

GADAMER, *WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTLICHES*
BEWUSSTSEIN, AND WHAT TO DO
ABOUT JUDAS (ACTS 1:12–22)

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ABSTRACT

Hans-Georg Gadamer's artfully ambiguous phrase, *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* (historically-effected consciousness), evokes both a consciousness that is aware of how understanding is shaped by effective history, but also the consciousness that is already always being shaped by effective history. This paper begins by unpacking Gadamer's concept of historically effective consciousness, drawing on his later works alongside the more familiar *Truth and Method*. Part Two explores how his phenomenological hermeneutics might assist a reading of the New Testament as a literary text. Gadamer's principles can be seen at play in Acts 1:12–22, in which Peter explains Judas's betrayal as the fulfilment of Psalms 69 and 109. While midrashic techniques explain some aspects of Peter's exegesis of these Old Testament texts, it can be difficult to find a coherent hermeneutical principle behind this kind of apostolic exegesis of the Old Testament. Historically-effected consciousness offers a promising overarching hermeneutic, drawing our attention to three elements of the text's historical horizon: question, geography and genre. Part Three then considers what a historically-effected consciousness might mean, in turn, for New Testament exegetes reflecting on their own phenomenological predicament.

HOW DOES THE APOSTLE PETER MAKE SENSE OF THE APOSTATE JUDAS? THE presence of only eleven disciples in the upstairs room in Jerusalem is not only an uncomfortable reminder of the public and grisly fate of Judas Iscariot, but also raises a pressing hermeneutical puzzle: where precisely does the fatal betrayal of the Messiah by a member of his own inner circle fit within the scriptural expectation of a divinely appointed—and protected—Davidic king? Peter looks to the Psalms to make recent history intelligible, and to point a way forward. But far from settling the matter, this creative hermeneutical event continues to raise questions for modern exegetes of scripture. Is this just opportunistic proof-texting? Perhaps a once-off apostolic revelation? Or is this a principled, repeatable, way for Christians to understand the Old Testament in the wake of the resurrection? For explanations for what Peter is doing here

in Acts 1 have often sought parallels with midrashic techniques. While this has yielded interesting and useful insights, we still need a way of articulating the foundational hermeneutical principles beneath the multifarious modes of apostolic exegesis. In this paper I begin by unpacking Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*, drawing on his later works as well the more familiar parts of *Truth and Method*.¹ I then explore how a *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* might supply some of the hermeneutical tools to help understand Peter's use of the Psalms in Acts 1:12–22. While midrashic techniques explain something of the flavour of Peter's exegesis, it is the historical nature of the event of understanding that best explains Peter's creative reworking of the source material. Three aspects of this hermeneutical event's historical horizon invite special focus: question, geography and genre. Finally, I briefly consider what a historically-effected consciousness might mean for New Testament scholars as they themselves participate in new hermeneutical events.

THE INESCAPABLE *WIRKUNGSGESCHICHTLICHES BEWUSSTSEIN*

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) developed his hermeneutics at the intersection of worlds: the Weimar Republic and National Socialism; Communist East Germany and Capitalist USA; romanticism and poststructuralism. On his retirement in 1968, he was surprised to find himself entering another world entirely: the translation of his second book, *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), into English in 1975 and its growing critical reception brought him into a new world of international teaching and highly public disagreements with thinkers as diverse as Jürgen Habermas, E. D. Hirsch and Jacques Derrida.

That Gadamer could provoke criticism along such opposing philosophical vectors is indicative of what he is trying to do. His project attempts to negotiate between extremes—confronting the finitude of our existence while remaining optimistic about the ability for truth to reveal itself. As Georgia Warnke summarises,

Against positivism ... Gadamer argues that an objectivity attained through scientific method is no more adequate than the prejudices it presupposes; but he also suggests that our prejudices are as much thresholds as limits, that they form perspectives from which a gradual development of our knowledge becomes possible. To this extent, Gadamer's

¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (trans. Joel Weinsheimer, Donald G. Marshall and W. Glen-Doepel; revised second ed.; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

account of understanding retains a connection to the Enlightenment.²

Naturally, therefore, from the radical perspective Gadamer often looks too conservative, but the conservatives are often spooked by his apparent relativism. It is inspiring to consider how a single scholar can be so wrong to so many people in such contradictory ways. Indeed, his creative answers to old problems is part of why his work is so provocative, and I think productive, for New Testament studies.

