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Union with Christ

Adolf Schlatter's Relational
Christology

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**Doctor of Philosophy
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2014**

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me, that it represents my own research and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Edinburgh, April 22, 2014

Abstract

The present study is considered to be the first extensive work on the Christology of Swiss theologian Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938). As the title of this study suggests, we argue that Schlatter’s Christology reveals a distinctly relational trajectory. From this claim emerge two hypotheses to be probed, namely, *first*, whether the aspect of ‘relationality’ (*Beziehung*) is a correct reading of Schlatter and, if so, one has to demonstrate, *secondly*, to what extent Schlatter’s relational approach offers a sustainable Christology that adequately describes and explains the person and work of Jesus Christ in relation to God and to humanity. Instead of pursuing the classic two-nature treatment, Schlatter, based on his empirical realist method, develops a relational account of Jesus Christ against the backdrop of a distinct Trinitarian framework. Father, Son and Holy Spirit share a communion of will and of love which creates, shapes and upholds the life-story of the Christ. Based on his New Testament ‘seeing-act’, Schlatter pictures the Son as dependent upon the Holy Spirit and in continual obedience to the Father, who, through his salvific work, invites us to participate in the Trinitarian communion of love. The prime locus to probe the validity of Schlatter’s relational motif is his *theologia crucis*. Schlatter regards Jesus’ action on the cross as the significant relational movement of Jesus Christ first and foremost towards the Father, as ‘service to God,’ and on this basis, also to human beings, as ‘service to humanity.’ Jesus reveals his divinity on the cross as he is able to maintain fellowship with God in spite of God-forsakenness, mediated by the Holy Spirit, and he reveals his humanity by remaining in close communion with sinners, thus transforming them and gathering the redeemed into the new community of faith. Schlatter’s relational perspective provides not only a balanced view of Jesus Christ’s divinity and humanity, but also offers a highly creative way of investigating Jesus’ being in relation and his being in essence. This work suggests that Schlatter’s Christological approach offers much by way of promise both in its faithfulness to the New Testament witness and in its attempt to achieve a harmonious understanding of Christology and soteriology.

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All errors and shortcomings remain my own.

SDG

Abbreviations

The following list indicates the abbreviations used for central works of Adolf Schlatter. All other abbreviations follow Siegfried M. Schwertner, *IATG: Internationales Abkürzungsverzeichnis für Theologie und Grenzgebiete*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992).

<i>Andachten</i>	<i>Daß meine Freude in euch sei: Andachten</i> . 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1957.
“Atheistische Methoden”	“Atheistische Methoden in der Theologie.” <i>BFChTh</i> 9, no. 5 (1905): 228-250.
“Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls”	“Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls.” <i>KiFr</i> 20 (12/1886): 409-417.
“Barth’s Epistle to the Romans”	“Karl Barth’s <i>Epistle to the Romans</i> .” In <i>The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology</i> , edited by James M. Robinson, translated by Keith R. Crim, 121-125. Richmond, VI: John Knox, 1968.
“Bedeutung der Methode”	“Die Bedeutung der Methode für die theologische Arbeit.” <i>TLB</i> 31, no. 1 (1908): 5-8.
<i>Die Bibel verstehen</i>	<i>Die Bibel verstehen: Aufsätze zur Biblischen Hermeneutik</i> . Edited by Werner Neuer. Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 2002.
“Briefe über das Dogma”	“Briefe über das Christliche Dogma.” <i>BFChTh</i> 5, no. 5 (1912).
“Christologie der Bergpredigt”	“Die Christologie der Bergpredigt.” <i>KiFr</i> 21 (10/1879): 321-328.
“Christi Versöhnen und Christi Vergeben”	“Christi Versöhnen und Christi Vergeben.” <i>EvKBlW</i> 59 (1898): 161-165.
<i>Dogma</i>	<i>Das christliche Dogma</i> . 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1923.
<i>Ethik</i>	<i>Die christliche Ethik</i> . 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1929.

“Christologie und Soteriologie”	“Christologie und Soteriologie.” Bern: lecture, 1884. Landeskirchliches Archiv Stuttgart, Bestand D 40 [No. 192].
“Christus und Christentum, Person und Prinzip”	“Christus und Christentum, Person und Prinzip.” <i>BFChTh</i> 8, no. 4 (1904): 5-24.
“Dienst des Christen”	“Der Dienst des Christen in der älteren Dogmatik.” <i>BFChTh</i> 1, no. 1 (1897).
<i>Dienst des Christen</i>	<i>Der Dienst des Christen: Beiträge zu einer Theologie der Liebe.</i> Edited by Werner Neuer. Giessen/Basel: Brunnen, 1991.
“Dienstpflicht des Christen”	“Die Dienstpflicht des Christen in der apostolischen Gemeinde.” Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag der Ev. Gesellschaft, 1929.
<i>Do We Know Jesus</i>	<i>Do We Know Jesus? Daily Insights for the Mind and Soul.</i> Translated by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2005.
“Entstehung der Beiträge”	“Die Entstehung der Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie und ihr Zusammenhang mit meiner theologischen Arbeit zum Beginn ihres fünfundzwanzigsten Bandes.” <i>BFChTh</i> 25, no. 1 (1920).
“Erfolg und Mißerfolg“	“Erfolg und Mißerfolg im theologischen Studium. Rede an die evangelisch-theologische Fachschaft in Tübingen.” In <i>Zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments und zur Dogmatik. Kleine Schriften</i> , edited by Ulrich Luck, 256-272. München: Christian Kaiser, 1969.
<i>Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament</i>	<i>Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament: ausgelegt für Bibelleser.</i> Vols. 1-10. Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1952-1953.
<i>Erlebtes</i>	<i>Erlebtes. Erzählt von D. Adolf Schlatter.</i> 5th ed. Berlin: Furche-Verlag, 1929.
“Die Furcht vor dem Denken”	“Die Furcht vor dem Denken. Eine Zugabe zu Hiltys ‘Glück’ III.” <i>BFChTh</i> 4, no. 1 (1900): 3-48.
<i>Geschichte des Christus</i>	<i>Die Geschichte des Christus.</i> Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1923.
<i>Gesunde Lehre</i>	<i>Gesunde Lehre. Reden und Aufsätze.</i> Velbert: Freizeiten-Verlag, 1929.

“Glaube an die Bibel”	“Der Glaube an die Bibel.” In <i>Heilige Anliegen der Kirche: Vier Reden</i> , 34-46. Calw: Verlag der Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1896.
<i>Glaube im Neuen Testament</i>	<i>Der Glaube im Neuen Testament</i> . 6th ed. Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1982.
<i>Gründe der christlichen Gewißheit</i>	<i>Die Gründe der christlichen Gewißheit, Das Gebet</i> . Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1927.
<i>History of the Christ</i>	<i>The History of the Christ: The Foundation of New Testament Theology</i> . Translated by Andreas J. Köstenberger. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997.
<i>Hilfe in Bibelnot</i>	<i>Hilfe in Bibelnot: Neues und Altes zur Schriftfrage</i> . 3rd ed. Gladbeck: Freizeiten-Verlag, 1953.
“Idealismus und Erweckung ”	“Der Idealismus und die Erweckung in meiner Jugend” (n.d., probably 1926, unpublished) Landeskirchliches Archiv Stuttgart, Bestand D 40 [No. 1025, transcript by Albert Bailer; compare original in No. 769; citations are to the Bailer transcript].
“Karl Barths Römerbrief”	“Karl Barths Römerbrief.” <i>Die Furche</i> 12 (1922): 228-232.
<i>Kennen wir Jesus?</i>	<i>Kennen wir Jesus? Ein Gang durch ein Jahr im Gespräch mit ihm</i> . 3rd ed. Gladbeck: Freizeiten Verlag, 1952.
“Noch ein Wort”	“Noch ein Wort über den christlichen Dienst.” <i>BFChTh</i> 9, no. 6 (1905): 47-83.
<i>Philosophische Arbeit</i>	<i>Die philosophische Arbeit seit Descartes: Ihr ethischer und religiöser Ertrag</i> . 4th ed., Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1959.
“Princip des Protestantismus”	“Ueber das Princip des Protestantismus.” <i>KiFr</i> 15 (05/08/1881): 241-247.
<i>Romans</i>	<i>Romans: The Righteousness of God</i> . Translated by Siegfried S. Schatzmann. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.
<i>Ruf Jesu</i>	<i>Der Ruf Jesu. Predigten von Adolf Schlatter</i> . 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1925.
<i>Rückblick</i>	<i>Rückblick auf meine [seine] Lebensarbeit</i> . Edited by Theodor Schlatter, 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1977.

“Selbstdarstellungen”	“Adolf Schlatter.” In <i>Die Religionswissenschaft in Selbstdarstellungen</i> , edited by Erich Stange, 145-171. Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1925.
<i>Sprechstunde</i>	<i>Aus meiner Sprechstunde</i> . 3rd ed. Bethel: Verlagshandlung der Anstalt Bethel, 1952.
<i>Theologie der Apostel</i>	<i>Die Theologie der Apostel</i> . 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Verlag der Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1922.
“Theologie des NT und Dogmatik”	“Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments und die Dogmatik.” <i>BFChTh</i> 13, no. 2 (1909): 7-82.
<i>Theology of the Apostles</i>	<i>The Theology of the Apostles: The Development of New Testament Theology</i> . Translated by Andreas J. Köstenberger. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.
“Theology of the NT and Dogmatics”	“The Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics.” In <i>The Nature of New Testament Theology</i> , edited and translated by Robert Morgan, 115-166. London: SCM Press, 1973.
“Unterwerfung unter die Gotteswirklichkeit”	“Die Unterwerfung unter die Gotteswirklichkeit.” <i>Die Furche</i> (Oct-Nov 1911): 6-12, 47-53.
“Religiöse Aufgabe der Universitäten”	“Was ist heute die religiöse Aufgabe der Universitäten?” <i>BFChTh</i> 5, no. 4 (1901): 61-79.
“Wert und Unwert unseres Wissens”	“Der Wert und Unwert unseres Wissens.” <i>MPTTh</i> 28 (1932): 259-265.
“Wesen und Quellen der Gotteserkenntnis”	“Wesen und Quellen der Gotteserkenntnis.” Bern: lecture, summer semester 1883. Landeskirchliches Archiv Stuttgart, Bestand D 40 [No. 191].
“Wille, Wollen”	“Wille, Wollen.” In <i>Biblisches Handwörterbuch - Calwer Bibellexikon</i> . Edited by Paul Zeller, 1011-1012. Stuttgart: Verlag der Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1885.
“Wunder”	“Wunder.” In <i>Biblisches Handwörterbuch - Calwer Bibellexikon</i> . Edited by Hermann Zeller, 831-832. Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1924.

Introduction

1. Why Adolf Schlatter?

Who was Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938), and why should we care—in particular about his Christology? The answer that ‘there is no study on Schlatter’s Christology yet’ might be true but not entirely satisfactory. While, for example, a study with the title ‘The Correlation between Excessive Preaching Habits and Congregational Sleeping Patterns: The Example of Eutychus in Acts 20:9,’ might be unique and perhaps even remotely interesting, its relevance is certainly arguable. The present work, however, claims to be both unique and relevant for the following reasons. *First of all*, Adolf Schlatter is an important theologian who has for too long suffered a wrongful neglect. Whilst he contributed crucially to the development of twentieth-century Protestant theology, endeavours with a view to examining his influence more closely are still scarce. This thesis represents one step towards closing this gap in scholarly research. *Secondly*, Schlatter’s theology is highly promising as it opens avenues of ecumenical understanding. Careful to avoid any confessional bias and always determined to examine Scripture as objectively as possible, Schlatter’s ‘theology of facts’ (Werner Neuer) offers an ideal basis for a constructive dialogue not only between Reformed and Lutherans but also, more broadly, between Protestants, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox traditions. As it is, *thirdly*, in particular Schlatter’s dogmatic trajectory which has so far successfully escaped scholarly attention, we claim that much work in this area is needed in order to unearth Schlatter’s forgotten legacy. Although Schlatter is still recognised as an important New Testament theologian, the scientific community sometimes seems to forget that he was also an influential dogmatician with a distinctive agenda. This project focuses on what we consider to be the most fascinating aspect of Schlatter’s dogmatics, namely his relational approach to Christology. Before we turn in more detail to the character and scope of this study, these incentives for a resurgence in Schlatter scholarship deserve a fuller explanation and we shall look at each of those in the following section.

Introduction

His Influence on Protestant Theology

Adolf Schlatter's influence is generally underrated. Markus Bockmuehl refers to Schlatter as "brilliant but widely ignored,"¹ and Robert Yarbrough names Schlatter "one of Christianity's truly seminal (and neglected) post-Enlightenment thinkers."² Though one observes a growing interest in Schlatter during the past fifteen years or so—after the publication of Werner Neuer's extensive Schlatter biography in 1996—he is still very much a forgotten theologian, both in the German-speaking world and in the Anglo-Saxon context. In John E. Wilson's *Introduction to Modern Theology: Trajectories in the German Tradition* (2007), Adolf Schlatter is merely worth a footnote and he is, strangely enough, mistakenly portrayed as representing an anti-Semitic position.³ In the Blackwell Compendium to *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918* (2005), Schlatter is only mentioned in passing, namely as one of Karl Barth's teachers.⁴ This fact alone, one would think, should have sparked academic interest in the past (particularly in the Barth community), yet Schlatter's influence on Barth is still one of the black spots of theological research. Worse still, the 2003 edition of the *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* omits Schlatter altogether.⁵ This list could easily be continued *ad infinitum*. Given his significant influence in theology—which we shall briefly summarise next—this notorious Schlatter-neglect is certainly a conundrum, calling for a new generation of scholars to rediscover his lasting contribution.⁶

¹ Markus Bockmuehl, *This Jesus: Martyr, Lord, Messiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity, 1994), 218n1.

² Robert W. Yarbrough, "Translator's Preface" to *Adolf Schlatter: A Biography of Germany's Premier Biblical Theologian*, by Werner Neuer, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 9.

³ John E. Wilson, *Introduction to Modern Theology, Trajectories in the German Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 21n72. We shall return to this issue in the next chapter.

⁴ Daniel W. Hardy, "Karl Barth," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 22.

⁵ Timothy Larsen, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2003).

⁶ Andreas J. Köstenberger offers some explanations for this neglect, in "Preface: The Reception of Schlatter's New Testament Theology 1909-23," in *The Theology of the Apostles: The Development of New Testament Theology*, by Adolf Schlatter, trans. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 13-22.

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During his career, Schlatter lectured for a hundred consecutive semesters in Bern (1881–88), Greifswald (1888–93), Berlin (1893–98), and Tübingen (1898–1930), thereby influencing several generations of pastors and theologians. A short listing of some of Schlatter's students reads like a 'who's who' of twentieth century German Protestant theology: Alongside the already mentioned Karl Barth, there were Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudolf Bultmann, Erich Seeberg, Paul Althaus, Paul Tillich, Ernst Käsemann, and Otto Michel, to name but a few. While one cannot speak of a characteristic Schlatter-school, he certainly left a distinct mark on his students; yet in many ways the exact nature of this influence is still theological *terra incognita*, awaiting its discovery today. Adolf Schlatter lived in turbulent times, both historically and theologically. His particular historical position at the interface of two centuries and the context of the then increasing diversification of the theological landscape make Schlatter research fascinating and promising for today, at the outset of a new century. Growing up in rural Switzerland, Schlatter was immersed in Wilhelmine Prussia during his time in Greifswald and Berlin; he lived through the First World War where he lost a son; he then became a citizen in the Weimar Republic, and subsequently witnessed in Tübingen the rise of National Socialism until he passed away on the verge of the Second World War. Theologically, he was raised and rooted in Protestant Reformed orthodoxy; he was influenced by German philosophical idealism, had to answer liberal claims around the fin de siècle, and was finally in dialogue with 1920s dialectical theology. At times of paradigmatic theological change, Adolf Schlatter challenged his contemporaries by formulating a fresh, yet conservative theological design. Advocating an observative, empirical approach to theology, Schlatter roots the historical and systematic disciplines in the perceived reality of God's revelation in creation, in Scripture, and, supremely, in Jesus Christ. With this angle, he aimed to provide an alternative to the liberal critique of Scripture and theology, while at the same time avoiding the uncritical adoption of a conservative 'biblicist' theology.⁷ Occupying this unique position, Schlatter's

⁷ Schlatter was clearly not a biblicist (more on this in chapter II/1). Still, the stereotype of 'Schlatter the biblicist' seems alive and well, even in his former domain Tübingen. Clemens Hägele observes that readers interested in Schlatter's dogmatic opus will have to look for his books in the Tübingen

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contribution promises to be stimulating for our theological conversation today and one cannot but agree with Wuppertal dogmatician Johannes von Lüpke, who notes that “[i]t is time to return to Schlatter’s theology in order to make progress in today’s discussions.”⁸ This applies not only to the present debate on Christology as we shall see later, but also to our ecumenical exchange.

Schlatter’s Ecumenical Perspective

In a time of increasing segmentation and specialisation, and some would add, confessional isolation, Adolf Schlatter stands out as a fascinating polymath with a holistic theological and confessional agenda. Covering virtually all the disciplines of theological scholarship, he brings together a remarkable grasp of original languages, exegetical skills, as well as philosophical and experiential power. Paired with his intrinsic confessional openness, which could be attributed to the special circumstances of his upbringing (his mother was a lifelong member in the Swiss Reformed church, whereas his father was one of the founding members of a free evangelical church), it makes Schlatter an ideal conversation partner in today’s attempts to overcome confessional barriers.⁹

Originally ordained in the Swiss Reformed church, Schlatter showed no reservation working closely alongside Prussian Lutheran theologian Hermann Cremer (1834–1903) in Greifswald or later, in Berlin, with the liberal Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), all the while retaining strong connections with the conservative pietist movement.¹⁰ In one of his autobiographical reflections, Schlatter

Theologicumsbibliothek under the shelfmark ‘biblicists.’ Hägele, *Die Schrift als Gnadenmittel: Adolf Schlatters Lehre von der Schrift in ihren Grundzügen* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2007), 33n102.

⁸ Johannes von Lüpke, “Vorwort,” in *Adolf Schlatter: Glaube und Gotteswirklichkeit, Beiträge zur Wahrnehmung Gottes*, ed. Johannes von Lüpke (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2002), 9.

⁹ On Schlatter’s ecumenical perspective see Werner Neuer, “Die ökumenische Bedeutung der Theologie Adolf Schlatters,” in *Die Aktualität der Theologie Adolf Schlatters*, ed. Klaus Bockmühl (Gießen: Brunnen Verlag, 1988), 71-92.

¹⁰ See Werner Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1996), 428-440. The term ‘pietism’ is notoriously difficult to define. See Wallmann, *Der Pietismus*, vol. 4 of *Die Kirche in ihrer Geschichte*, ed. Bernd Moeller (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 7-8. In general, scholars agree in defining pietism broadly as a religious movement of renewal of the seventeenth century which had its prime of life in the eighteenth century. Together with Anglo-Saxon Puritanism it is considered to be the most important religious movement within Protestantism since the Reformation. The main concern of early pietism was a reform of the Protestant churches in

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insists that while he was “in Switzerland a part of the Reformed [Church], in Prussia [a member] of the united [Church] and in Tübingen part of the Lutheran Church, it did not have any influence on my inner position.”¹¹ Schlatter also enjoyed the works of Catholic theologian Franz von Baader (1765–1841) who exerted an important influence on him (more on this later). Long before the initiation of the ecumenical dialogue, Schlatter makes clear that he intended to work towards “overcoming the severe abyss that separates the Protestant and Catholic churches.”¹² In this sense, it is not surprising that his contribution is in fact appreciated not only among Protestant readers but also within the Catholic context. In his *Geleitwort* to the 1985 reprint of Schlatter’s commentary on James, Catholic New Testament theologian Franz Mussner remarks that Schlatter’s exegetical works are highly significant for the ecumenical dialogue, as they exhibit a paradigm of obedience to the text which could work as a common denominator for both traditions.¹³ Protestant theologian Hans-Martin Rieger’s dissertation on ‘Adolf Schlatter’s Doctrine of Justification and the Possibilities of Ecumenical Understanding’ recently received an award from the Catholic faculty at the University of Regensburg.¹⁴ Moreover, Pope emeritus Benedict XVI considers Schlatter a noteworthy conversation partner,¹⁵ and it is surely not coincidence that Schlatter scholar Werner Neuer is the only Protestant enjoying the honour of being a permanent member of the Ratzinger *Schülerkreis*.¹⁶

Germany under Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705) in Frankfurt (1670s), picked up by August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) in Halle (1690s). Other noteworthy representatives of pietism are Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752) and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–82).

¹¹ *Rückblick*, 19-20.

¹² *Rückblick*, 236.

¹³ Franz Mussner, “Geleitwort,” in *Der Brief des Jakobus*, by Adolf Schlatter (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1985), xii.

¹⁴ In 2000, the Catholic theological faculty awarded Rieger the first prize of the Dr Kurt Hellmich Trust which promotes research in ecumenical theology.

¹⁵ Commenting on Schlatter’s dispute with Adolf von Harnack he notes that Schlatter was right in his assessment that what separated their theologies was not merely the question of miracles, as Harnack argued, but in fact the question of Christology. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 132n17.

¹⁶ Hans-Joachim Vieweger, “Der protestantische Papst-Schüler,” *Evangelisches Sonntagsblatt für Bayern* (8/2012), February 19, 2012, accessed June 10, 2013, http://www.sonntagsblatt-bayern.de/news/aktuell/2012_08_11_01.htm.

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As we shall see throughout this work, Schlatter's contribution indeed possesses significant potential to build bridges in today's attempts at interdenominational dialogue.

His Christological Contribution

As already mentioned, it is mainly Schlatter the New Testament theologian who has been in the spotlight of scholarly interest so far. While there occasionally appeared studies on Schlatter's dogmatic outline in the first decades after his death,¹⁷ scholarship in general focused mainly on Schlatter's New Testament legacy.¹⁸ It is interesting to observe that his New Testament theology was not only critically acclaimed in Germany,¹⁹ but was also well received in the English-speaking world, through translation work by Robert Morgan,²⁰ and more recently, Andreas J. Köstenberger, who translated Schlatter's two-volume New Testament Theology, *The History of the Christ* (1997) and *The Theology of the Apostles* (1999). Among Anglo-Saxon New Testament scholars who are currently rediscovering Adolf Schlatter's exegetical legacy are—in addition to Schlatter translators—Andreas Köstenberger and

¹⁷ The studies mainly focused on basic prolegomena to Schlatter's systematic approach. See for example Hans-Jürgen Fraas, "Die Bedeutung der Gotteslehre für die Dogmatik bei Adolf Schlatter und Reinhold Seeberg" (PhD Diss., University of Halle/Saale, 1960); Herbert R. Dymale, "The Theology of Adolf Schlatter with Special Reference to His Understanding of History: An Investigation Into His Methodology" (PhD Diss., University of Iowa, 1966); Alber Bailer, *Das systematische Prinzip in der Theologie Adolf Schlatters* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1968); Gottfried Egg, *Adolf Schlatters kritische Position: Gezeigt an seiner Matthäusinterpretation* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1968); Karl Meyer-Wieck, "Das Wirklichkeitsverständnis Adolf Schlatters" (PhD Diss., University of Münster, 1970); Irmgard Kindt, *Der Gedanke der Einheit: Adolf Schlatters Theologie und ihre historischen Voraussetzungen* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1978).

¹⁸ For an overview see Yarbrough, "Modern Reception of Schlatter's New Testament Theology," in *The Theology of the Apostles*, by Adolf Schlatter, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 417-423.

¹⁹ Schlatter students Wilhelm Lütgert, Otto Michel and Ernst Käsemann were significantly influenced by Schlatter as Neuer observes (*Adolf Schlatter*, 790). Leonhard Goppelt (1911–73) saw Schlatter as a forerunner of his own New Testament theology and Peter Stuhlmacher (1932–) followed closely in Schlatter's footsteps. See Stuhlmacher's own comments in his essay, "Adolf Schlatter's Interpretation of Scripture," *New Testament Studies* 23 (1978): 433-446.

²⁰ Robert Morgan translated Schlatter's "Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: The Contribution of William Wrede and Adolf Schlatter*, ed. Robert Morgan (Naperville, IL: Alex R. Allenson, 1973), 117-166.

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Robert Yarbrough—Donald Guthrie, Brevard Childs, Hendrikus Boers,²¹ N.T. Wright,²² Markus Bockmuehl,²³ and Thomas R. Schreiner.²⁴

While these positive developments suggest a slight Schlatter renaissance, Schlatter the dogmatician is still largely unknown to the wider audience. Perhaps this could be attributed to the rise of dialectical theology which somewhat overshadowed Schlatter's dogmatic heritage.²⁵ About half a century after Schlatter's demise, Werner Neuer lamented that his systematic approach had until that point not been adequately processed.²⁶ In 1996, Neuer presented his comprehensive Schlatter biography, 'Adolf Schlatter: A Life for Theology and the Church' (*Adolf Schlatter: Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche*). This milestone publication fuelled a fresh interest in the Swiss scholar, together with the publication of two reprint collections of some of his most influential theological writings a few years later.²⁷ Recent sources on Schlatter's dogmatic opus explore his take on the doctrine of Scripture,²⁸ his understanding of the sacraments,²⁹ and his view of justification.³⁰ Major English-

²¹ On Guthrie, Childs and Boers see Yarbrough, "Modern Reception of Schlatter's New Testament Theology," 423-426.

²² N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 121, 194, 344, 373.

²³ Markus Bockmuehl refers to Schlatter in his *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), and commends Schlatter's theology and method (74, 88).

²⁴ Note extensive references to Schlatter in the index of Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 947.

²⁵ As Stuhlmacher suggested, in "Adolf Schlatter," in *Theologen des Protestantismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 2, ed. Martin Greschat (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978), 219. Other scholars come to the same conclusion; see Neuer, *Der Zusammenhang von Dogmatik und Ethik bei Adolf Schlatter: Eine Untersuchung zur Grundlegung christlicher Ethik* (Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 1986), 22; Jochen Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie: Der philosophische Entwurf Adolf Schlatters* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 12; Ward W. Gasque, "The Promise of Adolf Schlatter," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 4 (1980): 20; Robert Morgan, "Introduction: The Nature of New Testament Theology," 29.

²⁶ Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 25.

²⁷ *Die Bibel verstehen: Aufsätze zur Biblischen Hermeneutik*, ed. Werner Neuer (2002) and *Adolf Schlatter: Glaube und Gotteswirklichkeit, Beiträge zur Wahrnehmung Gottes*, edited by Johannes von Lüpke (2002).

²⁸ Hägele, *Die Schrift als Gnadenmittel*.

²⁹ Daniel Rüegg, *Der sich schenkende Christus: Adolf Schlatters Lehre von den Sakramenten* (Gießen: Brunnen, 2006).

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Language systematic treatments however are still scarce, which could be attributed to the lack of translations of Schlatter's dogmatic works (such as his *Dogma* and *Ethik*)—noteworthy exceptions are Stephen Dintaman's monograph³¹ and Andreas Loos' doctoral thesis.³²

Considering the status quo, it is most surprising that Schlatter's significant Christological angle has until this day not attracted adequate attention. This is a serious neglect insofar as Schlatter's theology is, as Paul Althaus rightly put it, "through and through christocentric."³³ So far, there are only a few studies available which examine certain facets of Schlatter's Christology. While Johannes H. Schmid carefully analyses Schlatter's picture of the historical Christ,³⁴ he, however, misunderstands basic prolegomena to Schlatter's dogmatic thinking, which limits his study to a certain extent.³⁵ Werner Neuer touches upon certain aspects of Schlatter's Christology when discussing Schlatter's atonement theology.³⁶ In his examination of Schlatter's doctrine of justification, Hans-Martin Rieger refers to some important Christological foundations in Schlatter's dogmatic thinking, and he rightly points to the characteristic relational feature in Schlatter's Christology.³⁷ Finally, Andreas Loos provides significant insight into the Trinitarian structure of Schlatter's Christology, while his special focus on 'Divine action' in general prevents him from offering a more elaborate Christological discussion in particular.³⁸

³⁰ Hans-Martin Rieger, *Adolf Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre und die Möglichkeit ökumenischer Verständigung* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 2000).

³¹ Stephen F. Dintaman, *Creative Grace: Faith and History in the Theology of Adolf Schlatter* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).

³² Andreas Loos, "Divine action, Christ and the Doctrine of God: The Trinitarian Grammar of Adolf Schlatter's Theology" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2006).

³³ Paul Althaus, "Adolf Schlatters Wort an die heutige Theologie," *ZStH* 21 (1950/52): 103.

³⁴ See Johannes H. Schmid, *Erkenntnis des Geschichtlichen Christus bei Martin Kähler und bei Adolf Schlatter* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1978).

³⁵ We agree with Walldorf's observations (in *Realistische Philosophie*, 18-19), which suggest that Schmid in particular neglects Schlatter's philosophical-theological realism, while also denying an underlying ontological concept in Schlatter.

³⁶ Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 198-227.

³⁷ Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 306-326.

³⁸ See Loos, "Divine action, Christ and the doctrine of God."

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While those recent scholarly endeavours might be promising, one still looks in vain for rigorous attempts dedicated to chisel out the distinct shape of Schlatter's Christology. Some years ago, Jürgen Moltmann pointed out that "[i]n face of today's theological questions, A. Schlatter's 'Jesus' Divinity and the Cross' [*Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*] deserves to be snatched away from oblivion."³⁹ The findings presented in this thesis suggest that Moltmann is right. Of course, the goal cannot be to offer an exhaustive account of Schlatter's Christology. Rather, this study aims to expose the foundational building blocks of Schlatter's Christology. More precisely, the present thesis suggests that the central and most significant feature of Schlatter's Christology is its relational orientation. That is, on the one hand Schlatter is critical of the traditional way of approaching Christology merely speculatively 'from above;' yet on the other hand, he also rejects the path 'from below' as the only valid way towards a Christology proper. Instead, Schlatter suggests a highly creative relational approach to Christology, which, as this study shows, is a robust and creative approach that can adequately describe and integrate the person and work of Jesus Christ. Before we proceed to present a more detailed outline of this endeavour, we must, however, not forget to point to the overall character of this work and certain challenges associated with Schlatter research.

2. Challenges and Character of this Study

When investigation Schlatter's theology, one is faced with several challenges. We shall briefly look at three major difficulties which deserve to be mentioned at the outset, namely *first*, the problem of our overall theological terminology to be used in this study, *secondly*, Schlatter's lacking interaction with secondary sources, and *finally*, the sheer size and the often difficult language of Schlatter's works.

Terminology

There is, first of all, the problem of terminology, and this applies not only to Schlatter, but to every study concerning nineteenth- and twentieth-century theology.

³⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott: Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik christlicher Theologie* (München: Christian Kaiser, 1972), 187.

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Evidently, Adolf Schlatter's lifespan overlaps with a fascinating diversification of the theological landscape at that time. Usually linked with the branch of *positive theology*, Schlatter witnessed the hegemony and the collapse of so-called *liberal theology*, while he also observed the irenic attempts of the *mediating theologians*, who sought to break middle ground between these two poles. In the second half of his career, Schlatter was also in close dialogue with the *dialectical movement* of post-World War I Germany. One obviously needs to take into account this intriguing kaleidoscope of theological movements and schools as they explicitly and also implicitly contributed to the characteristic shape of Schlatter's Christological outlook. The complexity of the different theological streams of that time renders our task both stimulating and challenging. Joachim Weinhardt laments that "a standard description of the 19th century [theological] schools is not available," while adding that it will be impossible to reach any agreement in the future.⁴⁰ This certainly does not sound auspicious. As we have just mentioned, theologians usually resort to the fourfold division of liberal theology, mediating theology, positive (or confessional/conservative) theology, and dialectical theology, in order to systematise the different theological approaches and ideas. These terms, however, are fuzzy and unpropitious for several reasons.⁴¹ It is difficult, for example, to find a consensus on what liberal theology is.⁴² One would ideally need to add a qualification. That is, one would have to define in which ways a theology is liberal in relation to another theology. On the whole, scholars disagree in their labelling of different theologians as liberal,⁴³ mediating,⁴⁴ positive/confessional,⁴⁵ or dialectical.⁴⁶ It seems almost

⁴⁰ Joachim Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), 7.

⁴¹ See Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 5-15.

⁴² The term 'liberal' in itself seems to be highly problematic, as Weinhardt suggests. According to Weinhardt, the term 'liberal' was first used to describe a certain stance on church politics (for example in relation to the *Apostolikumsstreit*, see chapter II/2). Later, the term made its way into the theological vocabulary when it was used by confessional theologians, conservative Ritschlians, and dialectical theologians to designate the left-wing Ritschlians Harnack and Herrmann. See Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 13-15, 18. Cf. Christine Axt-Piscalar's definition, in "Liberal Theology in Germany," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 468-469.

⁴³ According to Axt-Piscalar, liberal theology stands (narrowly defined) for the theology from around 1870 to 1918 and includes Albrecht Ritschl (1822-89) and his successors, such as Adolf von Harnack

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impossible to categorise clearly the complex theological programmes of the (equally complex) theological individuals. One easily runs the risk of doing an injustice to the scholars' own theological idiosyncrasies. Thus, when referring in this study to these classical terms liberal, mediating, positive/confessional theology, and dialectical theology, one needs to bear in mind their inherent shortcomings. While we make, for the sake of simplicity, use of these terms in the following first chapter, they will be employed only tentatively in the remainder of this study and crucially in instances where Schlatter himself uses these terms.

(1851–1930), Julius Kaftan (1848–1926), Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922), Martin Rade (1857–1940) and Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923). It also includes representatives of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* ('history of religion school'), such as Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920), Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), Johannes Weiss (1863–1914), Alfred Rahlfs (1865–1935), Heinrich Hackmann (1864–1935), William Wrede (1859–1906), Albert Eichhorn (1856–1926), and Richard Reitzenstein (1861–1931). In the wider sense, she claims, 'liberal theology' refers to those "ways of thinking which constructively take up Enlightenment principles and try to render them theologically" (Axt-Piscalar, "Liberal Theology in Germany," 469). This includes then Johann S. Semler (1725–91) as well as the approaches by Schleiermacher, Strauss, Baur and the Tübingen school. On the history of religion school see the essay by Mark D. Chapman, "History of Religion School," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 434-454.

⁴⁴ Scholars generally agree that proponents of mediating theology sought to 'mediate' between the two poles of liberal and positive theology, that is, they clearly intended to remain faithful to the Scriptures (without being rigid 'biblicists'), while also taking into account the findings of modern science. Mediating theology began to prosper with the foundation of the journal *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* in 1828. Lists of mediating theologians usually include Isaak A. Dorner (1809–84), whom Eckhard Lessing, however, counts among the 'free theologians,' see his *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen evangelischen Theologie von Albrecht Ritschl bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. 1, 1870 bis 1918 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 141-144; Carl Ullmann (1796–1865), Friedrich W. C. Umbreit (1795–1860), Johann K. L. Gieseler (1792–1854) and Carl I. Nitzsch (1787–1868). See Matthias Gockel's essay on "Mediating Theology in Germany," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 301-307. Apparently, depending on how broadly or narrowly one defines liberal, or positive, theology, one ends up with different lists of mediating theologians.

⁴⁵ Eckhard Lessing defines 'positive theology' as a conservative theological stream which is closely tied to the church. Influential positive theologians are the Beck students Martin Kähler (1835–1912), Hermann Cremer (1834–1903) and Adolf Schlatter, who were the main heads of the positive Greifswald school (more on this in chapter II/2). To this school belonged also Schlatter's student Wilhelm Lütgert (1867–1938), Erich Schaeder (1861–1936), Ernst Cremer (1864–1922), Karl Bornhäuser (1868–1947), Friedrich Bosse (1864–1931), and Julius Kögel (1871–1928). Closely affiliated with the Greifswald school are Samuel Oettli (1846–1911), Christoph Riggerbach (1818–90) and Otto Zöckler (1833–1906). See Lessing, *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen evangelischen Theologie*, vol. 1, 116-132. With regard to this term, one also observes the lack of a scholarly consensus.

⁴⁶ Karl Barth's theology, for example, has one often been labelled 'dialectical,' which, however, does not reflect all of the different stages of Barth's theological development.

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In light of these conceptual vulnerabilities, the most elegant solution then, it seems, is to focus on Schlatter's own theological distinctives and of the different individuals he encounters in the context of his life and work. For, only when one takes the theological personality seriously, against the backdrop of his or her historical context, will one be able to probe the theological matter more deeply (we return to this characteristic biographical-historical approach in the following chapter).

Schlatter's Lacking Interaction with other Scholars

Secondly, Schlatter's hesitation to interact with other scholars in his works presents a particular obstacle to the reader. Only on rare occasions does one find clear references to other theologians and movements, and this might clearly be one of the reasons for the Schlatter-neglect mentioned earlier. "I neither had the time nor the inclination," writes Schlatter, "to refute my colleagues' views."⁴⁷ While this might sound quite harsh and even slightly condescending, one needs to put this statement into perspective in order to understand Schlatter's basic intention.

In one of his autobiographical works, Schlatter himself wonders whether he should not have listened more carefully to fellow New Testament theologian Bernhard Weiss (1827–1918), who once encouraged him to pursue to a greater extent "conversation with colleagues."⁴⁸ However, Schlatter makes clear that his reluctance in this respect was not a reflection of his ignorance. Rather, it was an essential part of his empirical realist method of focusing exclusively on the theological 'facts' (*Tatsachen*) as he perceived them in his reading of the New Testament. Schlatter writes:

It was not the desire for originality which prompted me to be more reserved in my references to [secondary] literature; it was rather a sign of a diffident anxiety . . . [F]or I needed protection for my own thinking, so that the thoughts of the others would not confuse me; [I needed] protection for my own eye, so that it would remain capable [*sehfähig*] to discern the facts [*Tatbestände*].⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "Entstehung der Beiträge," 54, cf. 71.

⁴⁸ *Rückblick*, 116.

⁴⁹ *Rückblick*, 116.

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Schlatter's main intention then was to focus the reader's attention on the content of the New Testament as the foundation for dogmatics. To interact with secondary literature would, Schlatter feels, only have distracted him (as well as the reader) from this goal. Whether or not this approach is helpful in terms of encouraging academic debate remains to be seen. However, a careful reading of Schlatter reveals that he indeed closely interacts with contemporary ideas, movements and even colleagues, although he is generally hesitant to name names—which might be due to his difficult frontline position between 'positive' and 'liberal' theology (we shall go more into detail in the ensuing chapter I). At any rate, one is thus required to read Schlatter very carefully, thus 'between the lines,' as it were, in order to identify his hidden, but surely existent, critique of ideas and movements.

Schlatter's Prolifity, his Language and Translation Problems

There is, thirdly, the sheer volume and the difficult language of Schlatter's works which deserves closer scrutiny. As the number of his publications exceeds the four hundred mark,⁵⁰ the key to a successful study is thus to select the most significant material in the Schlatter corpus. For our purposes, a focus on Schlatter's major New Testament theology ('Faith in the New Testament,' *The History of the Christ* and *The Theology of the Apostles*) and his dogmatic opus (*Das christliche Dogma* and *Die christliche Ethik*) is advisable, insofar as Schlatter unfolds in these fundamental works both the characteristics of his New Testament picture of Christ and the foundations of his overall Christology. One will also need to consult crucial monographs, relevant journal articles and speeches, as this additional material provides a substantial insight into the distinctive features of Schlatter's Christological approach.⁵¹ Schlatter's *Do we know Jesus?*, though originally composed as a devotional, contains significant Christological information (as his last publication, this somewhat represents his theological legacy and obviously deserves

⁵⁰ For an overview, see Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 832-841.

⁵¹ Such as *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1913), "Das Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," in *Gesunde Lehre: Reden und Aufsätze von D. Adolf Schlatter* (Velbert: Freizeiten Verlag, 1929), 32-48, "Der Zweifel an der Messianität Jesu," *BFChTh* 11, no. 4 (1907): 7-75, *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer: Vier Reden von Prof. D. Ad. Schlatter in Tübingen* (Velbert: Freizeiten-Verlag, 1926), and "Jesu Demut, ihre Mißdeutungen, ihr Grund," *BFChTh* 8, no. 1 (1904): 33-93.

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our attention). Last but not least, Schlatter's unpublished documents demand careful attention, in particular his 1884 Bern lecture, 'Christology and Soteriology' ("Christologie und Soteriologie"). Schlatter's unpublished works are handwritten in an outdated German writing-style, the so-called *Sütterlinschrift*, which renders a transcription at times challenging and only very little material has as yet been transcribed.⁵²

Finally, one must mention the particular difficulty, especially with a view to translating Schlatter, of his sometimes convoluted and labyrinthine language. "Schlatter's theology is difficult to comprehend," William Baird laments, "written in a convoluted style that defies comprehension even by native German intellectuals."⁵³ Similarly, Schlatter student Otto Michel notes that Schlatter is an "opinionated, in no way easily accessible theological thinker."⁵⁴ Peter Stuhlmacher complains about Schlatter's "monstrous phrases" in his *Faith in the New Testament*, for example,⁵⁵ and Stuhlmacher's other remark, namely that it is "virtually impossible" to translate Schlatter's prose into English is certainly not encouraging—and surely somewhat exaggerated.⁵⁶ As it is often difficult to provide a literal translation of Schlatterian key terms without losing important connotations, the meaning of the German term will be explained and used alongside when appropriate. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own. Having thus briefly discussed both the promise and the challenge of Schlatter research, we conclude our introductory remarks by offering the overall roadmap of this work.

⁵² Unpublished documents and manuscripts by Adolf Schlatter are accessible in the Adolf-Schlatter-Archive in Stuttgart, Germany [Bestand D 40].

⁵³ William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 2, *From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 374.

⁵⁴ Otto Michel, "Adolf Schlatter als Ausleger der Heiligen Schrift," *Für Arbeit und Besinnung* 6 (1952): 227. Cf. Albert Bailer's summary of challenges with a view to Schlatter research in *Das systematische Prinzip in der Theologie Adolf Schlatters*, 11-20.

⁵⁵ Stuhlmacher, "Zum Neudruck von Adolf Schlatters *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament*," in *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament*, by Adolf Schlatter (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1982), xi.

⁵⁶ Stuhlmacher, "Foreword," in *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, by Adolf Schlatter, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), x.

3. The Roadmap: Chapter Contents

This thesis consists of two major parts. The first half of this work is dedicated more to Schlatter's biographical-historical background, which sets the stage for the major dogmatic-Christological analysis in the second half. The first part, then, on 'The Genesis and Context of Schlatter's Christology,' is to a great extent an exercise in narrative theology, paving the way for the second, systematic-theological part, which focuses on 'The Dogmatic Shape of Schlatter's Christology.' The following section offers a brief summary of the chapter contents.

Part 1: The Genesis and Context of Schlatter's Christology

The *first chapter* deals with the basic question: 'Who was Adolf Schlatter?' As Adolf Schlatter is no household name among scholars, this introductory chapter offers a brief sketch of Schlatter's life and theology. Retracing Schlatter's individual history also raises one's awareness of the underlying reasons for his characteristic theological development, and, in particular, the genesis of his unique Christological outlook.

In *chapter two*, we focus on the question: 'Where was Adolf Schlatter?' In this threefold section we will thus examine in more detail the complex theological-historical landscape of Schlatter's time, determining how it contributed to the *Sitz im Leben* of his theology. *First*, in 'Between Idealism and Revival Movement,' we trace several noteworthy stimuli for Schlatter's theological development, such as his encounters with the revival movement (*Erweckungsbewegung*) at home and with pietism through his teacher Johann T. Beck, which stood in stark contrast to idealist positions the young Schlatter was faced with in school and at the university. *Secondly*, in 'Between Ritschl and Confessionalism,' we shall analyse Schlatter's critical position towards certain Christologies he came across during his career in Bern, Greifswald and Berlin, in particular focussing on his critique of Albrecht Ritschl and his pupils Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack. Moving chronologically to Schlatter's time in Tübingen, we shall *thirdly*, in 'Schlatter *Zwischen den Zeiten*,' examine Schlatter's critique of his former student Karl Barth more closely.

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In outlining Schlatter's theological exchange with major figures of his time, we are able to identify both significant aspects of his Christological critique and his alternative suggestions. These important considerations set the stage for the ensuing dogmatic discussion in part two.

Part 2: The Dogmatic Shape of Schlatter's Christology

Chapters three to six form the dogmatic heart of this study, based on Schlatter's threefold distinction of 'seeing-act' (*Sehakt*), 'thinking-act' (*Denkakt*), and 'life-act' (*Lebensakt*). The goal is to investigate first the methodological foundation of Schlatter's Christology (chapter three), moving then to an analysis of the dogmatic core of his relational Christology (chapters four and five), while the final part examines the existential-ethical ramifications of his Christological account (chapter six). The following paragraphs offer a more detailed outline.

Chapter three, 'The *Sehakt*: Empirical-Critical Realism and the Unified Christ,' demonstrates how Schlatter arrives with his empirical realist method at a unified account of Jesus Christ. According to Schlatter's New Testament observation, there is no rift between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. Rather, there is only one unified Jesus Christ who performed the salvific deed on the cross in concrete space and time.

In *chapters four and five* we focus on the dogmatic implications of the Christological picture described in the 'seeing-act.' 'The *Denkakt* I' deals with Jesus in relation to God, and in the *Denkakt* II, we shall add Jesus' relation to humanity to the overall picture. Briefly put, while Schlatter subscribes to classic Christological formulae, such as *homoousios* or the hypostatic union, he feels that these ignored the significant relational aspect he observes in the New Testament documents. In Schlatter's view, his relational approach is more in touch with the New Testament witness as it focuses on Jesus Christ as a being in action and in communion. Schlatter sees Jesus in a twofold relationship, a 'double communion' as he calls it, namely with God and with humanity. In relation to God (*Denkakt* I), Jesus is the Son of God who acts in perfect union of will with God. And in relation to humanity (*Denkakt* II), Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Man, who possesses the 'will to salvation' for humanity. Based on his creative, relational framework, Schlatter offers an alternative

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interpretation of the classic notions of Jesus' divinity and humanity. That is, following Schlatter, Jesus demonstrates his divinity as he obeys the Father perfectly and remains in unbroken communion of will with him even on the cross, while he also shares in our human nature and thus fulfils his role as the Christ with the ultimate goal of establishing the new community of God of which he is the head and over which he is Lord.

The final *sixth chapter* discusses the concrete consequences of these considerations for the Christian life, in 'The *Lebensakt: Organic Volitional Union with Christ.*' For Schlatter, dogmatics has to go hand in hand with ethics: orthodoxy remains incomplete without orthopraxy. It is thus essential for a correct reading of Schlatter to examine the implications of his Christology for the individual believer and the community. We will thus consider how Schlatter emphasises faith in the person and work of Christ as the means through which human beings are brought into an existential relation with God and with each other in the new community of faith. The individual completes the volitional 'union with Jesus' (*Anschluß an Jesus*), mediated by the Holy Spirit, which leads to a communion of will with God that in turn triggers ethical action. In this respect, it will also be assessed whether Schlatter accomplished his goal of a 'completion of the Reformation' (*Vollendung der Reformation*).

The study concludes by offering a summary of our findings while also pointing to the lasting value of Schlatter's relational Christology for today's discussions.

PART 1: Genesis and Context of Schlatter's Christology

“Theological history” writes Münster systematician Eckard Lessing is “personal history.”¹ While this is certainly correct, one could add that the converse is also true: personal history is theological history.² Lessing points to the various autobiographical accounts by German Protestant theologians of the latter half of the nineteenth century, and claims that their theological agendas were meant to be read against the backdrop of their personal and general history. This is certainly true in the case of Adolf Schlatter. When studying Schlatter, one needs to take into account his own life context, the “unity of [his] biblically rooted theology and [his] biography,” as Peter Stuhlmacher remarks.³ Schlatter himself penned several autobiographical volumes with the declared intention to disclose what shaped his theological thinking.⁴ He clearly points out that his theological outlook and particular method were given to him through his history.⁵ To neglect Schlatter’s biographical context then would be an unwise move as he himself, as it were, expects the readers of his theological *oeuvre* to be familiar with his own story, his *Geschichte*. For Schlatter, theology and life, ‘thinking-act’ (*Denkakt*) and ‘life-act’ (*Lebensakt*), form an inseparable union. As it is impossible to do justice to Adolf Schlatter’s theology without adequately taking into account his personal historical context, this study is thus not merely a task in dogmatic theology but also a historical and, if you will, a

¹ Lessing, *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen evangelischen Theologie*, vol. 1, 25.

² See James Wm. McClendon Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press, 1990), 67-88.

³ Stuhlmacher, “Adolf Schlatter,” 231.

⁴ Among these are his “Entstehung der Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie” (1920), *Erlebtes: Erzählt von D. Adolf Schlatter* (1924, rev. ed. 1929), the *Rückblick auf meine Lebensarbeit* (published posthumously in 1952), as well as his autobiographical chapter in “Selbstdarstellungen,” 145-171 in 1925. One also finds an unpublished autobiographical manuscript in the Schlatter-archive in Stuttgart, “Der Idealismus und die Erweckung in meiner Jugend” (n.d., probably 1926).

⁵ “Selbstdarstellungen,” 145.

psychological exercise. Understanding Schlatter's life, to which we now turn, is the key to unlocking the overarching elements of his theological, and in particular, Christological agenda.

I. Who was Adolf Schlatter? Biography and Theology

1. The *Sitz im Leben* of Schlatter's Theology (1852–75)

Adolf Schlatter was born in St. Gallen, Switzerland, on August 16, 1852, the seventh child of Hektor Stephan Schlatter (1805–80) and Wilhelmine, née Steinmann (1819–94). In the following nearly eighty-six years of his life as pastor, professor, author and speaker, Adolf Schlatter would continue the family's Protestant tradition, his family line being traceable to the fifteenth century reformer Joachim Vadian (1484–1551). Schlatter's grandmother Anna, née Bernet (1773–1826), was an influential Protestant figure, combining Christocentricity with ecumenical openness; of the nine hundred of her descendants counted in 1935, sixty-six were theologians and several were missionaries.¹

To a great extent, Schlatter's theology has its *Sitz im Leben* in the Christian home of his youth. "The power with which we children were embraced by the faith of our parents," remembers Schlatter later, "was the presupposition and root from which my own story [*Geschichte*] grew."² Looking back, Schlatter only has positive memories of growing up, describing his childhood home as a "pure home" (*reines Haus*).³ His parents lived out the union of faith and love, the unity of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, which would leave an indelible impression on their son. Still, despite their close fellowship in faith, Schlatter's parents were confessionally divided. Complaining of a lack of church discipline, Stephan Schlatter left the Reformed church, joined an evangelical free church, and was re-baptised. Even though his wife had sympathies for the free church, she could not follow her husband and remained

¹ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 3-9.

² *Rückblick*, 12.

³ *Rückblick*, 16. Schlatter also calls his home a "place of love" (*Stätte der Liebe*), a "place of peace" (*Ort des Friedens*), and even "my paradise" (*mein Paradies*). See *Rückblick*, 16-17 and "Entstehung der Beiträge," 25.

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with the children in the established Reformed church. Obviously, this painful split affected the young Schlatter.⁴ It might explain why he never became a clear-cut confessional theologian, rather embodying a lifelong ecumenical openness, reminiscent of his grandmother's own attitude (we shall return to this aspect in the following chapter II/1). Overall, however, for Schlatter's parents personal allegiance to Jesus Christ by faith was paramount and took priority over any denominational affiliations.⁵ This has undoubtedly contributed to Schlatter's strong Christocentric focus. An irenic theologian, he would throughout his career labour for the unity of the church, seeking fellowship with those with whom he knew himself united by faith in Christ, regardless of their different ecclesial backgrounds.⁶

His father, a trained pharmacist, inspired Schlatter with his love for nature, for the natural sciences, and for botany in particular.⁷ "My eyes, therefore," remembers Schlatter, "were opened to nature at an early age, for God had given me parents who praised him with earnest faith as the Creator of nature."⁸ This early exposure to the natural realm⁹ set the course for his later philosophical-realist stance against any contemporary Kantian approaches and contributed to his development of an empirical "theology of facts."¹⁰ Schlatter remembers that his interest in fauna and

⁴ For instance, Schlatter's father did not witness his son Adolf's *Konfirmation*, or his ordination, nor did he attend his own daughter's funeral service, as all these occasions took place in the *Landeskirche*. See *Rückblick*, 19 and "Idealismus und Erweckung," 43.

⁵ Schlatter explains: "For my parents, the superiority of Jesus over the church was certain [*stand fest*]. Their communion was established in that both saw in their allegiance to Jesus [*Anschluß an Jesus*] the rule that governed them." *Erlebtes*, 32; see also *Rückblick*, 20-21 and "Entstehung der Beiträge," 28. "Anschluß an Jesus" is a key concept in Schlatter's work; it refers to one's union, connection, and allegiance with Jesus Christ.

⁶ Having grown up in the Swiss Reformed Church, he had later no reservations about becoming a member of the United Church in Prussia and of the Lutheran Church in Württemberg. See *Rückblick*, 19-21, 26 and *Erlebtes*, 57-58. For Schlatter's view on ecumenical dialogue see for example, "Das Evangelium und das Bekenntnis," 21-31 and "Die Grenzen der kirchlichen Gemeinschaft," 3-20.

⁷ See "Entstehung der Beiträge," 24.

⁸ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: A Biography of Germany's Premier Biblical Theologian*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 27. See *Rückblick*, 14-15, *Erlebtes* 121-122, and "Idealismus und Erweckung," 37-39.

⁹ His *Anschluß an die Natur* as he calls it in "Selbstdarstellungen," 155.

¹⁰ As Werner Neuer labelled it. See Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 44-49; see also Matthias Dreher, "Luther als Paulus-Interpret bei Adolf Schlatter und Wilhelm Heitmüller: Ein forschungsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur 'New Perspective on Paul,'" *Luther* 79, no. 2 (2008): 112.

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flora kept him from becoming a Kantian.¹¹ “I had no idea,” he writes, “about the abundance of mathematical, chemical and biological wonders that were incorporated in every plantlet, and I was therefore far away from the thought that it was a formation of my consciousness.”¹² In his later publications Schlatter would consistently call attention to reality as source for human knowledge of God (*Gottesbewußtsein*). “God does not become credible to us if we do not have a great work before us that comes from him,” he insists, “and the first work of God we have to see is nature.”¹³ Reading assertions such as these, one must bear in mind that Schlatter did not pursue a natural *theology* as some have suggested,¹⁴ rather, he intended to underline the reality of natural *revelation*; Schlatter clearly highlights the significance of Scripture, history and creation as the media of God’s revelation, without succumbing to a full-blown natural theology. Overall, in his boyhood home, Schlatter was equipped with a view for the broad range of God’s revelation in creation, which certainly influenced his overall theological perspective, the ‘impetus towards the whole’ (*Richtung auf das Ganze*), as he would later describe it in his ‘Christian Dogmatics.’¹⁵

In secondary school (*Gymnasium*), Schlatter was exposed to a world quite different from home.¹⁶ In various ways, his time in secondary school foreshadowed the important questions Schlatter would struggle with as a theologian later in life. In religious education, Schlatter was challenged by liberal theology, and in the philosophy classroom he was confronted with Hegelian and Kantian abstract thought. His Latin teacher Franz Misteli (1841–1903) kindled his interest in languages and

¹¹ “I guess that my familiarity with the plant,” writes Schlatter, “childlike as it was, had the effect that it saved me from any inclination towards Kantianism.” *Erlebtes*, 125.

