

CATHOLIC HERMENEUTICS:
THE THEOLOGY OF TRADITION
AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF GADAMER

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT
CATHOLIC HERMENEUTICS:
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The thesis of the present dissertation is twofold. First, it is proposed that the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, which unites the presence of truth in history with the interpretation of that truth, generally describes the appropriation of revelation by the Christian community.

Second, it is proposed that the Christian interpretation of revelation, especially the interpretation by Catholic theology of its own tradition, exemplifies the general theory of philosophical hermeneutics and can profit from its insights.

The thesis is developed in four parts. The first part expounds the critique of tradition by Bacon, Descartes, Kant, and the members of the German historical school. Their critique, it is argued, sought to free thinking from the ingrained prejudices of tradition. But they could not help but acknowledge that all thought is shaped by history. The second part of the dissertation demonstrates how Hegel, Heidegger, and Gadamer himself have sought to overcome the critique by thinkers of the Enlightenment.

They have done so, it is argued, by means of a concept of historical truth. Truth is historical in that history puts a stamp upon it, a stamp to which the Enlightenment paid scant heed.

The third part of the dissertation examines the modern theology of tradition. This theology received its decisive form at the hands of Franzelin, and has been treated by Geiselman, Congar, and Mackey. The modern theologians of tradition, it is argued, maintained the Catholic insistence upon a living tradition. But they were pre occupied with the ecclesiastical magisterium as the authoritative exponent of tradition.

The fourth part of the dissertation synthesizes the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer and the theology of tradition. It argues that the transmission of Christian truth, while thoroughly shaped by history, is not thereby relativized.

The dissertation concludes by drawing a parallel between the axiom that theology is faith seeking understanding and the hermeneutical insight that one always believes without ever fully plumbing the depths of one's belief.

Professor David Stagaman, S.J. Dissertation Committee Coordinator

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