One of the unkind things Heidegger specialists say about Gadamer is that he is simply a footnote to his teacher's legacy—or, as Jürgen Habermas puts it in the title of one of his articles, Gadamer is merely “Urbanizing the Heideggerian Province.”³ Yet the key term under consideration in this paper, *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*, is something Heidegger would want nowhere near his province. One of Heidegger's great accomplishments was his “banishment” of consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) from the central position it had held in Cartesian metaphysics in favour of a more contingent, historical self-understanding.⁴ Heidegger would never accept Gadamer's use of the word “consciousness” in establishing his vision of the historically-effected consciousness.⁵

While smuggling in the outlawed term, Gadamer actually agreed. He was happy to continue to refer to consciousness, so long as we think of it as “more being than consciousness,”⁶ that is, not as a complete and stable possession on which philosophy can proceed, but as (like *being* itself) something never exhausted or fully grasped. The artful ambiguity of Gadamer's phrase *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* (effective-historical, or perhaps better, historically-effected consciousness)⁷ captures both sides of his phenomenological perspective on *being*: the historically-effected consciousness describes

² Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987) 4.

³ Jürgen Habermas, “Hans-Georg Gadamer: Urbanizing the Heideggerian Province” [trans. Frederick G. Lawrence; 1979] in *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983) 189–97, cited in Kristin Gjesdal, *Gadamer and the Legacy of German Idealism* (Modern European Philosophy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 35.

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) 50.

⁵ Hans-Georg Gadamer, Carsten Dutt and Richard E. Palmer, *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary* (Yale Studies in Hermeneutics; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 46.

⁶ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* 38.

⁷ This term is variously translated: effective-historical consciousness, or historically effective consciousness or historically-effected consciousness. The ambiguity is deliberate, as the following discusses.

the consciousness that is aware of effective history, but also the consciousness that is always being shaped by effective history.⁸

There are two sides to the historically-effected consciousness, and it is important to realise that only one of them is optional. As New Testament exegetes we can choose to cultivate a consciousness that is *aware* of the effective history. Nobody, however, can avoid having a consciousness that is always already being shaped by that history—whether we are aware of it or not.

To see why we need to look at what an effective history is. The history of interpretation of texts is part of the story, but in Gadamer's thinking the term has even deeper roots in the very nature of *being*. The young Gadamer first encountered Heidegger's concept of *Vorgriff* (preconception) in a manuscript given to him by Natorp which, in the early 1920s, "affected me like an electric shock."⁹ The core implication of phenomenology for hermeneutics is that we can never understand anything as a detached observer surveying the object behind the glass of objectivity. The object of interpretation in enquiry has the same mode of being as *Dasein*, in all its temporality and finitude and belonging to traditions; "neither the knower nor the known is 'present-at-hand' in an 'ontic' way, but in a 'historical' one—that is, they both have the *mode of being of historicity*."¹⁰

Thus it is true in every case that a person who understands, understands himself (*sich versteht*), projecting himself upon his possibilities ... Heidegger was right to insist that what he called "thrownness" belongs together with projection. Thus there is no understanding or interpretation in which the totality of this existential structure does not function, even if the intention of the knower is simply to read "what is there" and to discover from his sources "how it really was."¹¹

We cannot choose to avoid bringing ourselves into things; all we can choose is whether we are open about our prejudices and prepared to bring them up for scrutiny. For this reason, tradition becomes very important to what he calls *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*—a consciousness of our hermeneutical situation, of how we are affected by history. This is the opposite of the Enlightenment view that knowledge is achieved by breaking away from tradition. "When a naive faith in scientific method denies the existence of effective history, there can be an actual deformation of knowledge."¹²

⁸ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* 19.

⁹ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* 47.

¹⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 262.

¹¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 261–62.

¹² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 312.

Gadamer has little time for such historical objectivism

into which anyone falls who thinks that in understanding one is able to leave oneself out ... Tradition is not something which one knows as one's own heritage ... No, people who believe they have freed themselves from their interwovenness into their effective history are simply mistaken.¹³

Georgia Warnke employs Danto's fictional account of the "Ideal Chronicler" to helpfully illustrate Gadamer's discontent with previous hermeneutical accounts of history.¹⁴ Suppose a person or machine could make exact and complete notes about everything that happened in the world at every moment; nevertheless, the history produced by this Ideal Chronicler would still be incomplete, as it would not be able to record in 1618 that this was "the beginning of the Thirty Years War."¹⁵ The meaning of a historical event always goes beyond the agent's intentions.¹⁶ Gavrilo Princip may have known he was assassinating Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo 1914, but he probably did not know he was starting World War I.

