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Understanding as a Way of Being" Martin Heidegger's Hermeneutic circle in relation to the activity of Interpreting Christian Iconic 'The Lord Supper'

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Abstract

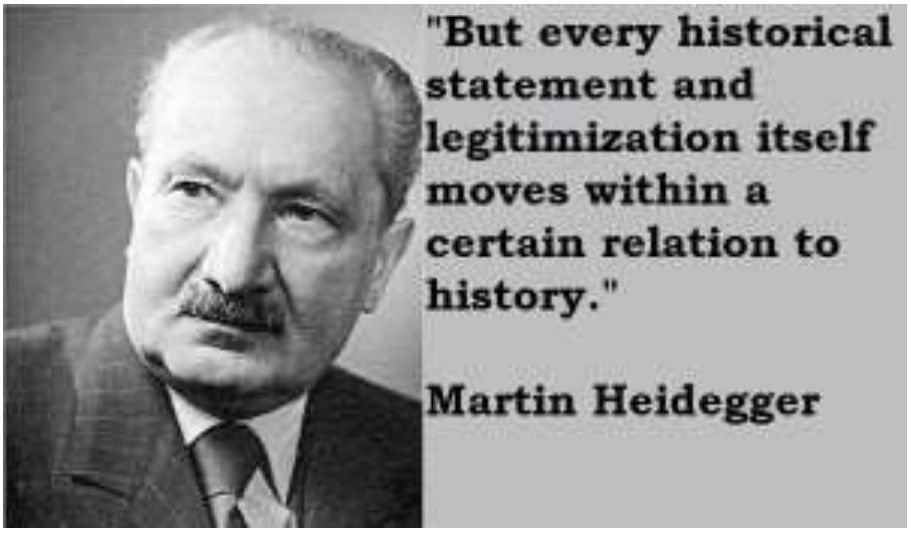
A Christian icon titled The Lord's Supper or The Last Supper. It is interesting to explore further. in relation to interpreting Christian symbols through painting. How do we understand a Christian icon context in relation to Heidegger's view on the hermeneutic circle. Understanding is not merely a way of daily life, but also an art. Understanding is also not just an art, but also a scientific method to uncover humans, society, and its history. Heidegger has his own thoughts about verstehen or understanding. Heidegger places understanding much deeper and more thoroughly in the ontological realm. Humans as hermeneutic beings. Understanding is no longer about capturing information about something, but rather an existential matter, namely "a person's ability to grasp their own possibilities for being." Understanding then is no longer a method, but a way for us to exist in this world. understanding as a way of existing? Heidegger understands that it is not something that is possessed. We are in this world by understanding. In Being and Time we could interpret the christian icon as a simbol to dig deeper the understanding of the contex. The activity of interpreting the christian iconic will give a space for all of us to have knowledge and understanding the Heidegger's perspective about the Hermeneutic Circle "understanding as a way of being".

Keywords

Understanding as a way of being; hermeneutic circle; Christian iconic

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INTRODUCTION



Who is Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Heidegger was born in the small town of Meßkirch near Freiburg i.Br. on September 26, 1889, into a devout and humble Roman Catholic family. His father was a worker at St. Martin's Church. The parish pastor and his Latin teacher facilitated his studies at the Gymnasium in Konstanz. Without financial assistance from the Catholic Church, Heidegger would not have been able to pursue higher education. He briefly studied theology at the University of Freiburg, where he became acquainted with hermeneutics. According to his own admission, at the beginning of his theological studies, Heidegger was heavily occupied with Schleiermacher and Dilthey and their relationship with theology.[1]

In 1907, the parish priest of Konstanz whom he knew well, Conrad Grober, gave him Franz Brentano's *work Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* (On the Various Meanings of Being According to Aristotle), a book that unveiled his thinking. His *Habilitationsschrift titled Die Kategorien-und*

[1] Lihat. Jean Grondin, *Einfuhrung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschfat Damstadt, 1991.119. Bnd. F. Budi Hardiman, Seni Memahami. Hermeneutik dari Schleiermacher sampai Derrida, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015. 100. Heidegger left theology after four semesters, entered the faculty of natural sciences and mathematics, and completed his studies without a church scholarship. In 1913 he studied philosophy and again received aid from the Catholic church. Heidegger was planned to teach Christian philosophy, so his dissertation, Die Lehre vom Urteil im Psychologismus. Ein kritisch-positiver Beitrag zur Logik (The Theory of Judgment in Psychologism. A Critical-Positive Contribution to Logic, 1914). It was written under the guidance of Arthur Schneider, a professor of Christian philosophy. Instead of meeting that expectation, he focused on Husserl's phenomenology.

