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0521650488 - Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination: The Crisis of
Interpretation at the End of Modernity

Garrett Green

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For Priscilla

sine qua non

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Preface

This book is a revised and expanded version of the Edward Cadbury Lectures, delivered at the University of Birmingham in February and March 1998, under the title “The Faithful Imagination: Theological Hermeneutics in an Age of Suspicion.” The present text includes additional material, for which time did not suffice during the lectures, as well as a few revisions undertaken in response to the insightful comments of several members of the audience. Professor Denys Turner was a gracious and articulate host on behalf of the Department of Theology from beginning to end, setting the tone of respectful though not uncritical attention that characterized my reception in Birmingham. Other members of the department whose hospitality I recall with appreciation include Martin Stringer, Isabel Wollaston, and J. K. Parratt. To Gareth Jones, though no longer a member of the Birmingham department, I owe a special debt of gratitude; for without his initiative and imagination the lectures would never have taken place. He also left behind him a coterie of eager postgraduate students, whose presence – right in the center of the audience at every lecture – helped to keep me focused.

Some of the materials comprising this book have appeared in earlier versions in previous publications, whose editors have kindly granted permission to reprint. Portions of several chapters had their origin in 1995, when I was

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invited to deliver four lectures at the annual conference of the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion. The interchange with Professor Hendrik M. Vroom and his colleagues from the various Dutch theological faculties, which took place over four days in a lovely setting near Amersfoort, gave an early impulse to ideas that have now taken final shape in this book.

An earlier version of chapter 2 was first presented to the Nineteenth Century Theology Working Group of the American Academy of Religion and later appeared in *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (Summer 1995): 301–17.

Chapter 3 contains a revision of material that was previously published in the volume *What Is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, edited by James Schmidt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 291–305. My translation of Hamann's letter to Christian Jacob Kraus also first appeared in that volume (pp. 145–53) and is included in the appendix of this book by permission of the publisher. I am grateful to Professor Schmidt and my fellow members of his NEH Summer Seminar at Boston University for their support and encouragement during this phase of my research.

Much of the material in chapter 4 was originally presented as a paper in the Nineteenth Century Theology Working Group of the American Academy of Religion and was subsequently revised and published in *Christian Faith Seeking Historical Understanding: Essays in Honor of H. Jack Forstman*, edited by James O. Duke and Anthony L. Dunnavant (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), pp. 45–65.

The research on which chapter 5 is based was carried out during my residence at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton in 1993. I am especially appreciative of the support offered by its staff and then director, Professor Daniel Hardy.

Chapter 6 grew out of my participation in the 1996

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Calvin College Faculty Summer Seminar in Christian Scholarship on “Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought,” funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. Portions were presented in a preliminary version at the 1997 Faculty Spring Conference in Christian Scholarship in Grand Rapids and a longer version will be included in the volume *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought*, edited by Merold Westphal and published by Indiana University Press. The support and friendship of my colleagues in the seminar and its director, Merold Westphal, as well as the Summer Seminar staff at Calvin College, have been invaluable.

The final phase of preparation for the Cadbury Lectures, together with the conversion of the lectures into this book, was carried out during a splendid sabbatical year as a Visiting Fellow of Clare Hall at the University of Cambridge. I would like to thank the fellows and staff of Clare Hall and its President, Dame Gillian Beer, for providing a working environment that successfully combines the traditional setting of the ancient university with the innovative and democratic spirit of one of its newer colleges. Most of all, I wish to thank Professor David F. Ford, who assisted in the arrangements for a year in Cambridge, welcomed us to the community and the Faculty of Divinity, and was a valued conversation partner as I struggled to work out the ideas that became this book.

Various members of the Connecticut College community have provided support and encouragement along the way, including Robert E. Proctor, who served as Provost and Dean of the Faculty during most of the time I was working on this book. I am especially grateful for sabbatical leave and for contributions towards my research and travel. For computer support (even from across the Atlantic!) I am grateful to Connie Dowell, Chris Penniman, Gerard D. Poirier, and other members of the Information Services staff. I want also to acknowledge my colleagues in the Religious Studies Department, as well as the secretarial services

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of Diane Monte. Colleagues in other departments, especially Kristin Pfefferkorn and the late John S. King, helped me with German language materials – most heroically in the struggle to render Hamann’s arcane German into English.

Other friends and colleagues have contributed to this volume in ways that I, and perhaps they, may no longer remember, through conversations and the exchange of ideas in papers and professional meetings. Some of those whose contributions I do recall include Donald H. Juel, Richard B. Hays, and Daniel Breazeale.

Finally I want to acknowledge the one to whom this book is dedicated: traveling companion (in both the geographical and metaphorical senses), skilled editor of academic prose, teacher extraordinaire, mother of our children (now too old to be dragged along on sabbaticals) – in short, no mere “partner” but my wife, Priscilla Green.