What this means for biblical hermeneutics is that there is never an objective standpoint from which we can read texts as they are. And so, says Gadamer, we need to rethink the Enlightenment's "prejudice against prejudice."¹⁷

This strong statement of the historicity of interpretation makes more conservative New Testament exegetes instinctively nervous. Kevin Vanhoozer, for example, queries whether Gadamer's concept of tradition ends up making the history of a text's reception by the believing community into "canon":¹⁸

[Gadamer] has furthermore tied *phronesis* to the authority of interpretative traditions. In the course of the present work, however, we have argued that the canon alone has final authority in theology (*sola scriptura*), even when it sometimes goes *against* the tradition of its interpretation.¹⁹

Whether it would be a good thing or a bad thing to elevate the history of interpretation to the final arbiter of validity is something we could discuss at

¹³ Gadamer, Dutt and Palmer, *Gadamer in Conversation* 45.

¹⁴ Warnke, *Gadamer* 23.

¹⁵ Warnke, *Gadamer* 23.

¹⁶ Warnke, *Gadamer* 22–23.

¹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 283.

¹⁸ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) 157. This is because, Vanhoozer thinks, Gadamer's emphasis on the traditionary event of transmission means that "What a text is ultimately about more or less coincides with the history of a text's effects": *Drama of Doctrine* 157.

¹⁹ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* 329.

length. What I hope to make clear is that it is not a *necessary* implication of Gadamer's hermeneutics. The question of validity of interpretation is Vanhoozer's question, not Gadamer's. Gadamer certainly does not mean that tradition *should* be elevated to the position of magisterium, or that we *should* always appeal to tradition.²⁰ It is simply that we always, already, *do* read as members of a tradition. His point is to describe the effect of that tradition: its *de facto* influence, though not necessarily its *de jure* authority. We do not—we cannot—start reading without a tradition already effecting certain prejudices and concerns. As Warnke puts it, “one has to have some way of approaching the object.”²¹

“*Being that can be understood is language*”²²—Gadamer's famous, almost Delphic phrase reminds us that whenever we understand something this process is necessarily linguistic in its nature (its being is language). And because language is essential to its being, and language is always part of a tradition, it is impossible to do away with the power of tradition.²³ The fact that we share a commonality which binds us with tradition means that our relationship with a text is not one of subject and object, but a dialogue between two about some *Sache* (thing, subject matter).²⁴ This leads to an important principle for Gadamer, that of the “fore-conception of completeness.”²⁵ To understand, we must first assume certain things about the text: that it is a unity, and that the writer of the transmitted text may know more truth about the subject matter than we do (at least until it is shown otherwise).²⁶ This shifts the focus of hermeneutics away from the dead end of the subject/object divide:

It is in the play between the traditionary text's strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*²⁷

Within the hermeneutical philosophy Gadamer is developing, the relationship between tradition and interpreter is always a two-way street, upon which the traffic never ceases. Some of Gadamer's critics see tradition as monolithic and

²⁰ At some points Gadamer does say we need to entrust ourselves to the authority of tradition, but this is only in situations where we lack a better claim to knowledge, and only as a pedagogical necessity: “All our learning is based on this.” See Gadamer, Dutt and Palmer, *Gadamer in Conversation* 44.

²¹ Warnke, *Gadamer* 82.

²² Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 490.

²³ Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* 29.

²⁴ In this respect Gadamer is suggesting something related to but distinct from reader-response theories such as that developed by Jauss using Gadamer's phenomenology.

²⁵ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 305.

²⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 305.

²⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 306.

hostile to the voice of the other.²⁸ Yet tradition is not a “permanent precondition,” nor are we passively determined by this tradition, but we further determine it ourselves as we participate in its evolution.²⁹

READING IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT HISTORY

To illustrate the dynamics of effective history, and therefore the necessity of a historically-effected consciousness, I want to turn to an example of New Testament exegesis. I mean “New Testament exegesis” to be deliberately ambivalent: the workings of effective history are obvious not just *externally* (in the history of interpretation by later readers of the New Testament text), but also *internally* (within the text of the New Testament when considered as a work of literature). I take Acts 1:12–22 as my text because of the particularly creative way the Lucan character of Peter is portrayed as a hermeneut: reworking and applying Old Testament texts in light of recent history.