Bedeutungslehre des Duns Scotus (The Category and Meaning Theory of Duns Scotus, 1916) indeed concerns the Medieval Christian philosopher, but the method he used is phenomenology.[2]

Heidegger generalized hermeneutics from a traditional method for interpreting authoritative texts into a way of understanding humans themselves. Hermeneutic and Phenomenology. What is Phenomenology? Phenomenology is an approach to describe things as we experience or perceive them, long before we formulate them in our minds. Another way to explain phenomenology is given by Heidegger. In *Sein und Zeit*, he returns phenomenology to the combination of the Greek word *logos*, which means 'discourse,' and *phainesthai,* which means 'to show itself'. So, phenomenology is a discourse on appearing. This means that phenomenology is also a hermeneutic or interpretation by 'allowing what shows itself to be seen from itself in the way it shows itself from itself'. Heidegger contributed a famous insight about *Vorstruktur des Verstehens* (pre-structure of understanding). Understanding a meaning is never without presupposition (*voraussetzungslos*); it presupposes a certain pre-understanding (*Vorverstandnis*). What is understood as a way of existing. That pre-understanding is formed from what Heidegger calls *Bewandtnisganzhein*, namely the totality of our involvement in the life practices we engage in, and often these things are 'silent' as non-thematic content, pre-predicative, nonverbal, etc.

Heidegger did not explicitly use the word hermeneutics, except in his lecture series in the 1920s entitled 'Ontologie-Hermeneutik der Faktizitat (Ontological Hermeneutics of Facticity)'. The word hermeneutics is also implicitly present in Sein und Zeit (Being and Time, 1927). The concept of hermeneutics also appears explicitly in his lectures in 1927, which were later published under the title Grundprobleme der Phanomenologie (Basic Problems of Phenomenology) and connected to human existence.[3]

The question of being: Heidegger's project. "An on-the way in the field of paths for the changing questioning of the manifold question of Being". It may remain forever a matter of debate how much truth there is in the old claim that every important

[2] Lihat. Jean Grondin, *Einfuhrung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschfat Damstadt, 1991.119. Bnd. F. Budi Hardiman, Seni Memahami. Hermeneutik dari Schleiermacher sampai Derrida, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015. 101.

[3] Lihat. Jean Grondin, *Einfuhrung in die philosophische Hermeneutik*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschfat Damstadt, 1991.119. Bnd. F. Budi Hardiman, Seni Memahami. Hermeneutik dari Schleiermacher sampai Derrida, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015. 102-103.

thinker has essentially one fundamental idea. In the case of famous philosophers, its vindication may oblige us to summarize the "one great idea" in such broad terms as to make it almost meaningless. What can probably be claimed with more justification is that for most great minds there has been one question that guided their thinking research. This certainly applies to Martin Heidegger,and the question that fascinated him the meaning of being? Ontology, in the widest possible sense, was his main concern throughout his life. This does not mean, of course, that he was forever looking for an answer to the same old question. As his thinking evolved, the meaning of the question changed; but Heidegger to the end of his life remained convinced that "questionability" of the *seinsfrage* was the main thrust of his life's work.[4]

Heidegger looks to re-examine this question (the *Seinsfrage*). He is looking then to illuminate this suppressed dimension of objects and things by returning to the age-old question of the meaning of being. It is centainly not the case. Heidegger believes, that 'being' understood under the rubric of Platonic Idealism, for example, will provide the requisite answers. As Thomas Sheehan succinctly summarizes: [5]