¹² *Erlebtes*, 125.

¹³ *Erlebtes*, 126. “The certainty of God [*Gewißheit Gottes*],” Schlatter notes, “and the certainty of the world are presented to us conjointly.” “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 14.

¹⁴ See Bailer’s summary in *Das systematische Prinzip in der Theologie Adolf Schlatters*, 50-54.

¹⁵ *Dogma*, 13, 19.

¹⁶ Schlatter first attended the *Elementarschule* (1858–62), followed by the *Realschule* (1862–65) and the *Gymnasium* (1865-71). Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 36-48; see also *Rückblick*, 27 and “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 30.

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learning as a whole.¹⁷ Schlatter would later even remark that he became a theologian through his language teacher, and with that, he also received his significant linguistic and historical trajectory in theology to which we shall return at a later stage in more detail.¹⁸

School, with its critical, liberal outlook, was a stark contrast to his parents' home and challenged the young Schlatter's faith. His decision to take up theological studies was therefore marked by a sincere interest in clarifying and consolidating his faith, an attempt to reconcile home and school, faith and science. "Not the clerical office, but the clarification of the question of truth, not the acquisition of skills, but the acquisition of knowledge were his goals when Schlatter took up his studies in May 1871," observes his biographer Werner Neuer.¹⁹

In 1871, when the German Empire was proclaimed in Versailles, Schlatter moved to Basel to begin his theological studies.²⁰ The first semesters were dominated by philosophical lessons.²¹ Schlatter found Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844–1900) lectures disturbing²² and was much more impressed by Karl Steffensen (1816–88) with his "religious manner of thinking" (*religiöse Art des Denkakts*),²³ together with his notion of the historical conditionality of philosophical ideas which

¹⁷ "In Misteli's classes," Schlatter remembers, "I experienced what apprehension [*Begreifen*] is." *Rückblick*, 30.

¹⁸ "As I became a theologian through a linguist," he remembers later, "I had neither a theology that neglected history nor a history that veiled God [*die mir Gott verbarg*]." *Rückblick*, 33 and "Entstehung der Beiträge," 31.

¹⁹ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 53. Schlatter himself emphasises the existential importance of his decision to study theology in that he identifies it with his conversion. "To those, who ask me for the day of my conversion, I am inclined to answer that my decision to study theology was my conversion." *Rückblick*, 37; see also "Entstehung der Beiträge," 34.

²⁰ Schlatter studied in Basel from spring 1871 until spring 1873, and then, after three semesters in Tübingen, again in the winter semester of 1874/5.

²¹ The Basel theology professors made no lasting impression on Schlatter, who later recalls, "Among the theological teachers back then in Basel, no-one has moved me significantly." "Entstehung der Beiträge," 39.

²² Schlatter attended Nietzsche's lectures on Platonic dialogue (1871/72) and remembers, "He treated his listeners like a despicable mob [*verächtlichen Pöbel*]." *Rückblick*, 42; see also "Entstehung der Beiträge," 38.

²³ "Entstehung der Beiträge," 37.

supported Schlatter's suspicion of Kant's 'pure reason.'²⁴ Rudolf Eucken (1846–1926) introduced Schlatter to Aristotle, which clearly had an effect on Schlatter, who would later, in Aristotelian manner, emphasise the reality-based character of human perception and thought—in both his philosophical and his theological works.²⁵ In his early years as a student in Basel, Schlatter drew a sharp distinction between faith and science in order to safeguard his childhood faith from the influx of critical philosophy; this dualistic separation, together with extensive readings of critical philosophical literature (in particular Spinoza), led Schlatter to a crisis of faith in the winter of 1871, as we shall discover in more detail in the following chapter. Schlatter thus moved to Tübingen in 1873, where he hoped to gain further theological clarification from the systematician Johann Tobias Beck (1804–78).²⁶ And Beck did not disappoint him. Beck was certainly *the* formative figure of his years of study. "Every sentence I utter reminds me of him," remembers Schlatter: "he unlocked the New Testament for my life."²⁷ We will return to the significant influence of Beck's teaching on his student Schlatter in more detail in chapter II/1.

Schlatter returned to Basel in 1874 and achieved in all theological exams the highest possible score (*sehr gut*). Although he found fulfilment in academic work, Schlatter felt the call for practical church service, which led him to his first post as a theological graduate in training for the ministry (*Vikariat*).

2. Theology and Church: The Pastorate (1875–80)

In the spring of 1875, Adolf Schlatter was ordained at the St. Laurenzen Church in St. Gallen, and for the following five years he worked in the ministry in Switzerland, first, for a few months, as a vicar in the parish of Kilchberg on Lake Zürich, then as

²⁴ "Through Steffenson, 'pure reason' died for me," writes Schlatter, "as it came to light through which historical processes it was generated." *Rückblick*, 39; "Entstehung der Beiträge," 35.

²⁵ Neuer points to the Aristotelian influence in Schlatter's theology. Neuer, *Zusammenhang*, 128; see also Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 38, 55n18.

²⁶ Schlatter studied in Tübingen from spring 1873 until autumn 1874. Beck himself had also studied in Tübingen a few decades earlier (1822–26). He then served as professor in Basel (1836–43) and subsequently taught systematic theology in Tübingen (1843–78). For a biographical account see Bernhard Riggerbach, *Johann Tobias Beck: Ein Schriftgelehrter zum Himmelreich gelehrt* (Basel: C. Detloff's Buchhandlung, 1888).

²⁷ Schlatter in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 72.

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an interim assistant (*Diakonat*) to a liberal minister in Neumünster and finally, for three years, as minister (*Pfarrer*) in Keßwil on Lake Constance.

In Neumünster, Schlatter was asked to balance the liberal teaching with positive theology to the satisfaction of the conservative part of the congregation. This was obviously not an easy task for the young pastor Schlatter. For the first time he was required to work alongside a liberal-minded theologian. This challenging situation somewhat foreshadowed his subsequent experiences in the academic context. Later in life, he was continually exposed to the challenge of defending his own position among liberal colleagues in the university. Schlatter was thus grateful for the support and friendship of the like-minded minister Edmund Fröhlich (1832–98) of a free church in Zürich. Fröhlich contributed to the development of Schlatter's theological thinking in that he introduced him to the writings of Catholic philosopher Franz von Baader (1765–1841).²⁸ In Baader, Schlatter found support not only for his critical evaluation of Kantian and Hegelian philosophy, but also for the development of his own concept of an empirical-realist theology combined with a strong emphasis on social ethics. These philosophical-theological stimuli as well as the fruitful friendship with Fröhlich somewhat balanced the distressing conditions in Neumünster. During his diaconate, several churches approached him with the request to fill their vacancies and Schlatter was open to different confessional ministry options. Whilst he was even prepared to become a free church minister, he finally felt the strong urge to support the established national Reformed church. Thus Schlatter agreed at the end of 1876 to respond to the call to the church in Keßwil on Lake Constance (which included the congregations in the villages of Uttwil and Dozwil), at the request of his predecessor Paul Jung, father of the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961).

Ahead of Schlatter lay three pleasant years in rural Switzerland, from January 1877 until April 1880, “filled richly with what is most charming and spiritually enriching in the pastoral work,” as he later reflects.²⁹ Living as a bachelor in a large manse, he took the opportunity to court a young lady from Dozwil. Schlatter

²⁸ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 102-103.

²⁹ *Rückblick*, 68.

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successfully proposed to Susanna Schoop (1856–1907) shortly after their first encounter, and they married on January 15, 1878. Susette, as Schlatter called his wife, was a faithful and loyal partner, bearing five children and following her husband through the ups and downs of German university life before her sudden and untimely death in 1907. Schlatter would never remarry.

For the children in his congregations, Schlatter drafted a curriculum for the confirmation class that already revealed the structure of his later dogmatic opus.³⁰ “Schlatter’s draft of the Keßwil confirmation class,” writes his biographer, “is nothing less than a first account of his dogmatic thinking in a nutshell.”³¹ At that time, however, Schlatter would have been far away from any thought of entering academia, were it not for friends who encouraged him to pursue an academic career and for the Bern pietist circles who tried to recruit him for a university post in Bern.³² The Bern pietist community, in the form of the *Evangelisch-kirchlicher Verein*, wanted to strengthen the influence of positive theology in the Bern faculty that had for decades been dominated by liberal theology. Samuel Oettli (1846–1911), the only positive theologian in Bern, tried to convince Schlatter to support him: “You simply have to come!” he insisted.³³ As Schlatter would receive no state payment for the teaching post, the Pietists were happy to contribute financially, but in addition to that, Schlatter would also have to teach religion and Hebrew part-time in an independent evangelical school, the Lerber-Schule. This was not an easy decision for Schlatter. “Giving up my pastorate,” he explains, “was a serious sacrifice for me personally.”³⁴ In the end, Schlatter decided in favour of Bern, under the conviction

³⁰ Schlatter did not use the Heidelberg Catechism in his class and drafted his own curriculum in order to contextualise the gospel, thus making it available in contemporary language and fashion. In a similar manner to his later *Dogma*, the material begins with God’s revelation in creation, conscience and history, followed by anthropology, then Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology. See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 126.

³¹ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 126.

³² Schlatter’s friends, for instance his student friend Adolf Bolliger (1854–1931), who became later theology professor in Basel, suggested he should take up academic research. Basel professor Hans Konrad von Orelli (1846–1912) asked Schlatter to contribute to the journal *Der Kirchenfreund*, and in 1879 Schlatter’s first essay was published, tellingly on Christology—“Christologie der Bergpredigt” (‘Christology of the Sermon on the Mount’).

³³ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 134.

³⁴ *Rückblick*, 72.

that the church called him to the post: “Indeed, here acted the church,” he notes.³⁵

According to Schlatter, theology and church belonged together. Whether as pastor or as theology professor, he considered himself to work constantly in the service of the church.

3. Christological Disputes in Bern, Greifswald and Berlin (1880–98)

Having arrived in Bern in May 1880, Schlatter was immediately confronted with the conflict between the positive pietists and the liberal faculty. Belonging to neither one of the two camps, Schlatter was isolated from the very beginning, with Old Testament scholar Oettli as his only ally. “I had to rely therefore,” writes Schlatter, “from the very beginnings of my work only on myself.”³⁶ Mark Noll sheds some light on the reasons for Schlatter’s isolated position:

Schlatter was far too conservative in his approach to the New Testament, and to Christian theology in general, to win a reputation in the university world in which he labored so earnestly. Yet he was also far too scholarly in his approach to problems of theological method and far too willing to engage the leading thinkers of his day to make much of an impact on the popular pietism of the German-speaking world with which he shared so much.³⁷

Looking back, Schlatter describes his experience as being caught in the crossfire of the two warring factions repeatedly as a “struggle for Jesus’ sake” (*Kampf um Jesu willen*).³⁸ The personal challenge consisted in his aim to mediate³⁹ between the two

³⁵ *Rückblick*, 76 and “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 17.

³⁶ *Rückblick*, 91 and “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 21.

³⁷ Mark A. Noll, “Foreword,” in *Adolf Schlatter: A Biography of Germany’s Premier Biblical Theologian*, 7.

³⁸ See *Rückblick*, 80-81, 92, 97, 99, 114, 140 and “Selbstdarstellungen,” 149. Schlatter also describes his struggle as a “fight with a dual front,” directed against a “restorative confessionism” on the one hand and a “polemical ‘science of religion’” on the other hand. *Rückblick*, 171; see also “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 18; “Ein Wort zum Preise meines Amtes,” *EvKBIW* 83 (19/08/1922): 97-98 and *Metaphysik*, 18.

³⁹ This does not mean that Schlatter was a mediating theologian. The definition of ‘mediating theology’ presented earlier does not suggest any overlap with his own viewpoints (we return to this issue in chapter II/2).

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positions in order to arrive at fellowship (*Gemeinschaft*).⁴⁰ This was obviously a very ambitious goal as the liberal camp labelled Schlatter a “biblicist without criticism” (*kritiklosen Biblizisten*), whereas the positive party referred to him as a “faithless critic” (*glaubenslosen Kritiker*).⁴¹

In order to receive permission to teach theology, Schlatter had to compose a doctoral dissertation and sit several exams.⁴² Having completed the dissertation on ‘John the Baptist,’ Schlatter complained that the Bern faculty still denied him the doctorate since they thought his “book did not have any scientific worth.”⁴³ Moreover, to frustrate Schlatter’s professorial aspirations, the faculty raised the bar for the exams to a level that would never again be applied. Yet, Schlatter succeeded in all his *vivas* and written exams, and finally, after a long waiting period, he received the *venia legendi* for New Testament and the history of dogmatics.

In early 1881, Schlatter began lecturing as a private lecturer (*Privatdozent*), covering in his eight years in Bern an extensive range of topics, from Old and New Testament and church history to systematic theology and the history of philosophy. In his *Habilitationsvorlesung* in spring 1881, as well as in his dogmatic lectures, Schlatter delineates his concept of an empirical theology of facts that he would adhere to throughout his career.⁴⁴ The first and foremost task of the theologian is thus to perform the ‘seeing-act’ (*Sehakt*), where she simply observes the New

⁴⁰ Schlatter consistently held fast to his irenic approach. He expressed his optimism that unity was achievable, as the Scriptures—in that they contain Jesus’ word, who calls all people to God—had the power to establish unity. See *Rückblick*, 82 and “Selbstdarstellungen,” 157.

⁴¹ “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 19. For Schlatter’s rejection of the label ‘biblicist,’ as understood by many of his colleagues, see “Briefe über das Dogma,” 56-58. See *Rückblick*, 124 for his own, positive definition of ‘Bibilizismus.’

⁴² Schlatter’s dissertation on John the Baptist, penned in only one month, was thought to have been lost until it was rediscovered in 1952 and subsequently published by Wilhelm Michaelis as *Johannes der Täufer* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1956).

⁴³ “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 61. Although the Bern Protestant faculty denied Schlatter the doctorate, Hermann Cremer later managed to convince the theological faculty at the University of Halle to award Schlatter the title. The *Dokortitel*, which Schlatter finally received in November 1888, was a formal requirement for Schlatter to take up his work as a professor in Greifswald. See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 250.

⁴⁴ See for example his “Wesen und Quellen der Gotteserkenntnis” (summer 1883).

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Testament documents with faithful objectivity.⁴⁵ We shall examine the significant implications of this method for Schlatter's Christological approach in more detail in part 2 of this work (chapter III). With his lectures and speeches, as well as his publications—especially the prize-winning 'Faith in the New Testament' (*Der Glaube im Neuen Testament*)—Schlatter soon won a positive reputation among even his liberal-minded colleagues.⁴⁶

The 1885 publication of 'Faith in the New Testament' represented for Schlatter an academic breakthrough. He received calls to the faculties of Halle, Kiel, Greifswald, Basel, Heidelberg, Marburg, and Bonn.⁴⁷ In response, the Bern faculty in fact now tried to keep Schlatter, promoting him to associate professor for New Testament and systematic theology (*Extraordinarius, außerordentliche Professur*). Yet it was Lutheran theologian Hermann Cremer (1834–1903) who was finally able to head-hunt Schlatter; Cremer convinced him to join him in his work in the north of Germany, in Greifswald.⁴⁸ Schlatter appreciated the uniformly positive theological faculty in Greifswald and looked forward to a lecture hall "that was incomparably larger and more efficient than the one Bern could offer."⁴⁹ In August 1888, Schlatter, together with his wife Susanna and their now two children, left Switzerland for good and moved to Greifswald.

One of Cremer's aims in winning Schlatter for Greifswald was to join forces against the 'history of religion school' (*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) in Göttingen

⁴⁵ Schlatter would presumably have been in favour of our use of gender-inclusive language. The University of Tübingen had opened its doors for female students in 1904. In contrast to some of his colleagues, Schlatter welcomed and supported female theology students, and he showed no reservations about leading bible studies at the Tübingen "Deutsche Christliche Vereinigung studierender Frauen" (DCVSF). See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 556-559. Kierkegaard biographer and Schlatter student Anna Paulsen, together with other Schlatter students, later expressed their gratitude to Schlatter in an open letter in the *Festschrift* for his seventy-fifth birthday, in Julius Bender et al., *Vom Dienst an Theologie und Kirche: Festgabe für Adolf Schlatter zum 75. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Furche, 1927), 5-6.

⁴⁶ The prize was awarded by the Hague Society for the Defence of Christianity (1883).

⁴⁷ For more background information see Stupperich, "Adolf Schlatters Berufungen," *ZThK* 76, no. 1 (1979): 100-117.

⁴⁸ Cremer's lasting contribution to theology was his *Biblisch-theologisches Wörterbuch der Neutestamentlichen Gräcität*, the forerunner to Gerhard Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*.

⁴⁹ *Rückblick*, 126 and "Entstehung der Beiträge," 69.

and, in particular, the Ritschlian school that dominated the German Protestant departments at that time. Over the next five years, from August 1888 until September 1893, the two Beck students would not only develop a lasting friendship, but also collaborate in counterbalancing Ritschlian influence in the German theological sphere.⁵⁰ In due course, the Greifswald school was known as a bastion of biblically rooted theology, attracting students from all over Germany and abroad, offering an alternative to Ritschl and his followers.⁵¹ (The significant Christological differences emerging in this fascinating debate are the focus of our considerations in chapter II/2).

After his inaugural lecture delivered in Latin on December 29, 1888, Schlatter began teaching New Testament and dogmatics in Greifswald. He offered daily consultation hours (*Sprechstunden*)⁵² for his students and invited them to his weekly open evenings at his home, as he had done previously in Bern. He published an ‘Introduction to the Bible’ (1889), and after a lengthy journey through Palestine, Schlatter summarised his findings in a monograph.⁵³ This work prompted a harsh critique by Kiel New Testament theologian Emil Schürer (1844–1910), who called Schlatter “unfit for scientific work” (*untüchtig zur wissenschaftlichen Arbeit*).⁵⁴ Schlatter, obviously hurt by the scathing criticism of his “modern [approach] that wants to observe,”⁵⁵ nonetheless carried on pursuing his empirical-realist trajectory. Other scholars and institutions were clearly more appreciative towards Schlatter’s agenda. Schlatter again received calls from esteemed German universities, such as Heidelberg and Marburg, but he declined as he was satisfied with the working environment at Greifswald and in particular with the fruitful collaboration with

⁵⁰ It was especially their common Christological focus which rendered their collaboration so fruitful. Schlatter remembers, “What united us [was] . . . that our faith arose from Jesus and was not primarily directed to the church, its teaching or its sacraments.” *Rückblick*, 138.

⁵¹ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 234-235. For an overview of the Greifswald-school see Lessing, *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen evangelischen Theologie*, vol. 1, 116-132.

⁵² Schlatter’s work, *Aus meiner Sprechstunde* (1929), allows for a unique insight into the kind of discussions he had with his students in those consultation hours.

⁵³ *Zur Topographie und Geschichte Palästinas* (1893).

⁵⁴ *Rückblick*, 153. See also “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 80 and Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 280-284.

⁵⁵ *Rückblick*, 154-155.

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Cremer. Even so, his time in Greifswald would soon come to an end as Schlatter was caught up in the events of the so-called ‘struggle over the Apostles’ Creed’ (*Apostolikumsstreit*), which shall be examined more closely in chapter II/2. In short, in 1893, the Prussian ministry of culture established a new chair for systematic theology at the University of Berlin in order to counterbalance the influence of Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), and the call was finally issued to Schlatter, who made sure that he would be entitled to teach not only dogmatics, but also New Testament theology, as he considered the two subjects as intricately connected. In August 1893, Schlatter thus delivered his last lecture in Greifswald, and a month later, he moved with his wife and by then five children to Berlin, where he would teach for the next five years.

In Berlin, Schlatter lectured alongside influential colleagues such as Julius Kaftan (1846–1926), Otto Pfeleiderer (1839–1908), and Bernhard Weiß (1827–1918); he taught Christian ethics, the ‘history of Jesus’ and New Testament theology, continually emphasising his empirical approach to hermeneutics, that is, the “observation of the given facts [*Tatbestände*].”⁵⁶ Alongside his teaching activity, Schlatter was engaged in ecclesial, evangelistic and missionary work. He joined a Christian homegroup (the ‘Bibelkränzchen’), held regular bible studies in the Berlin YMCA, and became one of the directors of the East-Africa Mission. His friendship with Friedrich von Bodelschwingh (1831–1910) resulted in the establishment of the biannual Bethel Theological Week (*Betheler Theologische Woche*). While in Berlin, Schlatter developed a closer relationship with Harnack and the two scholars engaged in regular debates on ‘the question of Jesus Christ’—we shall take a closer look at their theological interaction at a later stage (chapter II/2). In autumn 1897, Schlatter was offered the newly established chair for New Testament theology in Tübingen. Looking forward to more suitable conditions for doing theology, Schlatter accepted the call, while again ensuring that he would also be entitled to lecture in systematic theology.

⁵⁶ “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 35, 40 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 168].

4. An Impetus towards the Whole: Tübingen (1898–1938)

During his first few years in Tübingen, Schlatter had difficulty in warming to his faculty colleagues and students. The friendship with Tübingen systematician Theodor Haering (1848–1928) that he wished to establish was not gaining momentum, which could perhaps be attributed to their difference in character and to theological controversy, as Schlatter was critical of Haering's mediating approach.⁵⁷ However, Schlatter developed a closer relationship with church historian Karl Holl (1866–1926) whom he knew from his time in Berlin.⁵⁸ Considering Schlatter's biography, such as his exchange with Harnack in Berlin, for instance, it seems safe to say that Schlatter particularly enjoyed fellowship with scholars of opposing views, as he there had the opportunity for stimulating exchange and creative interaction, which suited his rather lively temperament.⁵⁹

To Schlatter's astonishment, the Swabian students welcomed him only with reserve, labelling Schlatter as too orthodox and unscientific.⁶⁰ To a great extent, such stereotypes grew out of the *Stiftsstudenten*'s exposure to liberal teaching in Tübingen, as Schlatter student Paul Althaus remarks.⁶¹ Many of Schlatter's fellow lecturers were strongly influenced by Ferdinand Chr. Baur (1792–1860) and advocates of the Ritschl-school.⁶² As we will examine more closely in due course, Schlatter's empirical-realist method of 'seeing what is there' differed considerably from his colleagues' approaches. In his lecture series, 'Philosophical Work since Descartes' (*Die Philosophische Arbeit seit Cartesius*), Schlatter critiqued the influence of

⁵⁷ "Haering is too weak," complained Schlatter. Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 377.

⁵⁸ Holl, who described himself as a 'liberal pietist,' taught in Tübingen from 1900 until 1906. The two theologians enjoyed a deep personal friendship (Schlatter baptised Holl's daughter Elly and became her godfather) and theologically fruitful relationship that was continued in a letter exchange after Holl's move to Berlin in 1906. See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 380-383 and Stupperich (ed.), "Briefe Karl Holls an Adolf Schlatter: 1897-1925," *ZThK* 64, no. 2 (1967): 169-240.

⁵⁹ Schlatter was not only spirited but oftentimes quite brusque in theological discussions, "Dear colleague, this is crap [*Blech!*]" was apparently one of Schlatter's favourite expressions. Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 378.

⁶⁰ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 385-391.

⁶¹ Althaus, "Adolf Schlatters Wort an die heutige Theologie," 96-97.

⁶² As, for instance, the already mentioned Karl Holl and Karl Müller (church historian in Tübingen from 1903–22).

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German idealism on theology.⁶³ The lectures, which were also later published, laid out the epistemological basis for his empirical-realist approach, highlighting that “every true theologian is an observer.”⁶⁴

In due course, Schlatter’s lectures were described as “events,”⁶⁵ not least as he lectured without manuscript and apparently knew the whole Greek New Testament by heart.⁶⁶ Thus, the former scepticism gave way to a growing appreciation among the Württemberg students.⁶⁷ Several of Schlatter’s students would later rise to prominence: Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Althaus, Paul Tillich, Erich Seeberg, Karl Barth, Ernst Käsemann, Otto Michel, Karl-Heinrich Rengstorff, Gustav Stählin, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer,⁶⁸ to name but a few. As usual, Schlatter held regular consultation hours for his students, and on Mondays, they were invited to his home for an open evening. These occasions were means for Schlatter to bring home the “theological teaching” in such a way that “it would become the inner possession [*innere Besitz*] of the student.”⁶⁹ For Schlatter, theology must never merely remain on a ‘cerebral’ level, but needs to be assimilated into the individual’s ‘life-act’ (*Lebensakt*), as we will see in more detail in chapter VI.

During his first Tübingen decade, Schlatter lectured in New Testament and systematic theology, and he regularly gave speeches, many of them with a clear Christological focus.⁷⁰ His literary output covered New Testament studies, Bible

⁶³ Winter semester of 1905/6 lectures (and again 1908), “Die Philosophische Arbeit seit Cartesius. Ihr ethischer und religiöser Ertrag.”

⁶⁴ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 27.

⁶⁵ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 602.

⁶⁶ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 603.

⁶⁷ See for example Paul Althaus’ reminiscences in “Adolf Schlatters Wort an die heutige Theologie,” 95.

⁶⁸ Hans Pfeifer argues that “[t]he only theologian from Tübingen who continued to be important to him [Bonhoeffer] was Adolf Schlatter.” Pfeifer, “Editor’s Afterword,” in *The Young Bonhoeffer*, ed. Paul D. Matheny et al., trans. Mary Nebelsick (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 570.

⁶⁹ *Rückblick*, 215.

⁷⁰ “Christi Versöhnen und Christi Vergeben” (1898), “Die Gottheit Christi” (1902), and “Die Messianität Jesu in ihrer Geschichtlichkeit und Bedeutung” (1907).

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commentaries,⁷¹ and Christological monographs.⁷² His activities in Tübingen, however, were not limited to the academy. With the subtitle of his Schlatter biography, Werner Neuer indicates that Schlatter devoted his life to “theology *and the church*.”⁷³ Theology and church were indeed inseparable for Schlatter. Schlatter was thus involved in the Württemberg church, as well as in various church-related groups and activities. He regularly preached from the pulpit at the Tübingen Stiftskirche,⁷⁴ and in 1912 he was elected a member of the Württemberg Synod. Schlatter organised and participated in various Christian meetings and gatherings,⁷⁵ and in theological conferences and societies.⁷⁶ He supported the ‘Tübingen German Christian Student Union’ (*Deutsche Christliche Studentenvereinigung*, DCSV) and he was involved in the ‘Jünglingsverein,’ later called CVJM (*YMCA*), which he presided over from 1912 until handing the chair over to his son Theodor seven years later. In the same year, 1912, Schlatter’s service to the church and to society as a whole was officially recognised as the King of Württemberg awarded Schlatter the *Order of the Crown* and ennobled him—an honour of which Schlatter however rarely made use.⁷⁷

The sudden death of his wife on July 9, 1907 marked a turning point in Schlatter’s life. Left with five children, Schlatter was supported by his two eldest

⁷¹ After twenty-five years of work he completed in 1910 the thirteen volumes of ‘Annotations to the New Testament’ (*Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*), covering virtually every book of the New Testament.

⁷² Such as “Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz” (1901), which is particularly relevant for our analysis of Schlatter’s theology of the cross in chapters IV and V.

⁷³ The title of the *Festschrift* in honour of Schlatter’s seventy-fifth birthday, *Vom Dienst an Theologie und Kirche*, mirrors that as well.

⁷⁴ On Schlatter as preacher see Wurster, “Adolf Schlatter als Prediger,” in *Aus Schrift und Geschichte: Theologische Abhandlungen Adolf Schlatter zu seinem 70. Geburtstage, dargebracht von Freunden und Schülern* (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1922), 207-219.

⁷⁵ For example the ‘Pfarrkranz’ (a regular gathering of ministers), the ‘Tübingen Vereinigung evangelischer Männer’ (union of Protestant men), and ‘Rüstzeiten für Lehrerinnen’ (retreats for female teachers).

⁷⁶ Such as the ‘Bethel Theological Week,’ ‘Tagung christlicher Akademiker,’ ‘Kirchlich-positive Vereinigung,’ ‘Jungpositiven Gruppe.’

⁷⁷ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 460.

daughters, Hedwig (1887–1946) and Dora (1890–1969).⁷⁸ Now a widower, Schlatter devoted the remaining thirty years of his life to the completion of his theological *oeuvre* and to further ecclesiastical engagement. Between 1908 and 1914, Schlatter published a broad range of exegetical and Judaistic studies,⁷⁹ while also summarising his previous theological drafts in four major works which reflect the broad range of his teaching activities. He arranged his New Testament studies in two volumes, namely, ‘The Word of Jesus’ (*Das Wort Jesu*, 1909), and ‘The Teaching of the Apostles’ (*Die Lehre der Apostel*, 1910).⁸⁰ His systematic programme was published in 1911 as ‘The Christian Dogma’ (*Das christliche Dogma*), followed a few years later by an ethic (*Die christliche Ethik*, 1914).⁸¹ Schlatter later renamed the second revised edition of his ‘Word of Jesus’ as *The History of the Christ* (*Die Geschichte des Christus*, 1923), thereby emphasising the concrete historical setting of Jesus’ being in action. In his *Dogma* he unfolds his ‘theology of facts’ in more detail, insisting that theological assertions have to be rooted in observable reality. Still, the facts are not only observed in the ‘seeing-act’ (*Sehakt*) and analysed in the ‘thinking-act’ (*Denkakt*) but they must also be assimilated, passing into the ownership of the individual’s ‘life-act’ (*Lebensakt*). Schlatter thereby underlined that that exegesis and dogmatics are inseparably connected with ethics. In his own terminology, he

⁷⁸ Schlatter’s three other children were his daughter Ruth (1893–1962) and his sons Paul (1888–1914) and Theodor (1885–1971). Theodor Schlatter followed in his father’s footsteps, becoming a professor at the ‘Bethel Theological School,’ then dean at Esslingen and later prelate in Ludwigsburg. Over eight hundred letters between Schlatter and his son Theodor bear witness to an intimate relationship.

⁷⁹ Schlatter points out that a clear understanding of Pharisaical and rabbinical Judaism is the prerequisite to an adequate New Testament interpretation. See “Selbstdarstellungen,” 16-21. His ground-breaking studies in Palestinian Judaism made him a pioneer in this area. Schlatter was “an historian who laid a firm foundation for the study of the background of New Testament literature by acquiring a first-hand knowledge of contemporary Jewish life and thought,” remarks Paul P. Levertoff, in “Translator’s Note,” in *The Church in the New Testament Period*, by Adolf Schlatter, trans. Paul P. Levertoff (London: S.P.C.K, 1955), xii. See also Stuhlmacher’s comments in “Zum Neudruck von Adolf Schlatters *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament*,” x. Leonhard Goppelt claims to be strongly influenced by Schlatter in this respect, praising his “immense and superior history of religion/philological investigation of the New Testament.” Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Jürgen Roloff, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 278.

⁸⁰ These works by Schlatter have recently been translated into English as *The History of the Christ* (1997) and *The Theology of the Apostles* (1999).

⁸¹ Both works are unfortunately still untranslated. Translations of his dogmatic opus into English are desirable in order to establish Schlatter’s importance as a systematic theologian in the English-speaking sphere as well.

highlights that the exegetical ‘seeing-act’ and the dogmatic ‘thinking-act’ must usher in the existentially relevant ‘life-act’ (*Lebensakt*).⁸² “I was always an ethicist,” writes Schlatter, “as for me, the dogma never only served to fill the intellect, but always, and primarily, to provide a foundation for the will [*Begründung des Willens*].”⁸³ It was therefore only natural of Schlatter to publish, shortly after his New Testament works and his dogmatics, a Christian ethics.⁸⁴ In the second part of this work we shall deal with the three acts, the ‘seeing-act’, the ‘thinking-act,’ and the ‘life-act’ in more detail, in particular as they provide a useful framework for our exploration of Schlatter’s overall Christological programme.

The First World War marked a deep incision in Schlatter’s life. Only a few years after his wife’s death, Schlatter had to suffer another heart-rending loss. In September 1914, Schlatter’s youngest son Paul, then a promising academic historian, was hit by a shell splinter on the battlefield and subsequently died of his injuries in a German hospital. The years after his son’s death proved to be a period of despondency and depression for Schlatter. The pace of his written output slowed down. Still, in 1915, Schlatter penned his most abstract work, ‘Metaphysics’ (*Metaphysik*), with the intention of explaining his empirical philosophy as an alternative to Kantian speculative reason. Perhaps still due to his despondency, however, Schlatter was not satisfied with the finished product and decided against its publication; only some seventy years later, in 1987, would his *Metaphysik* become available to the public.⁸⁵

It is worth mentioning that in spite of the war and his tragic personal losses, Schlatter did not feel compelled to modify his theology.⁸⁶ Thus, theologically, his

⁸² See *Rückblick*, 93.

⁸³ *Rückblick*, 172-173.

⁸⁴ For the relationship between dogmatics and ethics in Schlatter’s theology, see Neuer, *Zusammenhang*.

⁸⁵ Edited by Werner Neuer and published in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, Beiheft 7 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987).

⁸⁶ Except for revising the chapter on war in his ethics in a subsequent edition; without becoming a pacifist, he had now a stricter view on ‘war,’ arguing that it should only be viewed as the *ultima ratio* of politics, rather than one of its ordinary means.

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post-1914 writings do not differ substantially from his pre-War writings.⁸⁷ With the end of the First World War Schlatter regained new strength, and the period between 1918 and 1930 marks the high point of his career as a university professor when he lectured up to sixteen hours a week in a lecture hall filled with up to six hundred students, while also publishing over a hundred works.

In the summer semester of 1922, Schlatter delivered for the last time a dogmatic lecture, as systematician Karl Heim (1874–1958) was called to the Tübingen faculty. In August of the same year, Schlatter retired officially from his teaching activity at the age of seventy; however, he decided to continue lecturing in New Testament for fifteen more semesters, until 1930, as he was suspicious of his successor, the Bonn exegete Wilhelm Heitmüller (1869–1926), a representative of the ‘history of religion school.’

In the last decade of his teaching activity, Schlatter mainly lectured in New Testament theology while also publishing revised editions of his ‘New Testament Theology’ (1920 and 1922), his *Dogma* (1923), and *Ethik* (1924 and 1929), together with several essays, bible studies, sermons and autobiographical works. With the rise of dialectical theology in the 1920s, Schlatter was particularly interested in his former student and son of his successor in Bern, Karl Barth (1886–1968). Schlatter’s fascinating theological interaction with Barth, in particular with a view to Christology, is in the focus of our considerations in chapter II/3.

Schlatter’s last decade, with an output of almost ninety publications between 1929 and 1937, can surely be labelled ‘active retirement.’ As major projects, Schlatter pursued several scientific commentaries on the New Testament, such as on Matthew,⁸⁸ John,⁸⁹ Luke,⁹⁰ James,⁹¹ the Corinthian Letters,⁹² Mark,⁹³ Romans,⁹⁴ the

⁸⁷ Robert Yarbrough observes that “the Schlatter corpus documents a theological development that grew in breadth, depth, nuance and grounding. There are no radical shifts or new directions.” Yarbrough, “Adolf Schlatter,” in *Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 506. Wilhelm Michaelis notes that the 1880 dissertation of the “young Schlatter” was already a “true Schlatter.” Michaelis, “Nachwort des Herausgebers,” in *Johannes der Täufer*, by Adolf Schlatter, ed. Wilhelm Michaelis (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1956), 168.

⁸⁸ *Der Evangelist Matthäus: Seine Sprache, sein Ziel, seine Selbständigkeit: Ein Kommentar zum ersten Evangelium* [1929], 7th ed. (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1982).

⁸⁹ *Der Evangelist Johannes: Wie er spricht, denkt und glaubt. Ein Kommentar zum vierten Evangelium* [Stuttgart, 1930] 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1948).

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Pastoral Epistles,⁹⁵ and First Peter.⁹⁶ Schlatter's overall exegetical rule could be described as 'subjective objectivity.'⁹⁷ That is, on the one hand, the exegete is supposed to observe the New Testament facts in "prejudice-free objectivity,"⁹⁸ while on the other hand, she needs to approach the New Testament from the context-specific perspective of faith. One could thus describe Schlatter's hermeneutics as a faith-based empirical realism—we return to this significant method in chapter III. Schlatter also published his translation of the New Testament (1931).⁹⁹ However, it did not satisfy him completely as he still thought Luther's translation was better.¹⁰⁰

While Schlatter worked on his New Testament commentaries, the political situation in Germany changed for the worse. The rise of National Socialism culminated in Hitler's rise to power in 1933 and concerned Schlatter deeply. He opposed the Nazis' racist ideology, criticised the 'German Christians' (*Deutsche Christen*) and was highly suspicious of the leadership cult around Hitler (*Führerkult*) that was slowly but steadily gaining ground in Germany.¹⁰¹ At an early stage he raised his concerns publicly as a speaker and writer, and was later personally involved in the Württemberg 'church struggle' (*Kirchenkampf*), during which he published several statements opting for a clear independence of the church from the

⁹⁰ *Das Evangelium nach Lukas. Aus seinen Quellen erklärt* (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1931).

⁹¹ *Der Brief des Jakobus* [Stuttgart, 1932] 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1985).

⁹² *Paulus, der Bote Jesu. Eine Deutung seiner Briefe an die Korinther* [Stuttgart, 1934] 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1956).

⁹³ *Markus. Der Evangelist für die Griechen* (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1935).

⁹⁴ *Gottes Gerechtigkeit: Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief* [1935] 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1952).

⁹⁵ *Die Kirche der Griechen im Urteil des Paulus: Eine Auslegung seiner Briefe an Timotheus und Titus* (Stuttgart: Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1936).

⁹⁶ *Petrus und Paulus. Nach dem 1. Petrusbrief* (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1937).

⁹⁷ As Walldorf renders it in *Realistische Philosophie*, 70.

⁹⁸ "Selbstdarstellungen," 159.

⁹⁹ *Das Neue Testament, übersetzt* (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1931).

¹⁰⁰ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 694.

¹⁰¹ See his essay "Die neue deutsche Art in der Kirche," in *Sonderdrucke des Monatsblattes Beth-El*, Heft 14, ed. Theodor Schlatter (Bethel: Verlagshandlung der Anstalt Bethel, 1933).

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state.¹⁰² As the church struggle grew more intense, he had to witness his son Theodor's displacement as dean of Esslingen and could not prevent the repeated house arrests of his friend and fellow countryman, the bishop Theophil Wurm (1868–1953). One must certainly lament that Schlatter did not as emphatically reject the Aryan Paragraph as the Confessing Church for instance. Nonetheless, this does not immediately make Schlatter an anti-Semite, as some scholars suggest.¹⁰³

Do we know Jesus? (Kennen wir Jesus?). That was Schlatter's challenging question in 1937 to the National Socialists and the German population in his last publication.¹⁰⁴ Knowing Jesus, what he wants and does, was according to Schlatter the only answer to the precarious anti-Christian atmosphere in Germany at that time. In his final months, at the beginning of 1938, he worked on a second edition of *Kennen wir Jesus?*, thereby dedicating his remaining strength to the task that was most important to him: to portray the words and works of Jesus Christ. On May 18, 1938, eighty-five year old Schlatter died peacefully in his home in Tübingen. Friedrich von Bodelschwingh Jr. (1877–1946) remarked in his speech at the funeral, "For me personally and for many of my co-workers he became a leader to Christ."¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Who then was Adolf Schlatter? How can one best characterise his life and theology in a nutshell? This short biographical-theological sketch reveals that Schlatter escapes any spontaneous attempts at theological labelling. Nonetheless, looking at

¹⁰² "Das Evangelium und das Bekenntnis," in *Müssen wir heute lutherisch oder reformiert sein? Beiträge zur Frage einer neuen kirchlichen Einheit von D. Dr. Adolf Schlatter et al.* (Velbert: Freizeiten-Verlag, 1936), 21-31 and "Grenzen der kirchlichen Gemeinschaft," in *Ibid.*, 3-20. See also Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 725-745.

¹⁰³ This view is in particular propagated by James E. McNutt in his various essays, "A Very Damning Truth: Walter Grundmann, Adolf Schlatter, and Susannah Heschel's *The Aryan Jesus*," *Harvard Theological Review* 105.3 (2012): 280-301; "Vessels of Wrath, Prepared to Perish: Adolf Schlatter and the Spiritual Extermination of the Jews," *Theology Today* 63 (2006): 176-190; "Adolf Schlatter and the Jews," *German Studies Review* 26, no. 2 (2003): 353-370. For a more balanced account see Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 725-780 and Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 253-326.

¹⁰⁴ *Kennen wir Jesus? Ein Gang durch ein Jahr im Gespräch mit ihm*. Recently made available in English as *Do we know Jesus?* (2005).

¹⁰⁵ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 820.

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Schlatter's life and work, two characteristics seem to stand out: Schlatter was an *irenic theologian* with a clear *Christocentric perspective*. In the remainder of this chapter we shall briefly look at those two aspects.

Schlatter was an irenic theologian. What makes it difficult to locate Schlatter on the theological map of his time is his eclectic and at the same time irenic and holistic approach.¹⁰⁶ Somehow, Schlatter stood between idealism and the revival movement, between the Ritschl school and orthodox confessionalism (see the following chapter II/2). Although born and raised in the Reformed tradition, Schlatter remained confessionally open, showing no reserve towards representatives of any theological *couleur*. He also rejected the increasing specialisation and prevalent mentality of departmentalisation in the academy. Eager to unite the oftentimes estranged departments, Schlatter, as New Testament scholar, systematic theologian, lecturer in Old Testament, church history and philosophy, demonstrated in his own life how cross-theological work, with an 'impetus to the whole' (*Richtung auf das Ganze*) could look like. His theology then was distinctly designed to be a 'comprehensive theology,'¹⁰⁷ and in the end, life itself, argues Schlatter, has to be envisaged as an organic whole. Where others saw disunity and dualisms, Schlatter perceived unity and harmony between faith and reason, nature and grace, church and academy, God and humanity. In one of his autobiographical memories, Schlatter points out that he was always both scholar *and* believer, church member *and* member in the academy, pupil *and* teacher, part of the state *and* part of nature.¹⁰⁸ As parish minister, university professor, speaker, author, and social activist, Schlatter, with his life, his diverse interests and activities, sets an example of theological *and* cultural engagement, combining theory *and* practice, always with the perspective of the whole of human experience.

Schlatter was a Christocentric theologian. The salient features of Schlatter's 'impetus towards the whole' have already been touched upon by Schlatter

¹⁰⁶ *Rückblick*, 197; "Selbstdarstellungen," 157.

¹⁰⁷ Schlatter to Cremer, 25 November 1901, in Stupperich, *Wort und Wahrnehmung: Briefe Adolf Schlatters an Hermann Cremer und Friedrich von Bodelschwingh* (Bethel: Verlag der Anstalt Bethel, 1963), 93.

¹⁰⁸ See the chapter headings in *Erlebtes*, 7-8.

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scholarship so far.¹⁰⁹ What has, most surprisingly, not yet been fully covered is Schlatter's view of the one who enables and, in fact, creates this unity, namely, Jesus Christ. Taking into account Schlatter's biography, one easily detects the clear Christological leitmotif that pervades his life and work. Both his first and his last publications focused on Jesus Christ, the divine-human person in action who offers an existential union (*Anschluss*) with him. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Schlatter saw no rift between the 'historical Jesus' and a 'Christ of faith.' For Schlatter, the two are one as Jesus' person and work displays one harmonious unit. The unified Jesus Christ is the one who also brings about unity by uniting human beings with God and with each other in the new community of faith. In Schlatter's view, Jesus Christ performs his unifying work against the backdrop of concrete *history*, with a determined *volition*, and always in *relation* with his heavenly Father (through the Holy Spirit) and with us. These three terms, *history*, *volition* and *relation*, together with a distinct Trinitarian emphasis, are key to an adequate understanding of Schlatter's Christology and they will appear consistently throughout this work.

Given then the prominence of the Christological motif in Schlatter's life and work, its neglect in Schlatter studies is surprising. It leaves a serious gap in Schlatter scholarship insofar, as Schlatter's methodology and philosophy serve exactly the purpose of observing and understanding the being and action of Jesus Christ. We shall now, as a first step, turn to the genesis and the context of Schlatter's Christology, tracing important factors that influenced Schlatter and shaped his Christological thinking.

¹⁰⁹ See Kindt, *Der Gedanke der Einheit: Adolf Schlatters Theologie und ihre historischen Voraussetzungen*. In addition to Kindt's monograph see Althaus, "Schlatter's Wort," 106; Walter Tebbe, "Schlatter's Leben," *MPTH* 4 (1952): 266-268; Egg, *Schlatters Kritische Position*, 22, 33, 73-76, 83 and von Lüpke, "Wahrnehmung der Gotteswirklichkeit: Impulse der Theologie Adolf Schlatters," in *Realistische Theologie: Eine Hinführung zu Adolf Schlatter*, ed. Heinzpeter Hempelmann et al. (Gießen: Brunnen Verlag, 2006), 43-47.

II. Where was Adolf Schlatter?

Thus far we have answered the question, ‘*Who* was Adolf Schlatter?’ by providing a brief overview of his life and theology. In this chapter, we will now direct our attention to the question, ‘*Where* was Adolf Schlatter?’ The goal is then to trace the genesis and development of Schlatter’s Christology within the intellectual and theological context of his day and age. Hence, questions such as these demand answers: Who were Schlatter’s theological allies? With whom did he interact? Whose Christological positions did he share (and why)? With whom could he not agree (and why)? This foundational, and thus rather extensive, chapter seeks to portray Schlatter in interaction with significant representatives of diverse movements in order to identify the stimuli which contributed to his own Christology.

As one might expect from what has been outlined in the previous biographical section, Schlatter’s position is unique and certainly not easy to pin down. He was neither a convinced idealist nor a fervent pietist, and he was neither a liberal Ritschlian nor a simple biblicist. Rather, Schlatter was somewhat ‘in between,’ as we shall discover in more detail in the following three sections. In delineating the development of his Christology, we will proceed chronologically, *first* looking at Schlatter ‘Between Idealism and the Revival Movement,’ *secondly* tracing his position ‘Between Ritschlianism and Confessionalism,’ and *thirdly* focusing on his interaction with Karl Barth in ‘Schlatter *Zwischen den Zeiten*.’¹ This historical-theological overture sets the scene for our dogmatic reflections in part two, ‘The Dogmatic Shape of Schlatter’s Christology.’ With this outline in mind, we now turn to our first point, namely Schlatter ‘Between Idealism and the Revival Movement.’

¹ Our chronological approach means that the reader, having already studied the biographical part, might experience a déjà vu once, or twice; still, we have obviously tried to reduce any possible overlaps to a minimum to avoid redundancies.

1. Between Idealism and Revival Movement

Adolf Schlatter was born right in the middle of the nineteenth century, and in many ways these were exciting times, both historically, with revolutions in Europe and the rise of nationalist imperialist states, and also with a view to the intellectual *Zeitgeist*, when one thinks of the flourishing of German idealism,² romanticism or Marxism, for example. And theology, of course, was not excluded from these developments. David Fergusson is certainly right when he calls the nineteenth century the “most diverse and creative period in the history of Christian theology.”³ Now what was it that made this period so ‘diverse and creative’ as Fergusson suggests? Before focusing in more detail on Schlatter, it is fitting to answer first this important question as it allows us to understand the rich intellectual context of his time.

Some historians consider the nineteenth century to have been an era where increasing secularisation and scientific progress led to a collapse of religious belief in Western Europe. Jürgen Osterhammel describes this period as a time of de-Christianisation in Europe,⁴ and Owen Chadwick points to the “secularisation of the European mind.”⁵ On the one hand, it is certainly true that the nineteenth century witnessed a general attack on religion. Earlier Enlightenment and idealist critical thought had contributed to an erosion of belief in the supernatural, thereby fuelling a general anti-religious mind-set, which was susceptible to Ludwig Feuerbach’s (1804–72) reduction of religion to anthropology, and Karl Marx’s (1818–83)

² When referring to idealism in this work, we always mean philosophical idealism (in contrast to the notion of idealism where one intends to pursue certain ‘ideals’ in one’s life), and in particular German idealism. It is difficult to offer a succinct meaning for the term, as its interpretation differs slightly depending on whether one talks about Kant’s transcendental idealism or Fichte’s, Schelling’s or Hegel’s transformation of Kant’s thoughts into absolute idealism. It is for this reason that we refer to individual philosophers and their particular concepts in this study. For an introduction to German idealism see Karl Ameriks, “Introduction: interpreting German Idealism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-17.

³ Fergusson, “Preface,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), xi.

⁴ Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: C.H. Beck, 2009), 1248.

⁵ Chadwick, *Secularisation of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

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denunciation of religion as the ‘opiate of the people.’ Accordingly, Hugh McLeod observes a significant devaluation of personal faith and a decrease in attendance in religious practices and events in nineteenth century Germany.⁶ This, however, is only one part of the whole picture. For, on the other hand, one must not overlook a certain resurgence of religion in the nineteenth century. As a matter of fact, “the nineteenth century,” Christopher A. Bayly contends, “saw the triumphal reemergence and expansion of ‘religion.’”⁷ Indeed, religion, as an antithesis to Enlightenment rationalism, was very much in the focus of this era. The nineteenth century saw a significant increase in missionary activities⁸ and in revivals (*Erweckungen*) in the continental Protestant⁹ and Catholic churches.¹⁰ Records also show a new growth of

⁶ McLeod notes that the intellectual bourgeoisie (influenced by Darwinism) in particular showed an increase of hostility towards those who took their Christian faith seriously. McLeod, *Secularisation in Western Europe 1848-1914* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 182.

⁷ Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 325.

⁸ The nineteenth century has thus rightly been called the ‘century of missions.’ Shortly before the turn of the century, Protestant missionary societies were established in England (London, 1795), Scotland (1796), and the Netherlands (1797), reaching the apex of their impact in the nineteenth century. In Germany and Switzerland, still influenced by the missionary activities of the *Herrnhut Brüdergemeinde* under Count Zinzendorf (from 1732 onwards), missionary societies were founded in Berlin (1800) and Basel (1816, *Basler Missionsgesellschaft*). See Renkewitz, “Erneuerte Brüderunität,” in *RGG*, vol. 1, 1439-1443. For a short overview from a historical perspective see Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 1261-1268, and from a theological perspective, see Wellenreuther, “Pietismus und Mission: Vom 17. bis zum Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts,” in *Glaubenswelt und Lebenswelten*, ed. Hartmut Lehmann, vol. 4 of *Geschichte des Pietismus*, ed. Martin Brecht et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 166-193.

⁹ See Benrath, “Die Erweckung innerhalb der deutschen Landeskirchen 1815-1888: Ein Überblick,” in *Der Pietismus im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrich Gäbler, vol. 3 of *Geschichte des Pietismus*, ed. Martin Brecht et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 150-271; cf. Kupisch, *Die Deutschen Landeskirchen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, vol. 4 of *Die Kirche in ihrer Geschichte*, ed. Kurt Dietrich Schmidt et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 49-97. One also thinks of the related Protestant revival in North America, the *Second Great Awakening* (1785–1810). In this revival, one of Schlatter’s ancestors, Michael Schlatter (1718–90), was instrumental in that he propagated the new pietism among the German immigrants. See Noll, “Evangelikalismus und Fundamentalismus in Nordamerika,” in *Der Pietismus im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrich Gäbler, vol. 3 of *Geschichte des Pietismus*, ed. Martin Brecht et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 474-480.

¹⁰ Weigelt, “Die Allgäuer katholische Erweckungsbewegung,” in *Der Pietismus im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrich Gäbler, vol. 3 of *Geschichte des Pietismus*, ed. Martin Brecht et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 87-111.

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evangelicalism in Great Britain, which influenced to a great extent the French-speaking Protestants in Switzerland, leading to an awakening (*Réveil*) in Geneva.¹¹

This was then a time of severe cultural discrepancy: a critical, even anti-religious mindset leading to a decline of religious observance and tradition on the one hand and powerful religious awakenings on the other hand. This was the air the young Schlatter breathed, and his Christology grew out of his exposure to the two main opposing movements in the nineteenth century, namely modern idealist critical thought and the revival movement (*Erweckungsbewegung*).¹² Church historian Kurt Dietrich Schmidt calls this the ‘primordial dichotomy’ (*Urzwiespalt*) of the nineteenth century.¹³ “Idealism and the revival movement,” notes Schlatter, “were in the first part of the 19th century the most powerful and fruitful processes that gave us Germans our history.”¹⁴ In spite of their inherent differences, the contours of the two movements were not clear-cut; the careful observer will note significant overlaps. Many pietists, for example, held Enlightenment views, and many idealists had pietist roots and affinities.¹⁵ Ulrich Gäbler thus points out that the “discontinuity between Enlightenment and Revival [movement] was less deep than the revivalists pretended and as research supposed until recently.”¹⁶ Likewise, Hartmut Lehman maintains that “[t]he pious [people] who engaged in the works of the new pietism were . . .

¹¹ Scottish Congregationalist Robert Haldane’s (1764–1842) visit to Geneva in 1816 had a significant impact on the *Réveil*. Gäbler, “Evangelikalismus und Réveil,” in *Der Pietismus im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrich Gäbler, vol. 3 of *Geschichte des Pietismus*, ed. Martin Brecht et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 43, 51-52.

¹² For a brief overview of the revival movement in nineteenth-century Europe, see Beyreuther, “Erweckung,” in *RGG*, vol. 2, 621-629, and Kurt D. Schmidt in his *Kirchengeschichte*, 9th. ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 459-469.

¹³ Schmidt, *Kirchengeschichte*, 470.

¹⁴ “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 1. This quote alludes to Schlatter’s strong identification with the German people. Hence, in his memorial address, Gerhard Kittel calls Schlatter “the Swiss man, who was completely German! [*der Schweizer, der ganz Deutscher war!*]” Kittel, “Adolf Schlatter: Gedenkrede,” in *Adolf Schlatter: Gedächtnisheft der Deutschen Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938), 16.

¹⁵ Pietist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–82), a representative of Württemberg pietism, shows affinities with speculative, idealist philosophy (see in particular his *Theosophische Werke*, 6 vols., 1858-1863). Idealist poet and thinker, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81), on the other hand, grew up in an orthodox Lutheran home (his father was a clergyman), not far away from the pietist Herrnhut community.

¹⁶ Gäbler, *Auferstehungszeit: Erweckungsprediger des 19. Jahrhunderts* (München: Beck, 1991), 165.

paradoxical as it might seem at first glance, as much as their opponents, ‘children of the Enlightenment.’”¹⁷

This applies to Adolf Schlatter as well. He was certainly a child of his own time, and in what follows, we will explore the implications of this important synergy of idealism and *Erweckung* on Schlatter’s theological development in more detail. As noted earlier, we shall do so from Schlatter’s own perspective, which means that we will refer constantly to his own autobiographical accounts, where he explains how his theological thinking emerged out of the friction between his pietist background and his subsequent exposure to idealist teaching in school and at university.

Proceeding chronologically, we will *first* take a closer look at the contrast of Schlatter’s pietist background and the idealist philosophical-theological mind-set to which he was exposed at school and at university. In a *second* step, we shall trace how this tension culminated in a serious existential crisis for the young theology student. Influential figures such as Johann T. Beck and Franz von Baader contributed to a consolidation of his theology, as shall be discussed in the *third* section. Taking then this whole range of experiences and influences into account, we will, *fourthly* and finally, be in the position to carve out the characteristic Schlatterian response to idealist Christologies.

