are explored in full in his book, entitled 'Realms of Meaning'. Briefly these six 'realms', already listed, are:

**Symbolics** - Ordinary language, maths and gestures, rituals, rhythmic patterns. Contained in arbitrary symbolic structures. These must be employed to express meanings in other realms.

**Empirics** - Sciences of the physical world, factual descriptions, generalisations and theoretical formulations and explanations.

**Aesthetics** - Various arts, music, movement and literature. Contemplative perception of particular significant things.

**Synnoetics** - Meditative thought, relational insight, direct awareness, concrete, direct and existential.

**Ethics** - Moral meanings, expressed obligations rather than facts.

**Synoptics** - Comprehensively integrative - history, religion and philosophy. These combine empirical, aesthetic and synnoetic meanings into coherent wholes.

These six should give basic competences that general education should develop in every person, in **integrity, intrinsic logical order,**

**human development and maturation.**

General education must select and organise these realms of meaning by the following principles.

- 1) Draw from fields of disciplined enquiry from men of knowledge who possess authority.
- 2) They should be particularly representative; find seminal or key ideas.
- 3) Exemplify the methods of enquiry.
- 4) Arouse imagination; Materials that tap the deeper levels of experience.

From the preceding, it is clear that Phenix himself, through his writing and his discourse, bases his philosophy of education on what he feels to be a comprehensive, educational **theory of language**. The 'word' (knowledge from the past expressed in his six realms of meaning) is an 'acoustical event' (Ebeling) capable of realisation in the educational process (the scope, content and arrangement of the curriculum). Thus, 'meanings' can be established - education has a firm epistemological base.

These 'meanings' can be appropriated through the mediation of education - appropriation as mastery and belonging. From the prior understanding of an all encompassing doctrine of man based upon human nature and its capacity to function, interpretation is necessary and imperative if a person is to meaningfully participate in the community of man. This assumption is qualitative in that man has the ability to realise his essential humanness through an organised orientation to the deposits of knowledge found in the

past. Education is the means whereby 'time can be bridged', the past relates to the present through the process of education and the hermeneutic circle is expressed as **to educate is to understand and to understand is to educate**. The way into this circle is by way of the educator being Hermes, the interpreter, whose responsibility and task is to uncover these essential meanings so that they can be appropriated by the receivers. What is known can be grasped. What is known can be organised. Education is a comprehensive and transcendent process (cf. Transcendence and the Curriculum from Curriculum Theorising: The Reconceptualists, Ed. W. Pinar, 1975, McCutchan).

Using Ebeling's categories, the **authority to speak** stems from the knowable past - education is possible. The **responsibility for language** is the organisation of that possibility, and the **challenge** is to and for understanding of that possibility expressed in terms of education as engendering essential meanings. The educator is dedicated, in Phenix's language, to mediating

the finest treasures of civilisation so as  
they become a common inheritance of  
persons who are seeking to realise their  
essential humanness.<sup>5 5</sup>

As can be seen from such a brief discussion of Phenix's basic educational hermeneutic, his 'text' - the summation of his thoughts in 'inscribed discourse' is open to an infinite variety of interpretations. What can and must be said is that education must pay critical attention to the philosophies of knowledge in which interpretations are grounded (e.g. Phenix's philosophy of education) and these must reflect critically on these 'ways of knowing' in

relation to 'ways of being practical'; for instance, the appropriation of Phenix's educational hermeneutic in Religious Studies.

Attention has been given to a particular educational philosophy of knowledge, which is firstly articulated in language and that that language is considered to be meaningful for the educational community and therefore true for the part of the educational community who give credibility to that 'text'.

The intention is not now to attempt a critique on the work of Phenix so that a judgement is made on what is considered to be its rightness, authenticity and validity. Rather to state the prior question - by what criteria do we presume to interpret Phenix's work and thence appropriate the meaning implicit in his work? i.e. to pay critical attention to and reflect critically upon the philosophies of knowledge in which interpretation is grounded. It is a considered presupposition of this thesis that sometimes those involved in education

seldom display the level of deliberative reflectivity that one might hope to hear.<sup>6</sup>

The supposition is that hermeneutics may help on the level of 'deliberative reflectivity' assuming that

every educational choice is based upon a value commitment to some interpretive framework by those involved in the curriculum process.<sup>7</sup>

Hermeneutics may provide the language whereby certain issues in education are clarified and we can articulate more fully

what is at stake in the adoption of a particular interpretative framework, a hermeneutic, that we presume to locate in educational practice, i.e. a structured analysis of the theory of operations of understanding that we as educators bring to education and the subsequent application of that theory in the methodology of a particular, practised curriculum.

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#### 4.2 THE CONTENT AND ARRANGEMENT OF THE CURRICULUM

For manifestly, if the steps in our curriculum are so arranged that they can be successively ascended by the pupil himself with little or no help, they must correspond with the stages of evolution in his faculties; and manifestly, if the successive achievements of these steps are intrinsically gratifying to him, it follows that they require no more than a normal exercise of his powers.

Spencer, H. (1861), Essays on Education (J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1928, p.80).

#### 4.2.1 'THE PRACTICAL CURRICULUM'

- SCHOOL'S COUNCIL WORKING PAPER NO. 70
- THE 'MATTER' OF THE TEXT

The aim presupposed in the analysis of culture and experience is that of achieving for the pupil an induction into a particular society by way of a general education and by the specific aim of equipping a person to fulfil a particular role in that society. The educational presuppositions of a particular culture/society reflect the values of that society. Education is not separate from that culture/society; it is a priori involved and for instance education as a state system is necessarily linked with the 'hidden interests of the political powers'.<sup>1</sup>

The first task of education is to identify the discourse of a culture; to delineate an appropriate hierarchy of topics in such a structured and sequential way that a coherent and competent appropriation occurs. A task fraught with problems.

A general statement of issues involved in 'working out' a curriculum can be found in Schools Council Working Paper No. 70 - The Practical Curriculum. On page 15, six issues are cited:

- 1) The overwhelming need for each school and for the country as a whole is to find a rationale for the curriculum now every child has a right to eleven years education.
- 2) Then to identify the irreducible minimum to which every pupil should have a right of access: this should reflect the complex diversity of human nature and the capacity schools have to contribute to every aspect of personal and social

growth. The minimum curriculum should be broad and stimulating.

- 3) To decide what mix of subject disciplines and kinds of experience a school should provide to achieve a reasonable balance over the eleven years of compulsory schooling.
- 4) To take into account the implications of having externally examined outcomes for most pupils.
- 5) To negotiate a match between the desired curriculum and the staff, accommodation, equipment and materials.
- 6) To think out ways of discovering whether the planned curriculum achieves what is hoped of it.

These six points present in themselves a 'text', an instance of 'inscribed discourse'. An attempt will now be made to summarise Ricoeur's text hermeneutic in the context of this instance of educational discourse and from this summary interpret the 'text' in terms of an orientation to the 'action' of the 'text' vis a vis Religious Education.

This text is a work of discourse inscribed in writing and as such can be viewed as a 'totality'. It has been produced in accordance with a series of rules which define its 'genre' expressed in its 'style'.

As a work of discourse the text preserves the properties of the sentence but presents them in a new constellation (rationale for curriculum) which calls for its own type of interpretation.<sup>2</sup>

(In this case, the implications of 1) to 6) for the intended curriculum in Religious Studies.)

The text as a written work is necessarily 'distanced' from the conditions of spoken discourse. This 'distance' is encapsulated in the notion of 'distanciation'. In Ricoeur, the four main traits of distanciation are:

- 1) The surpassing of the event of saying by the meaning of what is said, i.e. the 'intentional exteriorisation' of the speech act realised by means of grammatical and syntactical devices.
- 2) The relation between the inscribed expression and the original speaker, i.e. textual meaning and psychological meaning have different destinies.
- 3) When discourse is spoken the hearer is specified in a dialogical relation; however, in written discourse the audience, although presumed, is unknown and the text is available to anyone who can read, i.e. the text 'decontextualises' itself from its social and historical conditions of production.
- 4) The emancipation of the text from the limits of ostensive reference, i.e. the text has a different 'referential dimension' than that of speech. This dimension is unfolded in the process of interpretation. Thus, the text defines the 'object domain of hermeneutics'.<sup>3</sup>

The application of this theory of the model of the text is extended in the thought of Paul Ricoeur to 'action'. Ricoeur considers 'action' as a text. The 'action' in this context is the interpretation of the six issues and their applicability to Religious Studies. We therefore must attempt to 'construe' and 'guess' (Hirsch) this action as a whole. Thus it is inevitable that a 'conflict of interpretations' will emerge. However, the action can be generalised in terms of

Religious Studies as the curriculum of that domain as an 'anticipatory schema' and thus viewed in a 'relational' sense. The 'past' of the text, as it is fixed in writing is related to the 'present', in the intended exteriorisation of the text, in this case the curriculum practice of Religious Studies. The act of interpretation, in this case the application of 1) to 6) to Religious Studies, 'brings together, equalises, renders contemporary and similar' <sup>4</sup> the past of the text to the present context and so we are able to appropriate appropriately the meaning of the text in our present understanding. The movement of interpretation is an expansion of the horizons of the reader by actualising the meaning of the 'text' in a concrete situation, i.e.