> Heidegger reads the history of Western metaphysics as a series of epochs in which philosophers elaborated different interpretations of the being of entities – for example, being as idea in Plato, as energeria in Aristotle, right down to being as eternal recurrence of the same in Nietzsche. Each epoch of metaphysics is characterized by its understanding of the presence of entities and its oblivion of the absence/finitude that makes possible (or "dispenses") that presence. For Heidegger, the last and climatic phase in this 'history of being' is our own epoch of technology and nihilism. [6]

It is not possible in one short essay to trace the meaning of this question throughout Heidegger's lifetime – why he continued to think it worth asking, and why it seemed so elusive. The discussion here will have to be confined to a clarification of the sense in which the 'question of being' came to vex the young Heidegger, and why he treated its "neglect" after a promising start in early Greek philosophy as the most serious omission in the history of Western philosophy. Basing the origins of the

[4] Dorothea Frede "The Question of being: Heidegger's project" in Charles B. Guignon, *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger,* Cambridge: University Press, 1993, 43.

[5] Mahon O'Brien, *Heidegger and Authenticity. From Resoluteness to Releasement*, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, 11.

[6] Mahon O'Brien, *Heidegger and Authenticity. From Resoluteness to Releasement*, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, 11.ss

problems he is dealing with in ancient Greek philosophy is more than the conventional homage paid to the Greeks by educated Germans of Heidegger's generation. Understanding Heidegger's reference to that tradition is indispensable for a proper understanding of the question of the meaning of being itself. [7]

As Heidegger first puts it in Being and Time, 'Being is that on the basis of which entities are already understood. He spells this out through a description of the intelligibility of the everyday world. World is the whole context of shared equipment, roles, and practices on the basis of which one can encounter entities and other people. So, for example, one encounters a hammer as a hammer in the context of other equipment such as nails and wood, and in terms of social roles such as being a carpenter, a handyman, and so forth. Heidegger calls the way the shared background practices are coordinated to give us access to things and to ourselves our understanding of being. Heidegger sees that this familiarity is so pervasive that it is easily passed over. As he puts it, it is nearest to us and so furthest away. [8]

Heidegger acknowledged with Husserl that the "being" of all entities lies in the sense we gain of them in our understanding. This much he shared with both Husserl's transcendental subjectivism and modern anthropocentrism. What Heidegger saw as crucial difficulties in Husserl's approach (apart from the fact that Husserl's phenomenology leaves him still with an unanalyzed multiplicity of meanings of being) can be summed up as three interrelated points:[9]

He objected to treating the subject in whose understanding all ontology must center as an impersonal and *transparent ego* that is infallible in its intuitions about the activity and the content of its consciousness. That the "I" is in a sense closest to me does not mean that I comprehend it; we may be very far from possessing any such self-transparency. As Heidegger takes great pains to show, our self understanding in fact is usually not at all authentic

Heidegger questioned the feasibility or advisability or "bracketing" the world. He regarded Husserl's "immanentism" as mistaken, since it came dangerously close to turning the objects of consciousness exclusively into objects in consciousness, and it

[7] Dorothea Frede "The Question of being: Heidegger's project" in Charles B. Guignon, *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger,* Cambridge: University Press, 1993, 43.

[8] Carol J. White, *Time and Death. Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude*, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005, x-xi

[9] Dorothea Frede "The Question of being: Heidegger's project" in Charles B. Guignon, *The Cambridge Companion…,* 53.

made Husserl dispense with the question of the ties there are to the actual world that transcends consciousness