Early Antagonisms: Idealism vs. *Erweckung*

Adolf Schlatter was deeply rooted in the theological and spiritual background of his family and its circle of friends from the Swiss revival movement. Schlatter’s hometown, St. Gallen, was along with Zürich and Bern one of the main centres in Switzerland where pietist ideas had already gained a foothold at an early stage.¹⁸

While the French-speaking cantons in Switzerland were touched by the Genevan

¹⁷ Lehmann, “Die neue Lage,” in *Der Pietismus im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrich Gäbler, vol. 3 of *Geschichte des Pietismus*, ed. Martin Brecht et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 8.

¹⁸ Heike Bock argues this in her review of *Der frühe Zürcher Pietismus (1689–1721): Der soziale Hintergrund und die Denk- und Lebenswelten im Spiegel der Bibliothek Johann Heinrich Lochers (1648–1718)*, by Kaspar Bütikofer, in: *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 22/10/2010, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2010-4-056> (accessed August 5, 2013). Schmidt simply defines the revival movement as the awakening of a renewed pietism. “Pietismus,” in *RGG*, vol. 5, 378.

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Réveil,¹⁹ the German-speaking regions, such as St. Gallen, were mainly under the influence of the ‘German Society of Christianity’ (*Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft*), which was founded in 1780 in Basel.²⁰ The *Christentumsgesellschaft* had a substantial impact on the Swiss revival as it gave rise to the establishment of the Basel Bible Society (1804)²¹ and the Basel Missionary Society (1815), as well as the creation of several charitable institutions.²²

Adolf Schlatter’s family history is deeply interwoven with the Swiss revival movement. In the biographical account, we mentioned his grandmother, Anna Schlatter-Bernet, who was a key figure in the movement at the turn of the century. “[O]ne of the most noble representatives of the new pietism,”²³ she stood in close connection with several heads of the Swiss and German revival movement, not only with those of the Protestant persuasion, like Johann Kaspar Lavater (1741–1801),²⁴ but also with Roman Catholics, like Martin Boos (1762–1825), main partisan of the

¹⁹ Gäbler, “Evangelikalismus und Réveil,” 43, 51-52.

²⁰ This took place through the initiative of the Augsburg minister Johann August Urlsperger (1728–1806). The *Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft* aimed to thwart rationalist Enlightenment ideas by affirming traditional orthodox Protestant doctrines. From its Basel headquarter the movement grew to an international network of like-minded circles and personalities. See Staehelin, *Die Christentumsgesellschaft in der Zeit der Aufklärung und der beginnenden Erweckung* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1970), 3-13; cf. Beyreuther, “Christentumsgesellschaft,” *RGG*, vol. 1, 1729-1730 and Weigelt, “Die Diasporaarbeit der Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine und die Wirksamkeit der Deutschen Christentumsgesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert,” in *Der Pietismus im neunzehnten und zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrich Gäbler, vol. 3 of *Geschichte des Pietismus*, ed. Martin Brecht et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 113-149.

²¹ Around that time, several other bible societies were established in Switzerland, such as those in Bern (1805), Schaffhausen (1809) and Zürich (1812).

²² Such as the formation of the Beuggen ‘Institution for the Education of Schoolteachers for the Poor’ (*Armen-Schullehrer-Anstalt*, 1820), the Beuggen ‘Social Welfare Institutes’ (*Diakonischen Anstalten Beuggen*, 1820), and the ‘Deaf-Mute Foundation’ in Riehen (*Taubstummenanstalt Riehen*, 1838). Staehelin, *Die Christentumsgesellschaft in der Zeit der Aufklärung und der beginnenden Erweckung*, vii; cf. Gäbler, “Erweckungsbewegungen,” in *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 1081-1088 and Pfister, *Kirchengeschichte der Schweiz*, vol. 3, *Von 1720 bis 1950* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985), 171-259. On the connection between the revival movement and social-charitable action see Kuhn, *Religion und neuzeitliche Gesellschaft: Studien zum sozialen und diakonischen Handeln in Pietismus, Aufklärung und Erweckungsbewegung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 14-41.

²³ Hadorn, *Geschichte des Pietismus in den Schweizerischen Reformierten Kirchen* (Konstanz: Carl Kirsch, 1901), 401.

²⁴ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 5.

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Allgäu Catholic revival movement in south Germany.²⁵ Anna Schlatter enjoyed a lively exchange of letters with both of them,²⁶ and also welcomed to Adolf Schlatter's later house of birth well-known figures of the revival movement.²⁷ She had also no reservations in enjoying fellowship with rather revolutionary theologians such as Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Wilhelm M. L. de Wette (1780–1849), for instance, who were also both among her guests.²⁸ “Through her Christocentric and bible-oriented piety,” observes Schlatter biographer Werner Neuer, “Anna Schlatter knew herself to be joined with all Christians who tried to bring their lives into line with the living Christ and the Scriptures—a trait that would later also characterise her grandson Adolf Schlatter.”²⁹ Though Schlatter never met his grandmother personally, the theological parallels between grandmother and grandson—particularly in terms of Christocentricity and ecumenical openness—are indeed striking and can be attributed to the continuation of her legacy in the Schlatter household.

The revival movement continued to leave its mark on the Schlatter family in the next generation. As Adolf Schlatter recalls, his mother Susanna represented the Protestant ‘Reformed type’ and his father Stephan the ‘pietist revival type.’³⁰ The harmonious combination of Reformed theology and pietistic piety in his parents left a deep impression on the young Schlatter. “The revival,” he notes, “has moved my

²⁵ See Jehle-Wildberger, *Anna Schlatter-Bernet, 1773-1826: Eine weltoffene St.Galler Christin* (Zürich: TVZ, 2003), 87-104.

²⁶ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 8. See also Franz M. Zahn, *Anna Schlatters Leben und Nachlass*, vol. 1, ed. Franz M. Zahn (Bremen: W. Valett & Comp., 1865), lxii-lxxiii.

²⁷ These included Karl F. A. Steinkopf (1773–1859), then secretary of the *Christentumsgesellschaft*, Christian H. Zeller (1779–1860), the inspector of the *Armenkinderanstalt Beuggen*, Aloys Henhöfer (1789–1862), leader of the Baden revival, and Gottfried Daniel Krummacher (1774–1837), leader of the Lower Rhine Revival (*niederrheinische Erweckungsbewegung*). See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 5.

²⁸ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 5.

²⁹ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 7.

³⁰ See “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 23; cf. *Rückblick*, 12. Schlatter himself notes that his mother's influence upon him, particularly in ecclesial aspects, was greater than his father's, which is also reflected in his extensive letter exchange with his mother. See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 30. On the other hand, Schlatter highlights that he followed his father in spiritual and theological matters. Neuer, “Der Idealismus und die Erweckung in Schlatters Jugend: Beobachtungen zu einem nichtedierten Manuskript aus Schlatters Nachlaß,” *ZKG* 96 (1985): 70.

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adolescence much more effectively and fruitfully than idealism.”³¹ Schlatter describes his parents’ influence as such:

Our parents brought us up in such a way that they shared with us their whole possession [*Besitz*] and experience . . . [I] saw from the very beginning what a life lived before God looks like. The power with which we were as children embraced by the faith of our parents was the prerequisite and the root from which my own story grew.³²

Looking back, Schlatter is grateful that he never felt the “overbearing attitude of ecclesial dogma” in his parental home, and that he “did not belong to those who were tantalised in their youth by orthodoxy.”³³ From the very beginning Schlatter thus learned that theology was not a dry discipline but that it influenced every aspect of life, and that dogmatics and ethics were inseparably connected, an important insight he would expand on in his later career. Schlatter’s father Stephan, who as a young boy was instructed at an institution of the Brethren movement,³⁴ had helped to build a home for children from troubled family backgrounds,³⁵ and was one of the seven founding members of the first free evangelical church in St. Gallen (1837).³⁶ Schlatter’s uncle, his father’s brother-in-law Daniel Schlatter (1791–1870), travelled as a missionary to the Muslim Tatars in the Crimea and became known as the ‘Tatarenschlatter.’ Appreciative of his uncle’s missionary activity, Schlatter refers to his uncle as a “man of the will,” in contrast to the rather passive idealists.³⁷ This notion of the ‘will’ is important as it points to Schlatter’s later theological-volitional emphasis, one of the key characteristics of his theology and, especially, Christology as we shall discover in due course. The young Schlatter then was clearly impressed

³¹ “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 24.

³² *Rückblick*, 12.

³³ *Rückblick*, 13.

³⁴ *The Knabenanstalt der Königsberger Brüdergemeinde*.

³⁵ In 1840, Schlatter’s father, together with his cousin Ambrosius Schlatter, set up the ‘Rettungsanstalt’ in St. Gallen for neglected children. “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 31-32.

³⁶ See *Rückblick*, 23. Schlatter’s father left the Reformed church due to what he considered a damaging influx of theological liberalism in the Reformed *Landeskirche*. See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 7, 13-14, 32.

³⁷ “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 26.

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with the kind of lived ethics he observed in both his father and his uncle. From an early age, Schlatter was thus affected by the key features of the revival, namely the combination of heart and hand, faith and works, orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Later in his career, Schlatter exhibited in his own life the unity of theology and ethics, encouraging his contemporaries to follow suit (more on this in chapter VI on the ‘life-act’).

In school, as highlighted earlier, Schlatter met the revival’s antagonist. In the classroom, he remembers, he had to cope with a different, rather anti-Christian and anti-pious atmosphere.³⁸ During his time in secondary school, Schlatter was introduced to German Enlightenment and idealist thought. His philosophy teacher, the Hegelian Johann Jakob Alder (1813–82), tried to warm Schlatter to Hegelian thought, yet Schlatter was reluctant to adopt Hegel’s abstract philosophical system and rather preferred the speculative character and the moral emphasis of Kantianism.³⁹ While Schlatter clearly appreciated the selfless and determined “moral power of Kantianism” with its focus on the performance of the moral duty,⁴⁰ he was convinced that Kant had built his philosophical house on sand, as we shall discuss below. Alder, as a former minister, also taught religious education, which meant that Schlatter came in contact with the kind of liberal Reformed theology that dominated the St. Gallen Reformed church at that time (and which was one of the reasons why his father had left the church).⁴¹ For a total of six years, Schlatter thus listened to a liberal theologian who questioned the historical reliability of the Scriptures, who emphasised primarily the ethical value of Jesus’ teachings and who was suspicious of traditional dogmatics in general.⁴² There was, then, obviously a considerable contrast between what the young Schlatter had learnt at home and what he was confronted with in the classroom. It seems plausible that this created a tension for Schlatter, and from this perspective, it is understandable why Schlatter chose to study theology in

³⁸ *Rückblick*, 34.

³⁹ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 41-42.

⁴⁰ “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 11.

⁴¹ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 13-14.

⁴² Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 43.

the first place, namely, as an endeavour to examine the ‘broad ditch’ between the piety of his parental home and the critical attitude of liberal theology at school.

Reading Spinoza with a ‘Glowing Head’

Schlatter moved to Basel in May 1871 and his first four semesters in university focused mainly on philosophy. At first, the young student proved to be very open towards critical philosophy, thus, he sat “with delight in the philosophical lecture theatre,” and it was Schlatter’s intention to reflect as critically as possible upon his theological position against the backdrop of his pious upbringing.⁴³ In the winter semester of 1871/2, the philosophy professor Karl Steffensen (1816–88) introduced Schlatter to the writings of Benedict de Spinoza (1632–77), which had a significant impact on Schlatter, as his Spinoza studies led to a serious crisis of faith for him around Christmas 1871.⁴⁴ Spinoza’s writings had obviously not only triggered a crisis in Schlatter’s life, but had also, much earlier and on a much larger scale, changed the post-Reformation theological landscape with the first major attempt at what we today call modern historical criticism.

Historian Jonathan Israel argues that in the period from 1650 to 1750 Spinoza was “the chief challenger of the fundamentals of revealed religion, received ideas, tradition, [and] morality.”⁴⁵ Assuming that Schlatter was familiar with Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), he saw himself confronted with an attack on almost everything in which he had been taught to believe. Influenced by Cartesian rationalism and Jewish medieval thought, Spinoza rejected the notion of a personal God and introduced a pantheistic worldview with ‘God,’ or nature, as the one single, supreme reality.⁴⁶ The son of Jewish immigrants from Portugal, Spinoza not only provided a new hermeneutical method, paving the way for modern historical criticism of the bible, but also challenged the traditional post-Reformation view on

⁴³ “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 10.

⁴⁴ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 59.

⁴⁵ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750* (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 159.

⁴⁶ See Donagan, “Spinoza’s Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 343-382.

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Christology.⁴⁷ As regards the latter, Spinoza did not subscribe to the traditional doctrine of Jesus' incarnation,⁴⁸ and he was convinced that Jesus did not perform miracles, which would have been incompatible with the laws of nature.⁴⁹ Moreover, he did not consider Christ a prophet,⁵⁰ nor did he believe that he was divine,⁵¹ or that the resurrection had occurred in the literal sense.⁵² Ultimately, the sole significance of Jesus Christ, according to Spinoza, lay in his abilities as a moral and religious teacher, a humanistic role model to be imitated. Jesus Christ, then, in Spinoza's view, was the philosopher *par excellence*, the 'summus philosophus.'⁵³ With his radical thoughts, Spinoza influenced later Deist and sceptical authors,⁵⁴ and he opened the door for subsequent Enlightenment and idealist thinkers. German idealist Georg W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) once remarked that "Spinoza is the main centre of modern philosophy: either Spinozism or no philosophy at all."⁵⁵ After Spinoza, then, theism was increasingly overshadowed by rational Deism and by Enlightenment philosophy and theology. Gotthold E. Lessing (1729–81) admired Spinoza,⁵⁶ and the 'Reimarus fragments,' which Lessing published in the 1770s, are clearly anticipated by Spinoza's thought.⁵⁷ Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) was thus mistaken when he

⁴⁷ See Israel, "Introduction," in *Theological-Political Treatise*, by Benedict de Spinoza, ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), ix; cf. Harrisville and Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 37.

⁴⁸ "As to the additional teaching of certain Churches, that God took upon himself human nature, I have expressly indicated that I do not understand what they say." Spinoza, *The Letters* (Letter #73), trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1995), 333.

⁴⁹ See Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 91; cf. Israel, "Introduction," xviii-xix.

⁵⁰ Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 63.

⁵¹ See Israel, "Introduction," xviii.

⁵² Spinoza argued that the resurrection had to be interpreted allegorically. Spinoza, *Letters* (Letter #78), 348, see also 338-339 (Letter #75).

⁵³ Hoping, *Einführung in die Christologie*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010), 135.

⁵⁴ Such as John Toland (1670–1722), Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) and others; see Israel, "Introduction," xvii.

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 20, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 163-164.

⁵⁶ Bubser, "Spinoza," in *RGG*, vol. 6, 251.

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argued in his investigation of the *Quest for the Historical Jesus* that “Reimarus had no predecessors.”⁵⁸ One can clearly trace the quest for the historical Jesus to the seventeenth-century criticism of Spinoza.

Still, one wonders whether it was in fact Spinoza’s Christological critique which seriously challenged Schlatter’s faith. Perhaps it was rather Spinoza’s close identification of God and substance, together with what Schlatter later called Spinoza’s “new concept of nature.”⁵⁹ While it is certainly debatable whether Spinoza was a pantheist, Schlatter presumably found this close linking of God, substance and nature both intriguing and unsettling. Intriguing, as he himself grew up developing a high view of nature (as mentioned earlier), but also unsettling as Spinoza’s God had not much in common with the personal Creator-God Schlatter was introduced to in his parental home. Schlatter reflects on his crisis as follows: “There was a time,” he writes, “when I read Spinoza with glowing head, far into the night, in order to figure out whether I could become a follower of Spinoza [*Spinozist*] instead of being a Christian.”⁶⁰ “Even today,” he adds, “I could point to the place in Basel where I came . . . close to blasphemy: ‘God, if you exist, reveal yourself to me.’”⁶¹ Schlatter eventually managed to overcome this existential crisis, particularly with the support of his family and a clear focus on the Scriptures. “What sustained me,” Schlatter is convinced, “was the fact that I remained in constant association with the bible.”⁶² In retrospect, this critical life-event actually helped to consolidate his theological convictions and it would remain his one and only major crisis of faith. In his

⁵⁷ Between 1774 and 1778, Lessing published altogether seven fragments (‘Wolfenbüttel fragments,’ *Fragmente des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten*), originally by Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), which appeared as “Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes” in the journal *Zur Geschichte und Literatur aus den Schätzen der herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttel*. This led to the so-called ‘fragment controversy’ (*Fragmentenstreit*) between Lessing and representatives of Lutheran orthodoxy. Finally, Lessing was banned from publishing works on religion. Lessing, however, continued the discussion by poetic means, for example in his drama, *Nathan der Weise* (published 1779).

⁵⁸ Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, trans. Dennis Nineham (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 24.

⁵⁹ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 58.

⁶⁰ *Rückblick*, 39.

⁶¹ *Rückblick*, 53.

⁶² *Rückblick*, 53.

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continuing intellectual struggle with critical philosophical thought, Schlatter gained substantial support from influential teachers and thinkers, such as Johann T. Beck and Franz von Baader. It is to these significant figures that we turn next.

‘Beck-Enthusiasm’

Johann T. Beck, who was born in 1804, the year Kant died, disapproved of the influx of Enlightenment and idealist thought on theology in his time.⁶³ With the support of the *Christentumsgesellschaft*,⁶⁴ Beck was called to his first university post in 1836 in Basel, in order to balance what the pietists considered the critical teaching of Wilhelm M. L. de Wette.⁶⁵ The year before, David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) had published his *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, which rapidly gained influence in German theological departments—Beck, obviously, responded critically to Strauss’ work.⁶⁶ Later, Beck moved to Tübingen, where he shared the lecture hall with Strauss’ teacher Ferdinand Christian Baur.⁶⁷ Beck, the ‘pietist biblicist,’⁶⁸ could not agree with the mythical viewpoint and the historical scepticism of his liberal adversaries, a view that his student Schlatter was happy to share.

When Schlatter arrived in Tübingen in 1873, Beck was in his final years of teaching, yet still lecturing at the age of seventy.⁶⁹ Schlatter had less than two years in Tübingen and he intended to focus mainly on Beck, thus attending all the lectures

⁶³ For an overview of Beck’s theology, see Claudia Hake, *Die Bedeutung der Theologie Johann Tobias Becks für die Entwicklung der Theologie Karl Barths* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1999), 27-84.

⁶⁴ This support came through the “Verein für christlich-theologische Wissenschaft.”

⁶⁵ Köberle, “Beck,” in *RGG*, vol. 1, 953. Beck taught in Basel from 1836–43 and de Wette from 1822–49.

⁶⁶ With his mythical view outlined in *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*, Strauss treated the New Testament storyline not “as true history, but as a sacred legend.” Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, vol. 1, trans. Marian Evans (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1860), 32. Strauss’ mythical approach and his historical scepticism influenced notable theologians after him, such as Wilhelm Bousset of the ‘history of religion school,’ and the later student of Schlatter, Rudolf Bultmann. Beck, whose life-span overlaps with that of Strauss, clearly rejected Strauss’ mythical critique of the Scriptures. See Riggenbach, *Johann Tobias Beck*, 135-136; cf. Hoffmann, *Das Verständnis der Natur in der Theologie von J. T. Beck* (Phd diss, Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, 1975), 132-139.

⁶⁷ Beck taught in Tübingen from 1843–78 and Baur from 1826–60.

⁶⁸ Beck was, Schlatter notes, heavily influenced by the Swabian pietists, not only by Oetinger, but also by Bengel, Roos, and Rieger. “Becks theologische Arbeit,” 28.

⁶⁹ Schlatter studied in Tübingen from spring 1873 until autumn 1874.

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delivered by him, in dogmatics, hermeneutics and in ethics.⁷⁰ Such was his early ‘Beck-enthusiasm’ (*Beck-Begeisterung*), as Schlatter biographer Werner Neuer observes,⁷¹ that his mother feared he would become a so-called ‘Beckite.’⁷² The then twenty-one year old student was fascinated by the personality and the charisma of his teacher and his style of lecturing. Commemorating Beck’s one hundredth birthday three decades later, Schlatter, then himself professor in Tübingen, explains what attracted his attention:

[H]e has a genuine [*echten*], a real [*wirklichen*] God! Not an idea of God that he processed dialectically, not a God-consciousness [*Gottesbewußtsein*], from which he drew his sentiment; frankly and openly in the lecture hall, not in a chamber in the back, but from within the professor himself this marvellous event came to light: having a God whose word he heard, whose will he did, in whose service he stood with his whole labour.⁷³

One can easily recognise how, in Schlatter’s eyes, Beck’s realist theology differed substantially from idealist theologians who borrowed Hegelian philosophy and ‘processed’ their thoughts ‘dialectically’ (Schlatter has perhaps Strauss in mind, here) and how it was also different from any Schleiermacherian tendencies, where ‘sentiment’ was central to our knowledge of God. This was very much to Schlatter’s liking. He clearly preferred Beck’s theological realism which emphasised God’s concrete revelation in creation over any theological speculation that remained abstract.⁷⁴ Beck thereby reinforced what Schlatter had already learned at home, and

⁷⁰ In the summer semester of 1873, Schlatter attended the following lectures by Beck: ‘Christliche Glaubenslehre, erster Theil,’ ‘Erklärung der Briefe von Timotheus,’ ‘Erklärung der kleinen Propheten.’ In the winter semester of 1873/74, Schlatter attended ‘Glaubenslehre, zweiter Theil,’ ‘Erklärung des Epheserbriefs,’ and in the summer semester of 1874, ‘Christliche Ethik’ and ‘Erklärung der Petribriefe.’ I am grateful to Dr Michael Wischnath, director of the archive of the University of Tübingen, for the kind provision of this information (e-mail message to author, November 16, 2010).

⁷¹ Schlatter’s student letters to his family are marked by a strong enthusiasm for Beck. Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 71.

⁷² Letter to his parents, 13 February 1874, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 74. Beck’s influence on Schlatter is treated elsewhere in more detail. See Neuer, “Das Verhältnis Adolf Schlatters zu Johann Tobias Beck,” *JETH* 2 (1988): 85-95.

⁷³ “Becks theologische Arbeit,” 25-26.

⁷⁴ See Schlatter’s notes in his *curriculum vitae*, “Rückblick auf meinen Entwicklungsgang,” 6 (in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 81); cf. “Becks theologische Arbeit,” 37-39. Similarly to Schlatter’s father, Beck, the “friend of analogies” as Schlatter called him, emphasised creation as the locus of God’s revelation (“Becks theologische Arbeit,” 30). Beck’s “lively devotion to nature [*lebhaft*]

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later, Schlatter encouraged his students—much like Beck—to an independent observation of the Scriptures.⁷⁵ In fact, later, Schlatter regarded his own lectures as ‘seeing-aids’ which should facilitate the students’ own seeing process (*Sehakt*)⁷⁶ and enable them to “hear God in Scripture.”⁷⁷ The student of Beck was convinced that one of the foundational tasks of theology (as of any other science) was observation:

We, as members of the *universitas litterarum*, are therefore called, in the scope of the work appointed to us, to see, to observe with chastity and cleanness . . . This is the *ceterum censeo* for every labour within the university. Science is first seeing, and secondly seeing, and thirdly seeing and again and again seeing.⁷⁸

In addition to Beck’s realism, his clear emphasis on unity, and in particular, the inner cohesion of Scripture impressed Schlatter. Beck could not concur with his liberal contemporaries, such as Strauss, de Wette and Baur, who for his taste went too far as they unduly separated the teaching of Jesus from that of his apostles.⁷⁹ Schlatter very much followed suit. Beck’s emphasis on theological unity,⁸⁰ in particular on Scriptural unity, resonates in Schlatter’s works, for instance in his *History of the Christ* and in his *Theology of the Apostles*, and also in his published lecture on ‘Jesus and Paul’ where he makes the case for the intrinsic unity and continuity of Jesus’ and the apostles’ teaching. “I saw . . . no rift between Jesus’ work and that of his

Naturandacht]” worked as a catalyst for his student’s emphasis on a personal *Anschluss an die Natur*. “Beck’s theologische Arbeit,” 30; see also “Selbstdarstellungen,” 155. For Beck’s theological understanding of nature, see Hoffmann, *Das Verständnis der Natur in der Theologie von J. T. Beck*.

⁷⁵ See *Erlebtes*, 98-100.

⁷⁶ *Rückblick*, 208; see also Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 605-606.

⁷⁷ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 391. “I showed the young folks who came to me how I dealt with the text, set myself before them as an example and lent them my eyes so that they learned to see.” *Erlebtes*, 102.

⁷⁸ “Atheistische Methoden,” 240 [*Glaube und Wirklichkeit*, 79]. This important aspect of ‘seeing’ will occupy us again at a later stage when we shall examine Schlatter’s ‘seeing-act’ more closely. Elsewhere, Schlatter notes: “I remained . . . what I always have been, a realist, and I required the seeing-act of the student, by which he opened himself in observation of the subject matter.” *Rückblick*, 208, cf. 52-53, 240; see also “Atheistische Methoden,” 139; “Christus und Christentum, Person und Prinzip,” 24; “Beck’s theologische Arbeit,” 32; “Religiöse Aufgabe der Universitäten,” 72.

⁷⁹ Beck, *Miscellaneum Pastorale*, 93 in Hoffmann, *Das Verständnis der Natur in der Theologie von J. T. Beck*, 106.

⁸⁰ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 68-71; see also Beintker, “Johann Tobias Beck und die neuere evangelische Theologie,” *ZThK* 102 (2005): 230.

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messengers,” Schlatter asserts in Beckian fashion, “between the work of Peter in Jerusalem and that of Paul among the Greeks, but I possessed a unified New Testament.”⁸¹

Furthermore, Beck also helped Schlatter to reconcile faith and science, a particularly important aspect for Schlatter’s later development as a university professor. Beck personified, in Schlatter’s view, the vision of a (literally) faith-ful scientist. In the lecture hall, remembers Schlatter, Beck was a “confessing Christian and researcher at the same time,”⁸² exemplifying how one could stay true to the biblical tradition while at the same time performing theology as science (*Wissenschaft*). Schlatter later emulated his teacher’s example by emphasizing the scientific character of theology, a subject that in his view had its rightful place at the university.⁸³ The requirement of ‘faith’ for the pursuit of theology was for him not an obstacle to true theological science, as some of his contemporaries suggested,⁸⁴ but was demanded by the subject-nature of theology itself (see our discussion in chapter III on the ‘seeing-act’).

However, though one notices then indeed significant overlaps between Beck and Schlatter, the student did not follow the teacher in every respect. Unlike Beck, Schlatter was, as noted earlier, no biblicist in the strict sense Beck was.⁸⁵ Moreover,

⁸¹ *Rückblick*, 233-234.

⁸² *Rückblick*, 45.

⁸³ This is, in fact, one of the few overlaps between the convictions of Schlatter and his Berlin colleague Adolf von Harnack. Both Schlatter and Harnack argued consistently for theology’s status as an academic subject at the university. See Schlatter, “Religiöse Aufgabe der Universitäten,” 61-79 and Harnack, “Die Aufgabe der theologischen Fakultäten und die allgemeine Religionsgeschichte nebst einem Nachwort,” in *Reden und Aufsätze II/1* (Gießen: J. Ricker’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1904), 159-187. See also my “A Queen without a Throne? Harnack, Schlatter and Kuyper on Theology in the University,” in *The Kuyper Center Review*, vol. 5, ed. Gordon Graham, forthcoming.

⁸⁴ As Paul Jaeger, for instance, argued in “Das ‘atheistische Denken’ der neueren Theologie,” *ChW* 25 (1905): 577-582. Schlatter offered a critical review of Jaeger’s arguments in “Atheistische Methoden,” 228-250.

⁸⁵ In contrast to Beck, Schlatter was more open to a critical approach to the New Testament. For Schlatter, faith *and* critique of the Scriptures—rightly understood—were not at odds but close allies in New Testament research. In Schlatter’s view, “[t]he critique of the bible becomes our vocation on two levels, namely as historical and as dogmatic critique.” *Dogma*, 373, see 372-380 for Schlatter’s position on the authority, infallibility and perspicuity of Scripture. In this context, see also my essay, “Adolf Schlatter on Scripture as Gnadennittel: Remedy for a Hypertensive Debate?,” *Journal of Scottish Theology*, forthcoming. On the theological differences between Schlatter and Beck on the Scriptures see Clemens Hägele, *Die Schrift als Gnadennittel*, 216-233.

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Schlatter could also not agree with Beck's interpretation of the doctrine of justification⁸⁶ and his overall systematic approach⁸⁷ with its ahistorical bent.⁸⁸ This latter point is particularly important. With his own emphasis on concrete history, and on the general historical context of the New Testament events, Schlatter clearly moved beyond his teacher.⁸⁹ Taking into account the historical context, specifically when dealing with Christology, is then a crucial aspect of Schlatter's theological thinking and it will surface time and again in this work. Still, taken as a whole, Beck's influence on Schlatter was considerable. Evidently, Schlatter himself admits that he was in many ways a "follower of Beck."⁹⁰ Beck's theological realism, his focus on the unity of the Scriptures and his synthesis of faith and science provided a solid basis for Schlatter's theological *vita*. Schlatter left Tübingen a changed student, equipped for the theological and Christological debates that lay ahead.

Franz von Baader

If Beck was *the* significant figure during his studies, the most important influence on his "theological and personal development during his time in the diaconate in Neumünster" was Catholic philosopher, physician, engineer and social reformer

⁸⁶ Schlatter complained that Beck deviated too much from Luther as he highlighted ethical renewal at the expense of the forensic aspect of justification. *Rückblick* 46-47. Thus, God's action in making us righteous, Schlatter laments, is pitted against his act of declaring us righteous. This creates an unhealthy dualism which Schlatter intends to avoid with his own account of justification by faith. See his essay "Von der Rechtfertigung" (1883). For a more detailed comparison of Beck's and Schlatter's positions on the doctrine of justification, see Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 20-33. We return to this aspect at a later stage when discussing the 'life-act' in chapter VI.

⁸⁷ From Schlatter's perspective, Beck's dogmatic system was too strict as it was exclusively based on Scripture. Schlatter preferred to develop a broader dogmatic framework by including extra-biblical sources such as history, linguistics, and anthropology. Altogether, Schlatter concludes that "Beck was indeed a determined dogmatist, but he grounded his system on a basis that was not accessible for me." *Rückblick*, 51; cf. "Beck's theologische Arbeit," 38.

⁸⁸ Schlatter speaks of Beck's "fear of history." *Rückblick*, 44; see also "Entstehung der Beiträge," 44.

⁸⁹ While Beck acknowledged the importance of biblical history and one's own, individual *Geschichte*, he neglected, in Schlatter's view, the significance of the general historical context. As a result, Schlatter complains, Beck's approach "remains in a peculiar way confined [*begrenzt*]," primarily due to the fact that Beck "rejected and ignored general history [*Gesamtgeschichte*], which creates societies, peoples, states and churches." "Beck's theologische Arbeit," 31, 37. This was, according to Schlatter, the crucial point "where his [Beck's] work was separated by a wide distance from what theological research is moved by today." "Beck's theologische Arbeit," 37.

⁹⁰ *Rückblick*, 46, 200.

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Franz von Baader (1765–1841).⁹¹ Schlatter was fascinated by Baader's works.⁹² Not only in the course of his pastorate, but also during his first years in Bern as a *Privatdozent*, Schlatter extensively read and excerpted Baader's works. He waded through two-thirds of Baader's complete works, sixteen volumes in total, as one can gather from the unpublished documents in Schlatter's estate.⁹³ What was it that Schlatter found stimulating in Baader's writings? At least three aspects deserve closer attention.⁹⁴ Schlatter appreciated Baader's holistic concept of theological unity based on empirical observation, his relational-volitional emphasis, and his balanced appraisal of orthodox pietism. We shall briefly look at each of these points in turn.

First of all, Baader's approach of taking into account the whole of reality in regards to the theological enterprise strengthened what Schlatter had already learned from Beck a few years earlier. Schlatter welcomes Baader's "movement of thinking towards unity that seeks to examine the totality of events."⁹⁵ Baader also echoes a theological realism Schlatter had encountered similarly in Beck, namely a clear focus on God's revelatory action in creation.⁹⁶ "The insight that knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] is impossible without congruent observation [*Schauen*]," Baader writes, "and that the manner of the one corresponds to the other, has completely disappeared from the newer philosophy."⁹⁷ Schlatter could not agree more. The Beckian-Baaderian conviction, namely that observation is the prerequisite for unified knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) is *the* foundation for Schlatter's theological realism as outlined in his later works. The God who is one, and who creates unity, also ensures that the

⁹¹ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 100.

⁹² Baader himself was deeply influenced by Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803). Baader's works were published between 1851 and 1860 as *Franz von Baader's sämtliche Werke*, 16 vols., ed. F. Hoffmann et al. (Leipzig: Verlag des literarischen Instituts, 1851-1860).

⁹³ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 106. These unpublished documents include "Biblische, theologische und philosophische Begriffe bei Franz von Baader," "Sentenzen aus Franz von Baader," and his lecture, "Baaders Verhältnis zu den wissenschaftlichen Bestrebungen seiner Zeit." In the winter semester of 1884/5, Schlatter devoted a series of lectures to Franz von Baader's theology and philosophy, "Einführung in die Theologie Franz von Baaders."

⁹⁴ For a more comprehensive account see Kindt, *Der Gedanke der Einheit*, 62-122.

⁹⁵ "Idealismus und Erweckung," 20.

⁹⁶ See Lütgert's comments in "Adolf Schlatter als Theologe innerhalb des geistigen Lebens seiner Zeit," *BFChTh* 37, no. 1 (1932): 22.

⁹⁷ Baader, *Werke*, vol. 1, 306, 276, cf. vol. 8, 348-349.

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observer of his works obtains unified knowledge. “As it was God’s work that I was supposed to observe,” Schlatter writes, “I was assured that my thinking would arrive at unity.”⁹⁸ Theology thus has to be concerned with the perception of the whole of God-created reality. In Schlatter’s own words:

The territory that the theological task has to stride across ranges over the whole revelatory work of God. That endows it with a direction to the whole [*Richtung auf das Ganze*] . . . In the idea of God [*Gottesgedanke*] is included the sentence that all being stands in relation to God and that it somehow visualises his power and his will.⁹⁹

These sentences from his ‘Christian Dogma,’ written in the early twentieth century, are clearly rooted in his early encounter with Baader. “Wherever Baader looked,” Schlatter later remarks, “whether he described nature or read the Scriptures, whether he dealt with the movement of thinking or of volition, he was always concerned with the work of the One, from whom and to whom everything is.”¹⁰⁰ By applying the idea of unity through observation to Christology, Schlatter arrives at a unified picture of Jesus Christ, as our discussion in chapter III on the ‘seeing-act’ reveals.

Schlatter was, *secondly*, also sympathetic to Baader’s focus on volition and relation.¹⁰¹ Baader underscores volition as a central human capacity, coining the expression ‘act of the will’ (*Willensakt*),¹⁰² a term Schlatter added to his own theological dictionary.¹⁰³ Moreover, Baader emphasises the reality of concrete volition in our relationship with God; he speaks of the soteriologically relevant ‘union of will’ (*Willenseinigung*)¹⁰⁴ between God and us, through which we receive through Christ a ‘new will’ (*neuer Wille*).¹⁰⁵ As we shall discover later, Schlatter uses the exact Baaderian vocabulary as he develops his own relational-volitional

⁹⁸ “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 63. Schlatter argues that as we are the creation of a God who works unity, the drive for unity is therefore basically implanted in our consciousness (see *Ethik*, 251).

⁹⁹ *Dogma*, 13; see also “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 82-83.

¹⁰⁰ “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 19-20.

¹⁰¹ See Kindt, *Der Gedanke der Einheit*, 78-79 and 87-88.

¹⁰² Baader, *Werke*, vol. 13, 213.

¹⁰³ See *Rückblick*, 93, “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 25.

¹⁰⁴ Baader, *Werke*, vol. 1, 191.

¹⁰⁵ Baader, *Werke*, vol. 8, 156.

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agenda with a view to Christology. Put briefly, Schlatter points to Jesus as being in volitional union with the Father and with us, acting according to his strong ‘will towards the cross’ (*Kreuzeswille*), through which he unites his will with the Father’s ‘will to salvation’ (*Heilandswille*), and thus paves the way for our volitional union with God. We deal with Schlatter’s relational-volitional approach in more detail in the ‘thinking-act’ in part two; for now, we note Baader’s palpable influence on Schlatter’s thinking in this respect.

Thirdly, Schlatter also developed through Baader a more balanced appreciation for his revival and pietist heritage. “Baader’s critical power . . . in the appraisal of pietism and of the Reformation,” writes Schlatter, “were of great help to me.”¹⁰⁶ Studying the writings of the Catholic philosopher, Schlatter was encouraged to take a step back and reflect critically on his own theological tradition, in particular with a view to social ethics. As early as 1835, Baader had published a work on ‘The Situation of the Proletariat’ (*Die Lage des Proletariats*), through which he established himself as one of the earliest nineteenth-century social reformers.¹⁰⁷ Given Baader’s strong social engagement on behalf of the socially disadvantaged, Schlatter wondered whether the contemporary pietist movement might perhaps lag behind, having lost its originally active impetus. “Baader’s rich doctrine of love stood next to the poor evangelical tradition,” Schlatter remarks; as regards to the latter, he observed what he called a “degeneration [*Verkümmerung*] of our evangelical ethic.”¹⁰⁸ Dissatisfied with what was in his view a passive pietism, Schlatter opted for an active ethics of love that was rooted in dogmatics, calling for nothing less than a ‘completion of the Reformation.’ (This important aspect of Schlatter’s work will be discussed in our final chapter VI on the ‘life-act.’)

Taken together, Schlatter received significant stimulation in his theological development through his encounter with Beck and Baader. He was encouraged to bring together faith and scientific theological research; as in any other science,

¹⁰⁶ “Selbstdarstellungen,” 151.

¹⁰⁷ The full title of this work is: *Über das dermalige Mißverhältnis der Vermögenslosen oder Proletaires zu den Vermögen besitzenden Klassen der Sozietät in betreff ihres Auskommens, sowohl in materieller Hinsicht, aus dem Standpunkte des Rechts betrachtet.*

¹⁰⁸ “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 22.

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critical observation was crucial and Schlatter's development of a faith-based theological realism is to a great extent rooted in the ideas of Beck and Baader. Through his empirical 'seeing-act' Schlatter observed, as did his teachers, unity and harmony in Scripture, creation, and, of course, Jesus Christ's words and works, his being and action. We also noted how Schlatter's concern for Jesus' concrete historical context, his volition and relation with God and us, was inspired by these two figures, thus equipping him to meet the challenges of idealist Christological ideas.

Having illustrated both Schlatter's upbringing in the context of the revival movement and the considerable impact of Beck and Baader, one is now able to trace Schlatter's critical interaction with the Christological challenges post-Reformation Protestantism faced at the nineteenth century.

Responding to Idealist Christologies

At the outset, one must point to some characteristics of Schlatter's consideration of idealist approaches to theology. First of all, Schlatter sees the origins of idealist theological critique mainly in Greek philosophy. According to Schlatter, a specific array of philosophical concepts ranges "from Plato in an unbroken tradition through Kant down into the present."¹⁰⁹ Thus one needs to keep in mind that "Schlatter's philosophical argument with 'Greek thought,'" as Werner Neuer claims, "is first and foremost a dispute with idealism."¹¹⁰ "Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant," Schlatter states, "are comparatively small modifications of the same type, namely the Greek type: the human being is reason; its life consists of thinking; and the same applies to the world, because it is thought [*gedacht*], it exists."¹¹¹ While these statements allude to one of Schlatter's main criticisms, namely the attempt to use 'pure reason' (*reine Vernunft*) to conceive of the world apart from empirical observation, they also suggest that Schlatter tends not to be very succinct with regard to philosophical concepts and movements. In fact, he does not seem to distinguish clearly enough between terms

¹⁰⁹ "Briefe über das Dogma," 18; see also *Rückblick*, 40.

¹¹⁰ Neuer, "Der Idealismus und die Erweckung in Schlatters Jugend," 67. See also Neuer's "Einführung," 10-11, and Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 214-224.

¹¹¹ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 212.

such as Enlightenment, Kantianism, idealism, and the like. This oversimplification in his treatment of philosophical concepts obviously limits the validity of his discussion to a certain degree.¹¹² Nevertheless, one has to admit that Schlatter was first and foremost a theologian and only secondly a philosopher, and as such, he could obviously not have been equally an expert on each and every thinker.¹¹³ Rather, the Swiss theologian took a “bird’s eye view” of philosophy—always having in mind the whole picture, the *Richtung auf das Ganze*.¹¹⁴

Taking this into account, we turn to Schlatter’s critique of idealist theology, considering it from his own perspective. In doing so we shall *first* concentrate on Schlatter’s criticism of Kant’s rationalism from the vantage point of his own empirical realism. Based on these considerations we focus, *secondly*, on Christology as the centre of gravity, as we illustrate how Schlatter conceives of a serious discrepancy between the Jesus he encounters in the New Testament and the Jesus of Kant and Hegel. The latter versions reflect in his view Ebionite tendencies as they stress Jesus’ human side as a teacher of morals, while neglecting, and this is our *third* and final point, the soteriological dimension of Jesus’ person and work.

First of all, then, Schlatter saw a fundamental conflict between his own empirical approach and the rationalism of the idealists. Now this does not mean that Schlatter was opposed to reason or rigorous theological thinking. On the contrary, he certainly welcomed Kant’s call, *Sapere aude!*, as his own focus on the theological thinking-act (*Denkakt*) illustrates (more in chapters IV and V).¹¹⁵ Yet Schlatter disagrees with what he considers Kant’s scepticism towards our perceptive abilities and his overconfidence in the capacity of our reason.¹¹⁶ Thus, Kant could not be further away from Schlatter’s empirical realist position, as the former pursued “a

¹¹² See Walldorf’s comments in *Realistische Philosophie*, 282-284.

¹¹³ Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 283.

¹¹⁴ This is how Walldorf describes it in *Realistische Philosophie*, 282.

¹¹⁵ See “Briefe über das Dogma,” 15 and Neuer’s comments in “Der Idealismus und die Erweckung in Schlatters Jugend,” 70.

¹¹⁶ For Schlatter’s critical interaction with Kantian epistemology see his *Philosophische Arbeit*, 115-151 and “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 16-19. See also *Dogma* 90-92.

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pure metaphysics without any intermixture of sense perception.”¹¹⁷ In this sense, Schlatter was certainly correct in assuming a close link between Kant and Platonism.¹¹⁸ Though Kant certainly tried to make room for a substantiated belief in God, the *perfectio noumenon*, he opines—other than Schlatter—that this belief cannot be based on knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) but is rooted in the subjective “longing of our reason” (*Bedürfnis der Vernunft*).¹¹⁹ In this way, Kant intends to “deny knowledge in order to make room for faith” (*das Wissen aufheben, um zum Glauben Platz zu bekommen*).¹²⁰ This was, in Schlatter’s view, a philosophical (and theological) cul-de-sac. Thus, Schlatter demurs that

for Kant, it was certain that the conditions which enabled our thinking were rooted exclusively in reason [*Vernunft*] itself . . . The thinking-process arises within ourselves . . . We thus abide with Leibniz’ *Monas* which produces its imaginations from within itself.¹²¹

Schlatter emphasises that every theology that tries to eke out an existence within the boundaries of mere reason and neglects the observation of concrete reality renders itself absurd.¹²² As soon as theology bids farewell to the close observation of the given facts in creation and the events presented in the New Testament, it deteriorates, becoming “abstract scholasticism,”¹²³ and losing its scientific character.¹²⁴ “A

¹¹⁷ Kant to J. H. Lambert, September 2, 1770, in Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence: 1759-1799*, ed. and trans. Arnulf Zweig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 60.

¹¹⁸ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 145, cf. “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 37.

¹¹⁹ Manfred Kühn, *Kant: Eine Biographie* (München: C.H. Beck, 2003), 304.

¹²⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and transl. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: University Press, 1998), 117 [*Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, Bxxx].

¹²¹ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 109.

¹²² Schlatter’s Dutch contemporary, the theologian Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), argues similarly, “A philosophy which, neglecting the real world, takes its start from reason, will necessarily do violence to the reality of life and resolve nature and history into a network of abstractions . . . If this be unwilling to take revelation as it offers itself, it will detach it from history and end by retaining nothing but a dry skeleton of abstract ideas.” Bavinck, *The Philosophy of Revelation* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908/09), 25.

¹²³ “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 77 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 199].

¹²⁴ “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 79 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 201]. See also his critique in *Philosophische Arbeit*, 112. Again, Bavinck agrees here with Schlatter in noting that “the starting point of all human knowledge is sense perception . . . Truth must not be drawn from books but from the real world. Observation is the source of all real science.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 226.

dogmatician,” contends Schlatter, “who no longer observes but only reasons . . . is at best a poet and at worst a dreamer [*Phantast*].”¹²⁵

According to Kantian epistemology, Schlatter observes, the theologian, by using ‘speculative, critical reason,’ isolates herself from reality, that is, from experience, history and nature, which results in a loss of the world. “Attention to abstraction,” he laments, “replaced entirely the observation of reality.”¹²⁶ Following Aristotle’s dictum that “there is nothing in the intellect which is not first in the senses,”¹²⁷ Schlatter is convinced that Kant’s endeavour of attaining knowledge without relying on empirical observation is destined to failure. The implications for the notion of faith are in Schlatter’s view particularly perilous. Whereas Kant, according to Schlatter’s reading, grounds religion and rational faith in ‘practical reason’ (*praktische Vernunft*), independent of history, Schlatter explicitly intends to ground faith in God’s revelation against the backdrop of concrete history. Whilst Kant, as noted earlier, had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith, Schlatter is emphatic that empirical knowledge is in fact the basis and the prerequisite for faith. The Swiss theologian was not only unhappy with the Königsberg philosopher’s epistemology and its implications for faith, but also disapproved of the corollaries of Kant’s approach for Christology, as we shall see next.

Moving to our *second* point, Schlatter concluded that the abyss between idealism and *Erweckung* was unbridgeable, in particular with a view to Christology. If sixteenth-century Reformation brought into focus matters of ecclesiology, and of course the question of justification, the focus shifted with the rise of the Enlightenment to Christology. “Now, the struggle is about Christ,” claims Schlatter.¹²⁸ Much to his dismay, post-Reformation Protestantism was ill-prepared for a profound Christological debate.¹²⁹ Protestant theology was—much more than

¹²⁵ “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 13 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 153]. In Schlatter’s view the church needed dogmatists who “desired nothing but observation in its austere and sober seriousness.” “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 83.

¹²⁶ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 111.

¹²⁷ Aristotle, *De anima*, III, 4, 430 a 1; cf. Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, chapter 66.

¹²⁸ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 93.

¹²⁹ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 94-96.

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Roman Catholicism—caught off guard by the challenges of the Enlightenment critique. Alister E. McGrath attributes this susceptibility to the relative weakness, at least in comparison to the Roman Catholic Church, of the Protestant ecclesiastical institutions.¹³⁰ Still, the major challenges came not from the outside but from the inside, from the Protestant camp itself. As already mentioned at the outset, many an Enlightenment philosopher descended from a Protestant, often pietistic, background, and the maxim of protest and reformation, *ecclesia reformata, ecclesia semper reformanda*, had always been a central pillar of Protestantism, thus allowing—and even encouraging—a philosophical critique of theology.¹³¹ It is thus no coincidence that the critical ‘lives of Jesus’ (by Reimarus, Strauss and others) and the overall ‘quest for the historical Jesus’ originated from within Protestantism itself. “It is in the nature of things,” writes Schlatter, “that the controversy concentrated on *Christ* and that the ‘Life of Christ’ by Strauß became, within the exceedingly vast Hegelian literature, one of the most famous and effective books.”¹³² To be fair, Schlatter acknowledges that

Many Enlightenment philosophers [*Aufklärer*] had a high esteem for Jesus, notably those of German origin, and for Christianity they showed veneration. They gladly agreed that Jesus was surely sensible and that the religion of the New Testament was the best.¹³³

Be that as it may, Schlatter comes to the conclusion that the Enlightenment Jesus who appeared on the Age of Reason’s stage was a caricature of the New Testament’s Jesus. In his philosophical studies, the student Schlatter had primarily engaged with Kant, Hegel and Schelling, and here, he encountered different Christologies—different ‘Christs,’ as he later put it. There is, for one, the ‘moral Christ of Kant.’ With Kant, notes Schlatter, arose a “new Christology [*neue Christologie*]” that was contrary to the Christology of the New Testament and of the church.¹³⁴ For Schlatter,

¹³⁰ McGrath, *Making of Modern German Christology: 1750-1990* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 18-19.

¹³¹ See McGrath, *Making of Modern German Christology*, 19.

¹³² *Philosophische Arbeit*, 183 (emphasis original).

¹³³ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 88.

¹³⁴ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 143.

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Kant's picture of Christ as the personified idea of the good principle was untenable because it clearly contradicted the findings of his own 'seeing-act,' what he observed in the New Testament documents. Of course, Schlatter was happy to agree with Kant that Jesus was morally perfect, but then again, he was more than that, more than just the incarnation of Kant's categorical imperative. In fact, for Kant, Stephen R. Holmes remarks, and Schlatter would presumably agree, Jesus "is not what is important; the ideal to which he witnessed is."¹³⁵ Hence, one had from Schlatter's perspective, "two Christologies, [namely] one of Kantianism and one of the New Testament."¹³⁶ After 'Kant's Christ' followed the 'Christ of Hegelian idealism,' still in opposition to the Christ of the New Testament and thus to the Christ of the church (whose doctrine needs to be rooted in the biblical facts, Schlatter feels). "The two kind of theologies that stood against each other," he writes, "were distinctly separated . . . they had a different Christology: in Hegel the Christ as the enunciator of an idea that goes beyond him and makes him expendable, - in the church the Christ as the sole and eternal causer of God's gracious will."¹³⁷ This last comment, or rather, the last word, is significant as it directs our attention again to Schlatter's volitional and soteriological angle.

Thirdly, then, this notable absence of the 'gracious will' of God is a crucial reason for Schlatter's dissatisfaction with the idealist versions of Jesus which oscillate between a rational or moral principle of the universe and the spirit coming to self-consciousness, without taking seriously Jesus' soteriological impact on humanity. Throughout his works, Schlatter highlights the organic connection between Jesus Christ's will and work. The Christ Schlatter encounters in the New Testament possesses a concrete volition which finds expression in the actual salvific deed. In regard to idealist Christologies, Schlatter complains:

An individual like Jesus comes into consideration only as an example of a general truth. His being [*Dasein*] and his works [*Wirken*] count for nothing; it is merely a question of his thoughts, his 'doctrines.' The uniqueness of Christ,

¹³⁵ Holmes, *Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 180.

¹³⁶ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 145.

¹³⁷ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 179.

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and his powerful efficacy [*Wirkungsmacht*] towards God as redeemer and towards humans as creator of the community are eliminated. The only title he can assume is that he is the best teacher of morals.¹³⁸

This quote is central for our understanding of Schlatter's objection to idealist Christologies. Jesus is merely presented as a 'teacher of morals,' Schlatter argues, while the intricacy of his 'being' and his 'works' are neglected. What is missing in these portrayals of Jesus, then, in Schlatter's view, is the 'powerful efficacy' of his salvific double-movement, both 'towards God as redeemer and towards humans as creator of the community.' This aspect of Jesus' double-movement is central to Schlatter's relational Christology and will be addressed at the appropriate place (in chapters IV and V on the 'thinking-act'). By way of contrast, Schlatter laments, idealism ignored the doctrine of sin, and it thus did not need to ask for a redeemer or for any soteriological connection with him.¹³⁹ The Jesus who is, in Schlatter's eyes, the redeemer from sin and the creator of the new community was not the Jesus of the Enlightenment thinkers. He writes:

The synoptic Jesus, who issues the call to repentance to the holy and righteous community and who dies in the completion of this mission and thereby creates the new community, was completely veiled for the Kantians. The terms repentance, guilt, judgement, [and] community remained incomprehensible to them.¹⁴⁰

In light of this serious neglect of hamartiology, soteriology, and ecclesiology, Schlatter opposed any proclamation of "idealism from the pulpit," such that sin was tamed and Jesus was reduced to an example for appropriate ethical behaviour.¹⁴¹ The preaching of an idealist Jesus as moral teacher is absurd as ethics is here pursued without soteriology, an impossible shortcut in Schlatter's view. For Schlatter, the ethical deed can only be the consequence of a soteriologically relevant connection

¹³⁸ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 92.

¹³⁹ Schlatter writes: "The Enlightenment did not work with ethical categories and did not preach a penitential sermon [*Bußpredigt*]. How one had to think, how to consider what is reasonable, the temperature of this question differed considerably from that of what one has to will and what sin was." *Philosophische Arbeit*, 88.

¹⁴⁰ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 145.

¹⁴¹ "Idealismus und Erweckung," 17.

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with Jesus Christ. The ethical imperative must be based on the indicative of our relation with God through Jesus Christ. Our existential point of contact with Jesus through faith, the *Anschluss an Jesus*, is not just the only way to our salvation but also the basis for our sanctification. Only in connection with Jesus Christ will one be able to join the ‘holy and righteous community’ that he created by his death. These significant soteriological and also ethical aspects of Schlatter’s relational Christology will be discussed in more detail in the second part of this work (see the ‘life-act’ in chapter VI).

Conclusion

In this section, we have explored the early stages of the genesis and the development of Adolf Schlatter’s Christology. Schlatter’s Christocentric upbringing, with a distinct emphasis on an existential relationship with Jesus Christ through faith, the volitional ‘lived ethics’ of central role models in his family and in his revival background, and the consolidation of both his holistic and empirical-realist theology through Beck and Baader, all contributed to his distinct response to idealist approaches to Christology. From our observations emerge at least five essential pillars of Schlatter’s Christology, namely, unity, observation, history, volition, and relation. These are the key concepts on which Schlatter erects and expands his alternative Christological approach as an answer to idealist views of Jesus Christ. That is, Schlatter *observes* in the New Testament a *unified* account of Jesus Christ who possesses a distinct *will* to perform the concrete *historical deed* of redemption on the cross in order to provide for us an existentially relevant *relation* with God. In the following section, we will continue to trace Schlatter’s theological development as we analyse his responses to the Christological concepts and challenges of his liberal and dialectical contemporaries in Bern, Greifswald, Berlin, and Tübingen. Proceeding this way, we will be able to identify the development of the characteristic shape of Schlatter’s Christology in more detail.

2. Between Ritschl and Confessionalism

This is the question that shall guide our discussion in this section: ‘What sets Schlatter apart from the Christological developments taking place around the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the early twentieth century?’ So far we have pointed to Schlatter’s critical interaction with German idealist theology in the context of his pietist upbringing. In this section we examine more closely how Schlatter interacted with theologians he considered to be influenced by idealist ideas and concepts.

As mentioned in the introduction, one is at this stage faced with a distinct challenge regarding theological terminology. Terms such as liberal theology, Ritschlianism, mediating theology and positive theology must be handled with care as we seek to identify Schlatter’s position in relation to Ritschl and the Ritschlians, who more or less eschewed any theological labelling.¹ As already pointed out, the focus of this study is more on the characteristic profile of individual theologians, which makes the use of labels more or less dispensable. Hence, one is not interested in answering the general question of whether Schlatter was perhaps ‘less liberal’ than Ritschl, but instead the goal is to identify precisely where Schlatter positioned himself in relation to Ritschl and the Ritschlians in matters of Christology. Where exactly did he agree? Where did he disagree, and why? By answering these questions one is adding crucial pieces to the mosaic that makes up Schlatter’s Christological development.