A considerable amount of scholarly effort has been expended trying to identify the hermeneutical principles at play in Peter's exegesis. Moyise suggests that Luke is drawn to Psalm 109:8 by the word association of ἐπισκοπή, and to Psalm 69:25 by its pre-existing association with Jesus' death.³⁰ Perhaps Peter is aware of a tradition of Jesus' own use of another part of Psalm 69 to describe his enemies (John 15:25).³¹ Ben Witherington points out, however, that Luke's use of Psalm 69 differs from other examples recorded in the gospels in that it is not strictly Christological: Psalm 69 is here applied prophetically to Judas, not the Christ.³² Perhaps then Longenecker is right to identify this as midrashic treatment of Scripture, using the rule *qal wahomer* (light to heavy) to assert that what is said of false companions and wicked men in the psalm applies all the more to Judas who has proven himself weightily wicked.³³ Arie Zwiep, following Frédéric Manns, finds an example of the midrashic practice of joining scripture using catchwords, so that a

²⁸ See, for example, Vanhoozer who following Bernasconi identifies this apparent monologism as a “fundamental problem.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Discourse on Matter: Hermeneutics and the ‘Miracle’ of Understanding,” in *Hermeneutics at the Crossroads* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, James K. A. Smith and Bruce Ellis Benson; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006) 14.

²⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 305.

³⁰ Rom 11:9–10; 15:3; Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New* (New York: Continuum, 2001) 52.

³¹ Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 1–12)*, Vol. 1 (Zurich: Benziger, 1986) 89.

³² Ben Witherington III, *Psalms Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017) 157.

³³ Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 81.

change of consonants produces new meanings.³⁴ Tzvi Novick has looked to another rabbinic practice, suggesting that the two verses are chosen because they contradict each other.³⁵

As interesting as it is to identify the midrashic techniques at play in this speech, they give a confusing picture of the overall hermeneutic of apostolic exegesis. As we read ahead through Acts, it is striking how different characters exegete the Old Testament in myriad ways. As Michael Whinton observes, when Stephen retells the story of Israel to a hostile crowd in Chapter Seven, his hermeneutical strategy is determined by his Greco-Roman rhetorical method, drawing on existing Jewish traditions to persuade his audience of his argument.³⁶ At other times, however, the hermeneutics of the Lucan speeches resemble *gezerah shawah* (analogy), *peshet* ("this is that") or other midrashic techniques.³⁷ Is there any principled hermeneutic here, or are these nascent Christian exegetes just making it up as they go along, opportunistically engaging any technique they can find so long as it proves that Jesus is the Christ?

While the hermeneutics at play in the New Testament are multifarious and sometimes puzzling, I do not think they are unstructured or unprincipled. This is where Gadamer can help us, by drawing our attention to three elements of the *wirkungsgeschichte* informing Peter's exegesis: question, geography and genre.

First, the event of Judas' demise imposes itself on Peter's *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* in the hermeneutical structure of a question. Gadamer reminds us that hermeneutics is entering into a dialogue with the traditionary text: "The speaker (*der Redende*) is put to the question (*zur Rede gestellt*) until the truth of what is under discussion (*wovon der Rede ist*) finally emerges."³⁸ As part of this creative event, Peter reworks the quotation from

³⁴ Arie W. Zwiep, *Judas and the Choice of Matthias: A Study on Context and Concern of Acts 1:15–26* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) 26. This is more persuasive than Darrel Bock's suggestion that the link is a *gezerah shewa* prompted by the common pronoun αὐτοῦ. Darrel L. Bock, *Acts* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 86.

³⁵ Tzvi Novick, "Succeeding Judas: Exegesis in Acts 1:15–26," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, No. 4 (2010) 797.

³⁶ Michael R. Whinton, "Rewriting Abraham and Joseph," *Novum Testamentum* 54 (2012) 166.

³⁷ See further Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New* 28–130; Agnethe Siquans, "Hermeneutics and Methods of Interpretation in the Isaiah Pesharim and in the Commentary on Isaiah by Theodoret of Cyrus," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context* (ed. Armin Lange et al; Leiden: Brill, 2011) 765–75; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* 79–87. Cf. Hans W. Frei, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?," in *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition* (ed. Frank McConnell; New York: Oxford, 1986) 36–77.

³⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 376. German glosses in parentheses are the translators'.