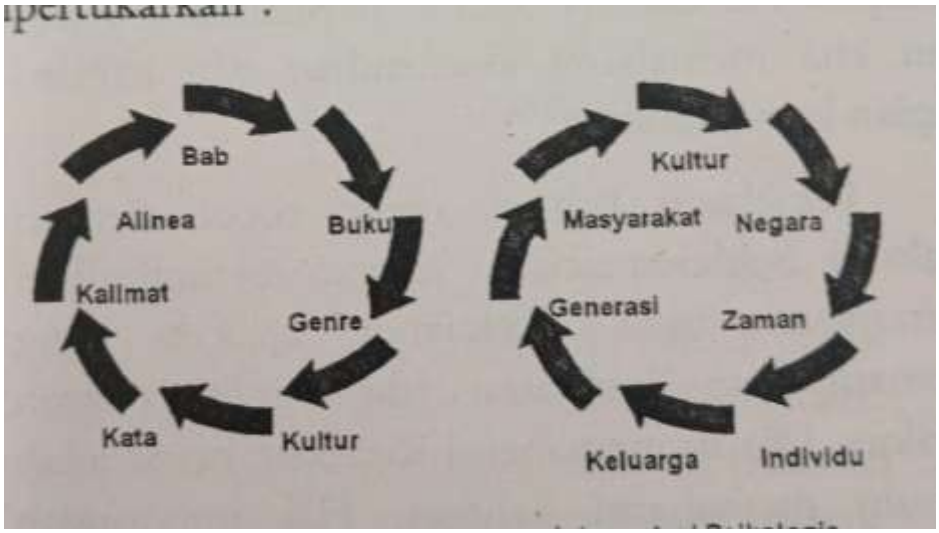
In spite of Husserl's attempt to capture all modes of consciousness including emotional attitudes, for Heidegger the very fact that the objects of consciousness are assumed as simply given in the stream of consciousness and to be studied in a detached "vieweing" or "intuition" showed that Husserl's ontology remained tied to the traditional theoretical stance and ontology of the "occurent".

Here Heidegger contributes a famous insight about *Vorstruktur des Verstehens* (pre-structure of understanding). Understanding a meaning is never without presuppositions (voraussetzungslos); it presupposes a certain pre-understanding (Vorverstandnis). The words 'presupposition' or 'pre-understanding' here are not meant purely in a cognitive sense, but existentially, that is, as a mode of existence. That pre-understanding is formed from what Heidegger calls Bewandtnisganzheit, namely the totality of our involvement in the life practices we engage in, and it is 'mute', that is, non-thematic, pre-predicative, non-verbal. [10] We are involved in practices just like that, and from that involvement our understanding grows. A sculptor in Bali, for example, 'understands' visual art, and that does not merely mean 'knowledge' of visual art, but rather the person's skill or proficiency in working with visual art. As a way of existing, creating art precedes and enables the Balinese person's understanding of ontic things, for example, about how to use a chisel, carve, or smooth wood. Thus, the presupposition or pre-structure of that understanding becomes the starting point of interpretation. In this sense, according to Heidegger as well, an understanding without preconceptions is impossible.

Heidegger's Hermeneutic Circle:

The hermeneutic circle is the dialectical relationship between the parts and the whole of a text; one cannot understand the parts without understanding the whole and vice versa. Therefore, psychological interpretation and interpretation in understanding the text. Grammatical interpretation focuses on the language elements of the text, while psychological interpretation focuses on the author's thoughts, namely the original intention of writing the text.

[10] F. Budi Hardiman, Seni Memahami. Hermeneutik dari Schleiermacher sampai Derrida, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015. 114-115.



Ket: Hermenutics circle

Here we must be careful not to misunderstand Heidegger. With the concept of the pre-structure of understanding, he does not mean to say that all understanding ultimately depends on the subjective pre-understanding of the interpreter. I see something more fundamental that Heidegger is thinking: for a text or foreign expression to be understood, there must first be clarity about the manner of existence or—in technical terms—the 'hermeneutic situation' of the interpreter. We are then reminded of the hermeneutic circle already discovered by Schleiermacher and Dilthey; the hermeneutic circle in Heidegger operates on an ontological level. Understanding moves within a circle from the way we exist as a pre-structure to our understanding of something. Thus, the hermeneutic circle in text interpretation according to Heidegger is merely a special case of the general phenomenon that all understanding is circular in nature. However, Heidegger himself was reluctant to call the process a hermeneutic circle because it was too geometric. F. Budi Hardiman offers an illustration of a Balinese artist depicting the way of life of religious people. The way of life of an individual or a community is a silent pre-structure, that is, non-thematic, which becomes the starting point for the person or community to understand things in an articulative way. [11]

[11] F. Budi Hardiman, Seni Memahami. Hermeneutik dari Schleiermacher sampai Derrida, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015. 117-118.