With regards to structure, then, this part is, like the previous one, closely tied to the chronology of Adolf Schlatter’s life and work. We will, *first*, by way of introduction, set the scene by tracing Schlatter’s professional development from his

¹ Joachim Weinhardt, for instance, disagrees with the common approach of labelling Ritschl a liberal theologian. According to Weinhardt, Ritschl himself rejected the label ‘liberal,’ as did Harnack. See Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 71. Weinhardt, along with Neugebauer, considers Ritschl a mediating theologian. See Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 17-18 and “Einleitung,” in *Albrecht Ritschls Briefwechsel mit Adolf Harnack: 1875-1889*, ed. Joachim Weinhardt (Tübingen: Mohr, 2010), 61; cf. Neugebauer, *Lotze und Ritschl: Reich-Gottes-Theologie zwischen nachidealistischer Philosophie und neuzeitlichem Positivismus* (Frankfurt a. Main: Peter Lang, 2002), 2.

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first post in Bern to his call to Greifswald, where he worked alongside Hermann Cremer from 1888 to 1893, and where he joined him in his rejection of Albrecht Ritschl's influential theological programme. Thus, we shall, *secondly*, take a closer look at the specific differences between the Christologies of Adolf Schlatter and Albrecht Ritschl. This paves the way, *thirdly*, for an analysis of Schlatter's interaction with the Christologies of Ritschl's followers and pupils, in particular with Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack. By carefully delineating the dynamic theological frictions between Schlatter and his contemporaries, one is able to determine how central characteristic features of his Christology crystallised during that time.

Christological Struggles: From Bern to Greifswald

Before he became a member of the Greifswald faculty, where he joined Hermann Cremer as one of the major representatives of the Greifswald school, Adolf Schlatter had to endure both personally and theologically a trying time in Bern. Having moved to Bern in 1880, Schlatter was introduced to a Protestant faculty which was dominated by critical rationalists. The considerably smaller positive group included, apart from Schlatter, Samuel Oettli (1846–1911), professor of Old Testament, and two honorary professors, Eduard Güder (1817–82) and Rudolf A. Rüetschie (1820–1903).² The Bern pietist circles had not only successfully arranged to call Oettli to the faculty, but were also responsible for Schlatter's appointment as an additional supporter for the positive camp.³ As previously highlighted, Schlatter did not clearly belong to either the 'positives' or the 'liberals' and he thus became the pawn of two opposing powers, finding himself in a "double frontline position" in Bern, as Peter Stuhlmacher notes, struggling his way towards his doctorate and the ensuing *Habilitation*.⁴ At that time, there was a deep-seated mistrust between the Bern

² See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 145.

³ Oettli had specifically asked for Schlatter as his future collaborator. See "Entstehung der Beiträge," 14-15.

⁴ Stuhlmacher, "Adolf Schlatter," 223.

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pietists and the critical members of the faculty.⁵ Church historian Friedrich Nippold (1838–1918),⁶ a pupil of Richard Rothe (1799–1867), was then the most influential theologian in the Bern faculty.⁷ He saw in Schlatter’s call a conspiracy of the positive forces against the liberals. Nippold complained about this publicly in the newspaper, ‘*Berner Post*,’ asking, “Who, in effect, is it that calls professors to the Bern Protestant faculty?”⁸ As one might expect, Nippold did not welcome Schlatter with open arms, to say the least. Nippold was certainly aware of the fact that Schlatter was influenced by Beck, whom he thought to be not ‘scientific’ and not critical enough towards Scripture. In one of his major works, Nippold complains about Beck, “whose warnings about the sinful flood of criticism [*Sündenflut des Kritizismus*] distracted him all too often from the ABC of the most essential criticism.”⁹ Schlatter thus comments on his first encounter with the Bern church historian:

Its [the faculty’s] most influential man back then was the church historian Nippold, who announced his strong desire to lead Bern’s church clergy and who was engaged in a passionate struggle with the city’s pietists. Upon my request to sit the faculty’s exam [*Fakultätsexamen*], he answered: ‘The only thing you have to do is to pack your suitcase immediately and leave.’¹⁰

This Schlatter did not do. As a result, he was obviously more or less isolated at the outset of his academic career. Schlatter himself attributes the differences between him and the Bern faculty to a substantially different Christological outlook. He writes:

⁵ Schlatter witnessed this theological tension between the ecclesiastical party and the university faculty not only in Bern. Later, in particular during his time in Berlin, he would be personally challenged to take a stand either for the church or the faculty. We will explore this in more detail below when we consider the so-called struggle over the Apostles’ Creed of 1892.

⁶ For a brief summary of Nippold’s theology, see Lessing, *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen evangelischen Theologie*, vol. 1, 211-212.

⁷ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 144. Up to Ritschl’s break with the Tübingen school, Nippold was closely affiliated with Ritschl. Later, Nippold would heavily criticise Ritschl for not being ‘liberal’ enough. See Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 24.

⁸ “Wer beruft denn eigentlich die Professoren an der Berner evang.-theologischen Fakultät?” See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 145.

⁹ Nippold, *Geschichte des Protestantismus seit dem deutschen Befreiungskriege - 1. Buch: Geschichte der deutschen Theologie*, vol. 3 of *Handbuch der neuesten Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin: Wiegandt & Schotte, 1890), 356.

¹⁰ “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 17.

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The battle for which I was recruited emerged from [the question of] the Christ, not from single dogmas, the doctrine of justification or pneumatology . . . but from the claims we were making about Jesus. The other theology tried to prove that Jesus was not the Christ and sought to call forth a religious movement that would carry us away from him and over and above him. I, on the other hand, stood near to those who saw God's grace in Jesus and had in him their Lord . . . [I was] coerced to live by faith, only by faith, but by faith I lived.¹¹

Christology, as this quote illustrates, was central to Schlatter, the factor which decided whether fellowship was possible or rendered impossible. Time and again conflicts between him and his colleagues would ignite due to different positions on Jesus Christ, as we shall see throughout this section.

Having completed his first major academic project, the 1885 'Faith in the New Testament' (*Glaube im Neuen Testament*), Schlatter was curious as to how his colleagues would receive it. But they remained silent, much to Schlatter's disappointment.¹² While the Bern faculty rejected Schlatter's first major opus, it won the attention of the Greifswald professor, Hermann Cremer (1834–1903),¹³ and 'Faith in the New Testament' became Schlatter's passport to the professorship in Greifswald.¹⁴ In 1888, Schlatter thus followed "Cremer's call" (*Cremer's Ruf*), as he himself says, and he became the successor of New Testament scholar Erich Haupt (1841–1910), who had relocated to Halle (Saale).¹⁵ This was the beginning of a fruitful collaboration between Schlatter and Cremer, who was almost twenty years older than his Swiss colleague. In due course, Greifswald would become known as a centre for theologians who critically engaged with Ritschl and his followers, and they attracted theology students from all over Europe. Together with Martin Kähler

¹¹ *Rückblick*, 92.

¹² "The Bern faculty remarked not one syllable on my book," Schlatter complains. "Entstehung der Beiträge," 60.

¹³ "Entstehung der Beiträge," 61.

¹⁴ Apparently, apart from Schlatter's monograph on 'Faith in the New Testament,' which was obviously a crucial stimulus, it was Schlatter's Bern lectures on prayer that tipped the scales for Cremer to "lobby vigorously for Schlatter's appointment," as Ernst Cremer notes, in his *Hermann Cremer: Ein Lebens- und Charakterbild* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1912), 138. See also Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 229.

¹⁵ *Rückblick*, 125.

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(1835–1912), professor of systematic theology and New Testament exegesis at the Martin-Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg,¹⁶ only a few hours away by train from Greifswald, Schlatter and Cremer formed an influential theological triumvirate.¹⁷

Hermann Cremer and Adolf Schlatter identified as their common goal a biblically founded critical interaction with both Ritschl's theology on the one hand and rigid pietist orthodoxy on the other. In 1897, Schlatter and Cremer founded the journal 'Essays for the Furtherance of Christian Theology' (*Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*) as the leading organ of the Greifswald school. This was, in a way, an answer to the Ritschlian 'Journal for Theology and the Church' (*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*). Schlatter and Cremer worked together despite a confessional divide as Schlatter came from the Reformed tradition and Cremer was a strict Lutheran. However, this represented no barrier to a deep and fruitful collaboration. Schlatter clearly appreciated Cremer's Lutheranism,¹⁸ though he did not feel compelled to convert to his confession.¹⁹ What united the two Beck students was not so much a confessional connection as their agreement on basic features of their teacher Beck's theology. In that respect, Schlatter writes:

We arrived at an agreement because we both desired a theology of faith, not an ignorant, unfounded faith, but a faith that is conscious of its truth and thereby able to point to its foundation; no more a godless theology that is driven by its fight against God and its struggle against Jesus, but such a science that finds in the faith that is given to us by Jesus its foundation and guidance . . . Cremer, too, was primarily a Christian . . . [he was] first of all connected with Christ and therefore a part of . . . the church. On this basis,

¹⁶ Kähler taught in Halle-Wittenberg from 1867 until his death in 1912. Among Kähler's students were Julius Schniewind (1883–1948), Hans Emil Weber (1882–1950), and Karl Müller (1852–1940).

¹⁷ The basis for their theological agreement lies, to a great extent, in their similar educational background. Kähler and Cremer had both studied in Halle and were influenced by Julius Müller (1801–78) and the Schleiermacher-opponent and Strauss-critic August Tholuck (1799–1877). Both Kähler and Cremer were also influenced by the Erlangen theologian Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann (1810–77). See Lessing, *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen evangelischen Theologie*, vol. 1, 44. In Tübingen, they sat, as Schlatter did later, under the teaching of Johann T. Beck. The three Beck students thus shared major theological common ground, such as their understanding of theology as science and, in particular, their strong Christological emphasis.

¹⁸ See *Erlebtes*, 47–48, and also Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 226.

¹⁹ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 237.

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the son of the Westphalian pietist shook hands with the son of the Swiss Baptist without any difficulty.²⁰

This is clearly reminiscent of Beck: a biblically rooted theology of faith, where faith rests on the secure foundation of facts, together with an appreciation of well-founded scientific research which does not, however, forget the existential connection with Jesus Christ. It was through the Beckian heritage that Schlatter and Cremer sought to answer the claims of Ritschl and the Ritschlians. In general, Hermann Cremer was more engaged in the public debate with Ritschlian theology than Schlatter, especially in his spirited political struggle with Adolf von Harnack during the so-called ‘struggle over the Apostles’ Creed’ (*Apostolikumsstreit*), which will be considered at the appropriate place later. Even so, Schlatter explicitly positioned himself theologically in relation to Ritschl and his followers, as he recognised the growing influence of their theological ideas in Protestant Germany. He might not have been as politically active as Cremer, yet Schlatter clearly addresses Ritschl’s theology in his lectures, in his speeches and later in his *Dogma*.

In what follows, we enter uncharted theological territory. The theological, and in particular, Christological differences between Schlatter and Ritschl have so far escaped scholarly attention. Our comparison of their views lays the foundation for our subsequent discussion of Schlatter’s position in relation to Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack. A comprehensive assessment of the Christological outlooks of Schlatter, Ritschl and the Ritschlians would easily fill a book on its own and thus lies beyond the scope of our study. The strategy, therefore, must be to provide a sufficiently concise comparison while doing justice to the inherent complexities of their theological programmes, always with a view to chiselling out Schlatter’s Christological characteristics in the process.

A Critique of Ritschl’s Christology

Before we turn to Schlatter’s critique of Ritschl in more detail, it might be helpful *first* to illustrate briefly some of Ritschl’s main theological concepts, before we turn, *secondly*, to Schlatter’s critique of the Göttingen professor’s Christological

²⁰ *Rückblick*, 137-138; cf. “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 72.

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programme, thereby revealing at the same time significant features of Schlatter's own view of Jesus Christ.

Key Aspects of Ritschl's Christology

Who, then, was Albrecht Ritschl and what were his central theological ideas?²¹ In the 1840s, Ritschl had studied in Bonn, Tübingen and Halle, and he was strongly influenced by Schleiermacher, Kant, and his teacher Ferdinand Christian Baur (although he later dissociated himself from Baur and the Tübingen school).²² After teaching for some time in Bonn, Ritschl lectured in Göttingen from 1864 until the end of his life. His most important contribution, which also marks the starting point for the so-called Ritschl school, is *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation (Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung)*.²³ It was published in three volumes between 1870 and 1874, just while Schlatter was studying in Basel and Tübingen, and, as Schlatter's discussion of Ritschl's work a few years later reveals, he must have read it very closely at the time.²⁴

Three features are central to Ritschl's theology: the 'kingdom of God' (*Reich Gottes*), the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the 'value judgements' (*Werturteile*) of the Christian community. Ritschl creatively combines these features like this:

²¹ For an introduction to Ritschl's theology, see Joachim Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 1-29, and also his "Einleitung" to *Albrecht Ritschls Briefwechsel mit Adolf Harnack*, 1-113. See also Christine Axt-Piscalar's "Einleitung der Herausgeberin," in *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, by Albrecht Ritschl, ed. Christine Axt-Piscalar (Tübingen: Mohr, 2002), ix-xi. In addition, we have drawn upon Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson's short summary, *Twentieth Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992), 51-59 as well as James Richmond's work, *Ritschl: A Reappraisal* (London: Collins, 1978), 168-219. See also Rolf Schäfer, *Ritschl: Grundlinien eines fast verschollenen Systems* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 45-67.

²² At the outset, Ritschl followed his teacher Ferdinand C. Baur, who was based in Tübingen (where Ritschl studied from August 1845 to April 1846). Later, in the 1850s, however, Ritschl broke with Baur. He could not support Baur's attempt to explain the origins of Christianity without miracles. See Weinhardt, "Einleitung," 29, 33.

²³ Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 7.

²⁴ While there are no explicit references to his Ritschl reading in Schlatter's personal records from his student time, one must assume that he studied Ritschl's works closely sometime between 1874 and 1880, as Schlatter refers to Ritschl in his 1881/82 lecture, "Geschichte der spekulativen Theologie seit Cartesius." I am grateful to Werner Neuer for clarification of this matter (e-mail message to author, December 18, 2013).

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God's loving purpose²⁵ with this world is to build the kingdom of God, which is the "universal ethical fellowship of humankind," and at the same time the fulfilment of humanity's highest good.²⁶ Human beings, says Ritschl, deliver value judgements on the kingdom of God, which is revealed in—and established by—Jesus Christ. Ritschl's value judgements are central in this context, as they point to his clear neo-Kantian trajectory. Value judgements, according to Ritschl, belong to the sphere of 'religious knowledge' (or, in Kantian terminology, 'practical reason') which has to be distinguished from 'scientific knowledge,' the neutral, disinterested observation of reality. Relevant for Ritschl, however, is the former, 'religious knowledge,' where the Christian makes subjective value judgements on reality.²⁷

This epistemological position has obvious implications for Christology. The 'divinity of Christ,' for instance, is according to Ritschl an objective topic, which belongs to the scientific realm, rather than to the religious arena.²⁸ As a consequence, Ritschl excludes the Chalcedonian affirmation of Christ's divinity as idle, rejecting it as a scientific-objective assertion which thus has no theological, religious value.²⁹ Now if it is not Jesus' divinity, as traditionally understood, which makes Jesus unique, what is it then? This is where we must turn to Ritschl's notion of Jesus' unique role, his 'vocation' (*Beruf*) in respect to the kingdom of God, given to him by the Father.³⁰ Jesus' vocation is unique as his own preaching, his volition and his

²⁵ The notion of God's love is central to Ritschl's system. "The exhaustive Christian concept [*Begriff*] of God is love." *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1881), 9 (§ 11).

²⁶ Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, trans. Hugh R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1900), 449 (§ 48). On the kingdom of God, see Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, 334-335.

²⁷ Grenz and Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology*, 54.

²⁸ Ritschl contends: "But if Christ by what He has done and suffered for my salvation is my Lord, and if, by trusting for my salvation to the power of what He has done for me, I honour Him as my God, then that is a value-judgment of a direct kind. It is not a judgment which belongs to the sphere of disinterested scientific knowledge, like the formula of Chalcedon." *Justification and Reconciliation*, 398.

²⁹ In his evaluation of Ritschl, Richmond explains that, "Ritschl and his nineteenth-century contemporaries did not understand Christ's deity in terms of *substance*, nor of *consubstantiality* with God, simply because such terms had become in post-Enlightenment Germany unintelligible, not to say meaningless." *Ritschl: A Reappraisal*, 172 (emphasis original).

³⁰ "His vocation, however," writes Ritschl, "is unique in its kind; for its special character is directed to the general moral task [*allgemeine sittliche Aufgabe*] as such, in other words to the founding of the

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performance (all revolving around the kingdom of God) are uniquely directed to the moral good of humankind, which is, as noted earlier, at the same time also God's highest goal.³¹ Thus, in his morally perfect life on earth, in particular his patient sufferings, Jesus has demonstrated the unity of his will and work with God's purpose for humankind.³² As a result, based on the value of Christ's life for God and the community, Christians address and confess him as 'God,' ascribing to him divine status. Ritschl thus writes that "we know the nature of God and Christ only in their worth for us."³³

Based on this brief overview of Ritschl's key concepts and thoughts, we are now in a position to turn to Schlatter's critical evaluation of the Göttingen professor's Christology.

Schlatter on Ritschl

Schlatter deals with Ritschl's theology to a great extent in his 1884 Bern lecture, 'Christology and Soteriology.' One also finds some critical interaction in his annotations in the 'Christian Dogmatics,' where Schlatter refers to Ritschl more than to any other theologian (a total of fourteen times, an unusual frequency for Schlatter, who, as noted earlier, generally hesitated to refer to secondary material in his works). These two sources are thus crucial references for our discussion in the following section.

Overall, Schlatter commends Ritschl for re-importing the lost notion of the *relational aspect of Christology*. Ritschl, in Schlatter's eyes, rightly underlines the vital communion between Jesus and his disciples, between the community and its

Kingdom of God and the community destined for this task . . . Therefore nobody can directly imitate Him; and an imitation which selects particular visible aspects of His life-course would still be no imitation of Christ." *Justification and Reconciliation*, 589 (emphasis mine).

³¹ Ritschl contends that "the vocational task of Jesus Christ [*Berufsaufgabe Jesu Christi*], or, the ultimate goal of his life, namely, the kingdom of God, is . . . God's ultimate goal in the world." *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, 20 (§ 23).

³² Ritschl, *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*, 20 (§22). Ritschl somewhat avoids elaborating further on the nature of Christ's union with God. This sphere is, according to Ritschl, not accessible to the theologian: "One has to resist all attempts to go behind this fact: how it is brought to existence in detail, how it thus has become empirical." Ritschl, *Theologie und Metaphysik: Zur Verständigung und Abwehr* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1881), 29.

³³ Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, 212.

founder. Hence, Schlatter appreciates that Ritschl “seriously considered afresh the church as the instrument of the divine dominion.”³⁴ Moreover, Schlatter feels that Ritschl’s notion of the value judgement is, in comparison to Schleiermacher’s agenda, an improvement, as it complements Schleiermacher’s emphasis on feeling with a “cognitive component” (*intellektuelle Moment*).³⁵ However, Schlatter is also keen to highlight where he parts with Ritschl; three points deserve closer scrutiny. *First*, Schlatter feels that Ritschl ends up in subjective theological speculation as he neglects empirical observation as the essential starting point for theology, with damaging implications for the notion of faith (one is reminded, here, of Schlatter’s Kant critique, introduced earlier). What is also missing in Ritschl’s system, Schlatter claims, is *secondly*, a clear focus on Jesus’ historical rootedness, again a point of critique that Schlatter had also directed at idealist Christologies. He is, *thirdly*, unhappy with Ritschl’s exclusive emphasis on Jesus’ ‘vocation’ (*Beruf*) without doing equal justice to his ‘office’ (*Amt*), as this leads in his view to a downplaying of Jesus’ divinity and thus also of his soteriological impact upon humanity.

First of all then we turn to Schlatter’s overall epistemological evaluation of Ritschl’s approach. Having already discussed Schlatter’s critique of Kantian ‘Christology,’ one will notice a similar pattern emerging here as Schlatter deals with Ritschl’s neo-Kantian theology. Not a friend of dualisms, Schlatter evidently disapproves of Ritschl’s distinction between ‘religious knowledge’ (through the value judgement) and objective ‘scientific knowledge.’ While Schlatter agrees with Ritschl that the cognitive, ‘judgement-forming’ dimension is central to dogmatics—one thinks of Schlatter’s notion of the ‘thinking-act,’ the *Denkakt*—he laments that Ritschl relates the judgement to the subjective realm rather than the objective sphere. This is regrettable insofar as Ritschl’s ‘religious knowledge,’ then, Schlatter feels, is lacking any substance and universal validity. Ritschl’s value judgements, Schlatter argues, do not “refer to the being of things,” but instead express how one “wants to perceive things.”³⁶ As Ritschl is critical of the empirical

³⁴ *Dogma*, 603n289.

³⁵ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 25.

³⁶ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 25.

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knowability of God's revelation in creation and history, the value judgement lacks any substantial foundation.³⁷ "It is indeed an essentially different form of logical reasoning," Schlatter writes, "whether we deal with the question 'What is?,' or [whether we] ask 'What is that which is being worth for us?' [*was ist das Seiende für uns wert?*]."³⁸ While neglecting the first question, Schlatter thinks, Ritschl deals predominantly with the second question, whereby he ends up in a kind of theological relativism. Schlatter explains:

The task of determining the value of a fact is rendered possible only when the fact has become known to us. When one negates the knowability of a fact, the value judgement becomes worthless; it becomes the postulate of individual discretion. This is no longer a scientific mode of operation, for it is no longer a reasonable act.³⁹

Thus for Schlatter, the "basis" on which Ritschl builds his value judgement is simply "too narrow."⁴⁰ In contrast to Ritschl, the Swiss empirical realist is confident that our value judgement, or, our 'thinking-act,' so to speak, must be based on an empirical 'seeing-act,' where the theologian observes the objective facts, confident that she will gain reliable knowledge in the process. Only in this way, Schlatter claims, will theologians be able to make a case for universally valid truth statements.⁴¹ As theology assesses and postulates propositional truth claims, through the close observation of the "objectively given fact" (*objektiv gegebene Thatbestand*), theology establishes itself as a rightful member of the academy.⁴² Furthermore, Schlatter is convinced that Ritschl's approach also has significant implications for faith. Thus for faith to be a reliable faith, it must be based on trustworthy, universally valid truth claims, Schlatter maintains. Yet this is not the case with Ritschl's value judgements, as they do not meet the serious demands of the "truth claim" without

³⁷ Cf. Weinhardt, "Einleitung," 50.

³⁸ "Christologie und Soteriologie," 26.

³⁹ "Christologie und Soteriologie," 27.

⁴⁰ *Rückblick*, 158-159.

⁴¹ "Christologie und Soteriologie," 28.

⁴² "Religiöse Aufgabe der Universitäten," 72n1.

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which faith is denied “its sufficient base.”⁴³ In Ritschl’s system then, Schlatter feels, any certainty of faith does seem to lie outside the reach of the Christian. Faith, notes Schlatter, in order to be a confident faith in Jesus Christ, must be based on a “given reality” (*ein Gegebenes Reelles*), a concrete revelation in history.⁴⁴ This brings us to our *second* point.

From Schlatter’s perspective, history in the general sense, and even more so history as the specific story of Christ, the ‘history of the Christ’ must be an essential element of Christology. It is the concrete historical setting which “sets the stage for Jesus’ appearance . . . when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, Gal. 4.”⁴⁵ However, Ritschl’s Christ is not sufficiently rooted in history, Schlatter complains. Jesus’ historical context, with its significant impact on the community, he asserts, was not adequately recognised by Ritschl and his colleagues.⁴⁶ More specifically, it seems to Schlatter that Jesus’ actual words and deeds recede to the background, whereas the ideas the early community had of Jesus, the “representations of the original consciousness of the community,” take centre stage.⁴⁷ In contrast, Schlatter underlines that the concrete history of the person and work of Jesus Christ was from the very beginning deeply intertwined with the history of the community. He continually points to the historical context-relatedness of Jesus’ person and work.⁴⁸ Thus, Schlatter sees an objective historical contingency in Jesus Christ’s being in action. There is a continuity which ranges from Jesus’ own works

⁴³ *Rückblick*, 158-159.

⁴⁴ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 21.

⁴⁵ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 38-39.

⁴⁶ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 40.

⁴⁷ Ritschl’s understanding of traditional doctrines as “correlative representations of the original consciousness of the community,” is surely different from Schlatter’s view of the traditional doctrines’ universal validity. Ritschl writes, “Thence follows for our present task, however, that the material of the theological doctrines of forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation is to be sought not so much directly in the words of Christ, as in the correlative representations of the original consciousness of the community.” *Justification and Reconciliation*, 3. David L. Mueller argues that for Ritschl the “apostolic circle of ideas” was even more significant than the New Testament. Mueller, *Introduction to the Theology of Albrecht Ritschl* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 45-47.

⁴⁸ Jesus, writes Schlatter, “comes upon it [the messianic idea] as a product of the Old Testament history, as a firm possession of the community into whose midst he was born as their member.” “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 39.

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via the ‘deeds of the apostles’ down to the early Christian community (and even to our context today);⁴⁹ in fact, the titles of Schlatter’s two-volume New Testament theology reflect his emphasis on this causal continuity: *The History of the Christ* (volume one) and *The Theology of the Apostles* (volume two). Schlatter fears that Ritschl overlooks this causal connection and substitutes for it a correlative relation, thus somewhat loosening the deep historical connection between Jesus, his apostles and the early community of faith.

With this we are moving, *thirdly*, closer to the centre of Schlatter’s critique. Perhaps Schlatter’s main concern with Ritschl’s Christology was his almost exclusive focus on Jesus’ vocation (*Beruf*), paired with the neglect of his messianic office (*Amt*). In other words, for Schlatter, the divinity of Jesus Christ in Ritschl’s account is reduced to the value it has for humankind. According to Schlatter’s reading of Ritschl, Jesus’ divinity is here limited to a subjective value judgement about Jesus’ perfect performance in achieving God’s and humanity’s highest good as the “Founder of the Kingdom of God in the world.”⁵⁰ Schlatter is convinced that the objective question of who Jesus is *in se* is intrinsically tied to the question of what value he has for us, *pro nobis*. Only when these questions are considered a unity, Schlatter contends, will the unity of ‘Christology and Soteriology’ make any sense.⁵¹ Thus, what Schlatter seems to miss in Ritschl’s programme is a clear commitment to the concept of Christ’s office. “Ritschl only acknowledged the vocation [*Beruf*],” remarks Schlatter, “and rejected the office [*Amt*] . . . The consequences of this sentence are disadvantageous as the royal goal of Jesus . . . must now be reframed.”⁵² What Schlatter hints at here is that Ritschl’s neglect of Christ’s office leads, in his view, to a constrained soteriology, in particular, to a fragmented *theologia crucis*. Schlatter complains that Ritschl merely speaks of Jesus’ *Berufstreue*, his ‘faithfulness to his vocation,’ whereas Schlatter rather intends to stress Jesus’

⁴⁹ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 10-12.

⁵⁰ Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation*, 451.

⁵¹ This crucial aspect of Schlatter’s agenda shall be addressed later, in chapters IV and V.

⁵² *Dogma*, 564n54.

Pflichttreue, namely his ‘faithfulness to his duty’ as the bearer of the cross.⁵³ Jesus’ faithfulness to his duty is made tangible in his concrete ‘will to the cross’ (*Kreuzeswille*), which includes, Schlatter feels, more than Ritschl’s term.⁵⁴ The following quote summarises well Schlatter’s Ritschl-critique:

Jesus does not set himself up as an example that should remind [the Christian] of God, as the one who represents him, but God acts through him, precisely in that he dies. In this way God’s lordship comes about, by reconciling us to himself. Neither does one find in Jesus the notion that he is supposed to represent humanity before God and remind him of it. In fact, just because God knows us and calls us to himself, that is, for the sake of the kingdom of God, does he unite himself with us, the sinful and dying, so that God’s forgiveness might become ours. Substitution does not illustrate a thought, it does not symbolise an idea, but it is the creative deed of love . . . This is why Christ’s office [*Christusamt*] and his cross are in Jesus not two diverging goals, but, as he is the Lord of God’s community, he becomes the crucified [One], and because he is the crucified [One], he becomes our Lord.⁵⁵

As this suggests, Schlatter feels that Ritschl, on his way to unfolding the paradigm of the kingdom of God, is taking a ‘Christological shortcut,’ as it were. Ritschl proceeds exclusively, Schlatter laments, via Jesus’ vocation in relation to humanity, while he fails to take into account the soteriological significance of Jesus’ sacrificial and efficacious work in history, mutually directed towards the Father *and* towards us, in which he at the same time vindicates his divinity by becoming the Lord over the new community. Ritschl’s position, as Schlatter reads it, is then a stark “reduction of [Jesus’] office, which not only displays but establishes the communion [between God and humanity].”⁵⁶ In other words, what Schlatter misses is a clear emphasis on the divine status of the Son of God, who is in perfect relation with the Father and with humanity, and who performed the historical deed on the cross, through which we are

⁵³ *Dogma*, 291. See also his “Introduction” to “Christologie und Soteriologie.”

⁵⁴ He writes: “Defining Jesus’ will to the cross [*Kreuzeswille*] only with the formula *Berufstreue* means that one identifies Jesus’ work merely with the action that preceded his end, whereby death puts an end to it and becomes a disaster for him . . . This does not only contradict the apostles’ teaching of the cross but also Jesus’ action; he did not see in his death a disaster against which he must protect himself and which he, after it became unavoidable, had to translate into a positive value by remaining true [*treu*] to himself.” *Dogma*, 584n167.

⁵⁵ *Dogma*, 585n173.

⁵⁶ *Dogma*, 585n173.

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now invited to enjoy an existential connection with him as members of the new community of faith.

Having identified key Christological differences between Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf Schlatter, one can now return to the broader question: ‘Where was Adolf Schlatter relative to Ritschl?’ In general, one observes a significant overlap between the two theologians as they both put the person and work of Jesus Christ back into the theological spotlight of their day. Looking at it more closely, though, significant differences emerge. Ritschl and Schlatter disagree on significant epistemological prolegomena which has, as we have just seen, far-reaching consequences for their different Christological trajectories. Still, Joachim Weinhardt and Peter Stuhlmacher claim that both Ritschl and Schlatter occupy a “double frontline position” (*doppelte Frontstellung*), namely between liberalism and confessionalism.⁵⁷ Assuming that this might be a correct observation, one must clearly highlight that they aim their ‘attacks’ at different directions. While Ritschl directed his critique also against the theological liberalism of his later followers, Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack,⁵⁸ his main criticism, it seems, aims at traditional orthodoxy (which explains why Karl Barth considered Ritschl a ‘liberal’—and this label had no positive connotation for Barth at all).⁵⁹ Adolf Schlatter, on the other hand, certainly criticised the rigid Protestant pietism of his days (calling for a ‘completion of the Reformation,’ as we will discuss more closely in chapter VI),⁶⁰ but Ritschl and his followers were obviously much more in the line of fire. That said, one needs to be very careful when using the label ‘mediating position,’ always defining precisely how one expects this to apply to Schlatter and Ritschl.

⁵⁷ Weinhardt, “Einleitung,” 72; Stuhlmacher, “Adolf Schlatter,” 223.

⁵⁸ Weinhardt, “Einleitung,” 71-72.

⁵⁹ Barth, for example, writes to his friend Eduard Thurneysen, “He [Ritschl] is really a bad egg, in his way no less dire than Schleiermacher, if anything, worse.” *Barth-Thurneysen: Briefwechsel*, vol. 2, *Briefwechsel 1921-1930*, ed. Eduard Thurneysen (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1973), 588. For a balanced evaluation of this critique see McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 53n41, 299-300.

⁶⁰ See also my essay, “Good Will Hunting: Adolf Schlatter on Organic Volitional Sanctification,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 55/1 (2012): 125-143.

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In the course of Schlatter's career, Ritschl's influence somewhat diminished and Schlatter critically followed the growing influence of Ritschl's pupils, Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack.⁶¹ In what follows, we will analyse Schlatter's critique of Herrmann and Harnack, always with a view to identifying the important building-blocks of Schlatter's own Christology.

Schlatter, the Ritschlians and the Question of the Christ

Adolf Schlatter very much enjoyed working in Greifswald among like-minded colleagues; he called the Protestant faculty "one big family."⁶² This explains why he rejected several calls from notable universities during that time. In 1890, Schlatter was called to the University of Heidelberg (against the will of the faculty), and he was tempted to accept, as the Neckar town was much closer to his *Heimat* Switzerland than Prussian Greifswald.⁶³ Schlatter, however, declined, as his engagement in Greifswald was proving to be successful and fulfilling. Not much later, Schlatter was offered a chair at the University of Bonn, which he also declined.⁶⁴ Two years later, in June 1892, Schlatter received a call to Marburg—in spite of Ritschl pupil Wilhelm Herrmann's "strong misgivings" (*schwere Bedenken*).⁶⁵ Systematician Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922), professor in Marburg since 1879, was aware of Schlatter's critical stance towards his theological approach and was, understandably, not enthusiastic about working alongside Schlatter.⁶⁶ Much

⁶¹ This was not only because Ritschl died in 1889 and could no longer defend his position personally, but also because Ritschlianism separated into a left and right wing around the events of 1892, the struggle over the Apostles' Creed.

⁶² Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 146.

⁶³ Letter to his mother, 1 May 1890, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 290.

⁶⁴ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 290.

⁶⁵ Proceedings of the Marburg theological faculty, 4 May 1892, in Stupperich, "Adolf Schlatters Berufungen," 107, 114.

⁶⁶ Wilhelm Herrmann was *the* major systematician of the Ritschl-school. Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 2. Ritschl himself, as well as Martin Rade, even considered him the actual founder of the Ritschl school. Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 126. For a concise overview of Herrmann's life and work see Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 49-66.

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to Herrmann's relief, Schlatter, though "quickly" and "without much consideration," declined the offer.⁶⁷

In what follows, we shall *first* turn to Schlatter's reaction to Herrmann's Christology before we deal, *secondly*, with the personal and, especially, theological relationship between Schlatter and Harnack.

On Herrmann's *Communion of the Christian with God*

When Herrmann published his major work, the *Communion of the Christian with God* (*Verkehr des Christen mit Gott*, 1886), Schlatter responded in the same year with a lengthy, critical review, 'From the inner life of the Ritschl school' ("Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls"). In many ways, Schlatter's treatment of Herrmann is reminiscent of his Ritschl-critique, although Schlatter clearly takes into account the specific aspects in which Herrmann further develops Ritschl's approach. We will highlight three major points of Schlatter's critique. *First* of all, Schlatter expresses his approval of Herrmann's focus on the individual believer's relation with God through Jesus Christ; the basis for this relation, in Herrmann's work, however, is, *secondly*, too weak in Schlatter's eyes as it is not based on objective facts, which has, *thirdly*, damaging effects on the concept of faith and, of course, Christology.

To open then on a positive note, Schlatter is clearly happy with Herrmann's focus on the Christian's communion with God. Perhaps more than Ritschl with his rather special interest in the community, Herrmann directed his attention to the individual Christian's relationship with God. Schlatter appreciates Herrmann's emphasis on the relation between God and the soul⁶⁸ and thus the individual's inner, religious 'experience,' the *Erlebnis* (a key term in Herrmann's work).⁶⁹ Schlatter also applauds Herrmann's clear Christocentric orientation. He stresses positively that the Marburg theologian rightly reminds the Lutherans (in particular, as Schlatter

⁶⁷ Letter to his mother, 16 June 1892, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 291.

⁶⁸ Timm, *Theorie und Praxis in der Theologie Albrecht Ritschls und Wilhelm Herrmanns: Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Kulturprotestantismus* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1967), 101.

⁶⁹ "Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls," 410.

perceives it, the Erlangen theologians)⁷⁰ of the ‘fact’ (*Tatsache*) of God’s actual revelation in Jesus Christ.⁷¹ He writes:

[T]he fact [*Tatsache*] that God seeks us and finds us consists in Jesus and his church . . . This is God’s revelation to us. In that we stand in Jesus before a man in whose presence we cannot deny the reality of God and [also cannot] doubt God’s love, this is the experience [*Erlebniß*] which awakens in us the notion of God [*Gottesgedanken*] in such a way that it takes hold of us with the power of truth, creating faith. To this, I say, for my part: *macte! Sic itur ad astra* [‘Well done! Thus you shall go to the stars’]. This is the aspect of this [Herrmann’s] theology that I would never renounce.⁷²

Thus, Schlatter approves of what he considers Herrmann’s return to the Reformation notion of the believer’s experiential communion with Jesus Christ who reveals to us the ‘reality of God.’⁷³ However, although Schlatter might be pleased with Herrmann’s experiential emphasis, he feels that Herrmann—much like Ritschl—commits what he considers the neo-Kantian fallacy of failing to ground the religious experience in its objective basis.

Secondly, then, from Schlatter’s perspective the subjective *Erlebnis* lacks an objective foundation. Schlatter charged Herrmann (as he charged Ritschl) with a denial of an objective ‘knowledge of God’ (*Gotteserkenntnis*). He complains that this knowledge of God belongs, in Herrmann’s view, to the inaccessible realm of objective knowledge, of science.⁷⁴ This has negative consequences, Schlatter remarks, for the Christian’s communion with God which Herrmann wants to establish in the first place—an endeavour that is then doomed to fail. Directed at his Marburg contemporary, Schlatter writes,

In your opinion, however, the realm of knowledge [*Gebiet der Erkenntniß*] is possessed by ‘science’ which only deals with things of this world . . . You

⁷⁰ Schlatter was generally critical of the Erlangen theologians’ attempts to modify traditional orthodoxy (as he was equally critical towards those of the mediating theologians).

⁷¹ Schlatter would later also detect and appreciate this in Herrmann’s student Karl Barth (see our discussion in the next section).

⁷² “Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls,” 410.

⁷³ “Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls,” 411.

⁷⁴ *Dogma*, 554n4.

thereby consider our communion [*Verkehr*] with God in tight, poor bounds, emptying it out.⁷⁵

At this point one wonders whether Schlatter's reading of Herrmann is entirely fair. According to Herrmann, the 'reality of God' was in fact over and above every human scientific endeavour;⁷⁶ Herrmann clearly reacted (perhaps over-reacted, to Schlatter's mind) against the domestication of God by the proponents of the historical-critical method (like Ernst Troeltsch, for instance), thus emphasising the transcendence of God and of our relation with him through faith. One wonders whether Schlatter could at this point have shown more appreciation for Herrmann, as the latter did not seem too far removed from his own agenda. Be that as it may, Schlatter is under the impression that Herrmann's focus on subjective experience somewhat eclipses the objective historical basis of faith, which is so important to Schlatter. And indeed, Herrmann claims that when we intend to talk about our communion with Jesus Christ, we are no longer to use the language of external historical facts; instead, we are to focus on 'Jesus' inner life' (again, a key term for Herrmann to which Schlatter playfully refers in the title of his review, 'innern Leben'). Thus in Herrmann's view, Jesus' religious importance for us consists in the 'inner life' of his religious personality; the relation between Jesus and us is then defined by the way in which Jesus' 'inner life' makes a definite impact on our 'inner life,' independently of history. But Schlatter clearly doubts that Herrmann has thereby managed to bridge Lessing's 'ugly broad ditch' between historical and universal truths, between history and faith. "Herrmann's flight from history to a 'storm-free' inner reality"⁷⁷ is in Schlatter's eyes a pointless endeavour, for the believer might enjoy an experience (*Erlebnis*), which is, however, unrelated to objective knowledge (*Erkenntnis*). In Herrmann, Schlatter feels, Christology is reduced to a matter of inward experience without being grounded in objective facts; instead of bridging the ditch, Herrmann is thus still left with an abyss, namely with the dualism of knowledge and experience.

⁷⁵ "Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls," 413.

⁷⁶ Herrmann, "Die Wirklichkeit Gottes," in *Schriften zur Grundlegung der Theologie*, vol. 2, by Wilhelm Herrmann, ed. Peter Fischer-Appelt (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1967), 292.

⁷⁷ Bruce L. McCormack, in *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 63.

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What the Beck-pupil misses is a distinct appreciation of God's revelation in creation as the basis for our subjective experience: the *Erlebnis* ought to be rooted in the *Erkenntnis*. "How dare we approach God inwardly," Schlatter asks the Marburg theologian, "when we disrupt his order in the natural realm?"⁷⁸ "Nothing," he writes, "that we find within ourselves can be the foundation of our confidence."⁷⁹

As a result, and this is our *third* and final point, Schlatter feels that Herrmann has no solid basis for faith.⁸⁰ With a view to Herrmann's concept of the so-called 'notions of faith' (*Glaubensgedanken*),⁸¹ Schlatter remarks that Herrmann detaches these from the universal natural realm, retreating somehow to a spiritual sphere where the *Glaubensgedanken* are valid only for the individual without any reference to objective, universal truth. Whereas Herrmann highlights the 'notions' of faith, Schlatter intends to focus on the 'content' of faith. In Herrmann's direction, Schlatter writes, the notions of faith are "only valid for you as your own formation, possessing meaning only for you."⁸² By contrast, Schlatter advances his own version of the notions of faith, which are "effective for you as the thoughts of *God*, which point to God's work, and which are God's gift to you, from the God who has also formed nature, whose word and will is the harmonious truth of all that exists."⁸³

Schlatter here clearly aims to advocate a broader and, in his view, more robust foundation for the Christian faith, where faith is rooted in the God who is not aloof from his creation but who grants faith to his creatures in a harmonious, organic way (we will return to these significant aspects in chapter VI on the 'life-act'). Overall, then, the critical-empirical realist Schlatter is convinced that his theology of objective facts provides a more sustainable Christological account and a more solid foundation for faith. Herrmann, on the other hand, does not do justice to the New

⁷⁸ "Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls," 414.

⁷⁹ "Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls," 413.

⁸⁰ "Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls," 412.

⁸¹ Herrmann's concept of the *Glaubensgedanken* implies that faith reflects on its own genesis and thus becomes conscious of its relation to the world. See Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 227-228.

⁸² "Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls," 415 (emphasis original).

⁸³ "Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls," 415 (emphasis original).

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Testament facts, Schlatter thinks, as his theological foundation is simply too subjective and thus too unstable. Schlatter concludes:

Here appears a young theology on the scene that again seeks and knows the ground, yet, it builds itself only a narrow, meagre little house [*enges, ärmliches Häuslein*], pleased when God and his goodness is not a doubtable factor. Surely, it renders to some a great service, as it points within all the theological and philosophical hurly-burly [*Wirrwarr*] to Jesus as the solid, secure proof of God [*festen, sichern Gottesbeweis*]. Nonetheless, everyone who puts the New Testament next to Herrmann's *Verkehr mit Gott* will develop the following wish: don't put the 'master' [*Meister*] over the Scriptures. The Scriptures offer more than that.⁸⁴

Taken together, we note a characteristic profile of Schlatter's critique in dealing with Ritschl and Herrmann. While he is in many ways appreciative of both the Göttingen and the Marburg theologian, he nonetheless identifies serious issues he feels obligated to address, such as a missing assertion of an objective knowledge of God as the basis for our experiential relation with him, paired with his critique of the retreat to inner, subjective states, which not only harms the notion of faith but also has damaging effects on Christology and soteriology. In his own major works, penned later in Tübingen, Schlatter would form his characteristic, critical-empirical realist approach to Christology (to which we will turn in the second part of this study).

We now proceed by turning to Schlatter's fascinating encounter with the other major Ritschl pupil, Adolf von Harnack. For a correct understanding of their theological differences it helps to consider first the concrete background of church politics, which brought the two theologians together, before examining the core of their Christological dispute.

Schlatter, Harnack and the Struggle over the Apostles' Creed

Schlatter would have probably remained in Greifswald, had not the 'struggle over the Apostles' Creed' (*Apostolikumsstreit*) ignited the Protestant scene in the late nineteenth century.⁸⁵ In the 1890s, the contrasting positions between Greifswald and

⁸⁴ "Aus dem innern Leben der Schule Ritschls," 417.

⁸⁵ For a summary of the *Apostolikumsstreit* see Karl Neufeld, *Adolf Harnacks Konflikt mit der Kirche: Weg-Stationen zum 'Wesen des Christentums'* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia Verlag, 1979), 114-132. As to the original debate see Harnack, *Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis. Ein geschichtlicher Bericht nebst*

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the Ritschlians came plainly to the fore. In June 1892, Württemberg minister Christoph Schrempf was suspended for refusing to use the Apostles' Creed during a baptismal service. Displeased with Schrempf's removal, Berlin theology students intended to draw up a petition to be submitted to the senior consistory (*Oberkirchenrath*), demanding the abolition of the requirement to use the Apostles' Creed in the liturgy and as a 'compulsory formula' (*Verpflichtungsformel*) in the ordination of ministers.⁸⁶ Before the students put their plan into action, they asked their teacher Adolf von Harnack⁸⁷ what he thought about the idea.⁸⁸ Harnack answered his students in a question and answer session during one of his lectures, fittingly on 'Recent Church History,' in which he advised them not to proceed with their petition. While explaining to them his own position, he also felt that he needed to give a more substantial account of his thoughts in written form.⁸⁹ No sooner said than done, Harnack published his opinion on the Apostles' Creed in the August 1892 edition of the Ritschlian journal *Die Christliche Welt*, in a piece entitled 'On the matter of the Apostles' Creed' ("In Sachen des Apostolikums"). In his short article, Harnack suggests either substituting or amending the Apostles' Creed in favour of a "short confession" that would "display the gospel as it was understood in the course of the Reformation" more clearly and that would avoid the current "wording that

einem Nachwort (Berlin: A. Haack, 1892); Hermann Cremer, *Zum Kampf um das Apostolikum: Eine Streitschrift wider D. Harnack*, 6th ed. (Berlin: Verlag von Wiegandt & Grieben, 1893), and Adolf von Harnack's answer to Cremer, "Antwort auf die Streitschrift D. Cremer's: Zum Kampf um das Apostolikum," in *Reden und Aufsätze*, vol. 1 (Gieszen: J. Riecker'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1904). See also, in particular the "Nachwort" in Harnack's *Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis. Ein geschichtlicher Bericht nebst einem Nachwort*.

⁸⁶ Harnack, "In Sachen des Apostolikums," *ChW* 32 (1892): 768.

⁸⁷ Harnack was clearly a follower of Ritschl, although, like many Ritschlians, he never actually sat in Ritschl's lecture hall as a student. Harnack was professor of church history at the University of Berlin from 1888 until 1921; he became a member of the Academy of Sciences, and later, from 1905 until 1921, he served as the general director of the Royal Library at Berlin. On Harnack's life and work see the compendium by Kurt Nowak et al., *Adolf von Harnack: Christentum, Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003). See also Claus-Dieter Osthövener, "Adolf von Harnack als Systematiker," *ZThK* 99 (2002): 296-331, and by the same author the "Nachwort" to Harnack's *Wesen des Christentums* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 257-289.

⁸⁸ Harnack, *Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis. Ein geschichtlicher Bericht nebst einem Nachwort*, 35-36.

⁸⁹ Harnack, *Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis. Ein geschichtlicher Bericht nebst einem Nachwort*, 36.

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gives offence to many.”⁹⁰ In contrast to his students, however, Harnack clearly does not want to “abolish the Apostles’ Creed,”⁹¹ though he proposes that churches could be given the right to decide for themselves whether they want to use it or would prefer to substitute it with another “formula of faith” (*Glaubensformel*).⁹²

Harnack’s publication provoked a storm of protest, revealing clearly the frontlines between the Ritschlians on the one hand and the Greifswald theologians, conservative Lutherans and conservative pietists on the other hand. The *Deutsche Evangelische Kirchenzeitung* as well as the *Neue Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* criticised Harnack’s statement as “destructive theology.”⁹³ Thereupon Ritschlians, such as Wilhelm Herrmann, Julius Kaftan, Ferdinand Kattenbusch, Martin Rade, and others, drew up a declaration, the so-called *Eisenacher Erklärung*, in which they publicly supported Harnack’s position.⁹⁴ Having provoked a lively debate, Harnack felt the need to clarify his position in more detail. His publication “drew heavy charges,” Harnack admits, “and forced me to provide a short . . . historical report about the origin of the confession of faith.”⁹⁵ A few weeks later, then, Harnack published a historical account of the Apostles’ Creed from the early church to the Reformation: *Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis: Ein geschichtlicher Bericht nebst einem Nachwort*. Again, Harnack’s work triggered opposition. The most substantial critique came from the head of the Greifswald school, Hermann Cremer. Schlatter, although he had “a good mind” to take part in the public debate, left it to Cremer to frame a well-grounded answer.⁹⁶ According to Schlatter—and, it remains to be seen whether it is a correct self-assessment—

⁹⁰ Harnack, “In Sachen des Apostolikums,” 768.

⁹¹ Harnack, “In Sachen des Apostolikums,” 768.

⁹² Harnack, “In Sachen des Apostolikums,” 768-769. According to Harnack’s view, the Apostles’ Creed contained both too much and too little to be a satisfactory test for candidates for ordination; he thus preferred a briefer declaration of faith which could be rigorously applied across the board.

⁹³ See Neufeld, *Adolf Harnacks Konflikt mit der Kirche*, 118.

⁹⁴ See Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 68.

⁹⁵ Harnack, “Das Apostolische Glaubensbekenntnis: Ein geschichtlicher Bericht nebst einer Einleitung und einem Nachwort,” in *Reden und Aufsätze*, vol. 1 (Gieszen: J. Riecker’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1904), 220.

⁹⁶ “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 73-75.

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[Cremer] possessed the courage for polemics that I lacked, plus he was involved in a lively war with the Erlangen [school] and even more so with the Ritschlian theologians. I immediately agreed with his opposition to the Ritschlian group's exclusive dominion over the church and the faculties.⁹⁷

The Greifswald scholars apparently feared that the Ritschlians would be able to influence the church through their dominance over the Protestant faculties in Prussian Germany, a fear that was perhaps not unfounded. By 1892, thirteen Ritschlians had acquired theological chairs in Germany, and such chairs were, ultimately, responsible for the education of the future Protestant clergy.⁹⁸ Schlatter reflects on the lively character of the political-theological debate between Greifswald and the Ritschlians in his *Rückblick*:

The glowing, manly rage [*glühender Manneszorn*] that Cremer carried with him commanded my . . . cordial admiration; nothing connected me more closely with him than the manner in which he was able to be cross. Just as I agreed with his ambition to prevent the Ritschlian group from exclusively taking over the dominion over the church and the faculties, I admired the bravery he repeatedly demonstrated in this battle.⁹⁹

With his critical stance towards the Apostles' Creed, Harnack had manoeuvred himself into a precarious situation in that he now faced disciplinary action. This happened as a result of complaints from an Evangelical-Lutheran Conference on the 20th of September, 1892, on the basis of which Emperor Wilhelm II asked for an 'immediate report' (*Immediatbericht*) on Harnack.¹⁰⁰ Prussian Culture minister Julius R. Bosse (1832–1901) was able to aid Harnack in this predicament by suggesting—in order to appease the ecclesial camp—the founding of a chair of systematic theology at the University of Berlin that would support the church position. This proposal was endorsed by the Kaiser as the so-called 'punitive professorship' (*Strafprofessur*) against von Harnack. The Prussian Ministry of Culture initially sought to call Martin Kähler, who was then professor in Halle and who received the Berlin faculty's unanimous support. Reinhold Seeberg (then in

⁹⁷ "Entstehung der Beiträge," 73.

⁹⁸ Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 124.

⁹⁹ *Rückblick*, 140.

¹⁰⁰ See Neufeld, *Adolf Harnacks Konflikt mit der Kirche*, 118.

Erlangen) and Hermann Cremer were also short-listed. Kähler, however, declined as he did not want to leave Halle. The negotiations with Seeberg proved to be difficult and the Berlin faculty categorically opposed issuing a call to Hermann Cremer. Adolf Schlatter was the last Greifswald theologian standing who could fulfil the requirements for the punitive professorship and appease the upset Lutherans. Schlatter himself, however, was certain that Cremer was the more suitable candidate. “If any one of us [the Greifswald school] must go, it has to be Cremer.”¹⁰¹ He was convinced that if the Prussian officials had been serious about finding an equal counterweight to Harnack, they would have called Cremer to the punitive professorship, yet the Berlin administration “feared his [Cremer’s] potency [Wirksamkeit],” Schlatter thought.¹⁰² Thus, Friedrich Althoff (1839–1908) approached Schlatter and repeatedly tried to convince him to accept the call. Schlatter clearly knew that he was only the second, if not, third choice, which explains his hesitation. He notes that “the choice thus became, as I felt it, a dishonourable game and an empty pretence, as I was being pushed forward in his [Cremer’s] place.”¹⁰³ Schlatter finally gave in and accepted the call, because, as he put it, “in such cases, personal desires have to remain silent . . . when it [the state] calls, Christianity has to be ready.”¹⁰⁴ And in the end, interestingly, Schlatter felt that this call had also a spiritual dimension, as he suggests that through him the gospel of Jesus Christ, by God’s grace, would be brought to the Berlin faculty. In a letter to his mother, Schlatter summarises his thoughts as follows:

I think, to tell the truth, the whole issue is about the gospel. It must also [be brought] to the University of Berlin. That I should take it there looks foolish [nährisch]; I would have preferred . . . somebody else to do it. Yet, no one else is available. The doors are closed for Cremer; and for me, they are not only opened but I am being forcefully pushed through. Well, then, I can do nothing else but look to God’s grace.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Letter to his mother, 20 January 1893, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 294.

¹⁰² “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 84.

¹⁰³ “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 84.

¹⁰⁴ *Erlebtes*, 14-15. See also Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 293 and Stuhlmacher, “Adolf Schlatter,” 225.

¹⁰⁵ Letter to his mother, 6 March 1893, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 296.

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During the negotiations with Berlin, Schlatter insisted on receiving ‘permission to teach’ (*Lehrerlaubnis*) not only systematic theology but also New Testament, for, as he continually emphasised, the historical New Testament discipline provides the basis for the dogmatic task, and the two organically belong together.¹⁰⁶ That Schlatter’s theological chair was primarily designed for systematic theology irritated Julius Kaftan—he feared that Schlatter would draw students from his own lectures in systematics.¹⁰⁷ Be that as it may, in August 1893, Schlatter delivered his last lecture in Greifswald, and one month later he moved with his wife and by then five children to Berlin, where, many decades earlier, his uncle Gottlieb Schlatter (1809–1887) had studied under Friedrich Schleiermacher¹⁰⁸ and where he would now teach for the next five years.¹⁰⁹

As Schlatter was awarded his chair as a penal professorship against Harnack, one would expect that a chilly reception awaited him in Berlin. Surprisingly, at least to Schlatter, Harnack had already written a welcoming letter a few months earlier, in March 1893, whose friendly tone would not only be reciprocated by Schlatter, but would also mark their positive future etiquette despite theological disagreement.