Curriculum concerns are practical concerns.  
Teachers are confronted continually with  
situations wherein they must make practical  
decisions: what knowledge should be included  
in the curriculum; why; how it should be  
taught; and to whom? <sup>5</sup>

Although the movement of interpretation is towards actualisation, the movement of interpretation is circular and therefore the goal of interpretation is not to merely reinforce the subjectivity of the reader but to be a fusion of horizons. The imagination by which this fusion, this transformation occurs, is dependent upon the hermeneutic methodology employed.

In terms of an orientation to Religious Studies, these six points 'project' a world, a possibility of realising a curriculum. Whatever is the experience, the prior understanding of the collective authors within the Schools Council, it has come to fruition in a text and the reader is presented with its language, its intended

meaning and its orientation to realisation. This discourse is (to adopt Ricoeur's three assumptions with regard to language - in this case educational language) articulated in language, it is not senseless, and at its least it should be meaningful for the community for which it is intended. The aim is for an understanding of the basis for planning a curriculum, i.e. it desires to communicate to the reader what are considered to be important issues in curriculum planning. The Schools Council has 'chosen' and become 'committed' to a particular interpretative framework - that of the necessity to be aware of certain issues and the implication of those issues for planning a curriculum. Its mode of this discourse thus points to

- 1) its presupposed meaningfulness, and
- 2) that that meaningfulness is capable of an interpretation that can be fulfilled.

In short, it attempts to link a 'way of knowing' with 'ways of being practical' and it has intended to adopt a mode of discourse that is appropriate. It may be then, that the first task of an 'educational hermeneut' is to

- 1) identify the discourse through the matter of the text, and thence
- 2) to delineate the hierarchy of topics and interpret the discourse in 'action'.

In each of the six points there is the fact of choice - find a rationale, identify, decide, take account of, negotiate a match, think out. The presuppositions of that choice are located in the prior understanding the interpreter (the educator) brings to the text.

Therefore, to be true to the major principles of the endeavour of hermeneutics there is the need for a 'critically analysed pre-understanding', a realisation that the 'movement of the process of interpretation is circular' and that 're-interpretation is only possible if the interpreter has other ways of speaking at his disposal' (Schillebeeckx). In this way we then pay critical attention to and reflect critically on the philosophies of knowledge in which the interpretation is grounded.

In the context of Religious Education, in relation to the above six issues, the intended curriculum has to find a rationale. This may be the nature and scope of religion. For instance, its bearing on culture, the effect it has had, and this is translated into an 'irreducible minimum' alongside decisions as to balance, to externally examined outcomes and evaluating whether that particular planned curriculum achieves what is hoped of it.

A curriculum could be defined as:

An attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and is capable of effective translation into practice.<sup>5</sup>

... it involves both content and method and in its widest application takes account of the problem of implementation in the institutions of the educational system.<sup>6</sup>

Let us therefore focus on an instance of the relationship between the 'intended text' (points 1) to 6), Schools Council) and an application of those criteria in the 'Avon Agreed Syllabus on

Religious Education' considered here to be the 'action' of the text. The syllabus can broadly be interpreted in terms of the 'action' of the text being construed as an 'anticipatory schema' (Possibility) and thus viewed in a 'relational sense' (Problematic: theory to practice).



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#### 4.2.2 A PLANNED CURRICULUM -

#### THE AVON AGREED SYLLABUS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION THE 'ACTION' OF THE TEXT

Hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a relation to the object that comes into language in the transmitted text and has, or acquires a connection with the tradition out of which the text speaks.

The scope of this focus can be summarised from the foreword of the Avon Agreed Syllabus:

The syllabus itself breaks new ground; it provides a framework for Religious Education in the County and it takes into account the contemporary process of curriculum development by placing on individual schools the responsibility for creating their own schemes of work.<sup>1</sup>

Three main areas will be covered in the discussion:

- 1) The 'Agreed Syllabus': Context.
- 2) The 'framework of Religious Education': Conditions.
- 3) Its relationship to the 'Process of Curriculum Development': Consequences.

Religious Education is the only subject that schools are legally required to teach. Also the 1944 Education Act states that Religious Education in England and Wales 'shall be given in accordance with an agreed syllabus adopted for the school'. The fifth schedule of the Act outlines the mechanics for the adoption of an agreed syllabus.

A Conference should be convened with members from:

- a) Religious organisations which ought to be represented.
- b) The Church of England (except for certain areas in Wales).
- c) Representatives from the teacher's organisations.
- d) The Authority.

The syllabus agreed upon by these members is also to be used in the controlled schools, although denominational teaching may be permitted in certain circumstances. Aided and Special agreement schools may give denominational teaching supplemented by the agreed syllabus of the area.

The Avon Agreed Syllabus and its curricular implications cannot be separated from a) the present legal situation, and b) the history of Agreed syllabuses. The present legal situation is that, subject to the conscience clause, daily worship will be held and that there will be a prescribed amount of religious teaching within the national system and that that teaching will be in accordance with the Agreed Syllabus for the area.

From 1870 to 1940, Religious Education was not required to be taught by law in England and Wales. Decisions for or against the teaching of Religious Education was a local decision and if religious teaching was provided it must acknowledged that 'no religious catechism or religious formula which is distinctive of any particular denomination' (Cowper-Temple Clause - which was repeated in the 1944 Act) must be included.

Church schools during this period usually had a Religious Education syllabus and many Local Authorities modelled their syllabuses along church lines, taking into account the Cowper-Temple Clause. The early syllabuses were usually brief and often included biblical references to be studied and learned. By 1920, there was more co-operation between Local Authorities and the churches as denominational rivalry decreased.

It could be argued that the 'Cambridgeshire Syllabus of Religious Teaching for Schools' (1924) was the first modern syllabus which attempted to draw up 'an agreed' syllabus of Religious Instruction and observance which would be acceptable to all religious bodies'. (From the foreword of that Syllabus.)

The Cambridgeshire syllabus seemed to be a catalyst and prompted a movement among many other Local Authorities to attempt to formulate an 'Agreed Syllabus' for their area. This movement of agreed syllabuses gathered such impetus that by the time of the 1944 Act they had become mandatory. Linked with this is the fact that by this time the approach to the formulation of agreed syllabuses had become well established according to certain traditions and it would be true to say that from the 1920's through to the 1960's, there were many typical agreed syllabuses. The emphasis of the content of these syllabuses was that they dealt entirely with the past. The present was acknowledged in that an approach to the present was nurtured through the study of the past. An example affirming this view occurs in the statement of aims to the 1945 Surrey Agreed Syllabus:

The aim of the Syllabus is to secure that  
children attending the schools of the County  
... may gain knowledge of the common Christian  
faith held by their fathers for nearly 2,000 years;  
may seek for themselves in Christianity principles  
which give a purpose to life and a guide to all  
its problems; and may find inspiration, power  
and courage to work for their own welfare,  
for that of their fellow creatures, and for the  
growth of God's kingdom. (Surrey, 1945)

For the most part, agreed syllabuses up to the 1960's concentrated on two main areas:

- i) Biblical teaching;
- ii) The Christian Life.

From the 1950's the emphasis had altered slightly to taking into account the experience of the child and by the 1960's a new type of agreed syllabus was appearing.

In 1966, the West Riding Agreed Syllabus, 'Suggestions for Religious Education', states in its underlying principles that ideas in Religious Education have changed rapidly over the preceding few years and that in the compilation of the syllabus certain requirements have been kept in mind:

- a) The material in the syllabus must satisfy the religious needs of children and young people at all stages in their development.
- b) The material in the syllabus must be related to life and experience.
- c) The syllabus must provide opportunities for shared experiences to be enjoyed.