Ket: Para Biarawan Membaca

Believing is not merely knowing about the doctrines of a religion, but also being as a believer - something non-verbal and pre-predicative that precedes all ways of thinking, acting, and feeling that are articulated. The life practices they spontaneously engage in without much thought constitute a pre-structure that enables them to understand themselves, others, society, the world, and God. In this sense, the way of life of Buddhist monks, for example, is not merely an addition to the way they understand themselves, society, and nature. More than just an addition, their way of life allows them to understand those things. The ascetic practices they undergo, for example, allow them to understand what 'desire' is that leads to 'suffering'.[12] We can also say that theology, that is, rational reflection on faith, is also an empirical form of understanding made possible by the mode of existence of a particular religious community, for example, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim communities in a certain time and place.

Since all three of these points are crucial issues to Heidegger, they can be used as a key to understanding what is characteristic of Heiddeggerian ontology in Being and Time:[13]

[12] F. Budi Hardiman, Seni Memahami. Hermeneutik dari Schleiermacher sampai Derrida, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015. 118.

[13] Dorothea Frede "The Question of being: Heidegger's project" in Charles B. Guignon, *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger,* Cambridge: University Press, 1993, 53-57.

(1) Heidegger's realization that the picture we form of ourselves may be influenced (and even distorted) by our personal interests and propensities, and that it is conditioned by the general historical situation, made it seem questionable whether there is such a neutral transcendental "I" that underlies all acts systematic suspicious.

(2) If the pure "I" is, then, an abstraction that permits a proper comprehension neither of Dasein nor of the embeddedness of all meaning and understanding in everdayness, it is also clear why Heidegger came to the conclusion that any bracketing of the factual world in phenomenology must be a crucial mistake. For Heidegger who was concerned with a penetrating analysis of how we are related to the world and to ourselves as beings with a world, all abstraction from the way Dasein actually experiences the world must destroy the phenomenon of "having a world". For the world is precisely the context in which we encounter beings and ourselves, and it is encounter that determines what they are for our understanding.

(3) since our implicit understanding of being is not only the basis of Heidegger's own interpretation but, as he sawi t, the all-pervasive feature that characterizes humankind in general, there has always been an at least dim understanding of the "question of being". Heidegger makes no claims to originality here. What needs an explanation is, rather, why this dim understanding was never fully developed before, and a good deal of Heidegger's originality consists in his explanation of what he calls our 'forgetfullness" of being.

The Icon of Lord Supper

Why icons? Wouldn't it be better to use paintings that are easier to understand, such as paintings by Michelangelo, Rembrandt, or Marc Chagall? Western artworks may indeed be more appealing, but icons create a purpose, namely offering an entryway, through a door that can be seen, into a mystery that cannot be seen. Icons are made to guide us into the space of inner prayer, and bring us close to the heart of God.[14]

[14] Henri J.M Nouwen, Pandanglah Wajah Kasih Allah (Spiritualitas Seni Ikon), Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2003, 17.

Symbols, icons, and Christian-themed paintings. what's the difference? Human life from birth to death is filled with ceremonies and various accompanying symbols. This is evident in Javanese tradition, for example, in the house of a deceased person, a teplok lamp or an electric lamp is kept lit. The purpose of lighting the lamp is for the deceased to have a bright path to reach their destination, returning to God. For Chinese people, water is considered a symbol of good fortune because water is equated with symbols of wealth and prosperity. Having flowing water pass through the main door/gate of a house is like receiving an abundance of wealth and prosperity. [15]

Contrary to more popular Western artworks, icons are made according to rules that have been established for centuries. The shapes and colors do not depend solely on the imagination and taste of the iconographer, but are passed down from generation to generation by adhering to a noble tradition. The concern of the icon maker is not to be recognized, but to proclaim the Kingdom of God through their art. Icons are made to be placed in the sacred liturgy and therefore painted according to the requirements of the liturgy. Just like the liturgy itself, icons strive to provide a glimpse of heaven.[16]

This is why icons are not easy to 'see.' The icons do not immediately speak to our senses. Icons do not instantly captivate us, amaze, stir emotions, or stimulate imagination. At first, even, icons seem stiff, lifeless, boring. Icons do not convey meaning to us at first glance. Only slowly, through patient presence and in an atmosphere of prayer, icons begin to speak to us. And when they speak, icons speak more to our inner self than to our physical senses. Icons speak to the soul seeking God. [17]