Harnack writes:

I assume you did not make this decision [to go to Berlin] a lightly, both with respect to your position in Greifswald and in face of the special circumstances here with us. I am still convinced that you will not come with hatchet [*Kriegsbeil*] to undertake a campaign [*Feldzug*], but rather in the manner of a professor, to speak what he has learned and what he cannot keep to himself. In any case I can assure you that I am happy that you are coming . . . I am not only glad that many a [professor] – who appeared on the horizon – did not come, but also – positively – that ‘you’ decided to collaborate with us. I use the expression of ‘collaboration,’ although I know that nobody trusts us. Yet, I think . . . that the common ground of the work

¹⁰⁶ See for example his 1909 publication, “Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments und die Dogmatik,” available in English as “The Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics,” 115-166. As a compromise, his teaching post was finally called “for systematic theology and the New Testament disciplines” (*für die systematische Theologie und die neutestamentlichen Disziplinen*). “This formula was not beautiful,” says Schlatter in retrospect, “but I could live with it.” *Rückblick*, 165; see also *Erlebtes*, 101-102 and “Selbstdarstellungen,” 156, 158.

¹⁰⁷ *Rückblick*, 181; cf. Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung in der Ritschlschen Schule*, 125n940.

¹⁰⁸ “Idealismus und Erweckung,” 29.

¹⁰⁹ Schlatter taught at the University of Berlin from October 1893 until March 1898.

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with the students is greater than what separates [us]. Please kindly accept these lines as a proof of this attitude; they should hearten you in your relocation to Berlin.¹¹⁰

These lines suggest that the first meeting between the professor occupying the penal professorship and the professor against whom this chair was directed would actually take place in a friendly atmosphere. In fact, this was then the case in autumn 1893 when the two theologians met for a long conversation. In a letter to his Greifswald friend Hermann Cremer, Schlatter reports the “lovely conversation” (*hübsche Unterredung*) he enjoyed with Harnack:

We pretty much talked about everything that affects our contemporary scientific world. We defined the religious difference to that effect: He reckoned the prophetic word: ‘Oh, that you would rend the heavens’ [Is 64.1], is not realised and is unrealisable; we are limited to the psychological sphere, to ‘faith’; I replied that prior to faith comes a seeing that rests on certain testimonies of God, in which faith has its motive and its content. You see, it is the old polarity of the ‘facts;’ but [we talked] openly and in a mutually measured way.¹¹¹

This is relevant insofar as Schlatter, by pointing to the ‘old polarity of the facts,’ touches here upon his central criticism of Ritschlian epistemology, namely its lacking an objective foundation for truth claims which harms the concept of faith. More precisely, in Schlatter’s view, the main controversy between him and Harnack consisted in the fact that he considered faith rooted in the perceptible actuality of historical-*heilsgeschichtliche* facts, whereas Harnack, it seemed, distinguished between ‘objective knowledge’ (*Erkenntnis*) and ‘existential experience’ (*Erlebnis*), in a way reminiscent of Herrmann. In what follows, we shall discuss this significant difference between the two eminent theologians in more detail.

¹¹⁰ Harnack to Schlatter, 9 March 1893. This wording is from an earlier draft by Harnack. The letter that reached Schlatter (same date) was slightly shorter and also differs somewhat in the wording. The welcoming tone, however, is the same. See for a comparison of both the draft and the original letter as it was sent, Adolf Schlatter Archive, Inventory No. 909 and No. 1306. For an extract of the draft, see Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, *Adolf von Harnack*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1951), 209.

¹¹¹ Letter to Cremer, 8 November 1893, in Stupperich, *Wort und Wahrnehmung*, 13 (emphasis mine).

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History, Knowledge and Experience

Evidently, Schlatter disagrees with Harnack on the extent to which objective facts, in this case, historical facts, can become the ground for subjective experience. Harnack, for one, argues that “Christ, as history introduces him,” cannot become believable as Lord and saviour through any historical ‘knowledge’ (*Erkenntnis*);¹¹² this is only possible through religious ‘experience’ (*Erfahrung*). Religious “experience,” writes Harnack, “lies above the coercion that is exercised through historical knowledge.”¹¹³ He adds:

The question of who and what Jesus is can . . . only be ascertained by means of historical research; but the conviction that this historical Jesus is the redeemer [*Erlöser*] and Lord does not follow from the historical finding, but from awareness of sin and of God when Jesus Christ is proclaimed.¹¹⁴

It seems that Harnack continues the tradition of his teacher Ritschl and his pupil Herrmann, as he separates in the neo-Kantian manner the religious question from the scientific question. That is, in order to distil the distinctive religious essence, namely, the ‘kernel’ (*Kern*) of who Jesus Christ was, Harnack has to first peel away the historical ‘husk’ (*Hülle/Schale*).¹¹⁵ From the Greifswald theologians’ perspective, Harnack introduces here an extraneous dualism to Christological method, namely a differentiation between the historical Jesus, who is accessible through ‘critical-historical research’ (*geschichtliche Wissenschaft*), and the Christ of faith, who is solely accessible through ‘experience.’

Now while Schlatter and Cremer clearly agree with Harnack’s endorsement of strenuous theological-historical research on the one hand and his sense of the importance of religious experience on the other, they argue that these processes are organically interrelated while Harnack seems to tear them apart. Knowledge (*Erkenntnis*), according to the Greifswald scholars, is the basis for religious experience (*Erlebnis*); that is, critical-historical research is an essential basis (though

¹¹² Harnack, “Antwort auf die Streitschrift D. Cremers,” 291.

¹¹³ Harnack, “Antwort auf die Streitschrift D. Cremers,” 291.

¹¹⁴ Harnack, “Antwort auf die Streitschrift D. Cremers,” 293.

¹¹⁵ See Harnack, *Wesen des Christentums*, 3rd ed., ed. Claus-Dieter Osthöener (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 17-18, 39-40.

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not the only one) for our faith. In Harnack, the two processes of *Erkenntnis* and *Erlebnis* seem to run in parallel, whereas Schlatter and Cremer stress that they are closely linked with each other. Apparently, Harnack was aware of creating an antagonism here, as he later admits in his *Wesen des Christentums*.¹¹⁶ This antagonism, however, can, according to Harnack, be ‘overcome within ourselves.’¹¹⁷ Again, for Schlatter, this dichotomy does not exist in the first place.¹¹⁸ The Swiss theologian categorically rejects any separation between knowledge and faith, science and religion. “This dilemma is misplaced,” argues Schlatter, because “knowledge is intrinsic to faith and faith cannot be sustained without knowledge.”¹¹⁹ This knowledge is obviously not perfect knowledge, but is knowledge nonetheless, knowledge which is indispensable for faith.¹²⁰ Schlatter thus opts for a holistic theological approach which comprises both objective scientific research *and* a subjective exercise of faith, the former as the basis for the latter. Schlatter writes:

The historical task of the bible can be virtually nothing else than an intense listening to what the bible contains and renders visible; anything contrary to that is not *science*. There can therefore be no friction between historical scriptural research and faith.¹²¹

From the Greifswald perspective then, Harnack’s approach is a continuation of the idealist heritage, where, according to Schlatter, “[w]e are not supposed to know, but we should have faith, and this faith is a substitute for the lack of knowledge.”¹²² To Schlatter’s mind, however, “[t]he act of faith is an affirmation of the given [*des Gegebenen*].”¹²³ Again analogous to his Ritschl/Herrmann-critique, Schlatter

¹¹⁶ Harnack speaks of the “dualism” (*Zwiespalt*) between “God and the world, the Here and the Beyond [*Diesseits und Jenseits*], the visible and the invisible, matter and spirit . . . physics and ethics.” Harnack, *Wesen des Christentums*, 88-89 [*What is Christianity*, trans. Thomas B. Saunders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 150].

¹¹⁷ Harnack, *Wesen des Christentums*, 89 [*What is Christianity*, 151].

¹¹⁸ Similarly to Schlatter, Weinhardt describes the conflict in Harnack’s argument as the dualism of “objective doctrinal assertion” and “subjective inwardness.” Weinhardt, “Einleitung,” 105.

¹¹⁹ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 18.

¹²⁰ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 18.

¹²¹ “Der Glaube an die Bibel,” 42 (emphasis original).

¹²² “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 20.

¹²³ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 20.

considers the main difference between him and Harnack as one of theological method, which in turn leads to different Christological outcomes. In his *Rückblick* on his life's work, Schlatter summarises why he therefore could not agree with Harnack on the question of Christology. He writes:

Whether or not Jesus was shown to us the way he is, whether we saw what he bestows upon us, or whether the New Testament disappeared behind our 'science,' this was the question that stood between me and the Liberals. Harnack's dogmatics required that he searched in Jesus for a 'religion' that connected 'the soul' with God. This entailed that history lost its power to transmit 'religion' to us; the historical [*das Geschichtliche*] was in the past, and thereby individualised and consequently confined . . . For that reason, Harnack instructs us to look behind Christianity for its 'essence' [*"Wesen"*]. This 'essence,' however, did not possess a content defined by clear concepts. The goal to pursue was an internalisation of the individual, who now, inevitably, had lost any relation to history and who perceived the church only as an oppressive burden. The history of dogmatics [*Dogmengeschichte*] thereby became the proof that dogma had destroyed itself. Thus what stood between him and me was the question which had moved me from the very beginning of my theological work, namely, who Jesus was.¹²⁴

Schlatter here illustrates how in his view, Harnack, with his critical-historical approach, disconnects Christology from history and, as a result, has to retreat to the inward subjective level.¹²⁵ Yet to base one's relation with Jesus Christ on subjective experience alone, Schlatter feels, means to paint a merely fragmentary picture of Jesus; the subjective experience must in his view grow out organically from an encounter with the objective, *heilsgeschichtliche* facts of the New Testament.

Despite these fundamental differences, Schlatter and Harnack enjoyed for the next five years, between 1893 and 1898, a close and friendly relationship. They chatted during lecture breaks, and sometimes in the tram, and they regularly visited each other's homes.¹²⁶ Positively impressed by this surprising development, Schlatter

¹²⁴ *Rückblick*, 160-161.

¹²⁵ Schlatter would most likely echo Weinhardt's critique of Harnack: "In fact, the religious feeling, or religious experience, is in Harnack a foundational systematic-theological principle which secures numerous religious notions which otherwise rest on biblical transmission, which Harnack eliminates or relativises with his historical-critical method." Weinhardt, "Einleitung," 107. Harnack's approach is then a fundamentally existentialist approach, as Kurt Nowak asserts, in Weinhardt, "Einleitung," 107.

¹²⁶ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 306.

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remarked, “I sincerely hope we can assist and serve each other.”¹²⁷ Presumably, Schlatter would have never guessed that he would one day reflect on his time in Berlin as follows: “among the Berlin colleagues, I only had a connection with Harnack.”¹²⁸ And Harnack perhaps felt very much the same. At one point he even let himself be so carried away as to exclaim, in the company of faculty members, “The only difference between me and my colleague Schlatter is the question of miracles!” whereupon Schlatter energetically interjected, “No, it is the question of God!”¹²⁹

In February 1897, Tübingen systematician Theodor Haering (1848–1928) enquired whether Schlatter would be interested in taking over the newly founded sixth professorial chair of the theological faculty in Tübingen. Haering wrote enthusiastically to Schlatter that “this would mean for Württemberg [a] continuation of [the tradition of] Bengel and Beck under new circumstances.”¹³⁰ The idea appealed to Schlatter and in September of the same year, Stuttgart prelate Carl von Burk (1827–1904) apparently sent Schlatter an official request.¹³¹ Two months later, in November 1897, Schlatter accepted, as he anticipated more suitable conditions for teaching and research in Tübingen than in Berlin, even hoping for a “new version [*neue Form*] of Greifswald.”¹³² Schlatter agreed on the condition that he would also be entitled to teach systematic theology, for, as already pointed out, the two disciplines formed one organic entity in his view.¹³³

Schlatter’s decision to leave Berlin came as a surprise to many. Robert Stupperich explains that “it caused a sensation that a Berlin professor would prefer

¹²⁷ Letter to his mother, 20 February 1894, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 306.

¹²⁸ *Rückblick*, 166.

¹²⁹ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 307.

¹³⁰ Haering to Schlatter, 15 February 1897, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 359.

¹³¹ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 360.

¹³² As he expressed in a letter to Cremer, 4 November 1897, in Stupperich, *Wort und Wahrnehmung*, 41.

¹³³ See *Rückblick*, 194. Adolf Schlatter named the newly established professorial chair ‘New Testament professorate.’ He explains: “To secure the new professorate a proper status within the Tübingen faculty, I gave it the title ‘New Testament professorate,’ as the faculty did not have one yet and the dogmaticians and church historians had until now divided the New Testament teaching instruction between themselves. The Württemberg minister [of culture] secured my right to lecture also in dogmatics.” *Rückblick*, 194.

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another faculty to the one in Berlin.”¹³⁴ Adolf von Harnack also regretted his colleague’s decision, and once Schlatter had gone, he expressed his regret in a letter, “I am missing you in the consulting room and I feel the lack of a peer next to me, who with his opposition provokes my thoughts.”¹³⁵ It is certainly an ironic historical episode that Schlatter’s chair in Berlin, which was originally designed as a penal professorship against Harnack, resulted in one of the most fascinating theological interactions between two influential scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Over the following decades, they remained personally loyal to each other. In 1922, for example, Harnack contributed to the *Festschrift* in honour of Schlatter’s seventieth birthday, *Aus Schrift und Geschichte*.¹³⁶ Their theological differences, however, remained.

Conclusion

In this second section of ‘Where was Adolf Schlatter?’, we focused on Schlatter’s professional teaching career from around 1880 to the late 1890s, in which he found himself sitting between the two stools of Ritschlianism and Confessionalism. This section clearly expands on what was introduced in the previous section, for Schlatter regards the theology of Ritschl and his colleagues as an extension of the Idealist movement. In Schlatter’s view, Ritschl, Herrmann and Harnack more or less adopt the Kantian suspicion of our ability to know objective facts and thus try to locate faith and religious experience in the subjective sphere. Whilst they might use different terminology and have different perspectives, they clearly share this epistemological premise, which leads in each case to a distorted Christology and a limited notion of faith. The faith of the believer who tries to connect with Jesus on the subjective level alone will shipwreck if the factual-historical foundation is missing.

¹³⁴ Stupperich, “Briefe Karl Holls an Schlatter,” 174n5.

¹³⁵ Letter to Schlatter, 5 February 1899, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 308.

¹³⁶ Harnack, “Das Alter des Gliedes ‘Heiliger Geist’ im Symbol,” in *Aus Schrift und Geschichte: Theologische Abhandlungen Adolf Schlatter zu seinem 70. Geburtstage, dargebracht von Freunden und Schülern* (Stuttgart: Calwer Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1922), 171-173.

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In contrast to Ritschl, Herrmann and Harnack, the Swiss critical-empirical realist affirms the possibility of a universal general knowledge of God, based on objective historical facts. To Schlatter's mind, then, Christology, if it indeed intends to capture the whole Jesus Christ, needs to focus on Jesus Christ's concrete volition that ushers in the historically effective, salvific deed on the cross. Only when our faith is based on the historical effectiveness of the person and work of Jesus Christ is our faith truly a faith in harmony with the New Testament. Schlatter thus considers his own Christological-soteriological approach more robust as it rests on a 'theology of facts.'

Our exploration into the genesis and the development of Adolf Schlatter's Christology would obviously remain incomplete without a further consideration of his interaction with dialectical theology. By adding this perspective we shall complete our picture of Schlatter's Christological development and thus open the door for our ensuing, more systematic-theological reflections.

3. Schlatter *Zwischen den Zeiten*

‘Where was Adolf Schlatter?’ In our endeavour to answer this question we have so far looked at Schlatter between Idealism and *Erweckung* and between Ritschlianism and Confessionalism. Finally, and this is the theme of the present third part, Schlatter came into contact with dialectical theologians, in particular with Karl Barth (1886–1968). What initially began as a rather difficult teacher-student relationship (at least in Barth’s view) developed over almost three decades, from 1906 to 1936, into a candid but cordial theological conversation between two Swiss theological heavyweights.

The theological encounter between Barth and Schlatter has more or less been neglected by scholarship.¹ Although an exhaustive comparative study of these two fascinating figures might be both fruitful and stimulating, this is not the place to achieve this ambitious goal. For the present purpose, our analysis will be deemed successful if it provides a clear answer to the question: ‘Where was Schlatter in relation to Barth?’ The intention is then to identify Schlatter’s characteristic critique of Barth’s theology, and in particular, his Christology, which will in turn add significant pieces to the overall picture of Schlatter’s own Christological approach. As in the previous two sections, we shall proceed chronologically, since their theological development is intrinsically tied to their personal histories.

This part is divided into four sections. We shall trace, *first*, the context of their early encounter at the beginning of the twentieth century, moving, *secondly*, to an exploration of Schlatter’s fundamental critique of Barth’s 1922 commentary on Romans, while looking, *thirdly*, at further developments and theological debates.

¹ A rare exception is Werner Neuer’s contribution. See particularly Neuer’s analysis of the letter exchange between the two Swiss scholars, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter: Ein Beitrag zum 100. Geburtstag Karl Barths,” *TBe* 17 (1986): 86-100, and the material in his Schlatter biography, *Adolf Schlatter*, 639-661, on which we heavily rely in this context. Peter Stuhlmacher and Udo Smid at least acknowledge theological parallels between Barth and Schlatter (the former in “Adolf Schlatter,” 240 and the latter in “Natürliche Theologie, als Problem bei Adolf Schlatter,” *Evangelische Theologie* 3 (1952/3): 106-116.

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Finally we deal more closely with Schlatter's critique of Barth's understanding of divine revelation, outlined in his discussion of Barth's *Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics* (1927) and of the *Barmen Declaration* (1934).

Early Difficulties: The Teacher and His Student

Twenty-five years after his first stay in Tübingen as a student, Schlatter returned in the spring of 1898 to the Swabian university town, where he would labour for the remaining four decades of his life. In a way, Schlatter would indeed continue in the 'positive' tradition of his teacher Johann T. Beck, as Theodor Haering had expected and as Schlatter himself admits:

I gladly became Beck's successor, not in his [manner], but in my own way, and I gladly continued the struggle where it has been fought with particular intensity, here, where D. Fr. Strauss had written his *Life of Jesus*, [where] F. Chr. Baur had claimed the fictitiousness for the most part of the New Testament and [where] Weizsäcker had contrasted Luke's story of the Apostles with his own. I expected that with Tübingen my years of pilgrimage would come to an end . . . and that it [Tübingen] would supply me with a lecture theatre in which a fruitful exchange with the students would become possible.²

Overall, Schlatter's expectations were fulfilled as he enjoyed his most fruitful and productive years, both as lecturer and as author, in Tübingen. Over the following decades many students sat in his lecture theatre who would later rise to prominence, among them a certain Karl Barth.

In March 1906, Schlatter and the young Barth met for the first time, not in Tübingen, but in their native Switzerland. The then nineteen-year-old theological student Barth, who was at that time studying in Bern, participated in the 'Tenth Aarau Christian Student Conference,' where Schlatter delivered a lecture about 'Paul and Hellenism.'³ Barth prepared a report on the conference and published it (his first

² *Rückblick*, 195.

³ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 424; cf. Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf: Nach seinen Briefen und autobiographischen Texten* (München: Christian Kaiser, 1978), 49. Schlatter's lecture was published in *Gesunde Lehre*, 128-143, and also in Karl Heinrich Rengstorf and Ulrich Luck, eds., *Das Paulusbild in der neueren deutschen Forschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964), 98-112.

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ever publication) in the *Berner Tagblatt*.⁴ According to Barth, Schlatter's "penetrative" paper was the "highlight of the conference."⁵ In the short article, Barth summarises the key elements of Schlatter's presentation: his emphasis on the Apostle Paul's relational agenda ("no one lives from and for oneself") and, what was most significant for Barth, Schlatter's moving from a (Hellenistic) human-centeredness towards a distinct God-centeredness.⁶ As we shall see in due course, Schlatter recognised and appreciated in the later works of his former student Barth precisely this latter aspect of God-centeredness while continually complaining about the missing relational element in Barth's theology. While it is not clear whether there was a private meeting between the two at the conference, Schlatter was certainly aware of who Karl Barth was, as he was well acquainted with Barth's father Johann Friedrich "Fritz" Barth (1856–1912), who established the Student Conference in the first place.⁷

Fritz Barth succeeded Schlatter as professor of New Testament at the University of Bern in 1889 after Schlatter had accepted the call to the University of Greifswald.⁸ Barth senior appreciated his fellow compatriot's 'positive' theology, the two enjoyed a letter exchange,⁹ and Schlatter visited Barth occasionally in his Bern home.¹⁰ With his clear preference for 'positive' theology, Fritz Barth was obviously not fond of his son's flirting with the Ritschlians at that time. At the end of summer 1907, he encouraged his son Karl, who was then an enthusiastic Harnack student in

⁴ Cf. Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 37.

⁵ Barth, "X. christliche Studentenkonferenz in Aarau, 1906," in *Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe* 21, ed. H. Helms et al. (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992), 124.

⁶ Barth, "X. christliche Studentenkonferenz in Aarau, 1906," 124-125.

⁷ Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 37.

⁸ Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, 21; cf. Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 638. In Bern, Fritz Barth also worked at the same Christian private school, the Lerberschule, as Schlatter did earlier. Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, 21; cf. Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 136, 143, 152.

⁹ See Schlatter's letters to Fritz Barth (No. 1234, Schlatter-Archive, Stuttgart) and Barth's letters to Schlatter (No. 425, *Ibid.*); cf. Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 638.

¹⁰ Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, 21; cf. Fritz Barth's letter to Schlatter, 4 March 1882, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 638.

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Berlin,¹¹ to attend Schlatter's lectures in Tübingen. "He felt that it was time," Karl Barth reflects on his father's request, "that, with my liberal tendencies, I should hear some sound 'positive' theology . . . so he sent me off to Tübingen, to Adolf Schlatter."¹² Finally, in October 1907, Barth moved to Tübingen "at the bidding of my father," he remembers, "who was now much more insistent, and not according to my own inclination."¹³ He thus attended Schlatter's New Testament lectures during the winter term 1907/8. While it is again unclear whether a personal conversation took place, Schlatter obviously knew that Barth was among his hearers, as Fritz Barth had told him.¹⁴

Overall, it seems, Barth senior's plan to win his son for 'positive' theology was unsuccessful. His son was not only disappointed with Tübingen as a town, calling it "a wretched hole" (*ein miserables Nest*), but also with Schlatter's 'positive' theological approach and the theological faculty as a whole—in his view, a "dive" (*Spelunke*).¹⁵ "Only one thing never happened in Tübingen," Barth later explains: "I did not join the ranks of the 'positives.'"¹⁶ In an autobiographical sketch, Barth reports that he heard Schlatter only "very irregularly, and then only with considerable resentment" (*mit heftigster Renitenz*).¹⁷ Barth's description of Schlatter as "half-cannibal, half-primordial Christian" (*halb Menschenfresser, halb Urchrist*) perhaps dates from this time.¹⁸ Barth sneered at "Schlatter's talent for moving difficulties

¹¹ Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, 50-55.

¹² In a conversation with Tübingen students, 2 March 1964, in Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 42.

¹³ Barth, *Autobiographical Sketch* (Fakultätsalbum der Evangelisch-theologischen Fakultät Münster, 1927), in Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 43.

¹⁴ Fritz Barth to Schlatter, 14 November 1907, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 638.

¹⁵ Letter to Wilhelm Spöndlin, 6 January 1908, in Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 43 [Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, 55].

¹⁶ In a conversation with Tübingen students, 2 March 1964, in Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 43 [Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, 55].

¹⁷ Barth, *Autobiographical Sketch* (Fakultätsalbum der Evangelisch-theologischen Fakultät Münster, 1927), in Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 43 [Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, 55]. Also in *Karl Barth – Rudolf Bultmann: Briefwechsel 1911-1966*, 2nd ed., ed. Bernd Jaspert (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1994), 294.

¹⁸ See Stuhlmacher, "Adolf Schlatter," 220.

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elegantly out of the way without really tackling them.”¹⁹ He complains about Schlatter’s “manner of reasoning,” which was, in Barth’s eyes, “unscientific, inaccurate and haphazard.”²⁰ Looking back, Barth concisely sums up his early Schlatter-aversion thus: “I rejected that Schlatter” (*Also, ich habe den Schlatter abgelehnt*).²¹ Apparently, Barth did not sit in Schlatter’s dogmatic lectures during the semester; this obviously prevented him from getting to know Schlatter as a dogmatician at that stage of his education.²²

Disappointed with both Tübingen and Schlatter, Barth moved to Marburg for the following semester, where he would encounter the lecturer Wilhelm Herrmann, whose influence on Barth is well established.²³ Still, Schlatter undoubtedly had some residual impact on his student, as their ensuing dialogue and letter exchange suggest. Yet before there was room for greater appreciation, there was, first, further estrangement. Schlatter was once more a source of disappointment to Barth, for the following reason: Schlatter was, together with many of Barth’s Ritschlian teachers, one of the ninety-three intellectuals who signed the petition ‘Aufruf an die Kulturwelt,’ published in major German newspapers on October 4, 1914.²⁴ Apart from Schlatter, other influential theologians who signed the appeal included Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Herrmann, Reinhold Seeberg, and Joseph Mausbach. With their signature, they expressed their support for Wilhelm II’s decision to declare war. Judged from today’s perspective one cannot but criticise Schlatter’s “naïve gullibility towards the emperor’s politics,” as Werner Neuer termed it.²⁵ However, one must also point out that many of the signatories put their names to the petition without

¹⁹ Letter to Wilhelm Spoendlin, 4 November 1907, in Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 43 [Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, 55].

²⁰ Barth, “Interview von H.A. Fischer-Barnicol, Südwestfunk (5 May 1964),” in Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe 28, ed. Eberhard Busch (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1997), 139.

²¹ Barth, “Interview von H.A. Fischer-Barnicol, Südwestfunk (5 May 1964),” 139.

²² Neuer, “Der Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 87.

²³ See Bruce McCormack, *Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 49-68.

²⁴ See Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg and Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg, *Der Aufruf ‘An die Kulturwelt.’ Das Manifest der 93 und die Anfänge der Kriegspropaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1996), 13.

²⁵ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 564.

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actually knowing the exact wording.²⁶ The ‘Manifesto of the Ninety-Three,’ as it was also called, was harshly criticised by Barth. He did not know what to make of “the teaching of all my theological masters in Germany. To me they seemed to have been hopelessly compromised by what I regarded as their failure in the face of the ideology of war.”²⁷ The disappointment with his teachers’ failures “sent him,” as Bruce L. McCormack put it, “in search of a *new theology*.”²⁸ Doing away with his bourgeois teachers’ culturally overoptimistic theology, Barth re-introduced the lost notion of the transcendent God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ. Thus, Karl Barth appeared on the theological scene with the first edition of his *Römerbrief* in 1919, causing a stir in Germany.²⁹

The ‘Shattered Thinking-Act’: On ‘Barth’s Romans’ (1922)

By the early 1920s, Adolf Schlatter had entered his third decade of academic teaching in Tübingen and he certainly knew about Barth’s 1919 *Romans*. It is unclear, though, whether he also studied it at that time.³⁰ Barth’s thoroughly rewritten *Romans* edition of 1922 clearly stimulated Schlatter’s interest, perhaps not least as Barth mentioned him in the preface. Barth names Schlatter—and this might have come as a surprise to him—as one of the few exegetes who shared his goal of theological exegesis.³¹ From Schlatter’s perspective, this comment was astonishing since he was, in fact, particularly unhappy with the hermeneutics of Barth’s *Romans*, as we shall see in due course. In April 1922, Schlatter’s friend, the church historian Karl Holl, asked him whether he would not want to write a *Romans* commentary himself in order to ‘muzzle’ Barth’s *Romans*:

²⁶ See Wilfried Härle, “Der Aufruf der 93 Intellektuellen,” *ZThK* 72 (1975): 211-212.

²⁷ Barth, *Autobiographical Sketch* (Fakultätsalbum der Evangelisch-theologischen Fakultät Münster, 1927), in Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 81 [Busch, *Karl Barths Lebenslauf*, 93]. For Barth, the events of autumn 1914 were so radical that he was compelled to break with the liberal theology of his teachers. See Wilfried Härle, “Der Aufruf der 93 Intellektuellen,” 207-224.

²⁸ McCormack, *Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 79 (emphasis original).

²⁹ McCormack, *Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 162-165.

³⁰ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 639.

³¹ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 7.

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Do you not want to kill the book [*Wollen Sie nicht das Buch totmachen*] by writing your own commentary on Romans or Galatians? Do not tell me that you have already written one. This time I mean one that is seriously scientific yet one that at the same shows what *theological* science [*theologische Wissenschaft*] ought to look like. Even though you might be a ‘seventy-year-old,’ you are still ‘bound’ to [do] it.³²

Schlatter, however, had neither the inclination to ‘kill’ Barth’s *Romans*, nor any intention of writing his own commentary on Romans any time soon; this endeavour would have to wait for another thirteen years.³³ What he had done even before he received Holl’s letter, though, was to write a review of Barth’s *Romans*, published in the journal *Die Furche* in early May 1922.³⁴

Reading his former student’s work, Schlatter easily finds words of praise. Hence, he appreciates in Barth’s approach an “earnest, unbroken affirmation of God.”³⁵ Compared to many of their contemporaries, Schlatter finds it remarkable that Barth, swimming against the liberal current of his Ritschlian teachers, returns to a full assurance of the reality of God. However, Schlatter also raises some points of critique. We shall briefly mention three significant issues: *First*, Schlatter claims that Barth overemphasises the transcendence of God at the expense of the context of his revelation in history, creation and humanity, which results, *secondly*, in an idiosyncratic interpretation of Romans, which neglects its communal dimension. *Thirdly*, Schlatter feels that Barth does not do justice to the concept of faith whereby we are experientially connected with Jesus Christ.

³² Karl Holl to Schlatter, 24 April 1922, in Stupperich, “Briefe Karl Holls an Schlatter,” 235 (emphasis original).

³³ Schlatter published a commentary on Romans as early as 1887, *Der Römerbrief: Ein Hilfsbüchlein für Bibelleser*. This commentary, however, was aimed at the theological layperson. His scholarly commentary was published in 1935, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit: ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief* (also available in English translation, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*).

³⁴ “Karl Barths Römerbrief,” published in *Die Furche* 12 (1922). I am indebted to Annemarie Kaindl of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München who was able to identify May 5, 1922 as the publication date of Schlatter’s review (e-mail message to author, February 28, 2012). Schlatter’s review has been translated into English by Keith R. Crim as “Karl Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans*,” in *The Beginnings of Dialectic Theology*, ed. James M. Robinson, trans. Keith R. Crim (Richmond, VI: John Knox Press, 1968), 121-125.

³⁵ “Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans*,” 121.

First of all then, Barth's concept of God as the transcendent 'other,' the "wholly other" (*der ganz Andere*) rankled with Schlatter.³⁶ Schlatter, though speaking in exactly the same terms of God as "wholly other,"³⁷ feels that his Swiss colleague's emphasis on the otherness of God is too strong, culminating in a neglect of the world and of humanity. Barth contrasts God and the world too sharply, he thinks, something that is foreign to the Apostle Paul. "Barth's God is 'the Other,'" Schlatter claims, "who is other than we are and other than the world is."³⁸ In that Barth almost exclusively conceptualises God over against humanity, Schlatter fears he renders theology absurd. As God is "the unattainably distant, the 'Other,'" he notes, "every thought directed to God breaks down; every religious statement, every theology, becomes basically folly, for it can speak only in perpetual self-contradictions."³⁹ Thus the Tübingen professor complains that in Barth's *Romans* "[a]ll that is human, all that is historical, sinks away. What is Rome, what is the early Roman Christian community, what is Paul?," Schlatter wonders.⁴⁰ In rescuing the Word of God from the hands of his anthropocentric Ritschlian teachers, Barth has gone too far in the other, transcendent, direction that neglects the concrete historical context: "Are we still hearing Paul," asks Schlatter, "when the Greek and the Jew have disappeared from the Letter to the Romans?"⁴¹ Of course, Schlatter does not object to Barth's emphasis on the pre-eminence of God's revelatory presence over any human authority and autonomy,⁴² yet one must not completely neglect, as Schlatter fears Barth does, the creaturely context of that revelation.

Secondly, the result of Barth's one-sided theocentric agenda is that Barth's exegesis, according to Schlatter's assessment, fails to give an account of the Apostle

³⁶ Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung)*, Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe 47, ed. Cornelis van der Kooi and Katja Tolstaja (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2010), 47, 59, 66, 76, 223, 435, 498, 522.

³⁷ "Wert und Unwert unseres Wissens," 263.

³⁸ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 123.

³⁹ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 124.

⁴⁰ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 121.

⁴¹ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 123.

⁴² The human desire for autonomy was in fact, as Bruce McCormack highlights, for Barth synonymous with original sin. McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 167.

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Paul's original message as it retreats to Barth's own isolated and idiosyncratic interpretation. At the end of the day, Schlatter feels, Barth becomes 'the exegete of his own life':

Since the exegete does not wish to say anything to us about the history of Roman Christendom, of Israel, of Paul and Jesus, what is he then going to talk to us about? He becomes the exegete of his own life and the interpreter of his own heart.⁴³

More specifically, Barth neglects, in Schlatter's view, the communal context of Romans. He writes:

'The author to the readers.' These are the words which Barth placed over Romans 1:1-7. These words repulse anyone who has learned to know Paul. Paul an 'author' who had nothing but 'readers' in mind—but how were things done in those days? After his letter arrived in Rome, it was read aloud to the Christian community there. Paul is here giving instruction to hearers, and these hearers were not sitting isolated, each in his study busily reading; they were a congregation gathered with one accord before God, and they then and subsequently carried out their common worship by letting Paul speak to them. Does it have no consequences for the reproduction of the letter if the apostle is turned into an 'author' and the community that listens to him into 'readers'?⁴⁴

Schlatter is clearly unhappy about Barth's reduction of Paul the apostle to an 'author' and of the recipients to 'readers,' as this camouflages the significant communal context of God's revelatory presence expressed in Romans. This leads to a discrepancy between the biblical text and Barth's commentary, to a "quarrel between the exegete and the apostle."⁴⁵ "In the hands of the exegete," laments Schlatter, "the Letter to the Romans ceases to be a letter to the Romans."⁴⁶ This criticism is also expressed by Schlatter's chosen review title, *Karl Barth's Epistle to the Romans* ("Karl Barths Römerbrief"), indicating that Paul's epistle had morphed somewhat into Barth's epistle.

⁴³ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 122.

⁴⁴ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 121.

⁴⁵ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 123.

⁴⁶ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 123.

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Thirdly, from Schlatter's perspective, Barth's exegesis has negative effects on our faith and thereby on our experiential connection with Jesus Christ. That is, in Schlatter's system, the empirical-critical reading of the New Testament in the 'seeing-act' is intrinsically connected with its interpretation in the 'thinking-act.' Only via this route does faith become possible as a real faith since it is deeply rooted in the historical facts. According to Schlatter, Barth has essentially violated the Schlatterian rule of critical observation when it comes to New Testament interpretation and he has thereby also pulled the rug out from under the 'thinking-act', making a substantial grounding of faith impossible. "The 'No' which Barth places on our entire life situation," writes Schlatter, "falls with devastating force on the act of thinking [*trifft mit verheerender Wucht den Denkakt*]." ⁴⁷ And once the thinking-act is impaired, faith is affected as well, Schlatter claims:

If the act of thinking is shattered [*Wird der Denkakt zerschmettert*], faith does not remain untouched, since it needs a content that is accessible to our perception and can be appropriated by us by means of solid judgment. It gets this content through Christ. That is the statement that comes from Paul. ⁴⁸

According to Schlatter's reading, Barth's notion of faith is flawed, having serious consequences for our connection with Jesus Christ. "[F]or Barth faith remains a 'leap into the void,'" notes Schlatter, "and in this a deep gap between his exposition and the Letter to the Romans opens up. Paul did not leap into the void, but joined himself to Jesus."⁴⁹ This experiential *Anschluss an den Christus* is, as already mentioned, of utmost significance to the Tübingen scholar, and Eberhard Busch claims that this issue is perhaps the most significant point of Schlatter's critique. Busch observes in Schlatter a "distant echo of the Pietistic objection to Barth that the divine reality must be 'experienced.'" ⁵⁰ In this way, Busch argues, Schlatter's "argument also touches a sore spot in the theology of the Epistle to the Romans. It was perhaps even one of the

⁴⁷ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 124 ["Karl Barths Römerbrief," 231].

⁴⁸ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 124 ["Karl Barths Römerbrief," 230].

⁴⁹ "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*," 124-125.

⁵⁰ Busch, *Barth and the Pietists: The Young Karl Barth's Critique of Pietism and its Response*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 189.

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most weighty arguments that Barth had to listen to then, and he certainly did listen to it.”⁵¹

Indeed, Barth acknowledged Schlatter’s criticism; in the preface to the subsequent, third edition of his Romans commentary, Barth writes:

The strangest episode in the history of the book since the appearance of the second edition has been its friendly reception by Bultmann and its equally friendly rejection by Schlatter . . . For the present I have simply noted carefully and gratefully the criticisms and questions put to me by Bultmann and Schlatter.⁵²

Barth, at that time honorary professor of Reformed theology in Göttingen, penned these lines in July 1922. By then his initial frustration with Schlatter’s critique seems to have ebbed away somewhat. A few months earlier, in late March—or early April—1922, Barth received an advance copy of Schlatter’s review, and he was certainly not blasé about his former teacher’s critique.⁵³ In a *Rundbrief* to his friends, of April 2, 1922, Barth notes:

Furthermore I can report that a high-calibre missile has touched down in the form of a Romans review by Schlatter in the ‘Furche’ . . . The punch-line is that I am accused of not taking part in the work of the ‘church,’ in the historical development of what Paul has said back then, my notion of God [*Gottesgedanke*] being different from the one of Paul, [so that] with me, ‘the thinking-act [*Denkakt*] is smashed’ (!!).⁵⁴

While Barth here alludes to some of the aspects of Schlatter’s criticism (God as ‘wholly other,’ the missing emphasis on actual history and the Christian community), he does not seem to take up Schlatter’s experiential critique. Apparently, what bothered Barth most was Schlatter’s claim that he had ‘destroyed the thinking-act.’ He picks it up some two weeks later in a letter to Rudolf Bultmann, dated April 14, 1922:

⁵¹ Busch, *Barth and the Pietists*, 189-190.

⁵² Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 16.

⁵³ The editors of the *Furche* had sent Barth an advance copy of Schlatter’s review, inquiring whether Barth would want to reply to Schlatter’s article. “Those . . . fools,” writes Barth to his friends: “[it] would really suit the ‘Furche’ to become the stage for such a scuffle [*Handgemenge*]. Quod non! my father used to say.” Barth’s *Rundbrief* of 2 April 1922, in *Karl Barth–Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1921-1930*, 66.

⁵⁴ Barth’s *Rundbrief* of 2 April 1922, in *Karl Barth–Eduard Thurneysen: Briefwechsel 1921-1930*, 66.

In the upcoming issue of the 'Furche' none other than *Schlatter* proceeds against me with a mildly appreciative [*mildaner kennenden*] rejection or mildly appreciative approval . . . The worst he charges me with is: 'Barth smashes the thinking-act'.⁵⁵

At this point one could assume that this was the end of a theological debate that had not even properly begun. Schlatter's language, such as the 'smashed thinking-act,' certainly did not inspire hope for further personal theological exchange. However, Schlatter's 'high calibre missile' did not destroy future opportunities for dialogue. Barth most likely knew how to take his former teacher's criticism. Having experienced Schlatter in the Tübingen lecture hall, he knew about his compatriot's temperament, his liability to polemics and sarcasm (see chapter I, where we refer to Schlatter's 'lively temperament').⁵⁶ Barth, then, presumably knew how to look behind Schlatter's rough façade, as he was, after all, at that time not very different from Schlatter himself with his animated style of debating theology.⁵⁷ Schlatter, for one, had clearly a realistic picture of his own lack of diplomatic finesse when it came to scholarly argument. In a letter to his parents, he writes that the success of a theological debate depends first and foremost on the "power of the lungs, for I have never been able to conduct a theological dispute in *piano*."⁵⁸ The *fortissimo* of Schlatter's critique, however, would soon give way to an ensuing correspondence in *piano* and a growing appreciation over the following years—on both sides.

Two years after Schlatter's *Furche* critique, in early 1924, Samuel Jäger, then director of Bethel Theological Seminary, suggested that Karl Barth be invited as a speaker for the biannual 'Bethel Theological Week' in the autumn. Schlatter, who had set up the conference in the first place together with his friend Friedrich von Bodelschwingh ('der Ältere,' 1831–1910),⁵⁹ was immediately open to this proposal

⁵⁵ Barth to Bultmann, 14 April 1922, in *Karl Barth – Rudolf Bultmann, Briefwechsel 1911-1966*, 9 (emphasis original).

⁵⁶ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 610, 614; cf. 377-378.

⁵⁷ The earlier Barth, at least, is often described as an "*enfant terrible*," as "a theological dissident whose natural genre is the polemical essay or highly charged address." John Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology: Four Studies* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 3.

⁵⁸ Schlatter to his parents, 6 February 1873, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 61.

⁵⁹ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 355.

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and expressed his support.⁶⁰ In a letter to his son Theodor, Schlatter admits that he is “confident that I can team up with him [Barth] without any harsh collisions.”⁶¹ Schlatter subsequently wrote to his former student, “[I]t would give me great pleasure if you could take over a major part of the work this autumn.”⁶² With a view to Barth’s lectures, Schlatter even issued him with a *carte blanche*: “You see,” Schlatter assures him, “that we do not work under the burden of any law, but in total freedom, according to the New Testament conviction that our unity does not come about through harmonisation [*Gleichmachung*].”⁶³ In his reply to Schlatter, Barth accepts the invitation and appreciates it as “proof of great trust.”⁶⁴ He adds that “the happiness about it and everything that I could learn from it outweighs my concern that I could disappoint you.”⁶⁵ Perhaps referring to Schlatter’s earlier critique of his emphasis on God as ‘wholly other,’ Barth explicitly states that one of his “main concerns” is still to point to the “distance that separates human beings and the world from God.”⁶⁶ All the same, Schlatter was happy about Barth’s acceptance. Full of optimistic anticipation, Schlatter looked forward to the conference, expressing his “personal delight . . . in watching a colleague at work.”⁶⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, too, whom Barth had informed about his invitation to Bethel, was excited about the

⁶⁰ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 642.

⁶¹ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 9 February 1924, in Neuer “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 89.

⁶² Schlatter to Barth, 16 March 1924, in Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 96.

⁶³ Schlatter to Barth, 16 March 1924; in Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 96.

⁶⁴ Barth to Schlatter, 25 March 1924, in Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 97.

⁶⁵ Barth to Schlatter, 25 March 1924, in Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 97.

⁶⁶ Barth to Schlatter, 25 March 1924, in Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 97. Barth furthermore expressed his intention to change the suggested subject to the ‘Fatherhood of God’ (*Gottes Väterlichkeit*), to which Schlatter agreed. See Schlatter to Barth, 5 April 1924, in Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 98.

⁶⁷ Schlatter to Barth, 5 April 1924, in Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 97.

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public rendezvous of the two Swiss theologians in Bethel: “That you will appear with Schlatter in Bethel could become interesting,” he writes to Barth.⁶⁸

Unexpectedly, though, and “with great disconcertedness,” Barth decided not to join the conference after all. He argued that it “did not fit into the economy of my work . . . to express myself in this forum and to proclaim my doctrine of God openly to a large audience.”⁶⁹ Barth, it seems, primarily wanted to steer clear of any criticism of his notion of God as ‘wholly other’ at that point. Yet he assured his colleague that he would join the conference another time in the future.⁷⁰ Barth’s withdrawal was very disappointing for Schlatter.⁷¹ Still, one ought to recall the extent to which Barth’s dialectical theology polarised the theological landscape at that time. Schlatter’s friend, Karl Holl, for example, was not willing to lecture alongside Barth at the Bethel Theological Week;⁷² Friedrich von Bodelschwingh junior (‘der Jüngere,’ 1877–1946) also had reservations,⁷³ and Barth perhaps felt that he would not be entirely welcome after all.

Nevertheless, one observes a growing appreciation between the two scholars in 1924, notwithstanding their remaining theological differences. Although the time was not yet ripe for their public collaboration, their ensuing discussion bears witness to a sincere attempt towards understanding one another. Schlatter, professor emeritus from 1922, continued to teach in Tübingen until 1930,⁷⁴ and remained generally open to dialectical theology. For example, he recommended that the pietistic evangelical circles digest “a good portion of Barthian theology.”⁷⁵ His son Theodor took him at his word: Theodor Schlatter, born in 1885, and thus just one year older

⁶⁸ Bultmann to Barth, 18 April 1924, in *Karl Barth – Rudolf Bultmann, Briefwechsel 1911-1966*, 34.

⁶⁹ As quoted in Theodor Schlatter’s letter to his father, 23 June 1924, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 644.

⁷⁰ As quoted in Theodor Schlatter’s letter to his father, 23 June 1924, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 644.

⁷¹ In a letter to his son, Schlatter writes, “Barth’s cancellation is painful . . . I would have considered it as something new and great . . . We must be satisfied with the fact that he was, initially, seriously prepared to shake hands with us.” Schlatter to his son Theodor, 26 June 1924, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 644.

⁷² Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 643.

⁷³ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 642.

⁷⁴ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 592.

⁷⁵ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 10 November 1924, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 645.

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than Barth, followed in his father's footsteps as a pastor and theologian and offered his own critical evaluation of Barth's theology.⁷⁶

Further Developments and Debates

As the influence and fame of dialectical theology grew in the 1920s, so did Schlatter's curiosity about the movement. In early 1925, Schlatter had an opportunity to get a first-hand impression of some prominent advocates of dialectical theology. He attended lectures by Friedrich Gogarten (1887–1967) and his former student Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) and he also met Karl Barth personally in Basel.⁷⁷ Schlatter particularly appreciated that the proponents of dialectical theology advocated a decisive return to the authority of Scripture. "The movement, it seems to me," writes Schlatter to his son Theodor, "does seriously stick to Scripture . . . I think if they seriously continue to adhere to Scripture the admiring noise will soon fall silent."⁷⁸ This focus on Scripture was, he felt, of vital importance for German Protestant theology at that time. Schlatter continued to be particularly interested in Karl Barth, who from late 1925 had served as professor of dogmatics and New Testament exegesis in Münster.⁷⁹ This is reflected in Schlatter's 1925 and 1926 public speeches, lectures and seminars on Barth's theology.⁸⁰ Schlatter also revisited Barth's *Romans* when he delivered a speech in Halle on 'The Theology of Karl Barth

⁷⁶ In 1925, Theodor Schlatter published a review of Barth's 'The Resurrection of the Dead' (*Die Auferstehung der Toten*), a summary of the latter's Göttingen lectures on 1 Corinthians 15. Schlatter senior welcomed his son's critical essay. In a way reminiscent of his own praise for Barth's *Romans* earlier, Schlatter junior endorses Barth's work as a "liberating word, as he bears powerful witness to the greatness of God as the sole reality, the almighty Lord, creator and judge." Theodor Schlatter, "Vom Glauben an Gottes Offenbarung: Einige Fragen zur Theologie Karl Barths," *Beth-El* 18 (1925), 4. Much like his father, Theodor Schlatter appreciates that Barth "argues with holy gravity for the majesty of God" (*Ibid.*, 6), and he commends Barth's theology as it "deals seriously with the word of Scripture that becomes alive as the Word of God." *Ibid.*, 5. The young academic, however, also echoes some of his father's critical remarks. Theodor Schlatter argues that the 'otherness' of God takes in Barth centre-stage whereas his concrete revelation in creation and history recedes to the background; this neglect of the creaturely and historical facts implies that our faith does not find its proper foundation which weakens the experience of our connection with Jesus Christ. See *Ibid.*, 8, 10.

⁷⁷ After Schlatter had lectured about the "Deviation of the Church from the New Testament Ethics," they had a short meeting (see Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 648).

⁷⁸ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 28 May 1925, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 648.

⁷⁹ See Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 164-172.

⁸⁰ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 649 for details.

and the Ministry of the Pastor' ("Die Theologie Karl Barths und der Dienst des Pfarrers").⁸¹ In a way reminiscent of his *Furche*-review three years earlier, Schlatter criticises Barth's narrow rendering of God's revelation in creation and his lack of existential emphasis. Schlatter claims that, for Barth, "Wherever the Word seeks me out, with an impact like a bomb, there the revelation of God is [present]," Schlatter remarks, "yet sure enough only as a tangent, not touching the arc of human life, therefore not aiming at the centre, - not yet."⁸² According to Schlatter's reading of Barth, then, revelation seems to occur almost out of the blue, bypassing, as it were, the creaturely realm, the 'arc of human life.' This radically actualist understanding of revelation is too restrictive, Schlatter opines, as it excludes the significant aspect of God's revelation through the various media of creation, history, and anthropology.

Schlatter's critique, however, was accompanied by a notable respect for Barth's theology and in the spring of 1926 the Tübingen professor emeritus supported Bethel Seminary's attempt to invite Barth again as a speaker for the Bethel Theological Week.⁸³ While Schlatter underlines in this context that he does not wish "that the pastors . . . or the [Bethel] theological school . . . speculate or preach in a Barthian way," still for him "personally," he notes, "it would be a joy to collaborate with Barth."⁸⁴ Barth agreed and informed Bethel of his chosen subject, namely, the sacraments. Based on Barth's choice, Schlatter decided that his contribution would consist in a public reply to Barth.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, however, their collaboration was again prevented as Barth suffered a riding accident.⁸⁶ Even so, Schlatter adopted Barth's original theme of the sacraments and subsequently produced four lectures on 'God's well-pleasing Sacrifice' (*Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*) for the Bethel Theological Week. A close reading of these lectures reveals a subtle yet noticeable

⁸¹ For a short summary of Schlatter's 1925 lecture in Halle, see "Die Theologie Karl Barths und der Dienst des Pfarrers," *EvKBlW* 86 (1925): 116. In this lecture, Schlatter focuses on Barth's exegesis of Romans 1:18, 3:23 and chapter 12.

⁸² "Die Theologie Karl Barths," 116.

⁸³ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 649.

⁸⁴ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 10 March 1926, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 649.

⁸⁵ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 13 May 1926, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 650.

⁸⁶ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 650. Cf. Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 171.

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critical interaction with Barth's theology. Reading between the lines, one notices that Schlatter clearly composed these lectures aiming to continue his debate with Barth. Hence, Schlatter takes up significant theological issues he misses in Barth without directly referring to him on any page (which was not unusual, for, as mentioned in the introduction, it was Schlatter's habit to refrain, to a great extent, from alluding to other scholars' works). As Schlatter highlights the concrete factual-historical character of Jesus Christ's sacrifice,⁸⁷ the natural-creaturely realm as the context of God's revelation (such as the significance of Jesus' 'body' in the sacraments),⁸⁸ and its significance for our faith,⁸⁹ the communal aspect of the sacraments,⁹⁰ and our existential union with Christ,⁹¹ one is clearly reminded of the contours of his overall Barth-critique discussed so far. Although Barth was not personally present at Bethel, Schlatter evidently intended to keep up the theological conversation with him throughout the lectures. Thus, later that year, towards the end of 1926, Schlatter sent Barth his Bethel lectures which by then had been published (*Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer. Vier Reden von Prof. D. Ad. Schlatter in Tübingen*). Having received Schlatter's work, Barth read it in a single sitting, clearly aware that these lectures were designed as an invitation for ongoing dialogue. Shortly before Christmas, Barth replied to Schlatter in a heartfelt letter, expressing his appreciation for his work.⁹² Schlatter valued Barth's warm response, pointing out that they had

⁸⁷ *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*, 11, 20.

⁸⁸ *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*, 24-25.

⁸⁹ "Once we assume a fighting position against nature [*Kampfesstellung gegen die Natur*], our remembrance of the creator becomes a burden and faith in him [becomes] difficult." *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*, 31.

⁹⁰ *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*, 13-14, 18-19.

⁹¹ *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*, 22.

⁹² Barth writes: "I . . . have to confess that I cannot remember much from your pen that has left such a deep impression on me. I very much notice to what extent you have . . . tailored your [contribution] to my collaboration at the conference; I specifically want to thank you for the ethos it reflects. In fact – I feel almost relieved that due to my accident it did not come to me having to display the little streamlet of my insights next to the large stream of knowledge that is given to you . . . Let me sincerely thank you in my own name for the good message you conveyed to us all. One badly needs, from time to time, to *hear* something like that, as if one were a young student." Barth to Schlatter, 18 December 1926, in Neuer, "Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter," 98 (emphasis original).

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been—finally—able to establish something like a “companionship” (*Gemeinschaft*).⁹³

The German Protestant scene in the late 1920s was very much aware of the overshadowing presence of Schlatter and Barth. In 1927, Karl Barth was invited to speak at the ‘Second Theological Week of the Reformed Union’ (*Reformierter Bund*) in Elberfeld, running from 18 to 21 October 1927. The conference’s theme was the ‘Problem of the Word’ (*Das Problem des Wortes*). Though Schlatter was, in all likelihood, not personally present at the conference,⁹⁴ his students and adherents clearly were, and they firmly voiced their theological concerns, so much so that the conference leader, Schlatter student Hermann Albert Hesse (1877–1957), summarised the gathering as “a conversation between Karl Barth and Adolf Schlatter.”⁹⁵ Apparently not amused by the large number of ‘Schlatterians’ at the conference, Barth notes that some “querulous persons [*Querulanten*] wanted to hear from me, too, at all costs, what Schlatter had said so beautifully.”⁹⁶ This conference, then, in a way, reflects the dominating influence of the two theologians on German Protestant Reformed theology and church life at the time. Hesse remarks that though they were different in their theological outlook, the church needed to listen to both of them as they complemented each other. Whereas Barth, Hesse claims, points to the “prophetic power” of the Word of God, Schlatter accentuates its concrete dependence on the historical context (*Kontextgebundenheit*).⁹⁷ “We are convinced that both men are given to us by God,” he writes, “and that their dual service [*Doppeldienst*] can further help us to tackle the problem of the Word as required.”⁹⁸

⁹³ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 23 December 1926, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 651.

⁹⁴ This is, according to Schlatter biographer Werner Neuer (e-mail message to author, March 27, 2012).

⁹⁵ Hesse, “Was war der Sinn unserer Theologischen Woche?,” *Reformierte Kirchenzeitung* 77 no. 44 (1927): 346; cf. Barth’s own remarks about the conference in “Das Wort in der Theologie von Schleiermacher bis Ritschl, 1927,” in Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe 24 (*Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925-1930*), ed. Hermann Schmidt (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1994), 183-186.

⁹⁶ Barth, “Das Wort in der Theologie von Schleiermacher bis Ritschl, 1927,” 185.

⁹⁷ Hesse, “Was war der Sinn unserer Theologischen Woche?,” 346.

⁹⁸ Hesse, “Was war der Sinn unserer Theologischen Woche?,” 346.