The work to be covered was arranged in broad categories such as topics suitable for Early childhood (4 - 7 years), Middle childhood (7 - 9 years), Middle adolescence (13 - 16 years), and Late adolescence (16 - 18 years). 'Themes and activities' provided the springboard for the need of the pupil to discover Christianity for himself and more material was concerned with the present, e.g. 'Personal Relationships' and 'Religion and Life in Contemporary Society'.

The Inner London Education Authority developed the ideas of theme teaching in a more systematic and thorough manner in their agreed syllabus of 1968, entitled 'Learning for Life'. In that syllabus there is material on such topics as, for example, neighbours, holidays, the family, work, death and money.

Even with these developments, it was felt that the Agreed Syllabus machinery was somewhat inflexible and it was felt in 1970 by the Cambridgeshire County Council (and others) that a statement

should be issued to schools:

Assuring them that trial and experiment  
in Religious Education was not only  
permissible but warmly supported by  
the Council.'

Thus, as the trend to consider Religious Education in terms of a  
continuing curriculum development became apparent from 1970  
and so, many authorities thought it right and worthwhile to set  
up a voluntary Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education  
alongside the statutory obligation for a Conference for the  
recommendation of an Agreed Syllabus. It is now becoming apparent  
that the distinction between the Statutory Conference and the  
Voluntary Standing Council is:

becoming blurred, teachers are taking a more  
prominent role, the problems of reaching  
agreement between the churches on what  
they hold in common are not in evidence,  
and the materials in use are open to con-  
tinuous addition. Agreed Syllabuses are  
becoming instruments not of syllabus creation  
but of curriculum development.<sup>2</sup>

This 'blurring' of the work of an Agreed Syllabus into the  
area of curriculum development has become apparent in recent  
agreed syllabuses, for example, in the Bath Agreed Syllabus of 1970  
on which the Avon Agreed Syllabus draws heavily. This development  
alongside the brief history of Agreed Syllabuses outlined here puts  
the Avon Agreed Syllabus into its present context.

The Bath Syllabus states its aims as:

The primary aim of R.E. is to help young people to understand the nature of religion. This does not simply mean teaching about religion if by that is implied an historical survey of the doctrines, practices and institutions of the major religions or even of only the Christian religion. It means helping young people to understand and appreciate religious phenomena, to discuss religious claims with sensitivity, to be aware of the nature of religious language and to recognise the criteria and standards by which truth and falsehood in religious beliefs are distinguished.<sup>3</sup>

The aims of the Avon Agreed Syllabus are set out on page 4 of the Syllabus document and from the above quote and the aims of the Avon Syllabus it can be seen that the function of the Agreed Syllabus, although still in a legal framework, has to be much more open ended than the Agreed Syllabuses of the past have been. When the aim of Religious Education is formulated as that of trying 'to secure an understanding of religion and its appreciation' then the subject will be controlled by whatever methods are suitable to the study of religion.

The mandatory fact of legal provision for Religious Education within an Agreed Syllabus is still with us, but increasingly, and the Avon Agreed Syllabus bears witness to this, Agreed Syllabuses are now becoming published recommendations for Religious Education rather than full schemes of work which have to be rigidly adhered to.

To summarise this section in a positive way, it could be said of the fact of an Agreed Syllabus that it:



retains a certain moral and professional weight which no other document has. They give official approval and recognition to trends already well established. They offer a platform for public discussion and for cooperation between many interested parties. Their most significant feature is usually not merely what they say but how they came to say it. Change in the classroom is not effected by presenting to a fully trained teacher a syllabus in the making of which he has<sup>had</sup> no direct part. But the agreed syllabuses do a great deal to register the climate of the subject and to set out its norms. <sup>4</sup>

As a paper by the County Advisor states ('Agreeing an Agreed Syllabus'):

in many ways the publication of this syllabus is part of a longer process; it is a product of much of the work that was going on in the former ancestral authorities and it is a base for the further development of Religious Education in the County. <sup>5</sup>

What then is the 'framework of Religious Education' and what is its relationship to the 'process of curriculum development'?

A philosophy of education, like any theory, has to be stated in words, in symbols. But so far as it is more than verbal it is a plan for conducting education. Like, any plan, it must be framed with reference to what is to be done and how it is to be done.<sup>6</sup>

Educational psychologists and philosophers have shown the importance of the child's experience in the process of learning. In response to this changes occurred in Religious Education during the early 1960's, mainly through the work of, for example, R. Goldman ('Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence', 1964) and H. Loukes ('Teenage Religion', 1961). They, amongst others, acknowledged the importance of the child's experience and the framework for Religious Education was shifted from a Bible centred, past orientated syllabus, to the exploration of 'life themes' (Goldman) in the Primary School, and the 'problem centred' discussions (Loukes) in the Secondary School. The shift from the factual Biblical emphasis to the experiential was a necessary change of direction, but Holm (1975) argues that two significant factors still related the Bible-centred to the child-centred approach. One was that even though there was a shift, these two frameworks were still essentially confessional in nature and so, secondly, took for granted some commitment on the part of the teacher to a particular viewpoint, i.e. sympathetic to the ideas of Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

Holm feels that there has been another significant change and this has in some way overcome the confessional/commitment aspect and this next change has therefore put Religious Education in a position of having a right to join in curricular decisions not

merely because of the legal aspects but precisely because it can rationalise its content alongside other disciplines. (See later, Phenix, 'Realms of Meaning', and Hirst's 'Forms of Knowledge'.) This change is expressed in the following quotation:

What we have called the religious education of the seventies resulted from taking seriously the questions asked by both the educational psychologists and the educational philosophers. It took into account the emotional and intellectual development of children and the ways in which they learn. It also sets out to provide a valid and essential educational experience for all children and to contribute to their full development as persons, whether their background, or later commitment, was Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or humanist.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the aim of Religious Education is now formulated as: to help pupils to understand what religion is and what it would mean to take a religion seriously.

Before putting forward a framework for Religious Education which would be in line with modern curriculum developments it is necessary to attempt to define, albeit briefly, what religion is in terms of the aims stated and thus its relationship to the subsequent framework.

Smart, in Chapter I of 'New Movements in Religious Education', suggests that instead of vague generic definitions as to what is religious understanding, the way forward is to seek certain formal characteristics of a religion. He presents a definition in terms of trying to identify six recognisable dimensions within a

religion. A religion is identified when it has:

- 1) A system of doctrines - these relate in a complex way to practice.
- 2) Religions have myths - stories of significance which try to translate and relate the transcendent and the human and worldly realm.
- 3) A religion has an ethical dimension - a set of social and ethical norms.
- 4) A religion involves ritual - an enactment or statement of its doctrines, myths and practical implications.
- 5) Thus a religion expresses its experiences.
- 6) A religion has a social dimension.

After attempting to define what religion is, the question of taking it seriously should, according to Holm (Chapter 2, 'Teaching Religion in School') involve studying religion in terms of the following.

Holm defines religion along the same lines as Smart, as containing certain formal characteristics. Man has always felt the need to try to make sense of his world, therefore religion is a universal phenomenon and therefore the study is not confined to one religion. Religion does not exist in a vacuum, it always exists within a particular society and therefore sociological factors must be considered when studying a religion. Religions exist in time, they change and develop and so the history of a religion must be studied in the sense of trying to show how religions develop historically. There must also be training in trying to recognise and handle the different kinds of writings associated with religions as most religions have sacred writings. To some extent, the psy-

chology of religion must be studied as there is the question related to all religions, what is faith? Finally, there must be an exploration of the ritual outworking of a religion through its worship and customs. <sup>9</sup>

The framework for Religious Education is therefore there to 'lay the right kind of foundations and gradually build up a comprehensive understanding of religion'. <sup>10</sup>

Traditional Religious Education, with its over emphasis on fact learning, and the 1960's approach with its almost exclusive emphasis on experience, did not provide, as the Avon Agreed Syllabus would agree (see Aims and Objectives in the syllabus document), the right kind of balance between the 'implicit' and 'explicit' elements of religion. The implicit is where there is a significance for religion implied but not directly referred to - concern with the exploration and reflection on human experience. The explicit is a direct study of something that is recognisably religious. With the risk of over simplifying, it can be seen that generally speaking the 1920's to 1960's perhaps concentrated on the explicit nature of religion too much, and the 1960's perhaps concentrated on the implicit elements too much. The Avon Agreed Syllabus tries to produce a healthy balance between the implicit and explicit elements in the study of Religious Education and therefore is in some way trying to achieve the aim of helping pupils to understand what religion is and what it would mean to take a religion seriously with the presupposition in mind that

a religion provides a coherent interpretation of the whole of human life and experience, and it also involves a way of life that is based on that interpretation.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, what then is the relationship of the Avon Agreed Syllabus in terms of its framework to the 'process of Curriculum Development'?