An icon is like a window open to eternity. Behind its two-dimensional surface, a divine garden hidden beyond all dimensions and forms lies. Every time one looks at these four icons: the icon of the Most Holy Trinity; the icon of the Virgin of Vladimir; the Savior of Zvenigorod; and the icon of the Descent of the Holy Spirit. These four icons reveal four aspects of our salvation. The first invites us to dwell in the house of love; the second assures us that we truly belong to God; the third reveals to us the face

[15] Widdwissoeli M. Saleh, Hari Raya dan Simbol Gerejawi, Lembaga Pembinaan dan Pengkaderan Sinode GKJ dan GKI Jateng, 2000, 31

[16] Henri J.M Nouwen, Pandanglah Wajah Kasih Allah..., 17.

[17] Henri J.M Nouwen, Pandanglah Wajah Kasih Allah..., 18.

of the Lord; and the fourth sends us to liberate the world. Together, these icons reveal the Christian understanding of the origin and purpose of our lives. [18]

It will first be proper to consider whether, regarding the subject a priori, that is, looking at the habits and manners of those among whom the symbolical system originated, if it originated anywhere, we have reason to think them at all likely to induce that system. Now, as matter of fact, we know that the train of thought, the every day observances, above all, the religious rites of the early Christians, were in the highest de gree figurative. The rite of Baptism gave the most forcible of all sanctions to such a system; and while it sanctioned, it also suggested, some of the earliest specimens of Christian symbolism.[19] What ways religious man attempts to remain as long as possible in a sacred universe, and hence what his total experience of life proves to be in comparison with the experience of the man without religious feeling, of the man who lives, or wishes to live, in a desacralized world. It should be said at once that the completely profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit. It does not devolve upon us to show by what historical processes and as the result of what changes in spiritual attitudes and behavior modem man has desacralized his world and assumed a profane existence. For our purpose it is enough to observe that desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modem societies and that, in consequence, he finds it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions of religious man in the archaic societies. [20]



[18] Henri J.M Nouwen, Pandanglah Wajah Kasih Allah..., 18.

[19] Guillaume Durand, The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments, Michaelmas, 1842, 31

[20] Mircea Eliade, The Sacred & The Profane the Nature of Religion. The Significance of religious myth, symbolism, and ritual within life and culture, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc, 1987, 8.

What we are saying is that religious symbols come alive in the very symbolic act, in the performance of an actual rite. But this is not to say that the symbolic exchange is complete simply in its performance, for the symbol also needs to be received and responded to. The point was well made by artist Mark Rothko, who said that a painting could only come 'alive' when it was viewed by a sensitive viewer responding to its form and colour. Religiously speaking, some might say that this is the point at which faith comes into play in the symbolic exchange of Christian worship. Indeed, without the appropriate intention, attention and receptivity on the part of woshippers in the symbolic exchange of worship, the symbol is in danger of becoming a mere empty sign.[21]

But this is not to say that the power of a symbol resides in what we, the participants, attribute to or invest in the material symbol. On the contrary, a vital element of what is said and done in an act of worship is the element of invocation, specifically, the invocation of the Holy Spirit that we ourselves may be changed by the symbolic exchange of such physical things as bread and wine, ash, light, water and oil in the context of an actual liturgical celebration.[22]

The way of life of a person or a community is a silent pre-structure, that is non-thematic, which becomes the starting point for that person or community to understand things articulatively. Iconic "The Lord Supper". [Symbols] both reveal and conceal...disclosing a different order of reality and experience. Symbols are thus by definition mysterious. The word iconic comes from the word icon, which means image or symbol. We will discuss the icon 'The Last Supper'. We can also say that theology, that is, a rational reflection on faith, is also an empirical form of understanding made possible by the way a particular religious community exists, for example, Jewish, Christian communities and certain locations. Faith is not just knowing about the doctrines of a religion, but also being as a believer - something non-verbal and pre-predicative, preceding all ways of thinking, ways of acting, and ways of feeling that are articulated. If understanding is factuality, understanding is a comprehensive disposition within a person's way of life. Our cognitive understanding is directed by that pre-cognitive disposition without us realizing it, so within every (cognitive) understanding there is a pre-structure of understanding that directs that

[21] Christopher Irvine, *The Use of Symbols in Worship*, London: SPCK Alcuin Club, 2007, 15.
[22] Christopher Irvine, The Use of Symbols in Worship, 16.

understanding. In this sense, our actual understanding contains presuppositions that we are not aware of.