On the Question of God's Revelation

In the same year, 1927, Barth published his first major dogmatic opus, *Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes: Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik*. Schlatter studied Barth's *Prolegomena* in the spring of 1928 and was clearly impressed. It is "a masterpiece," Schlatter admitted to his students during one of the open evenings at his home.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, it was challenging for Schlatter to evaluate Barth's work in detail. It cost him, he admits, "quite some time and effort" to clarify his "position towards Barth's *Dogmatik*."¹⁰⁰ Still ambivalent towards Barth, Schlatter again expressed both approval and criticism: "There is power and weakness in his position," he writes: "as it [Barth's work] is closely connected with his own, individual life history, it endows his *Dogma* with both momentum [*Stoßkraft*] and constriction [*Enge*] at the same time."¹⁰¹ Barth's strength, in Schlatter's view, is his ability to root his dogmatics in God and God's Word:

What do I preach and why do I preach? This is in Barth the root of dogmatics. An answer to this embarrassing agony is given in that God becomes for him the one who has spoken to us. *Deus dixit*. Thereby, the *Dogma* is not left in mid-air as speculation, but has a factual foundation and becomes the interpretation of what has happened and happens.¹⁰²

Although Schlatter applauds Barth's focus on the God 'who has spoken to us,' he feels that Barth is too restrictive when it comes to the ways in which God has done so. Again, the question of the locus and the extent of divine revelation emerges. Schlatter clearly remains critical of Barth's neglect of 'nature and history' as the context of divine self-disclosure. He comments:

My topic is God's work; his topic is God's Word. Work and Word are not at odds, but one. The Word is the creative [Word] and the work the visualised Word . . . His position connects him with Calvin, mine connects me with the

⁹⁹ Martin Tarnow to Peter Stuhlmacher, 30 May 1988, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 652.

¹⁰⁰ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 15 April 1928, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 652.

¹⁰¹ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 15 April 1928, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 652.

¹⁰² Schlatter to his son Theodor, 15 April 1928, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 652.

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New Testament. His position separates him from nature and history; mine puts me directly in it.¹⁰³

What Schlatter thus misses in Barth is a clear affirmation of the reality of God's (general) revelation in the context of creation. Schlatter refers to Barth's aversion to 'nature and history' as "Barth's *Katzenjammer*."¹⁰⁴ In a rhetorical question, he asks Barth, "Are there in the New Testament really no 'works of God,' in Paul's words, no 'works of the Christ'? Yet what are works if not events, history [*Geschehendes, Geschichte*]?"¹⁰⁵

During the rise of National Socialism in Germany, Barth and Schlatter were like-minded in their support for the independence of the church from any interference by the state, and both proclaimed the primacy of the Word of God as the sole criterion for theology. Barth, who had been professor of systematic theology in Bonn since 1930, and Schlatter had both been very suspicious of Hitler and the *Deutsche Christen* from the very beginning.¹⁰⁶ Whereas many of Schlatter's former colleagues at the Tübingen faculty joined the *Deutsche Christen*, Schlatter was principally opposed to a movement that, he feared, would jeopardise the impartiality and independence of theology and the church.¹⁰⁷

In April 1934, a few weeks before the Barmen Confessional Synod, Schlatter, by now in his early eighties, sent Barth his recently published commentary on Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, *Der Bote Jesu*. In an accompanying letter, Schlatter underlines his moral support for Barth who was at the time working on his draft for the *Barmen Theological Declaration*:

I send you the book . . . in order to express my conviction which unites me with you, [namely] that the church needs, in order to secure its existence and

¹⁰³ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 15 April 1928, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 652.

¹⁰⁴ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 16 January 1929, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 653. *Katzenjammer* means literally 'cat's wail' and is in German used to describe an overall state of despair and bewilderment.

¹⁰⁵ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 8 February 1925, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 647.

¹⁰⁶ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 737.

¹⁰⁷ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 739.

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efficacy, essentially the collaboration of those who interpret for her the divine Word. May God use both our words subservient to his grace.¹⁰⁸

Barth was “deeply moved” when he received Schlatter’s post and he replied on May 2, 1934 with a cordial letter. “It goes without saying,” writes Barth, “that I will always remain, in relation to you, a beginner and a student.”¹⁰⁹ While Schlatter welcomed the establishment of the *Bekennende Kirche*—he recommended that his son Theodor show solidarity with the movement—he could not offer it his full support.¹¹⁰ This was first and foremost due to theological concerns. Schlatter felt that the *Barmen Declaration* had too strong a dialectical flavour. It was in particular the strong Christocentric character of the *Barmen Declaration*’s first thesis¹¹¹ which prevented Schlatter (as well as his students Wilhelm Lütgert and Paul Althaus) from subscribing to it.¹¹² In contrast to Barth, Schlatter maintains that God makes himself not only known ‘in Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture’, but also in creation, through his works. For Schlatter, as noted above, the Word *and* the work of Christ (which can never be separated) are revelatory of God. Schlatter thus complains that “Barth’s exegesis” in the *Barmen Declaration* was in “a strange way limited.”¹¹³ He writes:

In my view we argue with irrefutable truth that the Bible consistently says that what is experienced is arranged by God, thus that God works effectively [*wirksam*] in history. I would have to close my Bible and [renounce] my faith in what I actually am and do if I had to abandon this [conviction].¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Schlatter to Barth, 28 April 1934, in Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 99.

¹⁰⁹ Barth to Schlatter, 2 May 1934, in Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 99.

¹¹⁰ Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 768.

¹¹¹ “Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God’s revelation.” On this first thesis of the declaration, see Eberhard Busch, *Die Barmer Thesen: 1934-2004* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 24-37.

¹¹² See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 765.

¹¹³ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 1 July 1934, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 766.

¹¹⁴ Schlatter to his son Theodor, 1 July 1934, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 766.

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Contrary to Barth, Schlatter is again keen to emphasise the broader context of divine self-revelation, namely also in the realm of creation and history. In his 1935 commentary on Romans, Schlatter writes:

God's incomparable power and glory are perceived. This occurs via God's *poiēmata* ['things that are made,' Rom 1.20], as a result of God's action, by what God's actions cause to be. Nature is something God has made. But the *poiēmata* of God consist not merely of those things and processes that fill the universe, for divine works also occur in the course of human history . . . Just as the human being encounters what God does, so the perception of God [*Wahrnehmung Gottes*] is brought about because the work sets forth the one who made it.¹¹⁵

By affirming the possibility of a 'perception of God' through his works, Schlatter's empirical-realist trajectory comes again to the fore. Yet one must clearly point out that Schlatter does not pursue a classic natural theology where the individual comes to know God autonomously. On the contrary, "[t]he knowledge of God that is present in humanity everywhere is God's gift and not human gain," writes Schlatter; "The individual knows God because God causes her to know."¹¹⁶ In a way then, for Schlatter all revelation is special revelation as it ultimately depends on the revelatory action of God. Revelation is, above all, special, in that it represents an encounter between the almighty Creator and his creatures. This aspect of *revelation as relation* is particularly important to Schlatter.

True divine self-disclosure in Schlatter's view occurs when the human being is put in a relation with God. "God's act of revelation . . ." Schlatter claims, "consists in setting human personalities in a specific relationship to himself by indwelling them."¹¹⁷ Schlatter time and again underlines in his works the necessity of an existential connection with Jesus Christ, the *Anschluss an den Christus*, through which we not only receive full self-awareness and knowledge of the world, but also

¹¹⁵ *Romans*, 36 [*Gottes Gerechtigkeit*, 57].

¹¹⁶ *Romans*, 34.

¹¹⁷ "Wesen und Quellen der Gotteserkenntnis," 172. I owe this quotation to Andreas Loos, "Divine action, Christ and the doctrine of God," 173.

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knowledge of the reality of God.¹¹⁸ This explains why, for Schlatter, anthropology and Christology are inseparable.¹¹⁹ “Anthropology,” Schlatter writes, “prompts us to look for the Christ, because in itself it [anthropology] cannot be completed [vollendet].”¹²⁰ Udo Smid rightly argues that Schlatter’s “anthropology presupposes and processes a Christocentric interpretation.”¹²¹ It thus seems that, according to Schlatter, the human being can neither have true self-awareness nor proper knowledge of God without having an existential connection with Jesus Christ. Only through an existential relation with Jesus Christ does divine revelation become meaningful.

On the one hand, then, Schlatter affirms that it is only by empirical seeing that we perceive God’s self-disclosure in the realm of creation, in Scripture, and in our consciousness, on the other hand, this ‘seeing,’ in order to become clear, true seeing, must be informed by our relation to Jesus Christ.¹²² Schlatter explains his relational approach like this:

The one who reveals God is his Son; this leads to the personal notion of God [*Gottesbegriff*]. With the Son, one has the Father. This, then, validates the notion of personality for ourselves. We as individuals are those whom God affirms, seeks, cherishes and those with whom he establishes his communion. What is real before God is the I [*Ich*] whose existence is unfolded in its consciousness and its will. Now we are being formed, within our personality, by grace, as the light that puts truth in our consciousness, as love that makes us alive. Now, the I [*Ich*] has found its ‘Thou’ [*Du*] and in that it has gained itself.¹²³

Divine self-disclosure for Schlatter always involves a personal encounter, where the human ‘I’ encounters the divine ‘Thou’ and thereby not only gains true self-awareness and knowledge of the world, but also special knowledge of God. Former

¹¹⁸ In his *Metaphysik*, Schlatter argues that through “our *Anschluß an den Christus*, we recognise him as the One who is set above all of us and who, with his works, embraces and unites us all.” *Metaphysik*, 39.

¹¹⁹ Schlatter underlines that “[we] do not achieve self-awareness without Jesus.” *Dogma*, 277.

¹²⁰ *Dogma*, 278.

¹²¹ Smid, “Natürliche Theologie—als Problem bei Adolf Schlatter,” 119.

¹²² This significant aspect shall be explored more closely in the following chapter on Schlatter’s ‘seeing-act.’

¹²³ “Christus und Christentum, Person und Prinzip,” 17.

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Schlatter student Otto Weber (1902–66) later describes, similarly, our “knowledge of God as an act of encounter, of fellowship.”¹²⁴

Given that they belonged to different generational cohorts, the debate between Schlatter and Barth found its inevitable end in Schlatter’s demise in 1938. Hence, Schlatter would, unfortunately, not encounter the mature Barth of the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. Their last recorded conversation is a letter exchange in 1936. Barth was by then in Basel as he had had to leave Germany as a result of his opposition to National Socialism. The then eighty-four year old Schlatter sent a final letter to Barth, inquiring whether he would publish an essay of his, either in the *Theologische Existenz* or the *Evangelische Theologie*, a request to which Barth gladly agreed.¹²⁵ About two years later, on 18 May 1938, Schlatter died peacefully in his home in Tübingen. He clearly left an impression on Barth as on the dialectical theologians in general. In the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* one of its co-founders, Georg Merz (1892–1959), writes about Schlatter: “Almost alone among academic theologians of the past generation, he asked questions and sought solutions that arose from an endeavour that must also be ours . . . his questions are ours, his doing is our example.”¹²⁶

Conclusion

Reflecting on Schlatter’s Barth-critique, one notices a characteristic pattern recurring over the years. While Schlatter certainly welcomed Barth’s emphasis on God’s transcendence, Schlatter felt that Barth went too far, losing sight of the important context of God’s revelation in creation, in history and humanity. This neglect has negative implications for our faith, and thus for our individual (and communal) experience of our connection with Jesus Christ. Schlatter’s theology requires not only observation of divine revelation in the New Testament, in creation and history

¹²⁴ Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol.1, 199.

¹²⁵ See Schlatter to Barth, 25 September 1936, in Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 100. Schlatter’s essay, “Allegorien-klingende Schellen, tönendes Erz. Eine Fortsetzung zu Hellbardts Deutung der Lüge Abrahams,” was published in the same year in *Evangelische Theologie* 3 (1936): 422-429. See Neuer, “Briefwechsel zwischen Karl Barth und Adolf Schlatter,” 95.

¹²⁶ Merz, “Adolf Schlatter,” *Zwischen den Zeiten* 5 (1927): 523-525.

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through the seeing-act, and its cognitive exploration in the thinking-act, but also the appropriation of the divine truth in the life-act. In Barth, Schlatter claims, the seeing-act is restricted through his idiosyncratic hermeneutics and his focus on the ‘wholly other’ God; as a consequence, the ‘thinking-act is smashed,’ that is, theology remains abstract and remote from the creaturely context of God’s revelation. Without a proper foundation, then, faith becomes a ‘leap into the void’ and a personal (and communal) experiential connection with Jesus seems out of reach.

To a greater extent than Barth, it seems, Schlatter affirms the possibility of human knowledge of God through the created order. However, this does not lead him to develop a classic natural theology as he is always keen to tie all human knowledge to its divine author, highlighting our total dependence upon him. Whilst, according to Schlatter, human beings indeed do have a natural knowledge of God, this knowledge is, on the one hand, only partial (and not saving) knowledge—who God is (*quis sit Deus*) remains hidden—and on the other hand, even this imperfect knowledge is always bound up with the divine revelatory initiative.¹²⁷ A theology proper is then always a supernatural, a revealed theology, as everything depends on the divine initiative. “We know God only through God himself,” writes Schlatter, “in that he grants us knowledge of himself, as far as he pleases.”¹²⁸ And while Schlatter agrees with Barth on God’s supreme revelation in Jesus Christ,¹²⁹ he wishes to stress the broad *context* of divine revelation in the created order, too. He also highlights, perhaps more than the early Barth, our experiential viewpoint as he stresses the *relational* aspect of revelation. Schlatter feels that this perspective is foundational both for faith to become real and for our individual and communal *Anschluss an Jesus* to work. It is in particular this latter existential, relational aspect of revelation which seems to find a stronger expression in Schlatter than in the early writings of Barth.

What emerges from Schlatter’s interaction with his Swiss colleague is a picture of Schlatter’s Christology that can be described not only as empirical-realist,

¹²⁷ *Gründe der christlichen Gewißheit*, 100.

¹²⁸ *Dogma*, 11.

¹²⁹ See “Das Kreuz Jesu unsere Versöhnung mit Gott,” in *Gesunde Lehre*, 11.

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but also as existential and communal. The following chapters explore this in more detail as we shall unfold Schlatter's relational Christology by looking at it through the lens of the 'seeing-act,' the 'thinking-act,' and, finally, the 'life-act.'

Interlude

In this first half of our exploration of Schlatter's Christological programme, we have covered his critique of Kantian Christologies, based on his studies with Beck and his reading of Baader. We then traced his critical engagement with Ritschl, Herrmann, and Harnack, and in our discussion there emerged a clear picture of Schlatter's theological method of empirical seeing, his awareness of the historical context, his desire for organic unity, and, in terms of Christology, his emphasis on relation and volition. Our final section on Schlatter *Zwischen den Zeiten* revealed his clear existential and also communal trajectory regarding New Testament exposition. Before we proceed to part two of this work, it might be helpful to briefly summarise the significant features of Schlatter's Christology identified so far.

We noticed, *first*, Schlatter's strong emphasis on the unity of the person and work of Jesus Christ, who performed the salvific deed on the cross in concrete space and time. As we have seen earlier, Schlatter was critical of Idealist Christologies which painted, according to his view, a rather abstract, and often merely moral, picture of Christ, overlooking the significance of Jesus' concrete action in time and history, and thereby emptying the notion of Christ of its most essential salvific elements. The historical Jesus, Schlatter argued against Herrmann and Harnack, is identical with the Christ of faith. There is no room and also no need for Christological dualisms. Schlatter arrives at these conclusions through his empirically based New Testament seeing-act (we have referred to this approach as Schlatter's critical empirical-realist method). In the subsequent chapter III, we shall investigate Schlatter's method more closely, with a special focus on Christology.

What stood out, *secondly*, was Schlatter's focus on Jesus' volition and his person in relation. While this emphasis might reveal similarities with Ritschl's account, we have laid out that Schlatter goes beyond Ritschl in linking Jesus' volitional being in action not only to humankind, but also, and most essentially, to God, such that Jesus demonstrates his divinity, his oneness with the Father. In

chapters IV and V, we will look more closely at this significant theocentric relational-volitional core of Schlatter's Christology.

Thirdly, we have seen how Schlatter continually highlights the necessity of an existential, soteriological relation to Jesus Christ by faith (this faith, of course, is based in Schlatter's system on the theological facts, as only in this way does faith have a proper foundation). More precisely, Schlatter speaks of a volitional union with Jesus that not only allows for a meaningful knowledge of God's revelation, but that also leads to a new ethical outlook for the individual. According to Schlatter, this crucial existential *Anschluss an Jesus* was not appropriately emphasised in contemporary theology. With these crucial components of Schlatter's Christology in mind, we now turn to the second part of this work.

PART 2: The Shape of Schlatter's Christology

This section represents the second major pillar of this thesis, looking more closely at 'The Dogmatic Shape of Schlatter's Christology.' In Part One we presented a short introduction to Schlatter's life and theology (chapter I), followed by an examination of the theological-historical context of his biography (chapter II). In what follows we shall explore the characteristic features of Schlatter's Christological programme identified so far in more detail. While the first part of this work was more in the form of a theological narrative, it is the goal of this second part to move more towards a systematic-theological discussion.

The overarching aim of this part is to portray the dogmatic shape of Schlatter's Christology in a holistic, and thereby very 'Schlatterian' way, namely with a perspective for the *Richtung auf das Ganze*, thus doing justice to Schlatter's unique linking of theological method, dogmatics and ethics. A professor of both New Testament and systematic theology, and an author of New Testament commentaries, as well as of works in dogmatics and in ethics, Schlatter unfolds, as mentioned earlier, a paradigm of Christocentric seeing, thinking and living. The advantage of presenting Adolf Schlatter's Christology in this way is that this threefold distinction mirrors Schlatter's own theological approach. As noted earlier, Schlatter distinguishes between 'seeing-act' (*Sehakt*), 'thinking-act' (*Denkakt*), and 'life-act' (*Lebensakt*). True theology, according to Schlatter's theological triad, consists in the unity of exegetical seeing in the *Sehakt*, dogmatic thinking in the *Denkakt* and ethical living in the *Lebensakt*. The theologian thus moves from an empirical analysis of the theological facts in the seeing-act to a cognitive evaluation in the thinking-act, followed by an existential appropriation in the life-act. Applied to Christology, this means that the act of 'seeing' Jesus Christ as he is displayed in the New Testament ought to be closely related to the dogmatic thinking-act in which the dogmatician composes a systematic picture of Christ. The theological task, however, remains incomplete without the volitional-ethical stage of one's individual 'union with Christ'

(*Anschluss an Christus*) through faith. In proceeding as just outlined, we arrive at a threefold structure for this second part, moving, *first*, from the *Sehakt*, which correlates with theological method, through, *secondly*, the *Denkakt*, which is more concerned with the dogmatic Christological picture, to, *thirdly*, the *Lebensakt*, where we shall explore the existential, ethical ramifications.

Before we proceed according to this roadmap, one ought to mention two crucial points. It is, *first*, essential to point out that a study in Christology, on account of its very subject matter, will never arrive at a finished state. Certain questions will remain unanswered. How could one possibly fully comprehend Jesus' being as fully divine yet fully human? Or how could we ever completely understand his pre-existence or the wonder of his incarnation? Adolf Schlatter does not claim that he has a solution for these conundrums. On the contrary, more than once he confesses that the subject matter he is dealing with in his theological research contains a great element of mystery. Our knowledge of Christ, underlines Schlatter, will remain partial. A 'complete,' finished Christology is thus impossible:

This goal is not achievable in its entirety because Christ is the concealed one, and there exists no direct, apparent fellowship between him and us. We do not see face to face, 1 Cor. 13.¹

However, what Schlatter does offer is a fresh and proficient approach to exploring this mystery as far as possible. In combining an empirical-realist method with a relational-volitional and experiential trajectory, Schlatter not only expands on traditional accounts of Christology, but also offers a unique approach that establishes him in the vanguard of today's relational Christological accounts. There are, *secondly*, certain criteria we are going to use in order to test the validity of Schlatter's Christology.² That is, the questions we shall put to Schlatter are as follows: Does his Christological account adequately integrate the person and work of Jesus Christ? Does it adequately describe the relation between the humanity and the divinity in Jesus Christ? Is Schlatter able to offer a coherent explanation of Jesus' cry of dereliction? And finally, does the account have a clear Trinitarian outlook?

¹ "Christologie und Soteriologie," 16-17.

² In the compilation of these criteria I greatly benefited from Bruce L. McCormack's 2011 Croall Lectures, delivered at New College, Edinburgh.

Having circumscribed our project, we turn next, as outlined, to the *Sehakt*, where we explore Schlatter's empirical-critical realist method (chapter III), moving then to the *Denkakt*: Jesus Christ as Relational and Volitional Being (chapter IV and V), and assessing finally the *Lebensakt*: Organic Volitional Union with Christ (chapter VI).

III. The *Sehakt*: Empirical-Critical Realism and the Unified Christ

Adolf Schlatter is a theologian of unity.¹ Schlatter's pursuit of a coherent theological framework with an 'impetus towards the whole' might well be termed one of his major methodological priorities. The careful reader of Schlatter's works soon realises how Schlatter aims to overcome any tendencies towards segmentation and compartmentalisation in theology.² Schlatter's affinity for unity, linked with his aversion to dualisms, has major implications for his Christology, as will be explored in this chapter. In short, he develops a unified account of Jesus Christ and rejects any theological attempts to differentiate, for example, between a 'historical Jesus' and a 'Christ of faith,' or between Jesus' actions and his convictions. Before we examine these aspects more closely, we need to identify the motivation behind Schlatter's quest for a unified Christ. What drives Schlatter to portray Jesus in this holistic way is his empirical-realist approach to theology. We shall thus, *first*, look at the empirical basis of Schlatter's theology in more detail before moving, *secondly*, to Schlatter's resultant portrayal of a unified Jesus Christ.

1. Faith-based Empirical-Critical Theology

Adolf Schlatter was from an early age encouraged to relate very closely to nature—what he calls his 'connection with nature' (*Anschluß an die Natur*).³ This early, realistic tendency was consolidated through his encounters with the Aristotelian

¹ Irmgardt Kindt was certainly right when she identified "the notion of unity" as a central theme in Schlatter; see her contribution *Der Gedanke der Einheit*, 13-28. In addition to Kindt's monograph, see Egg, *Schlatters Kritische Position*, 22, 33, 73-76, 83; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 78-79, 111; Lessing, *Geschichte der Deutschsprachigen Evangelischen Theologie*, vol. 1, 121; Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 493; see also von Lüpke, *Wahrnehmung der Gotteswirklichkeit*, 43-47.

² See his "Selbstdarstellungen," 157-158; cf. *Dogma*, 44, 370.

³ "Selbstdarstellungen," 155.

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Rudolf Eucken in Basel,⁴ and, later, with Johann T. Beck, as already mentioned, during his studies in Tübingen. In Aristotelian fashion, Schlatter thus advocates the “affirmation of that which is perceived” (*Bejahung des Wahrgenommenen*) which enables our human “consciousness to grasp the attributes of all being” (*die Merkmale alles Seins*).⁵ The close perception of reality became thus an integral element of Schlatter’s theological method. Schlatter writes:

I, for my part, consider the formula ‘perception’ [*Wahrnehmung*] as appropriate for my method and my goal; it characterises what I have in mind . . . I would . . . not reject the label *empirical theology*.⁶

For Schlatter, observation is key as only through empirical observation do we gather relevant knowledge.⁷ “There is no deduction,” Schlatter claims, “that can work with any other material than that which is perceived; even the most audacious aprioician [*Aprioriker*] has never merely skimmed through his material and the most assiduous spurner of seeing [*eifrigste Verächter des Sehens*] has never produced a thought other than by means of seeing.”⁸ In his prolegomena to dogmatics, the ‘Letters on Christian Dogmatics’ (“*Briefe über das Christliche Dogma*”), Schlatter asserts that it is only through objective observation that the theologian arrives at a suitable

⁴ Eucken points out that “[w]hat we are offered by our senses, are, according to Aristotle, the real things [*wirklichen Dinge*], and that gives his epistemology a completely objective character.” Eucken, *Die Methode der aristotelischen Forschung* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1872), 21. “Thus,” continues Eucken, Aristotle’s “whole philosophy is pervaded by the conviction of the reality and objectivity of observation.” *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵ *Metaphysik*, 26. Werner Neuer concludes that for Schlatter metaphysics is therefore “an ontology of created reality which tries to identify the immovable and unchangeable basic structures of nature, humanity, and history.” Neuer, “Einführung,” in *Metaphysik* by Adolf Schlatter, *ZThK* (1987) Beiheft 7, 5.

⁶ “*Briefe über das Dogma*,” 85 (emphasis original); see also 11.

⁷ See *Ethik*, 252; cf. *Metaphysik*, 18-25; “*Selbstdarstellungen*,” 164. On Schlatter’s empirical-realist framework see Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 51-146. Herman Bavinck has a similar empirical-realist trajectory; he writes that “the starting point of all human knowledge is sense perception . . . Truth must not be drawn from books but from the real world. Observation is the source of all real science.” *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 226. Bavinck also asserts, much like Schlatter, that “[n]atural certainty is the indispensable foundation of science . . . Prior to all reflection and reasoning, everyone is in fact fully assured of the real existence of the world. This certainty is not born out of a syllogism, nor is it supported by proof; it is immediate, originating spontaneously within us along with perception itself.” *Ibid.*, 223. Schlatter’s critical realist method has been recently picked up by N. T. Wright, who argues for a “critical realist reading” of Scripture. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to read the Bible today* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 82.

⁸ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 37.

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framework for theology.⁹ Thus, Schlatter needs no elaborate epistemology as such; we “need neither a theory of seeing, in order to see,” he argues, “nor a theory of epistemology, in order to know.”¹⁰ In this sense, then, Schlatter basically argues for a ‘common-sense approach’ to theology (not to be confused with Scottish common sense theology). He writes:

The suspicion that theology needs a specific preparation in order to arrive at an understanding and proof of its positions is destructive. The theologian proves the accuracy of her intellectual work in that she does not insist on a special logic, but instead thinks according to the same logical laws as everyone else.¹¹

For Schlatter, then, clearly revealing Beck’s influence, “every true theologian is first and foremost an observer.”¹² It is exactly such an empirical-realist act of seeing, Schlatter says, which renders theology a science, a *Wissenschaft*,¹³ and thus justifies theology’s rightful place among the other sciences within the academic setting.¹⁴ When, at the celebrations on his seventy-fifth birthday, a colleague described him as a “religious genius [but] scientific nobody” (*religiöses Genie, eine wissenschaftliche Null*), Schlatter retorted, “There is no religious genius in this room, such a person does not exist!—A scientific nil, well, we will have to see about that.”¹⁵ Schlatter was emphatic that virtually all areas of science use the same empirical method of observation; this applies to both the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and to the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*), and thus also to theology. “The first and

⁹ “Briefe über das Dogma,” 17.

¹⁰ *Dogma*, 42.

¹¹ *Dogma*, 558n15.

¹² *Philosophische Arbeit*, 12.

¹³ We here use ‘science’ in the broad sense of *Wissenschaft*, as Schlatter understood it, i.e., as also including the so-called *Geisteswissenschaften*, the humanities. Wilfried Härle notes that “*Wissenschaft*’s function is to expand knowledge in a revisable manner.” Härle, *Dogmatik*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 4. In this sense, Schlatter argues that theology can indeed count itself among the sciences. See in particular Schlatter’s “Atheistische Methoden,” 228-250.

¹⁴ This view was, and still is, subject to controversy; I have dealt with this problem in more detail elsewhere. See my essay “Seeing, Thinking, and Living: Adolf Schlatter on Theology at the University,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 30, no. 2 (2012): 177-188, and, in collaboration with James Eglinton, “Scientific Theology? Herman Bavinck and Adolf Schlatter on the Place of Theology in the University,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 (2013): 27-50.

¹⁵ Kittel, “Adolf Schlatter: Gedenkrede,” 8.

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foremost task of the dogmatician,” writes Schlatter, “as in every scientific profession, is observation, which shows her on the basis of reality the processes that bring us into relation with God and mediate the divine works through which God reveals himself to us.”¹⁶

This process of observing God’s work in creation, in history, and in the Scriptures as they witness to Jesus Christ Schlatter calls the ‘seeing-act’ (*Sehakt*).¹⁷ To Schlatter’s mind then, his empirical-realist method of ‘seeing’ rendered his theology unique among his contemporaries’ approaches. “This is why,” he explains, “I arrived at the conclusion that my dogmatics, which was concerned with the observation of the religious facts [*religiösen Tatbestände*], could show the students something that no other dogmatics said.”¹⁸ We shall next take a closer look at how the theologian is supposed to conduct this seeing-act when it comes to the observation of the New Testament facts.

Subjective Objectivity and Faith-based Theology

Applied to hermeneutics, Schlatter states that the theologian’s agenda must be to expose what the text itself says, in order to find out what “actually happened.”¹⁹ And in order to grasp correctly the facts (*Erfassung des Tatbestands*),²⁰ Schlatter calls for an almost neutral, “prejudice-free” observation.²¹ In other words, what Schlatter seems to suggest is that one ought to observe the given *heilsgeschichtliche* facts with perfect objectivity.²² Now one might ask at this point whether this is indeed a

¹⁶ *Dogma*, 12.

¹⁷ *Dogma*, 23; *Rückblick*, 208; *Erlebtes*, 102; *Philosophische Arbeit*, 12; cf. Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 51-73.

¹⁸ *Rückblick*, 159.

¹⁹ *History of the Christ*, 17.

²⁰ *Dogma*, 19. “The first task of New Testament theology,” then, writes Schlatter, “is the observation of the given facts [*Tatbestände*].” “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 35, cf. 40 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 168].

²¹ “Selbstdarstellungen,” 159.

²² Schlatter, for instance, speaks of the “impartiality of our eye [*Unbefangenheit unseres Auges*].” “Briefe über das Dogma,” 16. By the same token, Joachim Ringleben, who exhibits a clear Schlatter-affinity, argues, “Impartiality in observation and conceptual flexibility are indispensable in order to understand this human being Jesus.” Ringleben, *Jesus, ein Versuch zu Begreifen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 7.

realistic goal. What does Schlatter mean by ‘prejudice-free’ objectivity? One wonders whether Schlatter is not perilously close to opting for a positivistic understanding of hermeneutics.

A closer reading of Schlatter suggests that he certainly does not require the exegete to suppress any subjective involvement. On the contrary: The seeing-act is, as the term indicates, still an *act* of a unique individual. And as such, Schlatter points out, subjective involvement is inevitable, for the exegete is never, and should never be, a “lifeless mirror”²³ or an “observing machine.”²⁴ Schlatter’s demand for objectivity is therefore not for a neutral, “thoughtless empiricism.”²⁵ Rather, the observed material is processed by an individual who possesses preconceived notions that are active during perception (what Schlatter calls *Vorstellungsmassen*).²⁶ In fact, Schlatter actually allows for the infiltration of the seeing-process by the theologian’s idiosyncrasies. One observes here a fascinating parallel between Schlatter’s hermeneutical realism and the creative expressionism of his Dutch contemporary, the painter Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890). Both employ, in their own field, a quasi-objective critical realism combined with an idiosyncratic expressionism. “I am still living off the real world,” writes van Gogh in a letter in 1888: “I don’t invent the whole of the painting; on the contrary, I find it ready-made—but to be untangled—in the real world.”²⁷ Schlatter’s seeing-act could thus in a way be described as an exegetical expressionist form of hermeneutics.²⁸ Yet how, one asks, can Schlatter

²³ “Bedeutung der Methode,” 8; see also “Erfolg und Mißerfolg,” 268; “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 19 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 157]; “Briefe über das Dogma,” 19.

²⁴ “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 20 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 158]. Similarly to Schlatter, Herman Bavinck underlines that the theologian “is not only an intellectual but also a willing and feeling being; he is not a thinking machine but in addition to his head also has a heart, an [inner] world of feelings and passions. He brings these with him in his scientific research.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, 222.

²⁵ “Selbstdarstellungen,” 9; *Dogma*, 91.

²⁶ “Selbstdarstellungen,” 15; “Bedeutung der Methode,” 6; “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 20, 25 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 158, 162].

²⁷ Letter to Emile Bernard, Arles, on or about Friday, 5 October 1888, <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let698/letter.html#translation>, accessed August 10, 2011.

²⁸ Bruce L. McCormack also detects characteristic parallels between the expressionist art movement and theology at that time, in *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 33-34.

then still pursue ‘prejudice-free’ objectivity? How can he still call his empirical method ‘pure’?

Schlatter claims that the purity of the seeing-act is not jeopardised if, and only if, the exegete is, as far as possible,²⁹ aware of her own presuppositions,³⁰ while also performing the hermeneutical task devotedly, with “objective faithfulness.”³¹ Objective faithfulness then basically means that the exegete is faithful to her subject matter, attempting to approach it on its own terms. Schlatter thus connects hermeneutics with an ethical imperative of faithful New Testament interpretation. Only the faithful exegete, who performs the seeing-act from a position of faith, is a truthful observer who listens to the text carefully and thereby secures the accurate reading of Scripture which is Schlatter’s ultimate goal. The Swiss critical-empirical realist is eager to note that this almost paradoxical subjective objectivity is not a stumbling-block in the way of proper science. It is therefore not subjectivity per se which can harm the purity of the seeing-act, but only a profane, a selfish intention,³² what he describes as ‘delusion’ (*Wahn*).³³ On the contrary, he counters objections that this importing of faith into the theological task might obstruct his goal of ‘scientific work’ (*scientifische Arbeit*).³⁴ In agreeing with Anselm’s dictum that theology is “faith seeking understanding” (*fides quaerens intellectum*), he points out that faith is actually instrumental for accurate execution of theology, as only in the mode of faith does one achieve an elementary congruence between the God-made observed object (such as the Scriptures) and the God-made observing subject, the

²⁹ Schlatter acknowledges that there are many implicit influences that are not consciously accessible to the individual and therefore cannot be excluded from the judgement process. “Briefe über das Dogma,” 29.

³⁰ “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 20-21 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 158-159]; see also “Atheistische Methoden,” 247 [*Glaube und Wirklichkeit*, 85]; compare also *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 20.

³¹ “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 54 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 183]; *Ibid.*, 20-21; “Briefe über das Dogma,” 21; *Dogma*, 94; *Metaphysik*, 76.

³² “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 22-24 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 159-161].

³³ *Metaphysik*, 25.

³⁴ Letter to Hermann Cremer, 29 December 1894, in Stupperich, *Wort und Wahrnehmung*, 18.

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theologian.³⁵ “Our object,” Schlatter writes, “desires that we think of God.”³⁶ Thus, only as a coherent individual, with her life-act intact, can the theologian, like the natural scientist, work properly and accurately.³⁷ The exegetical as well as the dogmatic task can only be adequately performed when the theologian is at the same time a person of faith.³⁸ Intellectual capacity is obviously a precondition for adequate seeing, but the theologian is at the same time required to possess a pious connection with her subject. “Sure enough, the theologian must be a thinker,” writes Schlatter, “someone who appreciates her knowledge [*Erkennen*] as a gift of God; however . . . it is equally essential for her to be pious.”³⁹ Schlatter calls this mode of dogmatic thinking ‘faith-appropriate thinking’ (*glaubensgemäß denken*).⁴⁰ As a matter of fact, Schlatter goes so far as to say that the dogmatician’s thinking is, through faith, in harmony with the “mind of Christ” (according to 1 Corinthians 2.16), thereby enabling dogmatics in conformity with God’s will. This is possible due to the theologian’s ‘spiritual fellowship’ (*Geistesgemeinschaft*) with Jesus Christ, explains Schlatter, “so that we might be able to say with Paul, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me! And it is no longer I who thinks but Christ who thinks in me.”⁴¹ Theology is thus a deeply spiritual task.

In sum, Schlatter was clearly realist enough to acknowledge that there could be no such thing as a ‘presuppositionless exegesis,’ an insight which his student Rudolf Bultmann picked up later.⁴² If presupposition was unavoidable, Schlatter clearly preferred it to be orthodox rather than atheistic, since he considered the former to be congruent with the material he observed. Gösta Lundström comments:

³⁵ See “Selbstdarstellungen,” 15 and *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, xxii-xxiii. This congruence is, for example, absent in the ‘atheistic method,’ which renders theology absurd and harms the church. “Atheistische Methoden,” 235 [*Glaube und Wirklichkeit*, 76].

³⁶ “Atheistische Methoden,” 248 [*Glaube und Wirklichkeit*, 85].

³⁷ See “Selbstdarstellungen,” 15 and *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, xxii.

³⁸ Schlatter’s method shows here clear similarities with the one of John Calvin. See *Institutes* I.2.1.

³⁹ *Dogma*, 22.

⁴⁰ “Unterwerfung unter die Gotteswirklichkeit,” 11, 47-48.

⁴¹ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” xii-xiii.

⁴² See Bultmann’s essay, “Ist voraussetzungslose Exegese möglich?,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 13 (1957): 409-417.

Schlatter by no means abandoned this believing attitude in his critical researches, but considered on the contrary that it provided a better and clearer insight into the deeper meaning of the problems than is ever achieved by scholars who believe themselves unprejudiced but are actually entirely bound by (to them) self-evident theological and philosophical preconceptions.⁴³

In a way, then, Schlatter seems to suggest even stricter criteria for the science of theology than for any other science. One could obviously not expect an ornithologist to be transformed into a bird in order that he might be able to perform proper ornithology. Yet for theology, Schlatter claims, this metaphysical congruence between observer and the observed Word of God is not optional, but vital. Christian theology cannot be properly studied from a neutral point of view. On the contrary, its subject matter requires the scientific theologian to approach it not only empirically but also from a faith perspective. Having discussed these foundational aspects of Schlatter's theological method, we now turn to the implications of Schlatter's faith-based seeing-act for Christology, in particular in respect of his holistic picture of Jesus Christ.

2. The New Testament, History and the Unified Christ

In what follows we will *first* deal with Schlatter's understanding of scientific-historical research and how it relates to his Christological approach, while analysing, *secondly*, how his understanding of the seeing-act as a 'historical task' influences his view of a unified Christ.

Historical Research and Jesus Christ

The focal point of Schlatter's empirical-realist seeing-act is clearly the person and work of Jesus Christ. "In my view," writes Schlatter, "there is no higher calling for the human eye than perception which apprehends what Jesus desires and claims."⁴⁴ "Theology," he contends, "remains for ever Christology, perception [*Erfassung*] of

⁴³ Lundström, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus, A History of Interpretation from the Last Decades of the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day*, trans. Joan Bulman (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), 127.

⁴⁴ Schlatter in his "Foreword" to *Das Wort Jesu* (in *History of the Christ*, 17).

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Christ's image, insight into his history."⁴⁵ Perceiving Jesus' words and works within the context of human history is for Schlatter the ultimate purpose of the empirical seeing-act, since the appearance of Jesus Christ constitutes for Schlatter the goal of history.⁴⁶ The theologian has therefore to consider carefully Jesus' historical context. In fact, the seeing-act is essentially a historical task, simply because, Schlatter argues, "we receive God's revelation in history . . . there is no knowledge that is independent from the observation of history."⁴⁷ In the seeing-act, the theologian thus works as an observing historian who examines "what was true for them [the New Testament people]."⁴⁸ While this approach shares central elements of Ritschl's and Harnack's agenda, a closer look reveals that Schlatter's understanding of historical research differs considerably from that of his contemporaries.

Schlatter's emphasis on the historical context-relatedness of the New Testament clearly surfaced in our earlier reflections when we contrasted his approach with those of his contemporaries. It might be helpful at this stage to compare Schlatter's position on historical research with that of some of his peers more closely. One needs to bear in mind that Schlatter was obviously *not* against rigorous historical research; "I consider New Testament theology to be a historical task," he affirms.⁴⁹ And clearly, Schlatter maintains that hermeneutics ought to be rooted in concrete historical data and is therefore essentially dependent on historical and linguistic research.⁵⁰ Consequently, Schlatter ventured into in-depth studies of the historical

⁴⁵ *Gründe der christlichen Gewißheit*, 102-103.

⁴⁶ As Peter Stuhlmacher correctly observes, in "Adolf Schlatter," 233.

⁴⁷ "Theologie des NT und Dogmatik," 61 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 188]; see also *Erlebtes*, 59; "Selbstdarstellungen," 162. Martin Heidegger actually supports this position when he notes that "[t]he more historical theology is, the more immediately it captures the historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*] of faith in word and concept, [and therefore] the more 'systematic' it is." Heidegger, *Phänomenologie und Theologie* (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1970), 24. Interestingly, after witnessing Schlatter in the lecture hall, Martin Heidegger is said to have exclaimed, "Now that is theology!" Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 607.

⁴⁸ "Theologie des NT und Dogmatik," 9-10 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 150-151]; cf. "Bedeutung der Methode," 7.

⁴⁹ *History of the Christ*, 17.

⁵⁰ "Selbstdarstellungen," 164-165. See also "Entstehung der Beiträge," 76 and "Theologie des NT und Dogmatik," 71-73 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 195-197].

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setting of the New Testament, pioneering in first-century Judaism and linguistic studies, as mentioned earlier.⁵¹

However, what Schlatter reacted strongly against was an *exclusively* historical-critical method. He opposed any historicising approach that was, in his view, detached from the New Testament context and which conducted its research independently, as it were, of the New Testament data, thus from a neutral or even critical point of view.⁵² Such a procedure obviously clashes with Schlatter's faith-based approach described a moment ago. Schlatter could thus not agree with the pursuit of an exclusively, as he felt, historical-critical approach in the manner of Ferdinand Chr. Baur. Schlatter rejects any "opulent overgrowing of historicism" (*üppig überwuchernde Historisieren*),⁵³ which in fact clouds the view of the New Testament history of Christ, resulting in a distorted picture of him.⁵⁴ Schlatter's faith-based empirical approach does not allow him to use critical-historical research as a means to go 'behind' the New Testament sources in order to uncover 'hidden' information. In the same way, Schlatter could not 'demythologise' the New Testament data in order to rediscover the 'kerygma' according to the method of his student Rudolf Bultmann, or isolate the Christological kernel from the historical husk as his friend Adolf von Harnack envisioned.⁵⁵ Instead of going *behind* the New Testament, it is Schlatter's declared intention to go *into* the New Testament and to discover 'what is there,' in order to see Jesus through the eyes of the ones who encountered him back then. "Schlatter tried to see Jesus in the same way as a contemporary who believed in Him as Christ would have seen Him," Lundström argues.⁵⁶ Schlatter thus intentionally uses linguistic and historical tools in order to sharpen his view of the New Testament, and not as a means to question its validity or

⁵¹ See "Selbstdarstellungen," 162.

⁵² Cf. Köstenberger, "Translator's Preface," in *The History of the Christ: The Foundation of New Testament Theology*, by Adolf Schlatter, trans. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 13-14.

⁵³ "Christologie und Soteriologie," viii.

⁵⁴ See *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 286n1.

⁵⁵ See Schlatter's criticism of Harnack in "Christus und Christentum, Person und Prinzip," 9.

⁵⁶ Lundström, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus Jesus*, 127.

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reliability. “The historical task of the Bible,” Schlatter claims, “can by no means be anything other than an intense hearing of what the Bible contains and what it renders visible; anything contrary to that is not ‘science.’”⁵⁷

Evidently, many of Schlatter’s colleagues and contemporaries disagreed with his version of historical research into the New Testament.⁵⁸ The professional theological world did not receive Schlatter’s oeuvre with much enthusiasm, as seen earlier. Schlatter was, time and again, charged with naivety, and he was continually criticised for allegedly falling short of his own scientific standards of accuracy and precision. In his foreword to the 1923 edition of *The History of the Christ*, Schlatter acknowledges his awareness of certain critics who argued that he only imagined himself to be a historian.⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, Heinrich Holtzmann (1832–1910) and Walter Bauer (1877–1960) had both heavily criticised Schlatter’s historical approach in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*.⁶⁰ Bauer, for example, mentions that Schlatter’s claim to work as a historian was a “delusion” (*Selbsttäuschung*).⁶¹ “Since we know,” Bauer adds, “that one does not reap figs from the grapevine we do not expect a historical account from Schlatter.”⁶² Bauer attributed what he labelled Schlatter’s historical imprecision to his faith-based presupposition that rendered his approach useless:

⁵⁷ “Glaube an die Bibel,” in *Heilige Anliegen der Kirche: Vier Reden* (Calw & Stuttgart: Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1896), 42 [*Glaube und Wirklichkeit*, 54]. See also “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 56-57 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 184-185]. When Schlatter emphasises the ‘hearing’ or the rendering ‘visible’ of the Bible’s content, he is, beside historical studies, concerned with linguistics, with the relationship between language and cognition (“Selbstdarstellungen,” 164). “History means linguistics,” says Schlatter (“Erfolg und Mißerfolg,” 261). For a detailed discussion of Schlatter’s emphasis on language see Joachim Ringleben’s essay, “Exegese und Dogmatik bei Adolf Schlatter,” in *Arbeit am Gottesbegriff*, vol. 2, *Klassiker der Neuzeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 350-385.

⁵⁸ Today, scholars are more appreciative of Schlatter’s New Testament theology; see Robert W. Yarbrough, “Modern Reception of Schlatter’s New Testament Theology,” 417-431.

⁵⁹ *History of the Christ*, 22.

⁶⁰ Holtzmann reviewed Schlatter’s ‘Theology of the New Testament’ (*Theologie des Neuen Testaments, Zwei Teile: Das Wort Jesu & Die Lehre der Apostel*, 1909/1910) in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 35 (1910): 299-303, and Bauer reviewed Schlatter’s *History of the Christ* (*Geschichte des Christus*, 1920) in the same journal in 1923, *ThLZ* 48 (1923): 77-80.

⁶¹ Bauer, Review of *Die Geschichte des Christus*, 78.

⁶² Bauer, Review of *Die Geschichte des Christus*, 79-80.

Schlatter feels he is superior over researchers who are hesitant to offer more than ‘assumptions’ . . . He is fully self-assured. Expressions like ‘perhaps,’ ‘maybe,’ ‘possibly,’ or ‘probably’ do not exist for this author of the *History of the Christ*. He prefers the absolute language: ‘all,’ ‘always,’ ‘never,’ ‘entirely’; and he thereby reveals who he is, although he continually emphasises his intention to work solely as a historian.⁶³

This shows the wide gulf between Schlatter’s faith-based, almost existential, expressionist hermeneutics and the critical position of the supposedly rigorous scientific observers.

However, in Schlatter’s view, as pointed out earlier, Bauer and colleagues’ allegedly neutral scientific-historical approach is misplaced in theology. The New Testament historian who inquires about Jesus Christ is not and must never become a *tabula rasa*. Rather, this task requires the ‘whole dogmatician,’ with her own personality and her life-story, as a person who is conscious of her embeddedness in the wider historical context.⁶⁴ From this perspective then, it is evident that, for Schlatter, historical research and orthodox faith-based New Testament observation are not in a competitive relation but in fact complement each other.

The Unified Jesus Christ

Bearing in mind Schlatter’s particular understanding of historical research in relation to New Testament studies, we now turn to our *second* point, analysing more closely how Schlatter develops his Christology based on historical New Testament research.⁶⁵

First of all, Schlatter explains that the result of his empirical-realist seeing-act is a *unified* picture of Jesus Christ. Schlatter sees in the New Testament a ‘unified Jesus Christ’ who reveals himself as the God-human within the context of a concrete and coherent history and whose being is in harmony with his actions.⁶⁶ “I hope,” writes Schlatter in the 1920 preface to *The History of the Christ*, “that the reader will

⁶³ Bauer, Review of *Die Geschichte des Christus*, 78.

⁶⁴ “Atheistische Methoden,” 234-235; cf. *Dogma*, 5-6.

⁶⁵ See *Dogma*, 369, cf. 372.

⁶⁶ See Schlatter’s “Der Zweifel an der Messianität Jesu” and his New Testament theology, *The History of the Christ* and *The Theology of the Apostles*.

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succeed more readily in perceiving the unity binding everything that Jesus says and does when he pictures the interdependent activities of Jesus.”⁶⁷ According to Schlatter, it is thus impossible to drive a wedge between the different gospel accounts; it is always the same Jesus Christ in his organic life-act to whom the evangelists bear witness. Schlatter could therefore not scrutinise the gospel accounts expecting to extract an underlying Christ-principle (*Christusprinzip*),⁶⁸ or a certain ‘messianic secret,’ as his contemporary William Wrede (1859–1906) attempted.⁶⁹ With his faith-based empirical realism, Schlatter could not subtract alleged ‘myths’ from the gospel story on the basis of an anti-supranatural presupposition in the manner of David F. Strauss (1808–74). For Schlatter, the miracles recorded in the New Testament are not products of the evangelists’ imagination but are key elements of Jesus’ mission and vocation. “The more we reinterpret the miracle record or seek to distance it from the course of history,” Schlatter writes, “the farther we distance ourselves from the real events.”⁷⁰ There was and is only this one history of Christ, only this one message, only this one person of Jesus Christ who displays an organic union of being and action. Schlatter explains:

My attempt to concretise my theology for the church was based on the fact that I saw the history of Christ as a unity before me. I did not have next to a synoptic Christ a Johannine Christ, or next to a prophet who preached the Sermon on the Mount a Christ who carried the cross . . . I saw him before me pursuing *one* goal and *one* mission [*Sendung*] that generated the whole abundance of his word and work . . . I had the impression that I was entitled to this attempt, to show him to others like this as well.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *History of the Christ*, 21-22.

⁶⁸ See “Princip des Protestantismus,” 241-247. Schlatter has in mind presumably here his Swiss contemporary, Alois E. Biedermann (1819–1885), who differentiated between a ‘religious principle’ and the person of Christ. See Biedermann, *Christliche Dogmatik*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Reimer, 1884), 331.

⁶⁹ See Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien: Zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangeliums* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901).

⁷⁰ *History of the Christ*, 191. For further reading on Schlatter’s view on miracles see his lexicon entry on “Wunder” and his essay on “Die Wunder der Bibel,” in *Hülfe in Bibelnot*, 63-69.

⁷¹ *Rückblick*, 233 (emphasis original).

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According to his reading, Schlatter concludes that the New Testament nowhere forces its readers to distinguish between a ‘historical Jesus’ and a ‘Christ of faith.’⁷² The distinction between ‘historical Jesus’ and ‘Christ of faith,’ Schlatter thinks, is thus an artificial and unhealthy dualism that is foreign to the biblical text. Rather, the New Testament portrays, he feels, in a coherent manner the words, the convictions and the acts of the one person of Jesus Christ, who, as the Son of God, calls sinners to repentance, dies on the cross and thereby creates the new community of faith. To make a case for this account of a unified Jesus Christ was the purpose of Schlatter’s two main New Testament studies, *The History of the Christ* and *The Theology of the Apostles*. In these works, Schlatter argues for the unity of Jesus’ ‘life-act,’ carefully pointing to the harmony of his calling, his convictions, and his being in action, while also pointing to his continuing activity in the world through his presence in the apostles and in the church. In *The History of the Christ*, for instance, Schlatter lays out how Jesus Christ was from the very beginning convinced and assured of his messianic calling, having both perfect God-consciousness and perfect messianic self-consciousness.⁷³ Jesus, then, according to Schlatter, neither gradually grew in his messianic awareness, nor was his messianic office ascribed to him by the early community of faith in retrospect.⁷⁴ Jesus, according to Schlatter, was from the outset assured of his mission, and, being convinced of his mission, he acted. In Schlatter’s own words:

No division between history and doctrine does justice to Jesus’ work and death. The events of his life do not simply get a particular colour from the ideas he wove with them. Their entire source and origin is to be found in his convictions. He acted on the basis of his mission in the certainty of being the

⁷² He writes: “The failure to believe that Jesus confirmed himself as the Christ can only be maintained with the destruction of his whole word and at best proceeds immediately to the negation of Jesus’ existence. This is blatant rationalism, an inference from the alleged ‘impossibility’ to the destruction of the ability to see [*Sehfähigkeit*].” *Dogma*, 282.

⁷³ See *History of the Christ*, 284.

⁷⁴ This is what Hermann S. Reimarus, for example, believed. See Spence, *Christology*, 90-93; cf. McGrath, *Making of Modern German Christology*, 34-35.

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Son and the Christ. So discussions of what happened through him which ignore his inner life are worthless.⁷⁵

Schlatter is convinced that Jesus' self-consciousness did not shift from optimism to a later pessimistic outlook. Jesus, he clarifies, was never unsure of his assignment and never deviated from his goal, the cross.⁷⁶ Death came not as a surprise to Jesus but was the consciously willed apex of his kingly office, the culmination of the revelation of his divinity.⁷⁷ According to Schlatter, Jesus' 'kingly will' (*königlicher Wille*), his divine sonship, his call to repentance, his 'will to the cross' (*Kreuzeswille*), his fellowship with the disciples and his creation of the new community of believers are all significantly inter-related and dependent upon each other, forming one coherent unity:

His sovereign will, his divine sonship, his witness to God's sovereignty, his call to repentance, his willing the cross [*Kreuzeswille*], his fellowship with the disciples – in short the whole sequence of his acts – are not just one item after another. We fail to do them justice if we simply note each one separately. His knowledge of himself as Lord of the community is grounded in his filial relationship to God, in his knowing himself empowered to call sinners and in his authority to bear his cross. Jesus will be comprehensible to us in proportion as these connections are perceived.⁷⁸

When one understands the unity of Jesus' being in action in this way, Schlatter claims, it is impossible "to separate a 'message' from his actions, since, in his case, the word and the work, the assurance and the will, form a closely connected unity."⁷⁹

The Jesus who appears before Schlatter's eyes is the subject of a holistic life-act.

Schlatter writes:

⁷⁵ "Theology of the NT and Dogmatics," 156-157. Ward Gasque thus describes Schlatter's approach as follows: "[T]he focal point of his theology was simply the conviction that Jesus was 'the Christ of God' . . . and that Christ himself is the heart of the New Testament, indeed, of the Bible . . . He was committed to the belief that Jesus was already in his earthly life Son of God and Messiah . . . The Jesus of the New Testament was not the product of the church's faith but, rather, a historical given. To put it in other words, the church's faith was the product of Jesus, who himself was the Christ of God." Gasque, "The Promise of Adolf Schlatter," 29.

⁷⁶ See *History of the Christ*, 266.

⁷⁷ Schlatter writes: "A Christ on whom the imminent catastrophe began to dawn only gradually is not the Christ of the Sermon on the Mount." "Christologie der Bergpredigt," 323. We will return to this important aspect in the following chapter.

⁷⁸ "Theology of the NT and Dogmatics," 138 ["Theologie des NT und Dogmatik," 38].

⁷⁹ *History of the Christ*, 21.

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According to my view, it is one unified goal that determines the whole path of Jesus, his earthly work, its completion, his heavenly efficacy through the Spirit. During his earthly work he draws from his kingly mission his word of repentance, his proclamation of the divine kingdom, his signs, [and] his cross. The same mission makes his goal unique and empowers him to establish his fellowship with the disciples anew, now as the one who lives eternally. The same mission he accomplished by granting those who are now connected with him through faith, justification, redemption and sanctification, and the same mission bestows on his community what it is hoping for.⁸⁰

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have focussed on Schlatter's empirical-realist theological method of 'seeing what is there' in the New Testament narrative. The exegete, according to Schlatter, explores the New Testament from a distinct perspective of faith. This faith-based position is in his view essential for a successful examination of the biblical facts. From this New Testament observation, then, emerges a unified picture of Jesus Christ. Jesus, in his view, is the one who issues an authoritative call to repentance and an invitation to sinners, and at the same time, he is the Christ who embraces the cross upon which he performs the kingly deed of reconciliation and thereby creates the new community of faith. These are the major building-blocks of Schlatter's holistic account of Jesus Christ and they shall next be examined in more detail as we turn to the 'thinking-act' (*Denkakt*), moving thus to a more systematic-theological treatment of Schlatter's thought.

⁸⁰ "Briefe über das Dogma," 57.