It could be argued that the question of the 'process of curriculum development' should be the first aspect to be discussed when looking at a syllabus document. But, it has been the aim of the two preceding sections to put the Avon Agreed Syllabus into the context of curriculum development so that Religious Education can in some way rationalise its subject matter in terms of 'why' rather than just 'how' or 'what'. It can be seen that the shift from factual syllabuses to the experiential syllabuses through to what would appear to be a healthy balance between the implicit and explicit elements of Religious Education has been a steady process. Likewise, the 'process' of curriculum development has evolved over the years. Religious Education and the problems of curriculum development have come alongside each other as the 'process' in both spheres has itself been evolving and the past formulations cannot be separated from present trends. What has gone on before affects decisions taken now. The problem is relating the past to the present (as much the problem of religion as the problem of curriculum development!). The past has bearing on the present and the history of the Agreed Syllabus has developed into the present frameworks in Religious Education today. Similarly,

for instance, Tyler's (1945) linear view of curriculum development has evolved into the present frameworks and 'models' of curriculum development. The history of Religious Education since 1920 can be put alongside the history of curriculum development, as the 'process' approach would acknowledge that constant evaluation in relation to what has gone on before is vital to the dynamics of change.

Effective curriculum design requires an iterative process where each question is constantly being processed in the light of answers to subsequent questions.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, whether we express curriculum development through a linear, cyclical or geometrical model it would appear that certain fundamental questions emerge and the attempt to answer these questions is basic to the Avon Agreed Syllabus being:

a syllabus which breaks new ground providing a framework for Religious Education and taking into account the contemporary process of curriculum development.<sup>13</sup>

In the context of the Avon Agreed Syllabus it is assumed that the curriculum is the 'planned experiences [i.e. the syllabus itself] offered to the learner under the guidance of the school' (Wheeler, 1968) and that the curriculum (in this case the Avon Agreed Syllabus) relates in some way to the nature of the society and to the nature of the individual members of that society.

The fundamental elements which emerge in curriculum development, which are common in some way to all the 'models' of curriculum

development, are aims and objectives, content, methods and evaluation. Expressed as questions for use in the construction of a new curriculum vis a vis Schools Council Working Paper No. 70:

- What is its purpose?
- By what criteria do we select the content for that curriculum?
- What learning experiences for a particular curriculum can be provided that are likely to achieve the purpose?
- How can these experiences be effectively organised?
- How can we evaluate the results?

These fundamental elements of curriculum theory have direct relevance to Religious Education in the classroom. These above elements are interrelated in a complex way and we cannot refer to one without the other and also always remembering that any 'model', whether simple or complex, is to be used as a check list for analysis rather than as a blue print to be rigidly followed. What must be emphasised is the urgent need for a strategy for making decisions about the curriculum but remembering, in this case in relation to Religious Education, the logical priority of objectives over content must be emphasised if teachers in Religious Education are to be prevented from merely bringing up old content which has been shown to make little educational sense.

The fundamental elements must of course be enlarged in whatever curriculum model we use. For instance, the aims and objectives should be distinguished and once the general aims have been stated, the specific objectives should be classified or arranged in order (e.g. in line with Bloom's 'Taxonomy of Objectives - The Cognitive and Affective Domain'). As regards content, Hirst identifies seven distinctive 'forms of knowledge' and religion is one of them,



and Phenix (1964) identifies six 'realms of meaning', and religion can be found under 'synoptics'. Thus, there has been a placing of religion on the modern knowledge map and this demands the setting out and the adherence to certain criteria for the selection of that content, e.g.:

validity - will the particular content be liable to 'deliver the goods' in the achievement of objectives?

authenticity - is the particular content true to the dictates of the subject and accurate?

significance - the question of whether the 'content is logically central enough to apply to a wide range of problems' (Wheeler, 1967).

Are the learning experiences offered for instance, appropriate to the group, useful to the pupil, varied, possible and practical? Also, the question of organising the learning experiences is an open question but one which must be answered in a particular situation. Finally, evaluation must take place in two senses: feedback from the pupils and the teachers involved, and also evaluation of the pupil's work and progress.

The aim of this brief sketch of curriculum development has been to show that the fundamental elements in that process of curriculum development have been borne in mind in the making of the Avon Agreed Syllabus. There are of course many questions still to be asked of an Agreed Syllabus, and indeed of the 'process of curriculum development', but it would seem that if teachers respond to the syllabus it could 'break new ground' and therefore provide 'a framework for Religious Education in the County' which would be in line with the 'contemporary [ongoing] process of curriculum development'.

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7. cf. Surin, K. (1980), 'Can the Experiential and the Phenomenological Approaches be Reconciled?' (British Journal of Religious Education, Spring 1980).
8. Holm, J. (1975), Teaching Religion in School (Oxford University Press, p.3).
9. cf. Sealey, J. A. (1982), Religion in Schools: A Philosophical Examination (Ph.D. thesis, University of Lund., especially pp.125-134).
10. See note 8, p.10.
11. Ibid., p.7.  
cf. Grimmitt, M. (1973), What Can I Do In Religious Education? (Mayhew-McCrimmon).  
Also, Holm, J. (1975), Teaching Religion in School (Oxford University Press, e.g. Chart of Teaching Units, p.140).
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13. Avon Agreed Syllabus (1976).

#### 4.3 CURRICULUM CRITIQUE: A CONFLICT OF HORIZONS?

Movements in education are reflected in controversy. There is the necessity of the introduction of a new order of conceptions leading to new modes of practice.

Dewey, J. (1963), Experience and Education (MacMillan, p.5).

#### 4.3.1 CHOICE, COMMITMENT AND FRAMEWORK

Within the context of a hermeneutical framework, curriculum is seen as the study of educational experience and the communicative analysis of curriculum perspectives, orientations and frameworks. That is curriculum knowledge is tied to practical educational experience through a concept of curriculum as analysis, interpretation and communication.<sup>1</sup>

The educator as **chooser** through analysis;  
as **interpreter** of various forms of knowledge;  
as **communicator** of that which is considered  
to be appropriate.

The educator becomes a 'chooser' basing decisions upon what is considered to be worthwhile, essential, relevant and acceptable. The basis for that choice rests in part upon the cultural context of the situation - the socio-historical, economic-political milieu of society. That cultural context also necessarily involves the heritage, the traditions of that particular context. Choice is therefore apparent in what is considered to be significant and appropriate tradition. The outworkings of this choice, in the context of Western, and specifically British, institutions of education, are often expressed as the clarification of aims and objectives of a particular body of knowledge and the arrangement of those aims and objectives in such a way that they are capable of implementation in the classroom. Furthermore:

the curriculum planner is compelled to survey and interpret the nature of his own society, its basic stable values and the areas in which it is changing.<sup>2</sup>

Education is thus an orientation to the nature of the society and to the nature of the individual, and curriculum can be seen as:

the planned experiences offered to the learner under the guidance of the school.<sup>3</sup>

The Avon Agreed Syllabus is an example of an 'educational choice' based on a 'value-commitment' to religion as a universal and available 'realm of meaning'. Accordingly, an 'interpretative framework' is formulated, i.e. a hermeneutical strategy. This strategy (an interpreted view on what is considered to be the 'matter' of the text of religion) culminates in the inscribed expression of that interpretation - the planned curriculum - as the 'action' of the matter of the text. Religion is universal and available, therefore it is open to observation and it is legitimate to study that phenomenon in a classroom context. This action of the curriculum based upon the matter (theory of knowledge with regard to religion) of the text of religion is appropriate if it is in line with the assumed and accepted stages in children's development and the current, contemporary process of curriculum development. The intention of the planned curriculum on offer is that pupils are given the opportunity of 'mastering' and 'belonging' to an understanding of religion and what it means to take a religion seriously. In short, religion says something and that it is thus legitimate and possible to take religion seriously in an educational context.