Psalm 68:26 (Mt 69:26) in answer to the question posed by circumstances: what to do about Judas?

In Chapter One of Acts, the apostles return to Jerusalem with a pressing issue—the twelve tribes are about to be restored, but only eleven apostles remain.³⁹ Peter, himself once briefly apostate, strengthens the disciples as Jesus promised he would (Luke 22:31–32) by interpreting Judas' apostasy in light of scripture (Acts 1:16), and applying his exegesis to contemporary circumstances.

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, ¹⁶ "Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus, ¹⁷ for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." (Acts 1:15–17)

How is it that Peter can say that the Holy Spirit through David foretold Judas' betrayal? After an apparent authorial intrusion in verses 18–19 explaining Judas' grisly end,⁴⁰ Peter's character points to two psalms:

For it is written in the book of Psalms,
'Let his homestead become desolate,
and let there be no one to live in it';
and

'Let another take his position of overseer.' (Acts 1:20)

David, a type of Christ, speaks of the enemy of the Messiah in Psalm 69:25 (LXX 68:26).⁴¹ Judas, Peter reminds everyone, served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus, and so is an obvious candidate for an "Enemy of Messiah" role. Judas is thus inserted into the picture relative to this Christological typology. Peter then combines this text with Psalm 109:8 (LXX 108:8) to suggest that the proper response to Judas' dramatic betrayal and death is to replace him.

So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection. (Acts 1:21–22)

³⁹ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 118–19.

⁴⁰ So NIV, ESV, NRSV. The significant issues regarding this tradition (cf. Matthew's account of Judas' end) I will leave for another time.

⁴¹ See also Acts 13:13–52 (re Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10 (LXX 15:10)); cf. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* 81–87.

These quotations contribute to the momentum of the Acts narrative in two ways: they make intelligible the potentially derailing betrayal of a trusted friend in light of God's plan for Messiah Jesus, and they also indicate what the disciples are to do next.

The presupposed, inescapable question of Judas is why Peter changes the plural of the LXX's⁴² αὐτῶν (may *their* homestead become deserted) to a singular αὐτοῦ (may *his* homestead be deserted).⁴³ Darrell Bock suggest these changes may reflect an alternative traditional source for Luke's version.⁴⁴ However, given that the MT and the LXX agree on the masculine plural pronominal suffix (אֲנֵיהֶם, "their camp"), and that no such traditional source is available to us, the simplest explanation for the singular suffix is that the Lucan Peter made a creative alteration for this occasion.

To modern readers such alteration to the text might seem like startlingly irresponsible exegesis—you cannot surely arbitrarily change the prophecy to match the events you are claiming as the fulfilment of the prophecy! Yet the hermeneutical act is not arbitrary or subjectivist, for it is answerable to a question which history has already raised. Peter does not control history. The question which dominates Peter's horizon is what to do about the recent death of Judas. This *given* constitutes part of the *wirkungsgeschichte* that Peter can neither change, nor avoid.

Of course, there is nothing particularly Gadamerian in the observation that the interpretation of scripture can often be a creative process of application in light of historical experience. David Baer argues that the Greek translators of Isaiah, seeing translation as an "exegetical-homiletical" act, used "personalisation" in a similar way to implicate their contemporary audience in the message of the text.⁴⁵ Concerning Acts in particular, Aaron White has shown how Luke's adaptations of Amos create an *inclusio* structure that serves to highlight and interpret recent events using the normative authority of scripture.⁴⁶ Similarly, Chris Blumhofer has shown how Luke's adaption of Joel 3:1–5 in the following chapter of Acts is shaped by his theological vision of Israel's eschatological restoration through the early church.⁴⁷

⁴² "LXX" is used here and throughout somewhat anachronistically to mean the Greek translations assumed to reflect the Old Testament texts available to first century Greek-speaking Jews.

⁴³ Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte (Apg 1–12)* 1, 89.

⁴⁴ Bock, *Acts* 86.

⁴⁵ David A. Baer, *When We All Go Home: Translation and Theology in LXX Isaiah 56–66* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series; Sheffield: Sheffield, 2001) 53–54, 83–84.

⁴⁶ Aaron W. White, "Revisiting the 'Creative' Use of Amos in Acts and What It Tells Us About Luke," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 46, No. 2 (2016) 204.

⁴⁷ C. M. Blumhofer, "Luke's Alteration of Joel 3.1–5 in Acts 2.17–21," *New Testament Studies* 62 (2016).