The Reformer John Calvin had no hesitation is speaking of the Eurcharist as a 'symbol', an effective sign that was charged with the Spirit, the life and energies of God, so that in sharing the Eucharist bread and cup, what Christ offers and gives, and what we receive, is his body and blood. Again, as Chauver has argued at length, sacramental symbols mediate between God and humanity and are experienced as grace, as relationships are reconfigured within the Body and we receive our identity as brothers and sister in Christ.[23]

"...Understanding As A Way of Being".

Understanding is not merely a way of daily life, but also an art. Understanding is also not merely an art, but a scientific method to uncover humans, society, and its history. The art of understanding pioneered by Schleiermacher is not an easy endeavor. Its principle is indeed simple, namely that to understand a text we need to enter the world of its author through the arrangement of sentences they have written or enter the world of the author's imagery. Schleiermacher assumed a duality of language and its users, so that language is nothing more than a vehicle for the user's thoughts.[24] The choice of priority between language and its users will result in different consequences. If the content of thought is more important than the language used to convey it, psychological interpretation will certainly take precedence over grammatical interpretation, because 'people regard language specifically as a means for them to communicate their thoughts.' We can also argue the opposite, namely prioritizing grammatical interpretation, if we 'consider people and their utterances specifically as an opportunity for language to express itself.'[25]

Schleiermacher's stance on the matter is "that the two tasks are entirely equivalent." We understand language through its users, but the language user can be understood through the language they use. In our example, Kartini's thoughts and the letters expressing them hold equal standing in interpretation. We understand the person through the texts they wrote, and the texts are understood through the person.

[23] Christopher Irvine, The Use of Symbols in Worship, 16.

[24] F. Budi Hardiman, Seni Memahami. Hermeneutik dari Schleiermacher sampai Derrida, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015, 42.

[25] F. Budi Hardiman, Seni Memahami. Hermeneutik dari Schleiermacher sampai Derrida, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2015, 42-43.

Thus, "both grammatical and psychological interpretation must be treated as if they can be interchanged." According to Schleiermacher, the equal standing of grammatical and psychological interpretation in understanding the meaning of a text is what later became known as the hermeneutic circle (*hermeneutischer Zirkel*), the essence of which is that "each part can only be understood from the whole that encompasses it, and vice versa." Entering the imaginary world of the writer, that is, reliving their experience, is to go through this hermeneutic circle in interpretation. Here we encounter difficulties. If it is to understand the parts, then how does one understand the whole? Can we not simply start from the whole without the parts?

Palmer provides an interesting explanation of how Schleiermacher responds to this problem. "Sometimes," he writes, "A kind of 'leap' into the hermeneutic circle occurs and we understand the whole and the parts together"

The term Sacrament

The word "Sacrament" is not a term that originates from the Bible. The word originally referred to an oath or serious commitment as a Roman soldier's military oath. In the early Church, adult Christians being baptized had to renounce all gods and swear allegiance to Christ, which was called a "sacramentum," a term that gradually came to be applied to Baptism itself, and later also used in the Holy Communion. In Church language, a sacrament is a visible means of spiritual blessing, a religious rite established by Christ.

To reiterate, what we are saying is that it is in the actual celebration, the very doing of worship, that the voice and power of a symbol is realized and released. In the traditional nomenclature, the sacramental symbol is a 'visible sign of invisible grace', effecting what is signifies and revealing the transcendent signifier. And so, what is placed into our hands at Holy Communion is not 'ordinary food', but the Bread of Life. It is in the performance of ritual action that its signs gain or reveal symbolic significance, and for this reason, our full attention must be given to our symbolic practice, of how we use symbols in a liturgical context. For this reason the rest of this Guide will look at the very practical matter of how we place and handle symbols in the celebration of the Church's rites. [26]

But having arrived at this point in our enquiry we need to recognize that there are two possibly competing lines of argument regarding the use of symbols in worship.