What then, is the hermeneutical strategy (the theory of the operations of the understanding of the 'text' of religion), the 'underpinning' (Gooderham) of theory to practice presupposed in the expressed aim of religious education? Gooderham offers a succinct view of various 'hermeneutic perspectives' <sup>4</sup> or strategies that can be seen to have been at work in Religious Education. We could approach this question on the level of attempting to assess the present state of Religious Education as a curious amalgam of conflicting theories. Often, for the teacher, the theory, the hermeneutical strategy, is assumed and unravelling these assumptions is a difficult and complex business. However, rather than offer a purely historical view of Religious Education's hermeneutical strategies, it may be reasonable to suppose that our chosen expression of the aim of Religion Education (vis a vis Avon Agreed Syllabus) is to a large extent now accepted as a reasonable and appropriate aim for those involved in Religious Education. Broadly speaking, the hermeneutic employed is along the interpretative arc of a phenomenological/implicit/explicit approach to religion. In terms of religious education, the first part of this triad has its roots in such writers as Smart who, for the educator, acts as an acceptable academic 'cipher' (Jaspers), giving credibility to a particular approach. Smart, as previously stated, has delineated six formal characteristics of a religion (doctrines, myths, ethics, ritual, experiences and social) and also, as mentioned, Holm characterises these characteristics in terms of the phenomena of religion as universal, existing in society through its history, its sacred writings and its rituals. Thus, the religious educator 'lays the foundations' and builds up a 'comprehensive understanding of religion' (Holm).

Smart <sup>5</sup> outlines the phenomenological method as:

- 1) Assigning names to what is manifested.
- 2) The interpolation of the phenomenon into our lives sympathetically (eiditic vision).
- 3) The application of epoche (bracketting - a suspension of judgement).
- 4) The clarification of what is observed by structural association.
- 5) Achievement of this clarification through the foregoing of understanding.
- 6) Control and checking by philology, archeology, etc.
- 7) The realisation of objectivity - letting the facts speak for themselves. <sup>6</sup>

This method means we make use of 'sympathetic imagination' in the context of 'bracketing' our feelings and attitudes. We experience from a distance by formally analysing the nature of the 'discourse' in religion.

To speak as Husserl does, in discourse, we bracket the general thesis. Thus facts are transformed into states of affairs which may or may not be the case and norms are transferred into recommendations and warnings which may be correct or appropriate but also incorrect or inappropriate. <sup>7</sup>

By formally analysing the nature of the discourse in religion in a state of 'suspended seeing' we are thus able to understand the implicit and explicit elements of religion by way of phenomenology and so be on our way to understanding what it means to take religion or a religion seriously. <sup>8</sup>

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#### 4.3.2 CRITIQUE

The proposal of this thesis is to attempt to locate the language/text hermeneutic of Ebeling and Ricoeur in the context of religious studies in a secular and compulsory state system of education by a preliminary broad criticism of a phenomenological/implicit/explicit hermeneutic. In that context, it may be legitimate and acceptable to attempt to fulfil the first aim of religious education: What does religion say?, but that it is more difficult, doing full justice to the meaning of religion to answer the further question of taking religion or a religion seriously. For instance, it can be argued that the phenomenological/implicit/explicit hermeneutic presupposed in Holm's 'Teaching of Religion' in schools may pay adequate attention to the phenomenology of religion but does not and cannot pay adequate attention to the phenomenology of the exegete (the pupil) and taking a religion seriously per se involves the interpreter on a different level than a formal, detached and supposed objective analysis of the subject matter of religion as

surely to do justice to the text, the matter of religion, we cannot understand these texts and sources, facts and events, by observing them within a subject-object scheme of thought, while keeping my own existential life out of the encounter, but only by surrendering my own existential life and laying myself open to them, accepting them as my own possibilities. Thus the encounter always involves personal life and personal decision.<sup>1</sup>

It would appear that the emphasis of the Avon Agreed Syllabus is on a process - a gradual evolution, that is in step with what is known of child development. Therefore, what are considered to be appropriate examples of religious experience are presented and explored as ways of looking at particular phenomena (in this case, religion). This 'way of looking' is organised in such a way as to emphasise the acquisition of knowledge that explains the world. It does not seek to raise the question of 'being-in-the world'. The curriculum of Religious Studies, as encapsulated in these inscribed aims, is based upon a hermeneutical strategy that has as its presupposition that religion can be defined (cf. Smart's six principles) and that a hermeneutical method can be appropriated so that the pupil is led to understand the nature of religion and is therefore equipped to 'understand' what it would mean to take a religion seriously. The emphasis is on the 'observation' of a phenomena and not an 'encounter' with that phenomena. It may be that:

while phenomenology is competent in the realm of logical meanings, which was the object of the original inquiries made by Husserl, the inventor of the phenomenological method, it is only partially competent in the realm of spiritual realities like religion.<sup>2</sup>

Is it therefore possible to present an alternative hermeneutical strategy in terms of Religious Education? i.e. to point to the necessity of education and in particular, religious education, taking full account of the implications of hermeneutics. What is at stake in studying religion and taking a religion seriously? Religious Education presents religion in a particular interpreted form. Religion is minimised

by the planned curriculum - choice is apparent, aspects of religion are chosen and are sifted and ciphered, so as to be appropriate in the process and context of education.

Through a study of Ebeling's 'theological theory of language' and aspects of Ricoeur's text hermeneutic, it may be that there is a 'conflict of interpretations' and a hermeneutical dilemma will have to be resolved if Religious Education is to remain in the secular and compulsory arena of education. Religious Education may have to formulate its own radical hermeneutic and not just a hermeneutic that will withstand the glare of the changing curriculum footlights.

Let us focus this dilemma by taking Christianity as a religion and refer back to the story of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-20). The story would suggest that the authority, responsibility and challenge to understanding (Ebeling) is expressed in the healing power of Jesus. We can, as suggested in the brief exegesis of the story, arrive at certain conclusions as to what the story says by an analysis of its language and its background. But, it is reasonable to suppose that the thrust of the story is not educational/the goal of formal understanding in the sense of explaining in a detached way what Jesus did. It may be that the story aims to provoke a faith response that results in the possibility of 'participatory belonging' to the claim of Christianity that the distance of discourse, this story, is an occasion for a kerygmatic announcement as Christ as the one who has ultimate power and authority. The symbol of chaos, personified by the demoniac, radicalised into order by the healing power of Jesus.

To be taught is to acquire intended meanings. These intended meanings are in the context of education 'chosen' by the educator who, by his prior understanding, has concluded that these meanings are worthy of communication. The educator, by a careful analysis of the needs of the pupil and the content of the knowledge, chooses to teach certain things. To teach is to analyse, interpret and communicate in a planned and responsible manner what is considered to be appropriate experience that can be included in the curriculum. What then, is an adequate hermeneutical base in the context of Religious Education, for instance in terms of the Bible? It would seem at present to be on the hermeneutical arc of explanation and understanding the phenomena in a suspended (epoche) albeit sympathetic manner (eiditic) in order to arrive at a 'formal' understanding of that phenomena. The hermeneutical arc of explaining and understanding the phenomena along the line of the text 'projecting a world of one's ownmost possibilities' (Ricoeur) is to arrive at a 'mutual' and participatory understanding of the phenomena. Is this possible in a secular and compulsory state educational context? It may be that Religious Education, in terms of a supposed phenomenological/implicit/explicit hermeneutic in the example of this instance of biblical discourse, decontextualises the text to such an extent that the world projected is merely viewed from a distance and not an instance of present participation in the kerygmatic pronouncement, i.e. in and through distance. What may happen is that we merely recontextualise the story in terms appropriate to our chosen and considered educational situation. The hermeneutical starting point and the subsequent movement of interpretation in the context of a phenomenological/implicit/explicit hermeneutic is one of the spectator consciousness. It is a progressive application of limit

and it involves a retained preference for certain aspects of the phenomena. It would seem that Religious Education, on this hermeneutical arc, arrives at understanding by an uncommitted reflective procedure. Can this be paralleled to Schleiermacher's view of hermeneutics? i.e. romantic hermeneutics (Grammatical - to study carefully the matter of religion; and Psychological - an attempt to discover the heritage of the genius of the authors of religion. To understand the authors better than they understood themselves).

Perhaps in more contemporary terms, this hermeneutical strategy could be appropriately called 'structural phenomenology'. The main emphasis is on reduction and description: a decision is taken - 'the formation of a project' (Ihde) - choosing religion as an appropriate 'realm of meaning' and acting upon this decision; 'undertaking a pragma in the world' (Ihde) - the formulation of a planned religious curriculum, and that this decision and action necessarily results in a reduced consent. The border limits of education because of its secular and compulsory context, cut off the transcendental pretensions of a religion. The upper and lower limits are that the text of religion is viewed in such a way as not to recoil on the interpreter. The emphasis is on exploring the undogmatic more explicit features of religion. However, it could be claimed that religion as a realm of meaning (e.g. synoetic) offers a limited occasion for the exploration of understanding the self in relation to others (implicit features).