IV. The *Denkakt* (I): Jesus in Relation to God

Having so far examined what Schlatter ‘sees’ in the New Testament through the lens of his seeing-act, we will now analyse how he processes the material perceived in the ‘thinking-act’ (*Denkakt*). In Schlatter’s words:

The religious question is never settled by simply handing on what Scripture says. The question is always: what does Scripture mean for us? This ‘us,’ with all it involves, takes us into the realm of dogmatics.¹

Or, in more conventional theological language, we are moving from Schlatter’s exegetical approach to his dogmatics, and in particular, his Christological framework. This is certainly an ambitious goal, which explains why the treatment extends over two separate chapters, *Denkakt* I and II. Our aim, however, is *not* to provide a detailed account of every minute aspect of Schlatter’s Christological approach (although this might be a promising task for a future project); rather, our research question is, as indicated earlier: ‘What is Schlatter’s specific contribution to Christology, and how viable is it?’

The move from exegesis to dogmatics is intrinsically ‘Schlatterian,’ as for Schlatter, the empirical-historical seeing-act is fundamentally related to the theological thinking-act in the same way that New Testament research is vitally connected with dogmatics.² “Theology,” he contends, “should therefore never be just exegesis . . . but the church needs continually . . . the dogmatician.”³ While this

¹ “Theology of the NT and Dogmatics,” 133 (emphasis original) [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 165-166]. See also “Bedeutung der Methode,” 7-8 and “Briefe über das Dogma,” 50, 57.

² See “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 58; “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 21 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 158]; *Rückblick*, 102.

³ “Selbstdarstellungen,” 156. See also *Dogma*, 556. On the one hand, Helmut Thielicke is right when he describes Schlatter’s methodological intention thus: “one has to put it this simply: he only wanted to be a listening human being [*ein hörender Mensch*].” Thielicke is on the other hand, however, mistaken when he concludes that this empirical agenda prevented Schlatter from becoming a thorough systematician. See Thielicke, “Zum Geleit,” in *Die Philosophische Arbeit seit Descartes*, by Adolf Schlatter, ed. Theodor Schlatter (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1959), 10-11. It is exactly through empirical-realist New Testament observation that Schlatter arrives at a theological system.

might be a truism, one wonders whether today, in times of increasing segmentation and specialisation in the theological ivory tower, Schlatter's reminder of the unity of these disciplines—also by way of his personal example as professor of systematics and New Testament theology—is a much-needed encouragement for positive interaction between the (unfortunately) often estranged departments of biblical studies and systematics.

In Schlatter's view, the findings of historical research in the seeing-act are organised and processed in the dogmatic task, where the dogmatician delivers a 'judgement,' an *Urteil*.⁴ Similar to the exegetical process, the dogmatic task requires the 'whole dogmatician,' involving her own personality and the context of her life-story.⁵ The systematic theologian (much like the biblical studies scholar), Schlatter points out, never works in isolation but always in dependence upon history, culture and tradition: "We receive the thought that we think," he writes, "through what has been thought before us;"⁶ thus, the "manner in which she [the dogmatician] participates with her observation and experience in the experience of Christendom shapes her dogmatic judgement."⁷ From this follows, Schlatter contends, that the systematic theologian needs to be aware of her own particular presuppositions, her personality and her individual history, while pursuing dogmatic judgements in the thinking-act. This idiosyncratic aspect of the dogmatic task though is not a disadvantage and thus need not be suppressed. Parallel to the seeing-act, Schlatter insists on 'subjective objectivity,' which is not a stumbling-block on the way to accurate dogmatic work, since for Schlatter, the faith-based imperative is effective at this stage as well, guaranteeing the congruence between the interpreting subject and the interpreted material. The dogmatic task is therefore intricately connected with the 'life-act' (*Lebensakt*) of the dogmatician who enjoys an existential 'union with Christ' (*Anschluß an Christus*). We shall now introduce some basic aspects of Schlatter's *Denkakt*.

⁴ See *Dogma*, 373-374; "Briefe über das Dogma," 33.

⁵ "Atheistische Methoden," 234-235 [*Glaube und Wirklichkeit*, 75-76]; *Dogma*, 5-6.

⁶ "Der Glaube und die Geschichte," 343.

⁷ *Dogma*, 5.

Relational Christology

Based on our considerations so far it is not surprising to hear that the notions of *relation* and *volition* are intrinsic to Schlatter's Christological project and they are prominent also in this part. It is particularly this relational aspect of Schlatter's Christology that Jürgen Moltmann considered remarkable. In the *Crucified God*, Moltmann points out that "A. Schlatter, *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 1913, deserves to be recalled from oblivion in the context of today's christological questions."⁸

Now in what sense is the concept of relation (and volition) central to Schlatter's Christological agenda? First of all, Schlatter sees Jesus in a twofold relationship, what he calls a 'double communion' (*doppelte Gemeinschaft*).⁹ Jesus Christ stands in relation to God and to humankind.¹⁰ In relation to God, Jesus is the Son of God who enjoys the full love of the Father and who obeys him completely by uniting his will with the Father's will, thereby proving his own love for him in return.¹¹ And in relation to humankind, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Man, who shares in our human nature, who possesses the 'will to the cross' (*Kreuzeswillen*) and who, through what he accomplished on this very cross, unites us with himself and establishes the new community of God.¹² In Schlatter's words:

⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974), 289n10. Although Moltmann does not tend to refer to Schlatter explicitly, a close reading of his works clearly reveals Schlatter's influence as we shall see in due course.

⁹ *History of the Christ*, 135 [*Geschichte des Christus*, 166].

¹⁰ Hesitant to speculate about the inner life of the immanent Trinity (as we shall explore in more detail below), Schlatter's Christological conversation focuses on the incarnate second person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, while avoiding any speculations about the *Logos asarkos*. In Schlatter's view, it is thus not helpful to venture into in-depth speculations of the *Logos*' pre-existence, for it will, on this side of the *eschaton*, remain a mystery—in his eternal pre-existence, Jesus remains for us "incomprehensible" (*unfaßlich*), Schlatter notes. *Dogma*, 334; cf. *Theology of the Apostles*, 256. Schlatter argues that the church fathers did a disservice to Christianity in that they focused their attention too keenly on a miracle that must remain mysterious per se. *Dogma*, 334. Note, however, Schlatter clearly affirmed the eternality of the *Logos*: "the thought of the creative process that gave him [Jesus] the beginning of his earthly life did not contradict his concept of eternity." *History of Christ*, 33. On Jesus' pre-existence see also *Theology of the Apostles*, 132-135, 254-255; *Dogma*, 333-341; *Johannes der Täufer*, 121-132; *History of the Christ*, 307.

¹¹ *History of the Christ*, 27 [*Geschichte des Christus*, 11].

¹² *History of the Christ*, 27 [*Geschichte des Christus*, 11]; cf. 125.

Jesus knew himself to be linked with God and with humanity through his origin so that this dual connection gave him the measure of his life and the goal of his work. By ‘Son of God’ he said that he had his life from and for God. When he simultaneously called himself the Son of Man, he said that he had and wanted to have his life from and for humankind. While the one name expressed his closeness to God, the other expressed his closeness to humankind. This double communion [*doppelte Gemeinschaft*] determined what he was and did.¹³

This brief quote illustrates neatly Schlatter’s preferred Christological approach: his is obviously not a rationalistic approach in the Hegelian tradition, nor does he move from religious experience to doctrinal assertions. His is rather a Christology based on the New Testament narrative and language (as one would expect as he proceeds from the New Testament ‘seeing-act’), which, and this is important, allows us to infer from ‘Jesus in relation’ to Jesus’ essence. This is basically his claim in the above quote, when he writes that Jesus’ ‘double communion determined what he was and did.’ Now this is, evidently, a bold statement and it will keep us busy for most of our discussion in this and the following chapter. We focus in this first part of the *Denkakt* predominantly on the relation between the Son and his Father (and the Spirit), whereas the following chapter V broadens our discussion to Jesus in relation to humankind (*Denkakt II*). Let us then turn, first, to explore Schlatter’s view of Jesus in relation to God.

The Divine Son

When interpreting Jesus’ relation to God, the concept of sonship is paramount for Schlatter, as he feels it is *the* crucial New Testament description of who Jesus Christ is. According to Schlatter’s reading, the Apostle John “proclaims Jesus in the conviction that the gospel is completely expressed by the statement ‘Jesus is the Son.’”¹⁴ “All John needed for his teaching regarding the Christ,” Schlatter notes, “were the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son.’”¹⁵ Now this Father-Son relationship is characterised by the Father’s giving and the Son’s receiving. “He knows himself as

¹³ *History of the Christ*, 134-135 [*Geschichte des Christus*, 166].

¹⁴ *Theology of the Apostles*, 132.

¹⁵ *Theology of the Apostles*, 150.

the Son,” Schlatter writes in his *Dogma*, “and he describes thereby the whole content of his life as effected [*gewirkt*] and received from God.”¹⁶ Note a similar statement in his New Testament work on the *History of the Christ*:

[B]y ‘Son’ he referred not to what he had made himself to be, but to what God had made him. By calling himself the Son of God, he derived, with complete assurance, his existence and will, his vocation and his success, from God.¹⁷

Receptivity and dependency are thus the key marks of Jesus’ divine sonship. Whilst this might well be a coherent display of the biblical witness, Schlatter’s statements so far raise some serious questions: Does Jesus’ dependency upon the Father imply inferiority? Was Schlatter a subordinationist, or a kenoticist? Before we return to these pressing issues, let us for now continue with our journey through Schlatter’s notion of divine sonship.

Jesus’ sonship, Schlatter explains, is a very special sonship. Jesus is not only a Son, but he is *the Son par excellence*, the one and only, unique Son of God. Jesus is thus not just a *primus inter pares*, and it is not a special messianic awareness, a unique moral aptitude or a particular capacity for teaching that renders Jesus unique, rather it is the “uniqueness of his sonship” which characterises Jesus Christ more adequately.¹⁸ Jesus, Schlatter posits, is Son in a wholly different way than we are as God’s human sons and daughters.¹⁹ “By refusing to ascribe to God the same fatherly relationship to himself as obtains with us,” Schlatter maintains, “he sanctified God’s Law and preserved the boundary between sinners and the only one who is truly

¹⁶ *Dogma*, 311.

¹⁷ *History of the Christ*, 30.

¹⁸ *History of the Christ*, 77. Kathryn Tanner points out, much like Schlatter, that “the uniqueness of Jesus is not to be sought in particular features of Jesus’ life that one could identify as divine—for example, his unusual self-consciousness or psychology as a man with a perfect God-consciousness or his omniscient knowledge or even moral holiness. What is unusual about Jesus—what sets him off from other people—is his relationship to God (his relationship to the Word who assumes his humanity as its own), the shape of his way of life (as the exhibition of the triune life on a human level), and his effects on others (his saving significance).” Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 20.

¹⁹ Schlatter clarifies that “Jesus distinguished his relationship with God consistently and clearly from that enjoyed by others, including the sonship of God he gave to his disciples.” *History of the Christ*, 75; cf. *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 233-234.

righteous.”²⁰ In this sense then, Schlatter concludes, Jesus is the “Only One with the Father;” he is “in the strict sense ‘the only Son.’”²¹ This is important to note because it distinguishes Schlatter from many of his contemporaries as discussed earlier.

Reacting against any anthropological domestication of Christology, any reduction of Christ to a moral example, Schlatter underlines the ‘otherness’ of Christ, making a strong case for Jesus’ divinity. Schlatter’s most significant Christological works, especially the already mentioned ‘Jesus’ Divinity and the Cross’ (*Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*), distinctly underscore Jesus’ divinity (the title obviously gives it away), in particular as it is revealed in and through his relation with the Father. This was Schlatter’s creative way of offering a corrective of what he regarded as the ‘reduced’ developments in recent Christology.²²

Recapitulating our reflections so far, we note that Schlatter seems to suggest an alternative way for Christology. According to Schlatter’s *Denkakt*, the theologian is to look at Jesus *not* through the ontological lens (only), attempting to explore Jesus’ being in isolation, which might lead in his view to philosophical speculation (more on this below), but rather, based on the New Testament seeing-act, through relational spectacles, thus focussing on Jesus as Son in relation to the Father, from which, in turn, one might certainly draw inferences to ontology.²³ We shall now turn to explore this significant aspect of Schlatter’s Christology in more detail. In a *first step*, we consider Jesus’ relational (and volitional) union with the Father, through the Holy Spirit, and how it relates to his essential union with God. *Secondly*, the focus will

²⁰ *History of the Christ*, 76.

²¹ *Theology of the Apostles*, 158.

²² If one considers the Christological landscape today, in particular some forms of ‘Process Christology’ (which might run the risk of overemphasising Jesus’ humanity at the expense of his divinity), it seems that Schlatter’s voice is still educative today. See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christology: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 192-193.

²³ Christoph Schwöbel argues along the same lines: “Christological reflection tends to get lost in the intricacies of the relations of the two natures of Christ if the framework of the relations between the Father, the Son and the Spirit is no longer seen as that which defines the hypostatic identity and communal essence of God.” Schwöbel, “Christ for Us—Yesterday and Today: A Response to ‘The Person of Christ,’” in *The Person of Christ*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes and Murray A. Rae (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 186. “[T]he question of the divinity of Christ should not be interpreted in terms of his possession of a divine nature, but should primarily be seen in terms of his relationship as the Son to the Father as it is mediated through the Spirit.” Schwöbel, “Christology and Trinitarian Thought,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 139.

shift to the ethical aspect of this volitional union, namely, Jesus' concrete display of obedience and submission to the Father, again, mediated by the Holy Spirit. The adjacent question, then, is whether Schlatter is able to offer a balanced account of the Son's submission and the Father's *monarchia* without succumbing to the problematic position of subordinationism, or some of the other 'isms' mentioned earlier; this shall be in the focus of our concluding, *third*, section.

1. Essential Union and Volitional Union

Let us consider, *first*, how Schlatter relates divine relational-volitional union to essential union. We begin this exploration with a brief explanation of Schlatter's preferred way of talking about Jesus Christ in relational terms.

Relational Trinitarian Language

At the outset, one must acknowledge that Schlatter clearly approves of the patristic formula that Jesus is 'of one substance' (*homoousios*) with the Father and he certainly agrees with the Symbol of Chalcedon, which regards Jesus as having two natures, one divine and one human.²⁴ Schlatter uses the concept of 'person' regarding Jesus Christ, clearly aware of the term's problematic Greek baggage; but Schlatter stresses that in his view, person means always person in volitional relation with another person, which excludes any individualistic connotations.²⁵ Schlatter feels that it is difficult, perhaps even inadequate, to examine Jesus Christ in ontological terms like 'nature' or 'being' alone, since our knowledge of this aspect of reality will remain partial and thus lead to mere speculation.²⁶ Aiming to establish

²⁴ Leontius of Byzantium (485–543) developed the concept of *enhyposis*, where the human nature of Christ is not considered to exist in its own *hypostasis* but to subsist enhypostatically in the *hypostasis* of the *Logos*. Schlatter, though hesitant to use this vocabulary, would be happy with this affirmation, while pointing to the central aspect of Jesus in relation to the Father and the Spirit. See Loos, "Divine Action, Christ, and the Doctrine of God," 216-217.

²⁵ In his treatment of 'God's Will' in his dogmatics, Schlatter claims that the volitional bond between the members of the Trinity is key to our understanding of their unity. See *Dogma*, 179-180, 573n108, 589n206.

²⁶ If one considers Jesus' earthly life, Schlatter contends, one encounters someone who was clearly opposed to "theological intellectualism" (*theologisierenden Intellektualismus*). Jesus was, he adds, the "perfect anti-gnostic" (*der vollendete Antignostiker*). *Dogma*, 318. That is, Jesus neither "taught the presence of a divine power or substance in him nor the fusing [*Verschmelzung*] of his consciousness with the consciousness of God." *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 231. Schlatter's aversion to gnostic

coherence within his own framework, Schlatter intends to use the relational language of the New Testament *Sehakt* as a basis for his considerations in the *Denkakt*. He thus intends to use “conceptions of God” that are “taken from personal life,” as he finds them in the New Testament narrative, such as ‘Son,’ ‘Father,’ ‘will,’ ‘obedience’ and the like.²⁷ Now, this does not mean that Schlatter is blind to any ontological language in the New Testament, but it reflects his hesitation as a theologian, encountering the God who is ‘wholly other’ (*der ganz andere*).²⁸ Demonstrating a high doctrine of divine incomprehensibility,²⁹ Schlatter is hesitant to use “material formulas, forces, substances or the like to describe Christ.”³⁰ As we have no unmediated perception of the divine essence (*ousia*), the ideal starting-point is the divine relation and action described in the New Testament.³¹ Only in this way, and from this angle—and this is Schlatter’s important argument—can we infer any claims in respect of ontology. Of course, one could argue at this point whether Schlatter might have overlooked Jesus’ crucial self-testimonies in the gospels, such

speculations might actually have been one of the theological overlaps between him and his Berlin colleague Adolf von Harnack. Harnack complains about the intrusion of foreign (Gnostic) concepts like ‘substance,’ ‘essence,’ and ‘being’ into theological language and debate. See Harnack, *Wesen des Christentums*, e.g. 115-120. In rejecting any “philosophical volatilisation of our saviour” (*alle philosophische Verflüchtigung unseres Heilandes*), Harnack would surely have found Schlatter’s support. Harnack in Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, *Adolf von Harnack*, 67. However, as noted earlier, Schlatter was not able to agree with Harnack’s radical programme of rediscovering Jesus’ original message by separating the historical husk from the essential kernel of Christianity (see chapter II/2).

²⁷ *Theology of the Apostles*, 254. “[The Apostle] John’s concept of God,” for example, Schlatter notes, “takes on a Trinitarian form without reflecting a formulaic use of the three divine names.” *Theology of the Apostles*, 144. One might detect here parallels to the approach of Schlatter’s student Karl Barth. See in particular *CD IV*, 1-3; cf. Ernstpeter Maurer, “Narrative Strukturen im theologischen Denken Karl Barths,” *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 23 (2007): 9-21. For recent narrative approaches to Christology see for example Richard A. Burrige, “From Titles to Stories: A Narrative Approach to the Dynamic Christologies of the New Testament,” in *The Person of Christ*, ed. Stephen R. Holmes and Murray A. Rae (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 37-60.

²⁸ “Wert und Unwert,” 263.

²⁹ “For us,” writes Schlatter, “he [God] retains the impenetrability of the one who is absolutely superior” (*Er behält für uns die Undurchdringlichkeit des uns schlechthin Überlegenen*). “Unterwerfung unter die Gotteswirklichkeit,” 10. Schlatter’s language is clearly reminiscent of Schleiermacher; we will highlight some fascinating parallels between the two theologians throughout this discussion.

³⁰ *Theology of the Apostles*, 254.

³¹ With respect to the being of Jesus Christ, Schlatter prefers the term ‘form’ over the term ‘nature,’ since the latter is foreign, he feels, to the New Testament language. That “Paul avoided this term,” Schlatter writes, “shows how little he was concerned to accommodate his thought to Greek conceptualities.” *Theology of the Apostles*, 259.

as his statement in John, for instance: 'I and the Father are one' (John 10.30). Schlatter would obviously agree that this is a statement that refers to Jesus' claim of his divinity; still, Schlatter feels that our language soon reaches its limits when we intend to penetrate the question of essence. Instead, he is interested in exploring the concrete ways in which this essence, in this case, Jesus' divine essence, finds its concrete, tangible expression in 'real life,' against the backdrop of concrete history, and, particularly, as it is revealed in his relation to God (Schlatter makes this case explicitly in the chapter on 'Jesus' Statements Regarding Himself,' in the *History of the Christ*).³²

To sum up, based on the *Sehakt*'s principle of '[s]eeing what is there before your eyes,'³³ Schlatter encounters in the New Testament *a person in communion of will with God*, which allows us to infer *Jesus' communion in essence with God*, and thus his divinity. Let us consider Schlatter's line of reasoning at this point in more detail.

From Relation to Essence

We have noted Schlatter's desire to direct the theological conversation away from the—transcendent—'being' of the second person of the Trinity towards the phenomenological reality of Jesus Christ's relational-volitional union with the Father. Still, this does not mean that Schlatter disregards their essential union. On the contrary: In Schlatter's view, 'unity of will' (*Willenseinheit*) and 'unity of essence' (*Wesenseinheit*) are 'inseparable.' He writes:

The completeness of his divine sonship meant for Jesus that he was given unity of will with God so that he knew himself to be the one who did the entire will of God with complete obedience. This perfect communion of will [*Willensgemeinschaft*], however, was for him one with the perfect communion in essence [*Wesensgemeinschaft*]. This explains why he described himself as eternal. Jesus did not distinguish between unity of will and unity of essence but rather considered God's will and being as inseparable.³⁴

³² *History of the Christ*, 125-136.

³³ Neuer, *Schlatter: A Biography*, 99.

³⁴ *Geschichte des Christus*, 16; cf. *Der Evangelist Johannes*, 322.

While Schlatter regards ‘will and being as inseparable,’ he argues that the ‘unity of will’ should be the starting-point for our theological conversation, as it elucidates the ‘unity in essence.’ And, following Schlatter, there is much to discover here.

Volitional union represents for Schlatter the ‘real Christological miracle,’ which allows us to gain deeper insight into the essential union between the Son and his Father. This deserves closer inspection.

With his distinct volitional perspective, Schlatter claims that from our human point of view, the ‘real’ Christological miracle is Jesus’ volitional union with God (and also with us). The “real miracle in Jesus,” Schlatter notes, “lies in his volition, [namely] how he could love God wholeheartedly and at the same time could and can love the world.”³⁵ “In my view,” Schlatter contends, “the miracle in Jesus’ being seems to be a miracle of union, of volitional [union] and thereby an essential [*wesentlichen*] union, not a transformation of nature.”³⁶ Jesus, Schlatter claims, did not explain the nature of his being, his communion in essence with God or his pre-existence in ontological terms; instead, Jesus revealed himself as the obedient Son who acts, against the backdrop of concrete history, in communion of will with the Father and thereby reveals his union of essence with him.³⁷ The keyword here is

³⁵ “Christi Versöhnen und Christi Vergeben,” 163.

³⁶ “Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu,” 46-47. In that respect one must mention Schlatter’s critical view of the concept of the communication of attributes. Schlatter fears that the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* could jeopardise the humanity of Jesus Christ. “Luther’s formula was,” Schlatter echoes the Reformed critique, “insufficient due to its scholastic terminology. It gives rise to an obscure thought when one holds that the properties become separated from their substance and through their transfer do not change the other substance. The criticism, namely that the humanity of Jesus disappears when it is endowed with the attributes of the divinity, was justified.” *Dogma*, 339. In Schlatter’s view, a narrative approach to understanding the person of Jesus Christ, using notions of relation and volition, seems more helpful than speculation about a communication of attributes. Schlatter would have thus undoubtedly subscribed to Christoph Schwöbel’s criticism in that context: “The way in which the *communicatio idiomatum* is conventionally defined sees it as the communication of attributes of one of the two ‘natures’ of Christ, the divine and the human, in the unity of the one person of Christ. This, however, presupposes that we know what the divine nature and what the human nature are so that we can specify which attributes can legitimately be communicated from one to the other. This presupposition is by no means unproblematical.” Schwöbel, “Christ for Us,” 193.

³⁷ Schlatter writes: “Jesus’ message did not consist in a description of heaven or of God’s nature or of the glory of his pre-existence but rather in the claim that he had been sent to humanity and was calling it to himself. Accordingly, he did not point to what he had once been in unity with God but to what he now was for humanity by virtue of that unity. Therefore he never made his eternity the topic of instruction, with the theoretical purpose of fleshing out christological doctrine as fully as possible.” *History of the Christ*, 128.

‘reveals.’ That is, as noted above, Schlatter seems to regard the relational-volitional union as a *manifestation*, or *demonstration* of the essential union.³⁸ Hence, the volitional union between the Father and the Son, what he calls their ‘communion of will’ (*Willensgemeinschaft*), is key to understanding their ‘communion in essence’ (*Wesensgemeinschaft*)—and not the other way round. In Schlatter’s own words, and it is particularly the last sentence which is relevant here:

Jesus’ way leads him into the massive contrast of humiliation [*Erniedrigung*] and exaltation [*Erhöhung*]; the New Testament’s gaze on God, however, remains consistent in spite of this powerful tension and [it] regards Jesus, in whatever position [he might be], in unbroken union of will [*Willenseinheit*] with the Father. How could one still believe in their union of essence [*Homousie*] if the union of will were questionable! Unity of essence manifests itself in the unanimity of the wills [*In der Einstimmigkeit der Willen hat die Wesenseinheit ihre Manifestation*].³⁹

The only way for the theologian to approach the mystery of consubstantiality is then by means of relation and volition. In other words, our (limited) knowledge of the divine essential union is dependent upon our knowledge of the divine volitional union.

To sum up our considerations so far, Schlatter sees, based on his New Testament seeing-act, the Son of God living and acting in complete union of will and of love with the Father, which reflects his essential union with him. From Jesus’ perfect volitional union with God, one can infer his essential union with him, making the case for Jesus’ divinity. Moving ahead in our discussion, we now look more closely at how Schlatter conceptualises volitional union in detail. How exactly *does*

³⁸ This is reminiscent of Gregory of Nyssa’s credo that unity of potency implies unity of nature. Gregory writes: “For the community of nature gives us warrant that the will of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is one, and thus, if the Holy Spirit wills that which seems good to the Son, the community of will clearly points to unity of essence.” *Against Eunomius*, II, §15, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 132.

³⁹ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 9. Jürgen Moltmann’s vocabulary is strongly reminiscent of Schlatter’s when he asserts the “conformity of will” (*Willenskonformität*) between Father and Son. Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 230 [*Crucified God*, 252]. Much like Schlatter, Moltmann argues for a relational-volitional union between Father and Son on the cross as evidence for their essential union. With a view to the “volitional union [*Willensgemeinschaft*] between the Father and the Son on the cross,” Moltmann writes, one can speak “also of an essential union [*Wesensgemeinschaft*], of a *homoousion*.” Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 252 [*Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 231].

Schlatter conceive of Jesus' volitional union with the Father? And what is the Holy Spirit's role in this volitional union?

2. Volitional Union, Filial Obedience and the Holy Spirit

Following Schlatter, the union between Jesus and his Father is revealed most clearly in their *volitional-ethical union*. It is primarily through his actual obedience and his humble submission to the Father through love, Schlatter claims, that Jesus demonstrates the reality of his divine sonship and thus his essential union with God. In what follows we shall unpack the ethical dimension of divine sonship as Schlatter understands it.

Filial obedience is *the* hallmark of Jesus' divine sonship. Jesus' sonship, Schlatter underlines, "consisted in the exercise of obedience;"⁴⁰ "the Father counts on the will of the Son and the Son gives him the same [will]."⁴¹ Jesus' obedience is thus *the* factual proof of his volitional union with God and, as such, also *the* sign of his essential union with the Father.⁴² As the obedient Son, Jesus unites his will with the Father's will and thereby reveals his divinity. Through his New Testament seeing-act, Schlatter encounters the obedient Son, who says: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work" (John 4.34, cf. John 5.30 and 6.38).⁴³ Obedience is thus not a theoretical concept, or an attribute that is supernaturally bestowed upon the Son by his Father; rather, what we have here in the biblical data is, in Schlatter's view, practical obedience, lived out in actual history and in response to God. "Jesus always linked the assurance of God," Schlatter writes, "with obedience, not with theory."⁴⁴ The obvious question at this point is: Which will is it that Jesus unites with the Father's will? Is it his human will, or his divine will, or both?

⁴⁰ *History of the Christ*, 44-45.

⁴¹ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 233-234.

⁴² "Jesu Demut," 65, 85.

⁴³ Commenting on this particular verse, Schlatter writes: "This [Jesus'] oneness with the divine will, which renders him subservient to the divine work, is the foundation of his life and the source of his power." *Der Evangelist Johannes*, 130.

⁴⁴ *History of the Christ*, 92-93.

Which Will is united with God's Will?

From what has been said so far, one might imagine that Schlatter, with his emphasis on the unified Jesus Christ, with one mission and one goal, would perhaps also prefer to speak of only one will in Jesus Christ. Indeed, Schlatter, never a friend of dualisms, is hesitant to clearly elaborate on this issue; concrete references to Jesus' human will or his divine will are sparse. This obviously begs the question whether Schlatter was a monothelitist. In short: This does not seem to be the case. A close reading of his works shows that Schlatter agrees with Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662), who claimed, against the Patriarch of Constantinople, that there are in Jesus two wills, a human will and a divine will; these wills, however are not at odds, but harmoniously united in the one person of Jesus Christ (which is basically the dyothelitist position).⁴⁵ This position finds Schlatter's support: In Jesus we observe, he writes, the "unity of willing and working of the deity and humanity."⁴⁶ So yes, Schlatter acknowledges that there are two wills in Jesus Christ, a human and a divine volition. However, in accordance with the empirical-realist principles of his *Sehakt*, he does not elaborate on the rather theoretical question of the two wills (and their unification) in Jesus, but focuses on the New Testament narrative where he sees *one* person with *one* will, leading to concrete action in history. Since Schlatter does not read of an internal volitional struggle *within* Jesus, that is, as he does not encounter in his New Testament observation any volitional confusion or competition between the two wills in Jesus, he thus focuses on the dynamic inner 'volitional union' (*Willensverband*) of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Pyrrhus I of Constantinople (d. 654) argued that Jesus Christ had only one will (monothelitism). Maximus the Confessor objected, claiming that volition is an intrinsic component of being human. Being able to choose, freely, is a central characteristic of humankind. From the assertion 'Jesus is truly a human being' thus follows that he must also possess a truly human will. Additionally, as he is God, he must also have a divine will. The two wills in Jesus are, according to Maximus, united in the one person of Jesus Christ; that is, the human will is in voluntary conformity with the divine will (dyothelitism). The Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople III) recognised in 681 Maximus' dyotheletic view as orthodox. See Karl-Heinz Menke, *Jesus ist Gott der Sohn Sohn: Denkformen und Brennpunkte der Christologie*, 2nd ed. (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2011), 270-273; cf. Helmut Hoping, *Einführung in die Christologie*, 118-122.

⁴⁶ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 28.

⁴⁷ *Dogma*, 338; cf. "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 44.

The reader might wonder at this point whether Schlatter has perhaps overlooked Jesus' obvious volitional conflict in the garden of Gethsemane (more on this later) or his experience of temptation. With a view to the latter, Schlatter apparently acknowledges some form of an internal volitional challenge in Jesus. In Schlatter's view, the role of the Holy Spirit is crucial in this context and one must therefore add the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life and work of Jesus Christ to the overall picture.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

So far, we have only alluded to the Holy Spirit. Yet here, in connection with Jesus' volition, the involvement of the Holy Spirit is vital for Schlatter, both with a view to Jesus' internal volitional experience and his inter-volitional union with the Father. Concerning the former, it is through the Spirit, Schlatter contends, that the two wills in Jesus are organically united.⁴⁸ How does this work within Schlatter's framework?

First of all, Schlatter explains that God created Jesus' humanity—and thus also his (human) volition—“through the Spirit and the Word.”⁴⁹ For this reason, there can be no internal conflict between the human and the divine willing in Jesus Christ.⁵⁰ Schlatter remarks that it is “through the power of the Spirit” that Jesus did

⁴⁸ See “Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu,” 48.

⁴⁹ Schlatter writes: “God's action directed to Jesus' humanity works through both the Spirit and the Word. In this way, Jesus' humanity receives its existence and history through God. As Jesus was begotten by the Spirit, he received his being [*Wesen*], his will and his power from the Spirit. Moreover, in that the Word brings forth flesh, that is, a human life together with its natural substrate, Jesus is, from the very beginning of his life, made through God's action.” *Dogma*, 336, cf. 340; see also *Theology of the Apostles*, 78. Whilst it is then the Father “who had given him life through his creative activity” (*History of the Christ*, 29; cf. *Dogma*, 337, “Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu,” 33, “Furcht vor dem Denken,” 12-13), one must not forget the “powerful-creative Spirit” (*schöpfermächtigen Geist*; *Marien-Reden*, 3rd ed., Gladbeck: Freizeiten-Verlag, 1951, 8), who “conceives [*erzeugt*] Jesus together with his bodily form [*Leiblichkeit*].” *Dogma*, 340.

⁵⁰ In terms of Jesus' human will, one wonders whether Schlatter considers Jesus assuming a perfect human will or a ‘fallen will’? Subscribing to Gregory of Nazianzus' axiom, the “unassumed is the unhealed,” Schlatter draws our attention to Jesus as “someone who carried a measure of fallen-ness in himself.” “Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu,” 45. In doing so, he affirms the severity and reality of Jesus' experience as he was tempted (more on this below). On the other hand, whilst Schlatter clearly portrays Jesus as the one who has his “sonship in the same flesh that mediates to us our sinful passion and weakness,” he is eager to note that Jesus possesses at the same time a certain volitional “pre-eminence” which is, again, indicative of his “regal status.” The complete section reads: “Paul portrayed Jesus' equality with us in stark terms when he attributed to him the ‘likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom. 8:3). Paul did not doubt Jesus' purity, his will and ability to bear the flesh in such a way that it did not become an occasion for sin for him, already because of the outcome of Jesus' life. But he

“not know sin even though [being] in the flesh.”⁵¹ Hence, Jesus overcomes temptations “through the Holy Spirit;”⁵² he is able to “to subdue the carnal and worldly stimuli through the power of the Spirit,”⁵³ and Jesus finally embraced the cross as he put his confidence in the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴ Note two significant aspects: First, Schlatter’s clear stress on the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ life, and second, his emphasis on the historical reality of Jesus’ volitional union with God through the Spirit. It is clearly important for Schlatter to recognise that Jesus’ will was *actually* tempted, as only in this way would it become evident that Jesus’ will was a real (and also human) will.⁵⁵ Resistance to temptation was thus no theoretical question for Jesus, rather, it was a matter of active and concrete obedience in real life, through the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶ “In temptation,” Schlatter writes, “he had to prove how he conceived of his divine sonship and how he used it.”⁵⁷ Here, Jesus’ actual will is challenged, that is, Jesus actively needed to distinguish between the “good will” and the “depraved will”

considers it to be an essential characteristic of Jesus that he had his divine sonship in the same flesh that mediates to us our sinful passion and weakness and that he hung this same flesh on the cross, raising it to eternal glory at the resurrection. The fact, however, that he has the flesh not by natural compulsion but according to the power of his own will ensures that he possesses not merely equality with men but also that pre-eminence over them by which his regal status is established. Because through his will he possessed human likeness, he maintained over it an even loftier possession: he existed in the form of God.” *The Theology of the Apostles*, 257. Apparently, Schlatter does not intend to solve the dilemma for us. His strategy, it seems, is to present the reader with the complex polarities he discovers through his New Testament ‘seeing-act,’ hesitant to offer quick and easy solutions. We will meet this strategy again in this and also the following chapter.

⁵¹ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 5, 124. One detects here certain parallels to Scottish theologian Edward Irving, see his *Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of Our Lord’s Human Nature, Set Forth in Four Parts*, vol. 2 (London: Baldwin and Craddock, 1830), 152 and Colin Gunton, in “God the Holy Spirit: Augustine and His Successors,” in *Theology through the Theologians. Selected Essays 1972-1995* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 115-116.

⁵² *History of the Christ*, 59.

⁵³ *Dogma*, 320.

⁵⁴ “The decisiveness that made Jesus the bearer of the cross,” Schlatter writes, “was confidence in the Spirit. He dies because he honors the Spirit and trusts that he is the power that creates life.” *Do we know Jesus*, 428; cf. *Theology of the Apostles*, 144.

⁵⁵ For Schlatter, the reality of Jesus’ temptations are another reason why he thinks his narrative-volitional account of Christology is closer to the New Testament data than any exclusively ontological discussion. “Only will is tempted,” he insists, “not powers.” *History of the Christ*, 132.

⁵⁶ See *History of the Christ*, 59, 83; cf. “Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu,” 48.

⁵⁷ *History of the Christ*, 88.

(*verwerfliche Wille*).⁵⁸ In this sense, then, one could perhaps at least speak of a serious volitional tension in Jesus; ‘struggle’ or ‘conflict’ would be too strong a rendering, in Schlatter’s view. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus resisted temptations, thereby proving his concrete obedience to the Father and thus demonstrating his union of will and of essence with him. We are now able to sum up our observations so far.

First, Schlatter is always keen to speak of the unified person of Jesus Christ, considering it idle to ask whether Jesus was tempted in his divine or human nature; this would in his view lead to a division in Jesus and Schlatter is not happy to go down that road.⁵⁹ Yes, Jesus was truly tempted, yet the volitional tension is balanced and mediated through the Holy Spirit. *Secondly*, and for Schlatter more importantly: Jesus’ volitional union with the Father finds its concrete expression in his lived obedience. This is where the influence of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ life and work becomes tangible for Schlatter. Against the backdrop of concrete history, Jesus acted “according to the will of the Spirit” and “in the power of the Spirit.”⁶⁰ And through the Spirit’s ministry, Jesus’ will and the Father’s will are united, so that Jesus’ “will was accomplished when God’s will came to pass.”⁶¹ This volitional union reveals at the same time Jesus’ divine sonship, his unity of essence with the Father. “Here is communion revealed,” Schlatter insists, “not simply communion of nature and of power but something greater: communion which pervades the personal life, that communion which consists in the union of will.”⁶² This quote reveals Schlatter’s core conviction, that a conversation about divine volitional union, as it finds concrete expression in real life, in time and in history, is more promising than any ontological

⁵⁸ *History of the Christ*, 88 [*Geschichte des Christus*, 99].

⁵⁹ Schlatter asserts: “The apostle Paul did not distinguish between a cleansed and a corrupt part of his [Jesus’] soul. It is the same self which the body subjects to its commandment and to which the law comes and in which the Spirit makes effective the will of Christ. That which transpires in him has differing origins and is of various levels of worth, yet it does not take place in different parts of the soul but in the one, undivided self.” *Romans*, 14.

⁶⁰ “Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen,” in *Hilfe in Bibelnot*, 177; cf. *History of the Christ*, 185.

⁶¹ *History of the Christ*, 127. In this sense then, Schlatter would certainly have approved of Bernard of Clairvaux’s comment, that between the Father and the Son, there is “not a unity of wills but a unity of will.” I owe this reference to Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 41.

⁶² “Jesu Verhalten gegen Gott,” in *Hilfe in Bibelnot*, 105.

speculation about ‘communion of nature.’ Communion of will is thus ‘something greater,’ as it shows us the reality of God’s being in action.

Some Open Questions

Having introduced some key aspects of Schlatter’s relational-volitional Christology, it might be best to pause and consider some unanswered questions. These questions fall into two categories: one has to do with *Jesus’ divinity* and the other with *Jesus’ personhood*.

First, one wonders whether Schlatter is not getting close to a particular form of ‘kenotic’ Christology.⁶³ That is, whilst his version might not be the radical form of kenoticism in the tradition of Gottfried Thomasius (1802–75), where Jesus is considered to be emptying himself of some of his divine attributes in the incarnation, one might still ask whether Schlatter’s emphasis on the life of the humble, obedient, and dependent Son does not show at least some characteristic features of a kenotic Christology that tends toward subordinationism and could put Jesus’ divinity at risk (something he obviously would have wanted to avoid as his whole intention is to make a strong case for Jesus’ divinity). *Secondly*, the question arises whether Schlatter does not overemphasise Jesus’ volitional union with the Father and his dependence upon the Holy Spirit to the extent that Jesus’ own identity as a particular person of the Trinity is at risk of disappearing into the background. Is the person of Christ, in Schlatter’s framework, not in danger of being conflated with the Father (and possibly the Spirit)? The dilemma seems to be that the distinctive character of Jesus’ personhood almost dissolves in relational-volitional union, the hazard being that Jesus *becomes* the Father’s (and the Spirit’s) action? In other words, does it not seem that Schlatter’s Christology navigates towards some form of modalism? These challenging questions call for a closer analysis.

⁶³ Modern German kenoticism originated at the University of Erlangen and the movement was en vogue during Schlatter’s lifetime—its proponents were almost entirely Schlatter’s contemporaries. For an overview see David R. Law, “Kenotic Christology,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 251-279.

3. Jesus' Divinity, his Personhood and Intra-Trinitarian Love

Adolf Schlatter's proposal, it seems, is to call upon the notion of 'love' (*Liebe*) in order to meet the above-mentioned challenges.⁶⁴ Love is according to Schlatter fundamental to our understanding of Jesus' volitional unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Since it is through love, Schlatter claims, that Jesus Christ submits and humbles himself, he neither jeopardises his divinity nor loses his distinct personhood in the process. This is Schlatter's basic argument. How does Schlatter consider this to work out in detail?

Kenosis, Jesus' Divinity and Submission in Love

First, responding to the challenge of subordinationism and the possibility of compromising Jesus' divinity, Schlatter underlines that Jesus' obedient volitional union with God does not lead to a kind of inferiority or a loss of divine identity. On the contrary, Schlatter is convinced—and this may come as a surprise—that submission in love is in fact central to Jesus' divine *sonship*: it does not so much emphasise his humanity as his *divinity*. Jesus actually demonstrates, and this is a typically Schlatterian move, his essential equality with God through his loving submission. Schlatter explains:

That Jesus' unlimited coordination with God not only finds its ground in total subordination to him, but also renders him, in relation to human beings and nature, consistently as servant and puts him into equality [*Gleichheit*] with us, constitutes the seal of its [his divinity's] authenticity.⁶⁵

In other words, Schlatter somewhat turns the tables by arguing that Jesus' capability for subordination and his sharing in our humanity is truly a manifestation of his divinity.⁶⁶ As a matter of fact, Jesus' "majestic dignity" (*Hoheit*), Schlatter posits,

⁶⁴ Andreas Loos is certainly right when he claims that "the notion of love constitutes the basis for Schlatter's doctrine of the Trinity." Loos, "Divine Action and the Trinity: A Brief Exploration of the Grounds of Trinitarian Speech About God in the Theology of Adolf Schlatter," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4, no. 3 (2002): 270.

⁶⁵ "Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 46.

⁶⁶ C. F. D. Moule (1908–2007), although not referring to Schlatter, developed a similar argument. Moule argues that "Jesus saw God-likeness essentially as giving and spending oneself out . . . precisely *because* he was in the form of God he recognized equality with God as a matter not of getting but of giving." "The Manhood of Jesus in the New Testament," in *Christ, Faith and History*:

arises from “his subordination under the Father.”⁶⁷ Thus far, Schlatter’s basic proposition. Of course, one now wonders how he would further support his claim. The crucial argument Schlatter offers is that the obedient and submissive Son’s love is reciprocated by God. That is, the Son who submits himself in love and who unites his will with the Father’s will through the Holy Spirit is also the recipient of God’s perfect love in return, which represents the authentic seal of Jesus’ divinity.⁶⁸ “That the Son is the beloved [Son],” Schlatter writes, “excludes all diminutions and demotions in his relation to the Father and grants him the full unity which bestows ‘the sameness of being’ [*die Selbigkeit des Wesens*] with the Father upon him.”⁶⁹ Schlatter thus clearly excludes the fallacy of classic subordinationism (involving an inferiority of ‘being’), tending more towards the less unproblematic position of relational (or soteriological) subordination.

The adjacent question is whether Schlatter’s concept of love could also help him to avoid the charge of buying into certain problems associated with classic kenotic Christology which tends to emphasise Jesus’ humanity at the expense of his divinity. The already mentioned Gottfried Thomasius, for example, introduced a distinction between ‘essential attributes’ (which are essential for God to be God, such as absolute power, holiness, truth, and love), and ‘relative attributes’ (such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence) in order to do justice to the unity of Jesus’ humanity and divinity.⁷⁰ In Thomasius’ view, the incarnate *Logos* divested himself (temporarily) of the relative attributes while retaining the essential attributes in and through his human existence. Still, Thomasius then went one step further in his attempt to do justice to the humanity of Christ, as he argued that the *Logos* also

Cambridge Studies in Christology, ed. Stephen W. Sykes and John P. Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 97 (emphasis original). I am grateful to Donald Macleod for pointing me to this parallel.

⁶⁷ *Dogma*, 356.

⁶⁸ “As the Son,” Schlatter writes, “he knew that the Father gave him his complete love, and this love was perfected by his work in him so that his work was accomplished through the Son.” *History of the Christ*, 126.

⁶⁹ *Dogma*, 198 (emphasis original).

⁷⁰ Thomasius, *Christi Person und Werk: Darstellung der evangelisch-lutherischen Dogmatik vom Mittelpunkte der Christologie aus*, vol. 2 (Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1888), 241-242.

surrendered his divine ‘self-consciousness’ (*göttliches Bewußtseyn*).⁷¹ This is clearly problematic, since Thomasius is thereby giving up on his distinction between the attributes (one would think that divine self-consciousness should be an essential attribute), while he is also at risk of leaving behind divine immutability, moving towards a kind of Christological ‘theophany.’⁷² It seems that Schlatter is able to put forward a more balanced Christological account which does justice both to the humanity and the divinity of Christ, through his relational approach. Taking into account our earlier observations, we conclude that Schlatter understands *kenosis* first and foremost as referring to Jesus’ humble role and status as God’s servant. It does not, Schlatter is keen to add, involve a diminution or weakening of Jesus’ divine nature.⁷³ *Kenosis*, for Schlatter—again, a typically Schlatterian move—is not so much about what Jesus laid aside (such as his divine attributes), rather it is more about what Jesus freely assumed (namely the form of a slave). Schlatter explains, with his characteristically volitional language:

Corresponding to the divine will is the will of Christ, who, in unity with God’s will, was intent not on equality with God but on human existence: he emptied himself (Phil. 2:6-8). Paul derived the origin of Christ and his taking on human likeness not from a natural destiny or compulsion, to which God was subjected or to which he subjected Christ, but conceived of it in terms of a free act that occurs because Christ wills to be what we are, desiring human likeness and the position of slave as they characterize us.⁷⁴

Along these lines, Schlatter seems to suggest some form of divine volitional self-actualisation as way towards exploring the mystery of *kenosis*. The Son freely ‘wills’—in volitional union with the Father—his humanity.⁷⁵ In 1896, thus perhaps

⁷¹ Thomasius, *Beiträge zur kirchlichen Christologie* (Erlangen: Verlag von Theodore Bläsing, 1845), 94-95.

⁷² See Bruce L. McCormack, “The Person of Christ,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, ed. Kelly M. Kopic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 165.

⁷³ See his comments on Philippians 2.7 in the *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 8, 65-66.

⁷⁴ *Theology of the Apostles*, 257.

⁷⁵ Schlatter writes: “Both the words of Jesus and the words of the apostles do not place the divinity and the humanity [of Jesus Christ] next to each other as two static entities, but they speak of a volitional union (*Willensverband*). The humanity of Jesus is willed by the divinity, thereby also generated, ‘assumed’ . . . yet not in such a way that we might understand this assumption passively, for Jesus’ humanity enjoys the full Yes of the divinity and it is Christ’s condition [*Zustand des*

as an answer to contemporary kenotic approaches, Schlatter penned these lines: “This is the ‘relinquishing’ (kenosis),” he explains, “insofar as the Godhead carries it out, in that it wills the human being Jesus [*den Menschen Jesus*] and unites it with himself, and this is a constant will, both in the moment of the conception and no less in the event of the cross, and also on God’s throne in eternal firmness.”⁷⁶ Schlatter’s model of divine volitional actualisation offers a fresh perspective for our conversation today: With his focus on the divine ‘willing’ (in freedom) of the humanity of Christ as interpretation of the *kenosis*, Schlatter is able to avoid Thomasius’ problems while at the same time doing justice to the humanity and divinity of Christ.

Balancing Differentiation and Unity Through Love

Secondly, the question whether Schlatter is able to affirm Jesus’ distinct personhood calls for an answer. How would Schlatter respond to the challenge that his strong emphasis on volitional union between the Son and the Father somewhat veils the distinctiveness of the person of Christ and thus possibly invites a modalistic reading? Schlatter seems to have acknowledged that his programme might be interpreted in this way, and he thus unmistakably highlights that Jesus at no point loses his own ‘individuality’ (*Eigenständigkeit*) as a person. As Jesus was “neither a gnostic nor a mystic,” Schlatter writes, he did not teach “the presence of a divine power or substance in him,” nor did he “pursue the conflation [*Verschmelzung*] of his consciousness with the consciousness of God;” what he did though was that he “stood as the I before the Thou, as person before the person of the Father, as a Son stood before the Father.”⁷⁷ Still, Jesus’ personal idiosyncrasy must not be pitted against his intrinsic unity with the Father and the Spirit. And Schlatter was always keen to stress divine simplicity, the intrinsic harmony of the Godhead. This is Schlatter’s suggestion of how to approach the complex scenario: unity and differentiation are not two opposite poles but they embrace each other through love

Christus] which is given by God and through which God reveals himself.” *Dogma*, 338; cf. “Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu,” 44.

⁷⁶ “Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu,” 44.

⁷⁷ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 231.

(this emblematic Schlatterian argument will surface again in the second Part of the *Denkakt*). Schlatter writes, and it is helpful quoting him at length in this context:

In order to be the Son of God, Jesus did not lead a struggle of annihilation [*Vernichtungskampf*] against himself, for he possesses his communion with God not above or below his personal life, but in it. He is thus, as Son, sovereign over his own life, as is the Father. Yet, this distinctiveness from God does not involve separation from him. It is rather the precondition as well as the outcome of his communion with him. What he wants and possesses is communion, not conflation [*Vereinerleiung*] with God. This means: Jesus' relation to God was love. To love's essence belongs that it knows and wants simultaneously both: differentiation and fellowship [*Unterschiedenheit und Verbundenheit*]. This has nothing in common with tendencies of conflation or absorption.⁷⁸

The key seems to be intra-Trinitarian love through which both sovereign differentiation and perfect communion are harmoniously balanced within the Godhead.⁷⁹ Avoiding both the pitfalls of (chronological) modalism and tritheism, Schlatter suggests that Jesus does not lose his idiosyncrasy as the second person of the Trinity, since love's essence consists of both clear distinction and perfect communion of will and of love in return.⁸⁰

Analogous to his loving relationship with the Father, Jesus' relationship with the Holy Spirit is characterised by love. For this reason, Jesus gladly receives the ministry of the Spirit, yet, again, as Schlatter underlines, not at the expense of giving up the distinctiveness of his own personhood. That is, Jesus does not render himself fully passive, so that it would be exclusively the Holy Spirit working in and through

⁷⁸ "Jesu Demut," 80-81.

⁷⁹ See *Dogma*, 34; cf. 179-180. Reminiscent of Schlatter, Kathryn Tanner underlines that Jesus' "conformity with the will of the Father" is "a conformity that is naturally Jesus' own in virtue of his being the Son of God, the one whose very will is the will of the Father." Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 32.

⁸⁰ This is clearly reminiscent of Augustine. See Augustine, *On the Trinity: Books 8-15*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews, trans. Stephen McKenna (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 25-26. Note also the following quote by Schlatter which brings distinction, love and obedience together: "Jesus possesses sonship of God in the personal realm of his being that is illumined by consciousness, not by a transfer of power or a communion of substance with God [*Kraftübertragung oder Substanzgemeinschaft mit Gott*], which might tie him to God beneath or alongside God's personhood without actually touching it . . . He has sonship because his love is matched by identical obedience." *Theology of the Apostles*, 130 [*Theologie der Apostel*, 157].

him.⁸¹ The relationship between the Son and the Father and the Son and the Spirit is thus a harmonious, organic relationship, since it is a relationship of love; and as such it is free from any conflation or competition.⁸² Love is the key factor which guarantees both Jesus' idiosyncrasy and his harmony with the Father and the Spirit. "Within the loving relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit," Andreas Loos comments, "each actively seeks the other and in and through this the particular identity of each is mutually secured."⁸³

That means, on the one hand, with a view to the immanent Trinity, the persons of the Godhead indwell each other whilst their distinctiveness remains intact;⁸⁴ this is then, on the other hand, reflected in the economic Trinity, where the divine action *ad extra* works in harmonious unity although the members of the Godhead perform different roles. Schlatter's language here reflects an intention to strike a balance between divine unity and distinction, aiming to avoid both the pitfalls of modalism on the one hand and tritheism on the other hand.⁸⁵ Schlatter was obviously aware of the challenges involved here,⁸⁶ and, although this might sound theologically unsatisfying, it seems that for Schlatter—and his language somewhat

⁸¹ Schlatter writes: "The differentiation between the Spirit and his [Jesus'] own life, however, did not result in Jesus sensing a contrast between them and in seeking to suppress his personal life [*persönlichen Lebensakt*] in order to sense and enhance the Spirit within himself." *History of the Christ*, 133 [*Geschichte des Christus*, 164].

⁸² See "Jesu Demut," 37.

⁸³ Loos, "Divine Action and the Trinity," 273.

⁸⁴ Schlatter writes: "The formula 'unity in distinction' [*Einheit in der Verschiedenheit*] possesses an actual foundation [*realen Grund*]. It is based on the fact that the one God actively indwells [*innewirkt*] a plurality of personalities, each of which has, and should have, its own life [*eigenes Leben*]." *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, xvii-xviii. Schlatter emphatically distinguishes distinct persons within the Trinity (*Dogma*, 179-180, 589n206), and posits that the concept of 'person' remains 'essential for our concept of God' (*Gottesgedanken*). *Dogma*, 573n108.

⁸⁵ *Dogma*, 573n108.

⁸⁶ This is evident from his assertions in *Dogma*, 573n108. Schlatter would presumably have agreed with Schleiermacher's lament that one either overemphasises the unity of the Trinity at the expense of the "distinctiveness of the persons" (*Geschiedenheit der Personen*), or one does emphasise the "Triunity" (*Dreiheit*) and at the same time renders the unity abstract. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, 2. Auflage (1830/31) – *Erster und zweiter Band*, ed. Rolf Schäfer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), §171, II:523-524. Schleiermacher is sceptical that a real balance could be achieved, as he fears that we continually "remain oscillating between the two" (*bleiben unstätt zwischen ihnen schwanken*). Schleiermacher, *Der Christliche Glaube*, §171, II:524.

reflects this—oscillation, or polarity as we have called it, comes perhaps closest to the divine mystery.

Conclusion

There exists then harmonious unity of will and love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet distinction of their being in action. The Son submits himself and obeys in and through love and thereby not only reveals his humanity but, most importantly, demonstrates his divine status as the beloved Son who is equal to God. The Holy Spirit is involved in Jesus' union of will with the Father, as well as in Jesus' actual ministry, without causing Jesus' idiosyncrasy to diminish or to retreat into the background. One could certainly challenge Schlatter, questioning whether his notion of love is not made to carry more weight than seems reasonable; that is, one might query whether love has indeed enough explanatory power to solve the conundrum of differentiation in unity. Nonetheless, Schlatter is apparently not alone in suggesting the notion of love as the way forward in our understanding the complexity (and the mystery) of the relationship between the persons of the Trinity, as the work of John D. Zizioulas⁸⁷ and Christoph Schwöbel shows.⁸⁸ If this is the right path to pursue, it would indeed be promising to develop further Schlatter's proposal.

At the outset, we introduced Schlatter's view of Jesus in double communion, that is, in relation to God and to humankind. Up until now we have primarily focused on the former, namely Jesus' relation to God. It is now time to turn to the other aspect of Jesus in relation: his relation to human beings. In doing so, however, one must not—if one intends to capture Schlatter's agenda correctly—ignore our previous findings on Jesus' communion with God. According to Schlatter's dictum,

⁸⁷ According to John D. Zizioulas, for example, love is indeed the central constituent of the distinctiveness of divine personhood. See Zizioulas, "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution," in *Trinitarian Theology Today-Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 57-59. Zizioulas' relational trajectory in fact reveals interesting parallels to Schlatter, and future research, exploring the two relational approaches, is certainly to be recommended.