[26] Christopher Irvine, The Use of Symbols in Worship, 16.

The one, seeking to heighten our sense of the symbolic, urges us the streamline the use of symbols, to free them from all secondary symbolism and distracting clutter or decoration.[27] This we might call the minimalist approach, with its call for uncluttered sanctuaries and unfussy ceremonial and a generous and expansive use of symbols and symbolic actions. The other, the Roman Catholic revisionist position, presses the case that such streamlining of symbolism has actually resulted in the loss of symbols.[28]

The definition of sacrament

The sacrament must be distinguished from offering. In offering, humans approach God by giving something. Whereas in the sacrament, God approaches humans, offering and giving something to them. A sacrament is a celebration or an effort by God to give us a promise that is united with the ceremonial service. Thus, a sacrament is a holy act established by God, in which He, through certain external means, connected with His word, offers, conveys, and seals the grace that Christ attained for humans. A sacrament is an action: the water poured in Baptism, and the bread eaten and the wine drunk in the Holy Communion, as a sacred action. A sacrament must be distinguished from ordinary actions of washing, eating, and drinking - because God who approaches us as a sacrament is also the one who can establish it; a sacrament is not a human authority.

Likewise, it is God Himself who establishes the external means used: water in Baptism, bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. These external means (water, bread, and wine) are united with God's command and promise, and which makes Baptism and the Lord's Supper a sacrament 'Accredit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum'. A sacrament is not merely a sign of the profession of faith, which allows humans to understand the meaning of being a Christian. A sacrament is also not merely a depiction of spiritual blessings, received by believers in certain other ways. A sacrament is a sign and proof of grace, a means used by God to offer and guarantee His grace to humans. Sacraments guarantee that God's grace is given to us, offering the forgiveness of sins, and work or strengthen in us the faith to receive heavenly blessings. That in the sacrament God deals with humans individually and personally, and that His promises relate to external things, water in Baptism, and bread and wine in the Holy Communion. However, the power of the Sacrament does

[27] Christopher Irvine, The Use of Symbols in Worship, 17.
[28] Christopher Irvine, The Use of Symbols in Worship, 17.

not lie in those external elements, but solely and only in the Word that gives the related promise. Therefore, as Luther in the Small Catechism, we confess: "it is not the water that does these things (the very extraordinary things), but the Word of God that is contained in and accompanies the water."

It is not eating and drinking that does these things, but the word written here 'is given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins.' It is the promise of God that conveys these blessings, and in the sacrament of this promised grace, by the command of Christ, is fully connected with the visible elements.

It is undoubtedly the case that religious symbols attract further symbols, so for instance we find eucharistic vestments decorated with images of eucharistic vessels, or Easter fires that are so large that they dwarf the symbolism of the Easter candle. Symbols and emblems can be layered upon other signs and symbols, rather like barnacles on the surface of a boat's hull.[29] Thomas Merton wrote astringently about this danger in an essay aptly called 'Absurdity in Sacred Decoration'. Merton protested against the obscuring of religious symbols through the multiplication of decorative signs and emblems, but his underlying motive was to highlight the need for religious symbols to be placed and handled in ways which drew and held the focused attention of the worshipper.

Summary

What is means to be human in our time, the next step is not simply to agree on ideas, but to cultivate awareness and responsibility in how we live. We need to become more attentive to how fear, anger and obedience shape our actions, and then consciously choose to respond with critical reflection, ethical courage, and empathy. In other words, the task is to move from understanding to transformation, so that our way of being human is not defined by control, but by dignity and freedom.

Understanding is not merely a way of daily life, but also an art. Understanding is also not merely an art, but a scientific method to uncover humans, society, and its history

In the art of understanding, we are guided to enter the variety of pre-understandings of various dimensions of character within a community

[29] Christopher Irvine, The Use of Symbols in Worship, 17.

Through the icon of the 'Lord's Supper', we experience a journey of faith about the community of believers, fragility, betrayal, yet there is forgiveness and the promise of salvation

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