The task being to take the objective indicator  
as a sign for an experience of the Cogito in  
order to locate obscure areas within experience

and to limit in more definite fashion  
the borders of experience.<sup>3</sup>

The educator thus chooses his particular 'weighted focus' in line with the givenness of his situation. This will include evaluating intentions - seeing whether the planned curriculum has achieved what it intended. In some sense, the curriculum concerns of Religious Education have been questions of teaching concerns. The question: What is valid knowledge? is subsumed per se into the question: What are valid ways of teaching the knowledge so that the pupils, through the provided and planned curriculum, will be helped to:

identify for themselves the fundamental questions of human existence, so that they may continue to reflect upon and arrive at the decision life calls for in a responsible way.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of Religious Education is not to teach the child to be religious (what Max von Manen calls 'orientation skills'<sup>5</sup>), but to lead the child by planned experiences to understand the nature of religion, as interpreted and understood, by the curriculum planner. Further,

that a variety of approaches and skills are needed to enable investigation, description and evaluation of religious responses to human experience.<sup>6</sup>

(What Max von Manen calls 'technical skills'.<sup>7</sup>) Thus, religion is open to investigation, is open to description and can be evaluated by the pupil if he/she is given the appropriate methodological tools. However, as mentioned, the emphasis of the Avon Agreed Syllabus,

an example of a planned curriculum, would appear to be an observation rather than an encounter. This would seem to suggest the uneasy relationship in broad terms of the relationship of the language of religion and the language of education.

K. E. Nipkov presents a series of theses<sup>8</sup> which express the dilemma of observation as against encounter with specific regard to the Bible. For Nipkov there has been a 'vast amount of irrelevant learning' and education should focus on the 'elementary questions' of 'how to survive' and 'how to live a meaningful life'. Nipkov posits the concept of 'elementarisation' as a way of dealing with this dilemma. This concept is not 'only applicable to Religious Education but to all teaching-learning processes'. Elementarisation is comprised of four educational dimensions which contain four problems leading to four tasks. A synopsis of his argument from his article is presented as follows:

Problem	Dimension	Task
Certainty	Elementary truths	Elementary personal interaction/discourse/ encounter/inter-generational dialogue.
Concentration	Elementary structures	Responsible identification of the constitutive characteristic elements of a subject.
Relevance	Elementary experiences	Step behind the tasks to elementary contextual experiential basis and the relation of this to today, i.e. experience to experience - the text as partner.
Developmental sequence	Elementary beginnings	Linking concepts of elementary structures of the experiences of biblical faith so as to be personally relevant to corresponding elementary beginnings.



Nipkov's categories of the concept are broad and brief but they are basic to this discussion. In terms of this thesis it is a supposition that if meaning is possible in terms of asking What does religion say? in an educational context, we must pay critical attention to the implications of a language hermeneutic. The word is central to education, in Nipkov's terms the world is elementary.

What do I do when I teach? I speak.  
I have no other means of livelihood  
and I have no other dignity. I have  
no other means of transforming the  
world and no other influence upon  
men. The word is my work, the  
word is my kingdom.<sup>9</sup>

Ebeling's **language hermeneutic** expressed in his 'theory of language with the widest possible horizon' may point to the dimensions and categories in which to view the problem of language in education, and specifically in Religious Education. The aim through a language hermeneutic is to try to uncover the dimensions of the problem of language (crisis expressed in boredom, confusion and scepticism with regard to language) and recover and relocate the categories of authority, responsibility, challenge and understanding in the sphere of the problem of and the use of language in religious education, i.e. to bring about a meaningful encounter in terms of the text of religion, e.g. the Bible as 'partner' (Nipkov).

Explanation and understanding are crucial words in education. Education may be expressed as speech, event and possibility. The suggestion is that Religious Education must address itself to the problem of a theory of language appropriate to the presumed possibility

of studying religion as an established realm of meaning. How does religious education explain and understand the matter and the 'text' of religion? What does religion say?

It is a further supposition that meaning is possible in terms of taking a religion seriously in an educational context, we must pay critical attention to the implications of a text hermeneutic. Ricoeur's **text hermeneutic** expressed in his Model/Nature/Notion of the text of discourse and meaningful action may point to the dimensions and categories of the problem of distancing and appropriation in Religious Education. What does it mean to take a religion seriously?

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#### 4.3.3 LANGUAGE/TEXT HERMENEUTIC:

##### SUGGESTED IMPLICATIONS OF EBELING AND RICOEUR FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In every field of discourse, practical or theoretical, literary or scientific, the quest for appropriate speech is a quest for precision that is fearful of illusion.<sup>1</sup>

In order to 'hear' the question to which the language of the text is a form of response, the skills of the historian are not enough, we also need critically to reflect on our experience and our language in quest of more precise formulation of the questions to which this language of ours is the more or less spontaneous responsive expression.<sup>2</sup>

The title page of the thesis focussed the discussion in a quote from an article by Max von Manen - 'It is assumed that every educational' choice, etc.<sup>3</sup>

In the context of the first two parts of this final section it was firstly suggested that the work of P Phenix, particularly in his 'Philosophy of Education' and subsequent 'Realms of Meaning' provides an occasion for educational choice. As a consequence there is the possibility of his theory of education being appropriated in terms of the scope, content and arrangement of the curriculum vis a vis Religious Education - **an underpinning**. Secondly, in terms of Religious Education it was suggested that the criteria outlined in Schools Council Working Paper No. 70 provides an orientation to a value commitment to issues involved in working out such a curriculum - **an orientation**. And thirdly, that the Avon Agreed Syllabus illustrates the features of choice and commitment being expressed as an interpretative framework, a hermeneutical strategy capable of being put into classroom practice - **an expression**.

In 4.3.1 it was attempted to place curriculum in a hermeneutical framework of analysis, interpretation and communication. 4.3.2. attempted a closer examination of 'choice and commitment' in the form of a critique of an assumed and practised hermeneutic in Religious Education. The aim of this final section is to attempt to outline some implications, mainly expressed as questions, for Religious Education in the context of the language hermeneutic and the text hermeneutic of Ebeling and Ricoeur:-

**Hermeneutics                      and                      Education**

Thesis 1: A language hermeneutic

Is it possible to realise a theory of language with the widest possible horizon with regard to what is the nature of religion in the context of education?

Choice and commitment leading to a hermeneutic underpinning of the scope of the curriculum in terms of Religious Education.  
- Possibility/Imperative condition.

Thesis 2: A text hermeneutic

Is it possible to realise an appropriate methodology in terms of the nature of discourse and action in taking religion or a religion seriously in the context of education?

Choice and commitment leading to a hermeneutic underpinning of the content and arrangement of the curriculum.  
- Problem/Indicative context.

Nipkov's 'elementary' categories of Problem, Dimension and Task with regard to:

- a) Thesis 1 - a language hermeneutic, and
  - b) Thesis 2 - a text hermeneutic,
- will be adopted.

A language hermeneutic

Ebeling's maxim that people become tired of using a language with which they have a troubled relationship may provide a suitable starting point for the concluding discussion of the relationship of hermeneutics and education.

The religious traditions of this country make it appropriate that much of the teaching material should be drawn from Christianity but in today's world Religious Education also requires a wider range of material.<sup>4</sup>

The problem may be, is it accepted that Christian language is 'fully accepted' and a 'determinative element' in general education? Or, is the contemporary situation with regard to language in Religious Education more confused? There would seem to be a tension, a crisis, between 'inherited assent' and the characteristic of the 'linguistic pluralism of today'. Does, for instance, a phenomenological/implicit/explicit hermeneutic endorse or clarify that crisis? By adopting an 'observational stance' the implication is that artificial limits are placed upon the language of religion. Is there a fundamental distortion, a reductionist hermeneutic, which does not do justice to the claim of religion? To reiterate Ebeling, it may be that 'having religion' is different from that 'a possession of religious things'.

There would seem to be an inherent supposition running through Religious Education (the hermeneutics of suspicion?) that we must be wary of 'indoctrination' and the intention is

not to orientate the pupil to a 'particular religious commitment', <sup>5</sup> only a commitment to religion as a 'realm of meaning' capable of observation and study. As previously stated, the emphasis is on observation rather than encounter. However, it may be reasonable to suppose that a religion, for instance, Christianity, is predominantly and ultimately concerned with the relationship of God, man and Jesus. How can Religious Education point to the presence of the hidden and the possibility of the individual participating in the 'changing of the world' (Ebeling) without some prior commitment to a belief in the religious dimension vis a vis Ricoeur's paradigm of text interpretation: meaningful action as personal commitment to attempting to interpret significant discourse. If the situation (manifestation of the crisis of language) is that a coherent structure of understanding has broken down and language has become isolated from its basis in experience, what is the appropriate 'subject matter' of religion? Religion, to continue with Christianity, may offer the occasion to celebrate mystery, to stylise participation and make enigma comprehensible through faith in Jesus of Nazareth. Can this major feature be treated purely in a detached manner? The consequence may be religious language being reduced to merely an example of discourse.