Yet Gadamer goes further than this, insisting on a two-way, or dialogical, relationship between text and event. As Witherington observes, the use of the Psalms in the New Testament is inherently selective, because the Old Testament scripture is a *secondary* influence constrained by the *primary* given of the Christ event: not all that is said of David can be made to fit the accepted narrative about Christ.⁴⁸ Yet at the same time, reading the Psalms through the lens of the Christ event provides a "lexicon or source of the language the writers of the NT use to tell the gospel story," and this in turn shapes how those events are understood.⁴⁹ Not only are recent events interpreted in light of the norms of scripture, but indeed scripture takes on new meaning in light of the questions posed to it by history. Highlighting the dialogic structure of a *question*, Gadamer's hermeneutics helps us articulate both sides of the hermeneutical conversation.

Second, when these psalms are read the local geography imposes itself upon the *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*. Not only is Peter's exegesis shaped by local geography but the text also seems to want us to be conscious of it: the narrator's intrusive historical aside foregrounds the geographical knowledge—shared by "all the residents of Jerusalem"—which forms the horizon of Peter's act of exegesis.

Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.¹⁹ This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood. (Acts 1:18–19)

Dennis MacDonald infers that this field was a "real place somewhere near Jerusalem" from Luke's use of the Aramaic name, which is independent from the Matthean tradition.⁵⁰ This effective history is thus grounded, symbolically and spatially, in the geographical coordinates of a named field. This is why the background provided in verses 18–19 is not an awkward intrusion at all,⁵¹ but a crucial presupposition of Peter's creative reading of the Psalms. It is so much a part of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Peter's exegesis that it must be included for the benefit of readers who are separated by time and space from the original horizon of meaning.

⁴⁸ Witherington III, *Psalms* 164.

⁴⁹ Witherington gives the example borrowed from Raymond Brown's *The Death of the Messiah* of how Psalm 22 led Christian writers to concentrate on certain elements of the passion narrative: Witherington III, *Psalms* 165.

⁵⁰ Dennis R. MacDonald, "Luke's Use of Papias for Narrating the Death of Judas," in *Reading Acts Today: Essays in Honour of Loveday C. A. Alexander* (ed. Steve Walton et al.; *Library of New Testament Studies*; London: T&T Clark, 2011) 45.

⁵¹ Cf. Kim Paffenroth, "The Stories of the Fate of Judas and Differing Attitudes towards Sources," *Proceedings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.) 12 (1992) 72.

The underexplored idea that geography is part of a text's *Wirkungsgeschichte* is picked up by Régis Burnet who traces the history of interpretation of the Hakeldama from Augustinian monastic writings to contemporary heavy metal lyrics, retelling the development of the geographical object as a symbol of treason, blasphemy and corpse-devouring hell.⁵² Yet in Acts, the horizon of the geographical object extends not only forward through history, but backward to earlier texts as well. These first century coordinates, which locate Judas' messianic betrayal geographically, are effective also with regards to the older tradition of the Davidic psalms which speak of messianic betrayal in general. The Psalmist's accusations of betrayal against the anointed mean something different when you read them standing in a notorious field of blood.

Third, the pieces of traditionary material Peter is interpreting—two psalms—bring with them into Peter's *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* their own historical horizon, which includes their place within a literary *genre*. In this passage Peter is portrayed interpreting Judas in light of the psalms, but he is also re-interpreting—we might say even *rewriting*—the *psalms* in light of Judas. The poetic nature of this creative hermeneutical act suggests that Peter's reading strategy is guided not only by the *content* of the traditionary source material, but by the *genre* of the psalms he is re-reading.

In his analysis of Peter's translational Hebrew poetics, Matthew Whitlock argues that Peter's exegesis can be seen as a kind of "poetry of place": an expressive and creative movement between the emptying of Judas' physical place and the re-filling of the place of service he abandoned.⁵³ Participation in a poetry of place might explain why Peter, in his reinterpretation of Psalm 68, replaces the LXX's participle ἡρημωμένη with its adjectival form ἔρημος. Dennis MacDonald suggests that this change might be explained by dependence on Papias' *Exposition of Logia about the Lord*.⁵⁴ Certainly, and regardless of whether Luke is dependent on Papias, it may be that Luke is reflecting some alternate Greek version. Yet is his choice of this version more than accidental or arbitrary? Craig Keener's suggestion that Luke changes the verb form to "smooth the style" seems unsatisfactory, especially given that in this poetic context Luke delights in preserving, for instance, the LXX's ἔπαυλις—a hapax legomenon in the New Testament.⁵⁵ There is some explanatory power therefore in Whitlock's suggestion that the change from a participle describing the *process* of desertion to an adjective describing a

⁵² Régis Burnet, "Pour Une Wirkungsgeschichte Des Lieux: L'exemple D' haceldama," *New Testament Studies* 59, No. 1 (2013).