Thus, on the first level in terms of Religious Education, there may be a crisis in language - is the language of religion translatable into education except by way of reducing and limiting that language, ultimately doing 'violence' (Ebeling) to the matter and action of the text of religion? It would seem that this dilemma, this crisis, can be solved or ignored by Religious Education, by the



adoption of a carefully chosen analysis of the study of religion. On this line, the true concern of education is a gradual clarification of the issues at stake in studying religion, e.g. assign names to that which is manifested, i.e. a categorisation of the observable characteristics of religion.

In Ebeling's terms, this crisis is expressed in the context of the 'jungle' of the problem of language (cf. questions in 'Jungle', 2.2). Thus, in the context of Religious Education, how do we decide upon the priorities of what should be uttered? How do we decide what is the right and appropriate thing to say at a particular time?

How can a significant use of language be achieved in our present age? For Religious Education these are difficult questions, as what is ultimately at stake in language is:

- the authority to speak;
- the responsibility of and for language;
- the challenge of understanding; and
- the achievement of mutual understanding.

Can Religious Education merely state that the language of religion is one language amongst many others? Or, is the claim of the language of religion that it points to the essence of what is ultimately at stake in life? Is, therefore, the present state of the hermeneutics of Religious Education a curious amalgam of conflicting theories?

Does the phenomenological/implicit/explicit hermeneutical strategy in Religious Education lead to a conflict as against a fusion of horizons? The **dimension** of this problem perhaps centres on the goal of hermeneutics in Religious Education expressed as the aim of understanding religion and what it means to take a religion seriously. What theory of language can Religious Education adopt for the possibility of the achievement of these aims? For instance, does the following application of Ebeling's categories provide the appropriate dimension, the appropriate underpinning for the curriculum inclusion of Religious Education in our schools?

The authority to speak stems from the prior understanding and presuppositions of the educator (the chooser and planner) who may claim, as Phenix does, that there are 'rich treasures' in religion. The educator therefore has a responsibility in choosing what are considered to be appropriate aspects of these 'rich treasures'. The challenge for the educator is to organise effectively, these chosen, ciphered elements and delineated features of religion, into isolated instances (both in the wider sense of curriculum and the mundane but ever present fact of the timetable!) of discourse which are presented to the receivers. The resultant understanding is when the above is implemented and presumed to be achieved. The **task** of the educator is thus highly ambiguous:

he must transmit an intellectual tradition with gusto and instil loyalty to it, but leave open the possibility of gradual or even revolutionary change. And what matters in practice is not so much the teacher's motive, nor even his style, as the elbow-room he allows. <sup>6</sup>

This ambiguity may also be apparent, not just in the orientation of the educator to the problem, dimension and task of choosing and attempting to implement an appropriate theory of language in Religious Education. It may also be in what Ricoeur calls the problem, dimension and task of orientating to the 'epistemological specificity' of religion and on the other hand, the totality of its claims. If the Religious educator is to adopt a phenomenological stance where a:

lifeworld [in this case religion or a religion] is  
to be approached by degrees and the brackets  
slowly withdrawn'<sup>7</sup>

then the implication, the irony of a phenomenological stance, is that there must be a 'move away from immediacy'<sup>8</sup> which epoche and eiditic vision suggest. The authority to speak is in a finite context (the educational situation) whereas, as Ebeling has attempted to show in his theological theory of language, the authority to speak in terms of the religious dimension is ultimate, i.e. language that verifies speaking of God and also demonstrates the necessity of that speaking. In the finite context, fallibility in language must be recognised and the interpretation of religion can only be validated in terms of 'construing guesses' (Hirsch) as to the nature and meaning of religion. Those 'guesses' may be appropriate or inappropriate. As a fundamental question, this could be phrased as follows - Is religion too serious a phenomenon to be entrusted to the complex and contradictory world of education where religion is reduced to being one language among many? Further, on what basis is it possible to evaluate the understanding of religion or what it would mean to take a religion seriously?

The development of the 'text' (the matter - what is the nature of religion? and action - what does it mean to take a religion seriously?) is in the context of the pupil's and the teacher's present experience. It may be that the authority to speak, the responsibility for and challenge of language and the achievement of mutual understanding is both possible and necessary in relation to what is the nature of religion. An appropriate theory of language may be along the hermeneutic arc of structural phenomenology whereby religion can be studied as a hierarchy of topics, as cultural symbols of man's attempt to make sense of his situation. However, if we move from what something says to what something is about, the claim is that we are entering into a new hermeneutical arena. To attempt to understand what it would mean to take a religion seriously, in an educational context, is to move into the linguistic area of claiming that the action of religion provides a model whereby that action can be considered as meaningful and possible, i.e. the aim can be realised, appropriated, in the educational context.

If a language hermeneutic in terms of Ebeling's dimensions, is initiated into Religious Education, then Religious Education may leave behind what could be considered to be a self-conscious concern for method where much 'irrelevant learning' (Nipkov) has occurred. It would seem that what Ebeling attempts in terms of authority, responsibility, challenge and understanding, and what Nipkov suggests by elementarisation is that the diluted phenomenology, as suggested in 4.2.1, 4.2.2 and 4.2.3, would give way to the full implications of a hermeneutic phenomenology which presupposes the possibility of being 'open' to what the

text is saying. This implication would suggest a hermetic turn or shift rather than merely a hermeneutic detour and this turn or shift would result in Religious Education widening its horizons rather than limiting or confusing its horizons. A radical language hermeneutic has, as its major presupposition, that the motion of interpretation is circular and not linear, and that reasoning and commitment are conjoined.

**In listening to the text I am being  
transformed.<sup>9</sup>**

Can Religious Education in a secular and compulsory state system submit itself to the authority of the matter and action of the text of religion? Is it possible for Religious Education to be true to the responsibility it has for language, expressing that language as a challenge to the understanding of the matter and action of the text of religion which may result in transformation. Must and can Religious Education strive only for an informational understanding of the matter and action of the text of religion? Is it therefore possible for a fusion of horizons in terms of religious understanding, bearing in mind, for example, the hermetic methodology of phenomenology, as practised in much present Religious Education, which is mainly a progressive application of limits, i.e. observation as against encounter? Is Religious Education able to evolve a hermeneutical strategy appropriate to its context, which speaks of religion as encounter and the claims in religion of the possibility of participation in a committed and not a detached manner?

The aim of Section 2: Ebeling, was an attempt to uncover fundamental and basic questions with regard to language. All theology and education are linked to language and interpretation. The educator in terms of presuming to interpret religion as an event and as a realm of available meaning must be prepared to outline fully the theory of language, the hermeneutic, that is presumed in the theory and practice of education, and particularly in Religious Education. It is therefore a considered supposition of this thesis that Religious Education must necessarily involve itself in the full implications of hermeneutics as being the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the understanding of texts and that this theory must be a theory with the widest possible horizon.

In terms of the model (beginning 4.0) and in the context of Nipkov's categories of Problem, Dimension and Task, it may be that Religious Education must continually attempt to clarify, perhaps not answer the following questions:

Is it possible for Religious Education to claim the unity in language of past events with present decisions?

What ultimately gives Religious Education its authority to speak? and

By what means does it analyse and articulate the comprehensibility of its utterances?

Who ultimately has the responsibility for language in Religious Education? and

How does it validate or verify the truth of its propositional components?

Has Religious Education in its present school context, the right to presume to interpret the challenge to understanding which religion claims to do? and therefore,

Who decides upon the correctness and appropriateness of its performatory components?

Finally, how can Religious Education participate in the achievement of mutual understanding? and

Who judges the authenticity of the speaking subject?

A text hermeneutic

It has been an intention that the implications of selected aspects of hermeneutical theory have been presented throughout the thesis by the way those selected aspects have been expressed in the sense of a weighted focus: a suggested outline for further thought. Ebeling refers to this strategy in terms of his last chapter (cf. 2.4) where he still maintained an introductory, meditative, suggestive outline for his theological theory of language rather than concluding with a summary in the form of various applied statements and criteria. Dimensions and categories were specifically suggested but not as definitive and exhaustive treatments finally expressed as closed conclusions.

If it is not too presumptuous, the intention in these concluding words is to suggest implications, rather than attempt to rigidly apply an interpreted form (a 'guess') of, in this case, Ricoeur's paradigm of the Model/Notion/Matter of the text, i.e. not an attempt to apply a formulated hermeneutical methodology and graft it directly on to Religious Education. What these concluding words hope to achieve is to clarify the following question in the context of Ricoeur's text interpretation theory:

Is it possible for the aspects of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics to be appropriated appropriately in the sphere of Religious Education? What sort of 'world' is projected by the inscribed discourse of Ricoeur, and is there a possibility of that world of the text challenging education? Education in general and Religious Education in particular? As in the expressed implications in a 'language hermeneutic', the aim is to raise certain fundamental issues with



regard to language and interpretation in Religious Education. Therefore, it seems appropriate to offer suggestive implications rather than attempt to write a particular hermeneutical agenda for Religious Education. What risks are inherent in Religious Education laying itself open to certain issues with regard to the suggested hermeneutics of language and interpretation previously presented? It may firstly be to reinforce the presupposition that:

Interpretation in its broadest sense is  
the question of language itself.<sup>10</sup>

And further that:

hermeneutics presupposes that a 'text'  
or an 'expression' has something to say  
which in turn can be interpreted or  
re-said in another way. This notion,  
which recalls two classical meanings of  
hermeneutics, a translating technique  
for making obscure expressions clearer  
and an exegesis which exposes the  
hidden meaning of a text, relies first  
on its object, the text. In this case  
hermeneutics as a reading or listening  
to what is said.<sup>11</sup>

In Religious Education a select type of expression is to be investigated - broadly referred to in the aims of what is the nature of religion and attempting to understand what it would mean to take a religion seriously. In Ricoeur's paradigm of the text (essentially the dialectic of explanation and understanding explored through the concepts of distanciation and appropriation) the hermeneutical enterprise is grounded in the supposition that

interpretation is essentially one of confrontation and encounter with the phenomena. Is the situation and expression of Religious Education an occasion, in Ricoeurian terms, of distancing? And, is the problem of Religious Education one of the actualisation of the meaning of the text, i.e. appropriation?

Interpretation concerns essentially the power of the work to disclose a world, then the relation of the reader to the text is essentially his relation to the kind of world which the text presents. <sup>12</sup>

What are the implications for Religious Education in terms of these aspects of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics? If it presupposed along the Ricoeurian hermeneutical arc of explanation and understanding being inextricably joined, then taking religion or a religion seriously necessarily involves the interpreter in viewing appropriation as a possibility. However, in terms of Religious Education, what is appropriated? Is an understanding of religion, by way of explanation through a planned and analysed curriculum, the 'goal of interpretation' in the context of education? (A balanced account over the eleven years of compulsory schooling which forms the basis for future decisions [cf. Schools Council Working Paper No. 70].)

Let us attempt to focus this broad question in terms of the model at the beginning of Section 4, in the context of Religious Education. A major presupposition in education as in other moments of discourse, is viewing language as the power which creates understanding. Discourse, which is considered to be significant

is chosen and becomes the focus of language in a particular situation. The situation is the educational context where the educator, the teacher, becomes the interpreter. The interpreter, by the prior understanding brought to the instance of discourse, is the one who decides on the dimensions of the hermeneutical problem. The dimensions of the hermeneutical problem are largely shaped by the person to whom the interpretation is offered.

The hermeneutical situation is thus one of the analysis and communication of a presupposed meaning. The expression of that situation is the problem of choosing the most appropriate modes of expression and the ways in which the meaning is expressed through communicating, either through spoken or written discourse. The general movement of interpretation is thus circular:

Discourse, interpreter and interpretation. These general features, in terms of the language features of the educational situation implicate that situation in the necessity to formulate a theory.

That theory is focused in the particular. Hence, choice is analysed in terms of a presupposed commitment to a particular hermeneutical framework and it is hoped that the particular hermeneutical framework is true to its purpose, i.e. its language is the unity of past events with present decisions. The 'ways of knowing' are linked to 'ways of being practical' by the recognition of the procedures involved and the 'action' that results from a particular hermeneutical strategy, i.e. Interpretation is the result of the theory of operations of understanding mediated by 'text' (in its widest sense) and expressed in 'meaningful action' as the actualisation of meaning.

This circular movement of interpretation is contingent upon the **context** (the what of the text), the **conditions** (the how of the text), and the **consequences** (the why of the text). These three

dimensions of a text: contextual, conditional and consequential, cohere in Ricoeurian terms within the concepts (with their distinctive traits - cf. 3.2.1. and 3.2.2) of distancing and appropriation. These dimensions can be expressed as questions with regard to:

- 1) Discourse: what is the nature of the process which produces a text? (Problem)
- 2) Distancing: does the text fulfil its disclosing or revelatory claim? (Dimension), and
- 3) Appropriation: what happens when we receive it? (Task)

Religious Education (in the context of the two expressed aims) is an instance of educational discourse. That discourse is realised as event (as the intended curriculum) and understood as meaning (as the intended meaning is acquired or apprehended by the recipient). The context and condition of that educational discourse as event is that it is temporal and in the present, it is self-referential, it has a time and a subject, and it is the occasion for address. The consequences of that discourse understood as meaning, is the appropriation of the meaning which endures and this should be parallel to the intended meaning which, in Ricoeurian terms, can only be construed or guessed. Thus, in choosing and being committed to an interpretative framework, a particular hermeneutic, we have to be aware of what is at stake in the adoption of a particular hermeneutical strategy. In explaining, we explicate and unfold the range of meanings and propositions that are implicit in the text (in this case, the matter and action of the text as to the nature of religion), i.e. a delineation of the hierarchy of topics involved in the 'text'

of religion. The aim through this explication, is understanding: Understanding at and through distance so that the text is 'actualised' in the present comprehension of the self through the appropriation of the chain of partial meanings in one act of synthesis. This dialectic of explanation and understanding is the motion of interpretation. For Ebeling and Ricoeur, this motion of interpretation is ongoing and vital, as by interpreting that which is considered to be significant discourse, we 'wager' (Ricoeur) on the 'symbolic plenitude' (Ricoeur) of the text. Taking seriously the disclosing nucleus of the 'text' involves us in an act of faith. When the interpreter moves from what the text says, i.e. the features of the process which produce that text, and orientates himself to the possibility of taking that text seriously, then the interpreter moves from 'what it says' to 'what it is about', i.e. to a new dimension viewing the text as meaningful action. The interpreter aims to expand his horizons by a fusion of horizons with the 'world' the text projects as a possibility. This necessarily involves the interpreter on a different level, of an initial submission to the authority of the text.

If the reference of a text is the projection  
of a world, then it is not in the first  
instance the reader who projects himself.  
The reader is rather broadened in his  
capacity to project himself by **receiving**  
**a new mode of being from the text**  
**itself.** <sup>13</sup>

Finally, if the nature of religion and the taking of a religion seriously is considered to be of ongoing significance and necessarily appropriate in an educational context, then it also

may be of ongoing significance and necessarily appropriate that those involved in the possibilities and problems of that 'adventure in interpretation' realise, as Ricoeur says, that:

there is no general hermeneutics, no universal canon for exegesis, but only disparate and opposed theories concerning the rules of interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

However, it may be that by posing the problem in terms of the internal aporia of interpretation that we at least recognise the crisis of language and attempt to express anew that which is believed to be of significance. Thus, it may be that Religious Education, as an instance of educational discourse, is at the cross-roads of what Ricoeur calls the 'post-critical moment' which calls for a decision to wager on new and appropriate hermeneutic dimensions which do not just develop procedures for understanding but clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place: a philosophical hermeneutics which firstly attempts to orientate itself to the possibilities and problems of language and interpretation (linguistic criteria), for example, in attempting to explicate the question of the nature of religion. And, which secondly attempts to explicate the possibilities and problems of instances of discourse (textual criteria) which are of such presumed and profound significance that they are interpreted in such a way as to be expressed as capable of actualisation in meaningful action. For example, in understanding what it means to take a religion seriously.

However, the attempt to make clear, to clarify the conditions in which understanding takes place, may mean 'wagering' on the

risk of interpretation which transforms both our prior-understanding and our present apprehension.

And so we come full circle: from our initial fascination with texts in which testimony is preserved in poesis, through the critical disciplines which help us overcome idolatory and dogmatism, to the post critical moment when we ourselves begin to testify, in a divestiture of consciousness, which implicates our lives in the world 'in front of' the text.<sup>15</sup>

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