⁵³ Matthew G. Whitlock, "Acts 1:15–26 and the Craft of New Testament Poetry," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77 (2015) 89.

⁵⁴ MacDonald, "Luke's Use of Papias for Narrating the Death of Judas" 54.

⁵⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012) 766.

deserted *place* serves to emphasise the poetic theme of place.⁵⁶ This motif of place brings two ideas into relationship: the place Judas bought, and the place amongst the apostles that he abandoned.

It seems that the genre of the source material constitutes such an important part of the *wirkungsgeschichte* of the event of interpretation that the source psalm is able to bring some of the rules of its own linguistic games with it into the new act of literary creation. Peter shortens the second verset of the LXX, so that ἡ ἔπαυλις ("the homestead") is no longer extended by the parallelism of τοῖς σκηνώμασιν ("tents") as in the LXX (and MT) but is met by a more laconic ἐν αὐτῇ ("in it"). This is not a lazy or forgetful omission, but a crucial hermeneutical move. As Whitlock astutely observes, by removing the parallel τοῖς σκηνώμασιν the exact meaning of ἡ ἔπαυλις is left equivocal for the moment: it could still be referring either to the physical field or the leadership role.⁵⁷ Perhaps more significantly, the alteration moves the verb from the end of the line (as in the LXX and MT) towards the front, meaning that verset 2 no longer balances verset 1 with a closed symmetrical structure.⁵⁸ This leaves two grammatical "ticks" awaiting their corresponding "tock." The omission of the first verset of Psalm 108:8 completes the tri-verset with a final "tock": Psalm 108:8b (MT 109:8b), which breaks from the established pattern of verb fronted versets.⁵⁹ This final verset is thus alone in being fronted by the object of the verb, τὴν ἐπισκοπὴν αὐτοῦ, creating a sense of contrast.⁶⁰

The use of Psalms in this way to respond to the emotionally fraught Judas situation is fitting, because responding to emotionally fraught historical situations is part of what psalms are for: in other words, doing this kind of hermeneutical act is something inherent, not alien, to the genre of a psalm. The superscript "ⲧⲓⲗⲧ" on both of the psalms chosen by Peter reminds us that a common feature of the literary genre of psalm is its association with a certain historical personality. Furthermore, as liturgical works psalms are often sung on a certain occasion, invoking old historical events even as they interpret new ones. Psalm 63, for example, links David's spiritual thirst with his experience in the wilderness of Judah. The Psalms of Solomon, on the other hand, take

⁵⁶ Whitlock, "Acts 1:15–26 and the Craft of New Testament Poetry" 97. Whitlock goes on to show how the contrasting senses of place implicit in 1:20 are made explicit by the repetition of τόπος in the prayer of 1:25.

⁵⁷ Whitlock, "Acts 1:15–26 and the Craft of New Testament Poetry" 99.

⁵⁸ Whitlock, "Acts 1:15–26 and the Craft of New Testament Poetry" 95.

⁵⁹ Whitlock, "Acts 1:15–26 and the Craft of New Testament Poetry" 96.

⁶⁰ Whitlock, "Acts 1:15–26 and the Craft of New Testament Poetry" 102. The only change to the quotation from Psalm 108:8b is subtle: replacing the LXX's less common optative λάβοι to the more accessible imperative mood.

inspiration from the literary form of the canonical Psalms in their response to Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem.⁶¹

The genre of the source material partly informs how open it is to this kind of new event of reinterpretation. Reflecting on his two recent intertextual studies into the use of Isaiah and Psalms in the New Testament, Witherington makes the important observation that when addressing the emotional struggles of a new situation the New Testament authors are far more likely to reuse material from Psalms than from prophetic or narrative texts.⁶² Poetry is an inherently "risky thing—it can mean more than you realize when first you create it," and this lends itself to such "homiletical" as opposed to "exegetical" use.⁶³ Indeed, genre also informs how much of a text can be used in this way. Quoting from a psalm, he observes, requires a more selective and even critical hermeneutical approach than quoting from the prophetic material in Isaiah, because by its genre a psalm gives voice not only to the oracles of God but also to the struggles of humanity.⁶⁴

The present analysis of the poetic alterations involved in Peter's hermeneutical act confirms and extends Witherington's observations. The genre of the traditionary material also informs the literary techniques used as part of the hermeneutical event. Had the Lucan Peter been interpreting a section of Hebrew narrative or prophetic tradition then the hermeneutical strategies available to him would have been different. But Peter is interpreting poetry by re-creating poetry, and so some poetic licence is entirely appropriate.

EMBRACING OUR PREJUDICES

Of course, the dynamics we have observed in the internal exegesis of the New Testament is also true of subsequent external exegesis: that is, in the history of interpretation of Acts. Is Kevin Vanhoozer right then, that for Gadamer, "What a text is ultimately about more or less coincides with the history of a text's effects?"⁶⁵ In a descriptive sense, of course this is true and we do not need Gadamer to tell us why. It is very nearly tautological. *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the history of a text's effects is, by definition, the history of what people have thought a text is about. But in the more substantial sense—that texts ultimately mean *whatever* they have been taken to mean, and all readings are just as good—I do not think this is quite where Gadamer takes us.

⁶¹ See Brad Embry, "The Psalms of Solomon," in *Early Jewish Literature* (ed. Brad Embry, Ronald Herms and Archie T. Wright; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 563.

⁶² Witherington III, *Psalms* xiii, 330–31.

⁶³ Witherington III, *Psalms* 326–27.

⁶⁴ Witherington III, *Psalms* 330.

⁶⁵ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* 157.

Gadamer wants to reverse the prejudice against prejudice. We all read historically, as part of a history of interpretation. We cannot read otherwise, for without certain presuppositions we cannot read at all (when I pick up my Bible I need to at least know whether to read right to left or left to right.) We cannot tell in advance, Gadamer insists, which of our prejudices are helpful and which are a hindrance to reading. Yet he remains optimistic that, in the ceaseless to-and-fro movement of the play of understanding, certain presuppositions will be foregrounded and perhaps revised.

What does historically-effected consciousness entail, then? Perhaps it could inspire a new sympathy towards other readers whose institutional, historical or theoretical commitments mean they are not, as first assumed, wrong or ignorant, but simply reading with different prejudices. Gadamerian New Testament critics might therefore avoid presenting their reading of a text as the inevitable result of careful linguistic analysis, and instead describe truthfully how they arrived at their understanding of the text: the sequence of false-starts, obvious mistakes and creative accidents, starting with the very first time they picked up the text.

CONCLUSION

At the end of his comparative hermeneutical analysis of a later speech in Acts, Whinton concludes that "the view of scripture demonstrated from Acts 7:2–16 would suggest that the words of scripture alone are not what are important, only the words *as understood through tradition* count."⁶⁶ My Gadamerian analysis of Acts 1:12–22, however, suggests that this is only true if "tradition" is understood in an unusually broad sense: to include the entire historical horizon surrounding the event of interpretation. Peter's *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* includes not only the tradition of interpretation, but also the *question* raised by recent events, the local *geography* and the *genre* of the traditionary source material.

A traditionary text, Gadamer says, is a self presenting object. Like a game which exists in the playing, so a text exists in the reading. And because reading is an event, it is always historically-effected. I have explored how history presents Peter and the apostles with an inescapable question: what to do about Judas? It is impossible to read about the enemies of the Christ the same way once you have lived through the grisly demise of Christ Jesus' betrayer. Their event of meaning also takes place within spatial coordinates, relative to a geography they could not anticipate much less determine. And this event takes place in the context of genre, the rules of which are not arbitrary, but the

⁶⁶ Whinton, "Rewriting Abraham and Joseph" 166.

shared possession of the tradition which has given them the traditionary text of Psalms.

Within this complex historical horizon, Peter recasts Psalm 68 and Psalm 108 to create a new event of understanding. This is a creative act, but it is not an unprincipled one. In better understanding what Peter is doing, however, we also help cultivate an understanding of our own hermeneutical situation—our *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*. Our horizons are full of historical givens which interact, productively or unhelpfully, with the traditionary objects we study. We cannot choose *whether* this is the case for us; it is the game of understanding into which we are thrown. We can, however, try to be honest with ourselves, and with others, about what those prejudices are.

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