⁸⁸ Christoph Schwöbel suggests that we conceive of love not as an attribute of God in the traditional sense but in fact as an ontological statement. See Schwöbel, "Christology and Trinitarian Thought," 132. It remains to be seen whether Schwöbel's 'ontology of love as relation' is a helpful approach to explain discreteness in unity within the Godhead.

Chapter IV

Jesus' communion with God is the foundation for his communion with humanity.

Bearing this in mind, we shall now turn to the second part of the *Denkakt*.

V. The *Denkakt* (II): Jesus in Relation to God and Humanity

Having explored Schlatter's view of the Jesus Christ in relation to the Father and the Holy Spirit, we now expand our conversation by including more explicitly Jesus' relation with humanity. In doing so, we are instantly faced with questions of soteriology and ecclesiology, for, as Schlatter insists, the apex of Jesus' work consists in the salvation of humanity and the creation of the new community. Still, this does not mean that we now focus exclusively on 'Jesus and us.' Rather, our discussion in this chapter is closely related to the findings of the previous one, simply because we could never have a meaningful conversation about Jesus' relationship with humanity without referencing his intra-Trinitarian fellowship. In fact, Jesus' relationship with the Father and the Spirit is the prerequisite for a correct understanding of his salvific work with a view to humanity. In Schlatter's words, Jesus' 'service to God' (*Gottesdienst*) is the basis for his 'service to humanity' (*Menschen dienst*). Taking this into account, we arrive at the following structure for this second part of the *Denkakt*: *First*, we offer a brief outline of Schlatter's view of the fundamental relation between Christology and soteriology, setting out how Jesus' *Gottesdienst* represents the basis for his *Menschen dienst*. This clearly determines this chapter's flow of the argument. *Secondly*, we turn to what Schlatter considers Jesus' *Gottesdienst*, thereby exploring Schlatter's theology of the cross in more detail, analysing in particular how Jesus is able to sustain his union with God even in the midst of God-forsakenness. On this basis, we move, *thirdly*, to Jesus' *Menschen dienst*, which encapsulates for Schlatter the establishment of the new community of faith.

1. Jesus' Double-Relationship

We continue our exploration into Schlatter's Christology by way of the significant notions of relation and volition. As we shall see in due course, Schlatter considers

Jesus to be in volitional union both with God through his ‘will to the cross’ and with us through his ‘will to salvation.’ Before we turn to these concepts in more detail, some aspects of Schlatter’s thinking on the relation between Christology and soteriology demand our attention.

Theocentric Christology and Soteriology

In his lecture on “Christology and Soteriology,” Schlatter makes clear that the questions of Jesus’ person and work are closely “interrelated” and, in fact, “inseparable.”¹ For Schlatter, there is then an organic union between ontological Christology and functional Christology. “What Christ is,” Schlatter writes, “is demonstrated by the benefits he brings,”² thereby reiterating Philipp Melancthon’s dictum: “To know Christ is to know his benefits.”³ In order to understand who Jesus is, then, it is important that one integrates the salvific aspects of his being in action and in relation.⁴ “There are, therefore, not two questions: [one] of Jesus’ divinity and [one] of our redemption through him,” Schlatter claims, “but the two questions are one.”⁵ Jesus’ being (the Son) and his office (as the Christ) are in fact identical: they “penetrate each other completely.”⁶ Whilst Schlatter here clearly underscores the close unity of Christology and soteriology, there is, however, a clear direction in Schlatter’s theological method that moves from Christology to soteriology. For Schlatter, Christology is not a “function of soteriology,”⁷ but rather vice versa.

¹ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 4.

² “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 4.

³ Melancthon, *The Loci communes of Philipp Melancthon (1521)*, trans. Charles Leander-Hill (Boston: Meador, 1944), 63.

⁴ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 18.

⁵ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 24.

⁶ Schlatter writes: “Sonship and the office of the Christ penetrate each other completely in Jesus’ word. What the Father is for him establishes his vocation [*Beruf*] and determines his work. His relation to the Father does not end in his person but includes and determines his relation to the world, as in turn this completely establishes what the Father is for him. He receives in order to give, is loved in order to love, is exalted in order to reign. Sonship is given to him as the root of action.” *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 232. “In Christ,” notes Schlatter, “office and person are one; as the office is given to him by God so also is the person made by God.” *Dogma*, 332.

⁷ As Paul Tillich suggested, see Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 150.

Schlatter in fact raises concerns about what he considers the unruly treatment of Christology through a soteriological lens which necessarily carries with it a subjective, anthropocentric bias and thus results in a lopsided Christology. According to Schlatter's reading, theological scholarship (and it seems likely that Schlatter here has the neo-Kantian Christology of Ritschl and his followers in mind, as discussed earlier, see chapter II/2) has extensively focused on soteriology, that is, on the question of who Jesus Christ is in relation *to us* (as king, saviour, redeemer, role model etc.) and what he has purchased *for us* (forgiveness, justification, adoption, eternal life etc.). While these aspects might all well be true, too strong an emphasis on these issues reflects, to Schlatter's mind, a "subjective," "eudemonistic" bias, as one overlooks that it is actually Jesus' relation to God that is constitutive for his salvific activity in relation to humanity.⁸ Correspondingly, though, Schlatter agrees with Anselm (by way of exception, he explicitly refers to Anselm in his *Dogma* and especially in *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*) that an emphasis on the substitutionary and satisfactory aspect of the cross is certainly biblical, he adds that this does not display "the whole picture of the New Testament" (*nicht die ganze Aussage des Neuen Testaments*).⁹ What is missing in Anselm, Schlatter argues, is the foundational theocentric perspective of the cross, namely, Jesus' deed in relation to the Father, through which he reveals his divinity. Only from this theocentric angle can one understand Jesus' concrete salvific action towards humanity in its fullest sense.¹⁰ Schlatter's student Paul Althaus echoes his teacher's critique of the anthropocentric perspective in theology and clearly adopts Schlatter's theocentric vision of Christology. He writes:

Jesus died for God before he died for us. It was a severe deficit of the old Protestant theology not to understand the cross inherently based on the Son's relation to the Father, but unswervingly to refer to it as *obedientia passiva*

⁸ "Christi Versöhnen und Christi Vergeben," 162.

⁹ *Dogma*, 303; cf. 303-307.

¹⁰ See *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 14, 27, 37-38, 42, 45n1, 46-48, 56, 75-76, 79, 86. Schlatter would have thus rather agreed with Wolfhart Pannenberg who warned, against Tillich's direction, that "[s]oteriology must follow from Christology, not vice versa. Otherwise, faith in salvation itself loses any real foundation." Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1968), 48.

with a view to humanity's sin . . . This treatment is not theocentric enough. In this respect, it was only Schlatter's *Dogmatik* that struck the right note.¹¹

Althaus is certainly right. Schlatter clearly emphasises the theocentricity of Jesus' death on the cross, thereby anticipating Moltmann's later statement that "the cross was an event between God and God."¹²

Gottesdienst and Menschendienst

In terms of the cross—and our reflections in this chapter focus particularly on Schlatter's *theologia crucis*—Adolf Schlatter uses two terms to describe Jesus' action in relation to God and to humanity. As introduced earlier, on the cross, Jesus performs both a 'service to God' (*Gottesdienst*) and a 'service to humanity' (*Menschendienst*),¹³ together representing one holistic, organic entity of activity.

Schlatter writes:

He [Jesus] gave himself as a sacrifice to the Father and [he] pardons us with the selfsame deed. The wrath yields and guilt passes by and faith arises. This is a holistic, merciful work of God.¹⁴

It is exactly in this 'double communion' that Schlatter sees "the real miracle of Christology," as Hans-Martin Rieger remarks.¹⁵ Schlatter, whom we have introduced as a 'theologian of unity,' thus emphatically underlines the close bond between Jesus' *Gottesdienst* and *Menschendienst*. He writes:

For whom did he die, for God or for us? I am not supposed to ask in this way. I would thereby divide what he has united. He honours the Father, he strives for his glory and remains adamantly separated from those who rob God of what is his and refuse to be obedient. He, in contrast, glorifies the Father, since he professes him as the almighty and alone righteous merciful forgiver. At the same time, however, he honours human beings, preserves community with them and takes the blemish of their sin away.¹⁶

¹¹ Althaus, "Das Kreuz Christi," in *Theologische Aufsätze*, vol. 1 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1929), 23-24.

¹² Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 231.

¹³ *Sprechstunde*, 29-30.

¹⁴ *Andachten*, 111.

¹⁵ Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 312.

¹⁶ *Andachten*, 111.

Still, in Schlatter's view—and this is obviously a corollary of his theocentricity just mentioned—Jesus' *Gottesdienst* enjoys conceptual priority over his *Menschen dienst*. From Schlatter's theocentric perspective, Jesus' love for humanity is clearly rooted in his love for God.¹⁷ Schlatter notes:

Jesus' service to God [*Gottesdienst*] determines and forms his service to humanity [*Menschen dienst*]. The latter has its base and its power in Jesus' service to God.¹⁸

With his account of Jesus in 'double-relation' with God and humanity, Schlatter attempts to explain two crucial facets of Jesus' being in action. Referring to Jesus' *Gottesdienst*, Schlatter maintains that Jesus vindicates his divinity by demonstrating volitional union and fellowship with God in spite of God-forsakenness on the cross. Jesus' *Menschen dienst*, on the other hand, consists in his creation of the new community of faith, making our volitional union with Jesus possible.

2. Jesus' *Gottesdienst*: Fellowship in Forsakenness

The cross is of vital significance for Christology, Schlatter contends, since on the cross, Jesus Christ reveals his divinity by demonstrating communion with God through volitional union with him, even in the midst of God-forsakenness. In the following, we shall, *first*, elucidate Schlatter's position more fully, and *secondly*, critically evaluate his view.

Jesus' *Kreuzeswille* and God's *Heilandswille*

First of all, the cross represents for Schlatter the ultimate proof of Jesus' obedience as the divine Son of God. By going to the cross, Jesus obediently fulfils his 'vocation' (*Beruf*),¹⁹ his messianic-kingly duty as the Christ.²⁰ Schlatter calls Jesus' determined

¹⁷ See "Die letzte Bitte Jesu," in *Gesunde Lehre*, 328-329.

¹⁸ "Christi Versöhnen und Christi Vergeben," 161.

¹⁹ Cf. "Christologie und Soteriologie," 5. Schlatter's notion here comprises more than Ritschl's concept of Jesus' *Berufstreue*; see *Dogma*, 584n167 and our discussion in chapter II/2; cf. Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 314n58, and Schmid, *Erkenntnis des Geschichtlichen Christus*, 297-299.

²⁰ *Dogma*, 290, 430.

volition to embrace the cross his ‘will to the cross’ (*Kreuzeswille*).²¹ This is the “rock-hard [*stahlharte*] will that did not collapse even under the load of his cross.”²² Jesus’ will to the cross, Schlatter adds, was not a stoic or a sterile will, but a joyful will that was born out of love for God. Possibly with Anselm in mind, Schlatter insists that the divine will that Jesus grasps is primarily associated with God as the Father and not as the judge: “[I]t is the Father whose will is done here, not only the judge’s.”²³ Jesus’ view was plainly directed to the Father and his glory as he embraced the will to the cross. And here, again, we come across the notion of ‘love’ as the means by which volitional union is made possible. “Jesus’ will to the cross,” Schlatter explains, “revealed love for God that was intent on the revelation of God’s greatness, the execution of God’s justice, and the operation of God’s grace.”²⁴ Through his unwavering commitment to carry his cross, and, indeed his actual suffering on the cross, Jesus thus fully revealed “what genuine love and complete obedience” are.²⁵

Jesus’ *Kreuzeswille* is the ultimate litmus test for his volitional union with the Father. It indicates, according to Schlatter, Jesus denying his own will and being prepared to unite his will with God’s ‘will to salvation’ (*Heilandswille*), that is, God’s will to save the world from sin and judgement.²⁶ Parallel to our earlier observations, we note here, too, that Jesus’ volitional union with the Father does not jeopardise his idiosyncrasy, since he unites himself with the Father through love.²⁷

²¹ See “Jesu Verhalten gegen Gott,” in *Hilfe in Bibelnot*, 103.

²² *Do we know Jesus*, 429 [*Kennen wir Jesus*, 399].

²³ *Jesus und Paulus: Eine Vorlesung*, ed. Theodor Schlatter (Stuttgart und Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1940), 55.

²⁴ *History of the Christ*, 291.

²⁵ *History of the Christ*, 292; cf. *Dogma*, 293-294.

²⁶ See *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 50-52; *Dogma*, 291; “Der Ausgang Jesu,” 145; see also Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 315-316.

²⁷ Schlatter makes clear that Jesus’ will to the cross is not a form of self-destruction (*Selbstvernichtung*) but a free denial of his will (*Entselbstigung*), because he knows “to whom and why he gives himself.” *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 100. This will to the cross is not an empty will, but a will with a “certain content,” as Jesus is focused on the Father’s righteousness and grace and his people, whom he is about to free from sin, death and judgement. In dying, Jesus possesses his ‘will to salvation’ (*Heilandswillen*) together with the ‘will to the cross’ (*Kreuzeswillen*) and he is thereby obedient as the “performer of God’s will” (*Gotteswillen*). *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 100.

So much for the theory; yet where does Schlatter see volitional union as it plays out in the concrete context of Jesus' life and work? The New Testament episode of Jesus' struggle in the garden of Gethsemane comes to mind, where Jesus prays, "'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will'" (Matthew 26:39; cf. Mark 14.36, Luke 22.42). In his annotations to this verse, Schlatter states:

Jesus' prayer shows how he placed himself, in dying, in relation to God. What he did before God was *the obedient unification of his will with the divine will*. In nothing else did Matthew recognise the glory of Jesus' death and his victorious power more than in his complete obedience.²⁸

This illustrates how Schlatter interprets this occasion not as a volitional struggle between the divine and the human will in Jesus, but as an inter-volitional challenge—requiring the unification of 'his will with the divine will.' This is the volitional challenge as it presents itself to Jesus: Jesus' own will, obviously, involves a natural aversion to pain and a strong (and legitimate) desire for life, victory and glory.²⁹ This is at odds with the task and will that confront him in Gethsemane; one observes here a very real and painful struggle. Yet even in this horrible situation, Jesus continued to act "as the Son, who even now remained in fellowship with the Father."³⁰ In his *History of the Christ*, Schlatter offers a careful treatment of this struggle in chapter 19, entitled 'The Decision in Gethsemane.'³¹ Interestingly, one observes here a quasi-Hegelian dialectic in Schlatter's thinking.³² Discussing Jesus' "prayerful interchange with God" in Gethsemane, Schlatter seems to argue for a movement of Jesus choosing what is not his will and thereby gaining a "greater will."³³ That is, Schlatter claims that Jesus "confronted his initial desire with an

²⁸ *Der Evangelist Matthäus*, 751 (emphasis added); cf. "Jesus und wir heutigen Menschen," in *Hilfe in Bibelnot*, 175.

²⁹ *History of the Christ*, 365.

³⁰ *Do we know Jesus*, 430.

³¹ *History of the Christ*, 363-367.

³² We have noted earlier that Schlatter sat for six years in the classroom of the Hegelian Johann Jakob Alder (see Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 42-43); it should therefore not surprise us to detect some Hegelian influence in Schlatter.

³³ *History of the Christ*, 365.

opposite desire, one gained through a new and higher will by which he agreed unconditionally with the will of God.”³⁴ One wonders whether Schlatter would here allow for some form of divine self-actualisation within history; that is, through the stages of affirmation (of God’s will), and negation (of his own will), Jesus’ gains a ‘new and higher will.’ Schlatter himself, however, hesitates to offer any specific comments in this context, which is regrettable. “Jesus’ will to the cross does, of course,” he notes, “possess a depth we do not comprehend.”³⁵ We shall return to the difficulties of interpreting this dialectical aspect of Schlatter’s Christology below.

The main aspect for Schlatter, it seems, and this he highlights emphatically, is that Jesus’ prayer does not suggest uncertainty about the Father’s will; he neither questions the Father’s will nor ponders the purpose of his impending suffering. Instead, what Jesus expresses in this prayer is his need for fatherly reassurance. And it is only intimate, prayerful exchange with the Father that can yield the desired confirmation.³⁶ Having received this fatherly assurance through prayer, Jesus is thus prepared to unite his will with the Father’s will. In this volitional union, Schlatter sees, as noted earlier, true evidence for Jesus’ ‘glory’ and ‘victorious power.’

Having focused on the aspect of volitional union in preparation for the cross, we now move to the centre of Schlatter’s argument. For it is on the cross, according to Schlatter’s line of reasoning, that Jesus actually reveals his divinity by maintaining fellowship with his Father in the face of God-forsakenness. This is the core of Schlatter’s argument in his *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz* and it deserves closer exploration.

³⁴ *History of the Christ*, 365.

³⁵ *History of the Christ*, 366.

³⁶ *History of the Christ*, 365. In one of his devotional works, the *Andachten*, Schlatter writes: “As he now, enchained, professes God’s omnipotence, and [as he] must say as the crucified one: ‘I am Lord,’ and as the one who dies, testify: ‘I am the life,’ this [affirmation] transcended, with august novelty, everything that was his vocation [*Beruf*] to date [*das ging in erhabener Neuheit über alles hinaus, was bisher sein Beruf gewesen war*]. For this he needs the assurance that tells him that he will now through his action accomplish the Father’s will . . . He does not discuss the purpose of his suffering with his Father . . . Obedience does not ask: ‘Why do you do this?’ Only one thing must he know, namely that it is God’s will, and this he comes to know through prayer.” *Andachten*, 135.

Jesus' Divinity, Fellowship and Forsakenness

Schlatter's clear intention is to move the aspect of Jesus' God-forsakenness on the cross to the centre of the Christological stage.³⁷ From Schlatter's point of view, Jesus experienced real forsakenness on the cross as he endured the consequences of human sin and rebellion against God. Since Jesus was identified as closely as possible with human sin (he was made "to be sin," 2 Corinthians 5.21), he had to accept that his relationship with the Father, who "cannot look at wrong" (Habakkuk 1.13), was challenged, to say the least. As Jesus bore the horrendous consequences of human sin on the cross, he undoubtedly experienced God-forsakenness, allowing for the "disruption of communion with God" (*Störung der Gottesgemeinschaft*).³⁸ Thus, Jesus' cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15.34; cf. Matthew 27.46, Psalm 22.1), was not only a genuine psychological experience but also a real reflection of the forsakenness which actually afflicted him. In Schlatter's own words:

What rendered his [Jesus'] suffering difficult was that God had forsaken him, and this happened not only through the helplessness into which he had been thrown by his circumstances but also in his internal existence. Dying is not merely an external change; it also affects the person. God had taken his hand away from him . . . God's protection and gift were no longer with him.³⁹

Now if Schlatter were to affirm, as this quote suggests, that there was indeed a time on the cross when Jesus was actually forsaken by the Father, he would create serious problems for his own Christological position. As highlighted in the previous chapter, sonship is for Schlatter the incarnate Christ's very *raison d'être*; it defines who he is in relation to the Father. Would not a severing of the filial relationship imply that the (now) fatherless Son would have no basis left for his own existence?⁴⁰ How can he

³⁷ Jürgen Moltmann's proposal, of course, reveals a similar focus and we shall point to significant parallels throughout this section.

³⁸ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 53, cf. 3.

³⁹ *History of the Christ*, 373; cf. *Do we know Jesus*, 446-447.

⁴⁰ See Thomas H. McCall's discussion in *Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why it Matters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), 34-35.

still be the Son without the Father? Within his own framework Schlatter is thus faced with significant difficulties.

A close observation of Schlatter's language reveals, as suggested earlier, an underlying dialectic, or polarity. Given that Wilfried Härle considers Schlatter's "thinking in polarities [*Denken in Polaritäten*] stimulating and trendsetting,"⁴¹ one wonders whether recognising this feature of his thought might be a step towards solving the apparent dilemma. Looking at things more closely, then, one notes that Schlatter is generally hesitant to speak of God-forsakenness without including at the same time God-fellowship on the cross.⁴² Schlatter thus writes of Jesus as the One, who, "in the perfection of his whole obedience, possessed and acquired, *within* complete forsakenness, communion with God."⁴³

Schlatter's basic claim is that as Jesus is able to remain in communion with God in face of God-forsakenness, he thereby demonstrates his divinity (for only God can maintain union with God).⁴⁴ The "elevation of the dying one into communion with God"⁴⁵ on the cross is thus a manifestation of his divinity. Jesus reveals his divinity on the cross, Schlatter writes, in that for him, "God-forsakenness passes

⁴¹ Härle, "Vorwort," in *Realistische Philosophie: Der philosophische Entwurf Adolf Schlatters*, by Jochen Walldorf (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 5.

⁴² It seems that Karl Barth maintains a similar view of polarity here when he argues that while Jesus is surrounded by nothingness, he is still in the hands of God—God "acts as Lord over this contradiction," writes Barth, "even as He subjects Himself to it." *CD IV/1*, 185.

⁴³ *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*, 48 (emphasis added). "On the cross," Schlatter claims elsewhere, "died the one who did not allow himself to be separated from the Father by anything." "Das Kreuz Jesu unsere Versöhnung mit Gott," 13. Interestingly, Jürgen Moltmann distinctly echoes Schlatter in this respect as he develops, likewise, a dialectic of God-forsakenness in God-fellowship on the cross. Even using similar relational-volitional vocabulary to Schlatter, Moltmann writes: "This deep community of will [*Willensgemeinschaft*] between Jesus and his God and Father is now expressed precisely at the point of their deepest separation, in the godforsaken and accursed death of Jesus on the cross." Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 230 [*Crucified God*, 252]. While Moltmann thus seems to side with Schlatter in arguing for the continuation of God-fellowship in the midst of God-forsakenness, Schlatter draws different inferences from this dialectic as we shall see in due course. Moltmann writes: "If one sees in the death on the cross both historical God-forsakenness and eschatological devotion [*Hingabe*], then this event between Jesus and his Father contains communion in separation and separation in communion [*Gemeinschaft im Getrenntsein und Getrenntsein in Gemeinschaft*] . . . In the cross, Father and Son are most deeply separated in forsakenness and yet at the same time most intimately united in their devotion." Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 230-231 [*Crucified God*, 252].

⁴⁴ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 6, cf. 13-14.

⁴⁵ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 6.

away” (*daß für ihn die Gottverlassenheit vergeht*).⁴⁶ The advantage of this suggestion is obvious: By avoiding a sequential move from God-forsakenness ‘back’ into God-fellowship, as it were, Schlatter steers clear of the Christological dilemma mentioned above. However, this position is still perplexing on several grounds. For one, Schlatter would have to provide some evidence for his claim that Jesus is simultaneously in God-abandonment and in God-fellowship. Moreover, Schlatter would need to show more clearly how he considers Jesus revealing his divinity in this context. And again, one here comes across the issue of whether Schlatter allows for some form of divine self-actualisation. That is, does the ‘elevation of the dying one into communion’ with God imply certain ontological changes in the second person of the Trinity? Or does this point to some new level of relationship between the Father and the Son? This demands a closer scrutiny.

Mutual Giving in Love and the Holy Spirit

Earlier, we pointed to the centrality of love for Schlatter’s view of the Godhead. It is thus not surprising to note the significance of love in the context of what happens on the cross between the Son and his Father. In short, Schlatter observes on the cross *a divine exchange in love* which in fact constitutes the intimate communion between the Son and the Father over against forsakenness, and which clearly reveals Jesus’ divinity. Particularly relevant for our understanding of Schlatter’s model of divine exchange in love on the cross is the aspect of Jesus actually giving himself as *gift* to the Father. What Schlatter offers here, in this sacrificial mode, is nothing less than a highly creative theocentric interpretation of the penal substitution model, which was, in his view, too often approached merely from a (limited) anthropocentric perspective. Hence, divine fellowship on the cross is, in Schlatter’s view, “only completely and truly established when the gift returns to the giver.”⁴⁷ Now how does Schlatter conceive of this mutual giving in love on the cross in detail, and how does it relate to Jesus’ divinity and his communion with the Father? We shall explore these questions by, *first*, considering Jesus’ involvement in this exchange, then,

⁴⁶ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 27.

⁴⁷ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 52.

secondly, looking at the Father's and the Holy Spirit's part in this exchange, and on this basis, *thirdly*, we consider more closely the question of self-actualisation, namely whether Jesus is, in and through forsakenness, 'elevated' to a new level of relationship with God.

The Gift gives Himself to the Giver

First, then, concerning Jesus' role: Schlatter regards Jesus as giving himself as the "effective sacrifice" for human sin to God.⁴⁸ Jesus is the faultless "Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world;"⁴⁹ he is the one, who, as the perfect substitute,⁵⁰ atones for the sin of humanity by giving himself completely to the Father. Jesus basically dedicates himself, through the Holy Spirit, as a gift to the Father.⁵¹

Schlatter clarifies:

He [Jesus] entered into total self-denial [*Entselbstigung*] with his eyes raised toward the Father, and he then praised him as his God, even when and because it was finished [*hat ihn als seinen Gott gepriesen dann, als, und deshalb, weil es mit ihm zu Ende war*]. When he ceased to be Lord over his spirit, letting it go, 'handing it over to the Father,' he gave everything to God; he gave himself fully to God.⁵²

By giving himself to the Father, Jesus returns the gift of life he has received through the incarnation back to the giver of life. In Schlatter's words:

Now his [Jesus'] service to God [*Gottesdienst*] was carried out according to the formula 'Not as I will, but as you will' . . . It is likewise evident that he, even as he went into death, embraced God as the giver of life . . . Since his life was God's gift he could die . . . Since it is God's gift, he gives it to God.⁵³

This devotional act of self-sacrifice lies at the heart of Jesus' loving and obedient 'service to God' (*Gottesdienst*). Schlatter, as noted earlier, is keen to point to the

⁴⁸ See *History of the Christ*, 97; cf. *Dogma*, 300; see also *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*.

⁴⁹ See *History of the Christ*, 94-97.

⁵⁰ On Schlatter's broad affirmation of substitutionary atonement see *Dogma*, 295-296, cf. *Erlebtes*, 73-77, "Der Ausgang Jesu," 119, "Christologie und Soteriologie," 10-11.

⁵¹ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 34-35.

⁵² *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 63, cf. 67.

⁵³ "Der Ausgang Jesu," 118.

conceptual pre-eminence of Jesus' *Gottesdienst* over his *Menschen dienst*. "Jesus' dying is on its own, irrespective of its fruit, purely and completely service to God [*Gottesdienst*] and not service to humanity [*Menschen dienst*]." ⁵⁴ Since Jesus is wholly God-oriented in his action on the cross, Jesus makes his "walk to the cross his walk towards the Father" (*aus dem Gang zum Kreuz den Gang zum Vater gemacht*). ⁵⁵ Jesus' last words on the cross offer in Schlatter's view a helpful clue here. Commenting on Jesus' cry, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46; cf. Psalm 31.5), Schlatter observes that this points on the one hand to the fact of "how piercingly his God-forsakenness has been felt by him;" ⁵⁶ yet on the other hand, and Schlatter most likely refers here to Jesus' invocation of God as 'Father,' it points to how he "unabatedly carried his certain rest in God even on the cross." ⁵⁷ Schlatter then sees here clear Scriptural warrant for his position of polarity. On this basis, he can say that "Jesus went with God into death;" "[h]is cross was his service to God [*Gottesdienst*] through which he fulfilled the divine will and revealed God's greatness." ⁵⁸ The ultimate end then of Jesus' work is to glorify the Father through the perfect *Gottesdienst*. ⁵⁹ Schlatter argues:

Do I still have to ask? Do I not see that here, only here, yet certainly here, God is fully conceived as God? Here, God is given his whole glory. When Jesus took the cross from God's hand it was said as never before in truth: your will be done . . . Without grumbling and reluctance, not only with words but through deed there was testified: you are righteous in judging; and with equally unconditional assurance the deed was put into practice: you are the one who forgives. When was it ever considered that all things are possible for God? Back when Jesus made himself the dying one . . . There is no other

⁵⁴ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 77.

⁵⁵ *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*, 13.

⁵⁶ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 2, 330.

⁵⁷ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 2, 330-331.

⁵⁸ "Der Ausgang Jesu," 112.

⁵⁹ In his 'Christian Dogmatics,' Schlatter claims: "The necessity of the cross results from theology, from what God is . . . 'I have glorified you'; this was in fact the goal of the Crucified. His dying is the act of love, a cultic act that glorifies God, and this was not only one goal for Jesus among others, but we describe with this formula his whole will. It is not wrong to name God's honour the goal for whose completion Jesus died." *Dogma*, 304.

service to God [*Gottesdienst*] in which God has been praised more perfectly than in that hour.⁶⁰

The glorification of his Father is thus the grand objective of the Son's being in action on the cross. And, as we shall see in the following, the Father, in turn, glorifies his Son.

The Father responds and the Holy Spirit unites

Secondly, moving to the Father, Schlatter notes that the Father answers to the devout service of his Son by gladly receiving his gift. With the Father's receptive reply, as it were, there is then dialogue and communication—in short: we have here some form of God-fellowship in spite of forsakenness. Schlatter writes:

The statement has to be followed by the answer, in order that each of the parties [*Verbundenen*] speaks, each listens, and both give and receive; now is communion established. The notion of 'divine fellowship' [*Gottesgemeinschaft*] thereby remains empty and rhetorical until his [Jesus'] service to God [*Gottesdienst*] is understood.⁶¹

This is then how communion in the midst of forsakenness is possible: The Son gives himself as a gift to the Father and the Father, correspondingly, receives the gift of his Son. Still, the Father does much more than simply passively receive the sacrificial gift of his Son, for and this is an important Schlatterian idea, the receiver acts also as the giver. That is, in turn, the Father hands Jesus the new community as a gift, thereby closing the circle of divine giving and thus enabling Jesus as the Lord of the new community to forgive his people. Schlatter sees Scriptural evidence for his position in John 6.38, where Jesus says that it was his Father's will that he "should lose nothing of all that he has given me." Commenting on this verse, Schlatter notes: "The gift that the Father's love makes him consists in the human beings who come to him."⁶² Schlatter describes the Father's 'gift in return' in the following words:

In the Son's relation to the Father the gift [*Gabe*] constitutes the gift in return [*Gegengabe*], love [constitutes] love in return [*Gegenliebe*]. The Father's gift

⁶⁰ *Andachten*, 132; cf. 117.

⁶¹ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 52.

⁶² *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 3, 96.

to his Son consists in those whom he may forgive; the Son's gift to the Father is [the Son] himself. He renders himself the lamb offered to God; this is how he is set over the world so that he might take away its sin.⁶³

This illustrates that for Schlatter, love is the underlying motif of the divine mutual giving and receiving: The Son loves and is loved in return. This intimate interaction in love obviously points to the involvement of the Holy Spirit. In the previous chapter, we highlighted the Spirit's ministry in Jesus' volitional union with the Father. Now, in the context of Jesus offering himself as a gift to the Father, the Holy Spirit plays an equally significant role in Schlatter's framework. Key to Schlatter's argument here is Hebrews 9.14: "How much more will the blood of Christ, *who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God*, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (emphasis added). In his 'Annotations to the New Testament,' Schlatter comments on this verse as follows: "The move, by which the Son is drawn towards the Father, in that he offered himself up and sacrificed himself, [the move] which unites him with the Father . . . is the Spirit, the eternal Spirit, because it is God's Spirit who unites the Son with his Father in eternal fellowship."⁶⁴ It is only through the Holy Spirit, then, that the divine mutual transaction on the cross, as well as fellowship in forsakenness is conceivable in the first place. Again, Schlatter writes:

From where does his sense of sacrifice and the will to salvation which drove him to his priestly work come? From the Spirit. And from where does the power that allowed him to carry the cross and to shed his blood and to honour God until his last gasp come? From the Spirit. And from where does his power, so that death could not hold him captive, but rather so that he would be exalted through death, come . . . ? From the Spirit. The Spirit is the eternal and living bond which unites Jesus inwardly with the Father.⁶⁵

The love between the Father and the Son, expressed in their divine exchange on the cross, is clearly sustained and mediated by the Holy Spirit, the 'living bond which unites Jesus inwardly with the Father.' Only in this sense is fellowship in

⁶³ "Christi Versöhnen und Christi Vergeben," 165.

⁶⁴ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 9, 298.

⁶⁵ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 9, 297.

forsakenness imaginable and, indeed, possible.⁶⁶ Mutual love through the Holy Spirit implies mutual glorification: In their divine interaction on the cross, the Son glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies the Son in return, thereby confirming the latter's divine status.⁶⁷

Based on what has been said so far we can summarise Jesus' *Gottesdienst* on the cross as follows: Jesus gladly gives himself as a gift to God and he remains, in spite of God-forsakenness, in divine fellowship, since a) the volitional union remains intact (Jesus consistently wants and indeed performs the Father's will), and b) we witness the mutual divine exchange in love (the Son giving himself to the Father and the Father, receiving the Son's gift, giving to the Son the community of faith in return) and mutual glorification (demonstrating at the same time Jesus' divinity). For now, we note that Schlatter's proposal reveals a highly creative attempt to approach the mysteries of the cross, as he intends to combine Jesus' forsakenness, his sacrificial death and the revelation of his divinity in the same context. In particular, Schlatter's emphasis on love seems an adequate tool to approach these conundrums of the cross. The question remains, however, whether Schlatter considers Jesus to move in and through this divine mutual exchange in love to a new ontological status or a new level of relationship with the Father? Schlatter's language at times seems to point in such a direction.

Suffering and the Completed God-human

It is important to consider in this context Schlatter's notion of Jesus Christ as the 'completed' God-human. He writes:

The necessity and the salvific power of the cross consists in the fact that Jesus, for himself, entered by means of the cross into communion with God

⁶⁶ Schlatter writes: "The cross of Jesus is not only the measure for the Father's love to the world . . . but also the reason why Jesus himself possesses the Father's love. This takes away the horror of the cross. Jesus suffers for the sake of love through which the Father unites him with himself." *Der Evangelist Johannes*, 238-239.

⁶⁷ Schlatter writes: "Jesus would have not desired the cross had he not, through his cross, achieved the glorification of God. The Son loves the Father and he thus goes to the cross since through it he glorifies God; and the Father loves the Son and sends him to the cross because he thereby glorifies the Son." *Andachten*, 131-132, cf. 110-111.

and he revealed his divinity on the cross as it was there that the God-human was prepared, sustained and completed [*vollendet*].⁶⁸

This raises the intriguing question of what Schlatter means by ‘prepared, sustained,’ and, particularly, ‘completed’? Does this involve any (ontological) change in Jesus? Or, with a view to his relational union with the Father, is there now, with the Son’s mission complete, a new level of relationship between the Father and the (now ‘completed’) Son? This calls for closer exploration.

First of all, one is well advised to recall Schlatter’s basic principle of the ‘seeing-act,’ namely, of simply acknowledging ‘what is there’ in the New Testament. This seems to be Schlatter’s underlying strategy here, as his language reveals clear affinities with the New Testament vocabulary. Evidently, his description of the ‘completion’ (*Vollendung*) of Jesus’ work on the cross echoes Jesus’ cry, ‘It is finished’ (*Es ist vollbracht*, John 19.30). Or, even more obvious, one observes a distinct parallel between Schlatter’s ‘completion’ of the God-human and Hebrews 2.10, which reads: “For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation *perfect* through suffering” (like Luther, Schlatter translates *teleio* as ‘vollenden’). Now, with a view to our question, it seems unlikely that, for Schlatter, ‘completion’ here implies any change in the being of Jesus Christ; rather, it seems to mean that in suffering on the cross, Jesus reveals his ‘perfection’ (*Vollkommenheit*) as the promised, perfect Messiah. “The letter [to the Hebrews] is happy to use the word ‘completing’ [*vollenden*] in order to display Jesus’ work and gift,” Schlatter writes, “for it thereby points to the expectation with which Israel viewed the promised [One].”⁶⁹ In Schlatter’s view, the ‘completion’ of the God-human thus displays the messianic fulfilment of the Christ in time and history, his public demonstration of a perfection he always possessed. It is unlikely, then, that Schlatter assumes here any ontological changes in the being of Christ.

Moreover, Schlatter applies this trope of ‘perfection’ (*Vollendung*) in suffering not only to the person of Christ but also to his relationship with the Father.

⁶⁸ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 94.

⁶⁹ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 9, 211-212.

In his ‘Christian Dogmatics,’ Schlatter describes Jesus as the one who “had in suffering the reason for complete joy, since suffering did not loosen his communion with God but completed [vollendete] it.”⁷⁰ Again, one is faced with the question of how to interpret the notion of ‘completion.’ Does this point to an (ontologically?) new level of relationship between the Father and the Son? Based on our considerations so far, it seems possible but not probable. It is difficult to imagine Schlatter signing up to Moltmann’s statement that “[t]he pain of the cross determines the inner life of the triune God from eternity to eternity.”⁷¹ In fact, rather than focussing on the ‘suffering,’ on divine passibility, as Moltmann does, Schlatter draws our attention to divine communion, to the significant fact that it is precisely *through* the pain that Jesus establishes communion with God on the cross; this is perhaps how one should read Schlatter’s above comment.⁷²

Thus, in contrast to Moltmann, who risks reading the pain of the cross back into the immanent Trinity (and thus losing divine immutability on the way),⁷³ Schlatter seems more careful. In our view, it seems more likely to interpret Schlatter’s notion of ‘completing’ communion here also in terms of a demonstrating and displaying of communion which does not break apart in suffering but transcends suffering. This does not involve any ontological change, or any new level of intra-Trinitarian relationship.

Ultimately, Schlatter admits that what happened on the cross is beyond our human linguistic and cognitive capacities. Schlatter’s approach of speaking (and

⁷⁰ *Dogma*, 132.

⁷¹ Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 161; see also Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 151-153.

⁷² Namely in the sense that ‘suffering did not loosen his communion with God but completed it.’ Moltmann would most certainly complain that Schlatter does not take seriously enough Jesus’ pain of forsakenness, a charge that seems to have some validity. Although Schlatter clearly speaks of the Father as offering his Son, as regarding him as an object of his divine displeasure (Schlatter clearly states that the one who handed Jesus over and who, ultimately, proclaimed the death sentence over him was “none other than God,” *Evangelium des Lukas*, 445; cf. *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 35), one still wonders whether Schlatter truly does justice to the horror and the intensity of God-forsakenness that Jesus experienced. See for example Donald Macleod, *Person of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 174-177.

⁷³ This would imply that the immanent Trinity “loses conceptual priority and is thus collapsed into the economic Trinity,” as Rob Lister concludes, an outcome that Schlatter would seek to avoid. Lister, *God is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* (Nottingham: InterVarsity, 2012), 136.

thinking) in polarities, it seems, is an attempt to reflect our limited capabilities while at the same time trying to get as close as possible to the truth of the mystery of the cross. This might explain why he speaks of non-fellowship and fellowship, suffering as completing communion, de-glorification and glorification, taking and giving:

In that he [Jesus] is excluded from communion with God, and as he goes without it, he establishes it, since indeed his "I" becomes nothing, yet God does not become nothing to him. As he is negated by God whilst not negating him, forsaken by God whilst not forsaking him, his God-forsakenness becomes the basis for communion with God, his abandoning of the spirit [*Entgeistigung*] and his de-glorification [*Entherrlichung*] become the condition for his inspiration [*Vergeistigung*] and glorification [*Verherrlichung*] . . . What God took from him he gave willingly and freely to God, and thus, as he turns divine taking into his free giving, it becomes the basis for God's gift in return that brings him into complete communion.⁷⁴

Schlatter's language of polarities is in our view a creative and satisfactory way of approaching the profound intra-Trinitarian action on the cross. In his own, unique way, Schlatter takes seriously the New Testament narrative, which, in and of itself, leaves many a question unanswered and certain tensions unresolved. Schlatter's careful attempt to strike a balance between seemingly antagonistic poles is certainly an adequate way of approaching the mysteries of the cross, offering much by way of promise for our Christological discussion today. Based on our considerations of Schlatter's view of Jesus' 'service to God' (*Gottesdienst*) we are now in a position to turn to the second aspect of Jesus' double-service (*Doppeldienst*), namely his 'service to humanity' (*Menschen dienst*).

3. Jesus' *Menschen dienst*: Establishing the New Community

As noted earlier, Jesus' vertical move towards the Father in his *Gottesdienst* is at the same time a horizontal move towards humanity in his *Menschen dienst*.⁷⁵ It is in

⁷⁴ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 65.

⁷⁵ Schlatter writes: "His oneness with the Father accounts for his dying, because out of it emerges the struggle of the world against him; it is therefore impossible that the world should keep him for himself and that he could have his place anywhere else than with the Father. His oneness with believers accounts for his dying, because it places him into the world, thus allowing the assault on him. The same makes it impossible for him to abandon his own people and he establishes [*begründet*] through his death his bond with them and brings it to perfection. From this double-movement [*Doppelzug*] of his love results his destiny: both upward towards the Father and towards human beings; that he does

Jesus' "upward gaze to God that his whole love for humanity is alive," Schlatter states.⁷⁶ This reminds us again of how closely Schlatter relates the divine action *ad intra* (Jesus' *Gottesdienst*) to the divine action *ad extra* (Jesus' *Menschen dienst*), and we return to this aspect in the following considerations. Turning now to Jesus' *Menschen dienst*, we note that, to Schlatter's mind, it consists most fundamentally in the establishment of the 'new community' (*neue Gemeinde*) over which Christ himself is Lord.⁷⁷ As we have seen, Schlatter considers the establishment of the community to be the result of the mutual divine exchange on the cross. The obedient Son gives himself as a gift to the Father and the Father returns the community as a gift to the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the bond of love in the divine giving. Now before we deal in more detail with Schlatter's ideas, one is clearly curious as to why Schlatter doctrinally places the establishment of the community precisely here, on the cross. The Schlatterian seeing-act would require clear evidence based on Scripture. Now one could think of the imagery of the bride given to the bridegroom (for instance in Revelation 19.7 and 21.2) or Jesus' interaction with his Father regarding the new community in John 17 (verses 9 and 24 in particular). While it would certainly be possible exegetically to relate these passages to the events of the cross, one wonders whether Schlatter does not overemphasise the divine action on the cross at the expense of Pentecost and the eschatological realisation of the community still to come. Now on the one hand, this placement of Jesus' service to humanity is certainly a rather idiosyncratic Schlatterian move; it perhaps reflects, with its clear focus on the cross, the Lutheran influence of his friend Hermann Cremer.⁷⁸ On the other hand, however, a careful reading of Schlatter shows that he

not arrive earlier or differently at the Father than by his death brings forth this twofold, yet in and by itself completely uniform love as its necessary outcome." *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 30-31.

⁷⁶ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 77. "The immediate success of the cross," Schlatter concludes, "can only lie in the upward [move], in the relation to the Father, and everything it [the cross] means for us is based on what happened with it before and for God." *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 77.

⁷⁷ Schlatter uses the different German denotations, such as *Kirche* (church), *Gemeinde* (this term can refer to the local community or council as well as to a local congregation/church) or *Gemeinschaft der Glaubenden/der Liebe* (communion/fellowship of believers, of love) interchangeably. Cf. Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 367-370.

⁷⁸ More research is needed to better understand the Lutheran influence on Schlatter's theological project. Future studies could build on the work by Paul Althaus, "Adolf Schlatters Verhältnis zur

incorporates some of the aforementioned points in his model of Jesus' *Menschendienst*. For one, Schlatter clearly admits that the full completion of the new community lies from Jesus' perspective still 'in the future.' Schlatter argues:

[Jesus] waits for the Spirit, in agreement with the fact that the gathering of the new community likewise remains to be accomplished in the future. For 'the Spirit' and 'the community' are concepts that are firmly connected with one another.⁷⁹

Schlatter is clearly aware of the already-but-not-yet tension expressed in the New Testament, hence, Schlatter presents Jesus as the "custodian of a now," as the one who "sets the present in a strong causal relation to the final end."⁸⁰ One could summarise as follows: Schlatter regards the cross as the central, inaugural moment of the new community which is to be realised through the Spirit at Pentecost, and which still awaits its full completion in the *eschaton*. For our purposes, discussing Jesus' *Menschendienst*, we shall focus then on the, for Schlatter, significant inaugural moment of the new community's establishment on the cross. We proceed as follows: *First*, Schlatter's distinct communal perspective is particularly conspicuous and we begin our discussion with this significant aspect. *Secondly*, we turn our attention to the divine Trinitarian action in respect of the establishment of the community, while *thirdly*, and finally, the conversation focuses on Schlatter's distinct emphasis on the community's 'relational oneness,' both on a vertical level (with God) and on a horizontal level, with one another.

Soteriology, the Individual, and the Community

We have already alluded to Schlatter's strong communal focus at several stages in this study (such as in the context of his Barth-critique), and we have also pointed to Schlatter's autobiographical work, *Erlebtes* (which translates as 'experiences'), where he describes his own life as intertwined with relational networks. In the

Theologie Luthers," *ZSTh* 22.3 (1953): 245-256 and Matthias Dreher, "Luther Als Paulus-Interpret bei Adolf Schlatter und Wilhelm Heitmüller: Ein forschungsgeschichtlicher Beitrag zur 'New Perspective on Paul,'" 109-125.

⁷⁹ *History of the Christ*, 335.

⁸⁰ *History of the Christ*, 122.

preface to the first edition of that work, he writes: “I was a part of the state, a member of the church, a listener of the bible, a guest at Jesus’ table, a comrade in the band of teaching and researching workers, and . . . I was a creation of nature [*ein Gebilde der Natur*].”⁸¹ By describing his relational rootedness, he underlines at the same time what he was not, namely, an individualist. Schlatter identified individualism as one of the main obstacles facing contemporary theology and church life. He was concerned about what he considered the subjectivism and individualism of the Swabian pietism he encountered in Tübingen.⁸² In his ‘Christian Dogmatics,’ Schlatter criticises “[a]scetics, who, in order to secure their sinlessness, separate themselves from others,”⁸³ and he issues the warning that the Christian, who is “led away from her human relationships becomes a hermit.”⁸⁴ Schlatter speaks of the “total guilt which rests on German theology,” on account of its blindness for its own individualism which “taught us merely to nurture our own consciousness.”⁸⁵ With his characteristic communal trajectory, then, Schlatter intends to put forward a corrective of what he considered individualistic tendencies in contemporary theology. And Schlatter’s contribution has much to offer even today. In face of today’s postmodern Western individualism, Schlatter’s critique is an enduring voice of correction.⁸⁶ Throughout his oeuvre, Schlatter time and again indicates that Jesus did not come to create redeemed eremites, but relational beings who enjoy an inseparable link with God and with each other.⁸⁷ Now this does not mean that Schlatter neglects the existential aspect of soteriology. On the contrary: As we shall see in the next chapter, Schlatter has a keen interest in applying soteriology to the individual

⁸¹ *Erlebtes*, 5.

⁸² Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 395.

⁸³ *Dogma*, 474.

⁸⁴ *Dogma*, 473.

⁸⁵ *Rückblick*, 70.

⁸⁶ Miroslav Volf claimed recently that the task of today’s theology is “to counter the tendencies toward individualism in Protestant ecclesiology and to suggest a viable understanding of the church in which both person and community are given their proper due.” Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 2. Schlatter could not have agreed more.

⁸⁷ See, for instance, *Ethik*, 176-248; *Dogma*, 357-524.

believer's 'life-act.' Yet for Schlatter this existential salvific connection with Jesus must never be considered in isolation from the context of the community.⁸⁸ (This was one of the main aspects of his Barth-critique discussed earlier, see II/3). The believer's faith is not a "private revelation" (*Privatoffenbarung*) and her life as a Christian is not an individualistic life but a life of dialogue and interaction with other human beings and with the Triune God.⁸⁹ In soteriological language, this means for Schlatter that the fruit of Jesus' atoning work on the cross on behalf of human beings certainly includes the removal of God's wrath from the individual, the personal offer of forgiveness of sins, and justification by faith and adoption for the individual.⁹⁰ However, all these benefits are available only by being part of the community. He writes: "God's work does not consist in the completion of many or of a few human beings. It rather creates the abiding community, and individuals in it and for it."⁹¹ There is then no individual experience of faith without the community of faith, Schlatter claims, as any act of faith presupposes the "affirmation of the community."⁹² The community established by Jesus is in fact the "instrument through which union with him becomes possible for us" (*das Organ, durch das uns der Anschluß an ihn gewährt wird*).⁹³ It is on theological grounds then that Schlatter rules out any "tension between the community and one's personal state of life."⁹⁴ He explains:

God's glory and God's grace can only appear among us as they bring us together. If we remain in lonely abandonment, we can neither be God's witnesses nor a witness to Jesus' government. We carry the image of the one who created the community by being within the community.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ *Dogma*, 20-21, 386-387.

⁸⁹ *Dogma*, 386.

⁹⁰ See Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 327-364.

⁹¹ *History of the Christ*, 28.

⁹² *Dogma*, 497.

⁹³ *Dogma*, 382.

⁹⁴ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 537.

⁹⁵ *Ethik*, 176.

In this way, Schlatter highlights his understanding of soteriology as both individual and communal. In fact, the heading under which Schlatter treats this whole section on soteriology in his *Dogma* affirms this characteristic angle: ‘Christendom as a community called towards God—soteriology’ (*Die Christenheit als die zu Gott berufene Gemeinde—Soteriologie*).⁹⁶ Jesus’ *Menschen dienst*, according to Schlatter, thus has a clear relational impetus as it ushers in the creation of the new community where a wholly new relation with God and with one another is made possible for humanity.⁹⁷ Keeping in mind these central remarks on Schlatter’s communal perspective, we shall next examine more closely how Schlatter weaves together the establishment of the community with the Trinitarian action on the cross.

The Trinity and the New Community

From Schlatter’s perspective, “the establishment of the community [*die Herstellung der Gemeinde*]” is *the* culmination of Jesus’ earthly work, representing the apex of his “kingly office” (*königliche Amt Jesu*).⁹⁸ Schlatter thus has a clear Christocentric angle when it comes to the formation of the new community. Still, as the following discourse will show, Schlatter underlines the involvement of each member of the Trinity in the divine action *ad extra*. So how does Schlatter then conceive of the divine action directed to the creation of the new community?

The events on the cross between the Father and the Son, through the Spirit, are central for our understanding of the creation of the new community. Schlatter writes that “the purpose for which God led him [Jesus] into death was that a community would be born through him, one free from guilt and death.”⁹⁹ Through his accomplished work on the cross, Schlatter notes, Jesus gains “as his own possession the large community that possessed freedom from guilt and death as the fruit of his death.”¹⁰⁰ This new community with Jesus Christ as Lord is unique,

⁹⁶ *Dogma*, 357.

⁹⁷ See *Dogma*, 295.

⁹⁸ *Dogma*, 280, see also 357.

⁹⁹ *History of the Christ*, 315.

¹⁰⁰ *History of the Christ*, 315; cf. “Die letzte Bitte Jesu,” in *Gesunde Lehre*, 319.

different from any other (natural) community, since it was established “through a divine creative deed” (*durch eine göttliche Schöpfungstat*).¹⁰¹ Note in this context again Schlatter’s distinct notion of relational subordination: Jesus was ‘led into death’ by the Father the above quote indicates. And elsewhere, Schlatter put it in these terms: The Son does not “work for himself . . . Only God could reveal him and make him the Lord of the community.”¹⁰² Hence, it is only “[i]n God” that Jesus “had authority, the authority of the one who gathered the eternal community.”¹⁰³ As pointed out earlier, Schlatter subscribes to functional (or soteriological) subordinationism without succumbing to classic (ontological) subordinationism as Jesus submits himself in love. Based on his *Sehakt*, then, Schlatter reflects here the receptive aspect of Jesus’ divine sonship he identified in the New Testament. “Jesus’ inaugural experience . . .,” Schlatter clarifies, “did not consist in a decision by which he offered himself to God and said, ‘I am your Son.’ It rather lay in his hearing of the declaration, ‘You are my Son.’”¹⁰⁴ In a similar way, he argues, Jesus does not declare himself Lord over the community, rather, his Lordship over the community is declared for him by his Father. The Holy Spirit also plays a significant role in this context. It is the “word of Jesus Christ’s grace and the love of God, the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit through which we are one church,” Schlatter writes.¹⁰⁵ And it is “[b]y the Spirit of God that “Christ will fashion into a holy community those who were in danger of divine judgement.”¹⁰⁶ Once again, the Spirit, in Schlatter’s view unites himself with the work of the Son—this echoes our earlier observations in the context of Jesus’ volitional union with the Father through the Holy Spirit (see chapter IV/2). Schlatter writes:

Through Jesus the community became in the highest sense the place where the Father was active. As he himself lived through the Father as the Son, the community was transferred into light and life by the Father. Likewise, the

¹⁰¹ *Dogma*, 246; cf. *Ethik*, 176.

¹⁰² *History of the Christ*, 93.

¹⁰³ *History of the Christ*, 311.

¹⁰⁴ *History of the Christ*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ *Die neue deutsche Art in der Kirche*, 22; cf. *Dogma*, 352, 344.

¹⁰⁶ *History of the Christ*, 59.

work of the Spirit formed a complete unity with that of the Christ. Both held possession of the called community and simultaneously performed a universal work upon humanity, and both effected righteousness and grace in complete unity.¹⁰⁷

This illustrates Schlatter's motive of accentuating the distinctiveness within, yet harmonious unity of the divine action *ad extra*. The members of the Trinity have distinct roles—the Son giving himself as gift, the Father giving the community as a gift to the Son and the Holy Spirit as the bond of love between Father and Son—yet they work in complete harmony. Divine action, for Schlatter, is “always Trinitarian action.”¹⁰⁸ Hence, Schlatter can agree with Protestant scholastics that the external works of the Trinity are undivided (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*), but he would also add: ‘and distinct’ (*et distincta*).¹⁰⁹ Based on our earlier discussion in chapter IV, we know that Schlatter infers the divine action *ad intra* from the divine action *ad extra*, for, according to Schlatter, the “revealed Trinity [*Offenbarungstrinität*] witnesses [to] the essential Trinity [*Wesenstrinität*].”¹¹⁰ We also recall that, for Schlatter, the former is a manifestation of the latter. While the Trinitarian relations *ad intra* constitute their action *ad extra*, however, he does not read the divine action *pro nobis* back into the immanent Trinity.¹¹¹ Schlatter applies this to Jesus' *Menschen dienst* as follows:

The Father's gift establishes the giving of the Son, and this [establishes] the giving of the Spirit. In turn, the Spirit's work [*Wirken*] establishes the giving of the Son and this [establishes] the giving of the Father. The Father is both the foundation and the goal of all acts that reveal him and he is without division and rupture in everything that is Christ's and the Spirit's. What is different is only the manner of the divine action [*Weise des göttlichen Wirkens*].¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ *History of the Christ*, 389.

¹⁰⁸ Loos, “Divine Action and the Trinity,” 274.

¹⁰⁹ Loos, “Divine Action and the Trinity,” 274.

¹¹⁰ “Wesen und Quellen der Gotteserkenntnis,” 158.

¹¹¹ See Loos, “Divine Action, Christ and the Doctrine of God,” 243.

¹¹² *Dogma*, 352. Schlatter seems to affirm here Irenaeus' concept of the ‘two hands of God.’

Again, as noted in our earlier observations, Schlatter affirms unity in distinction when it comes to the divine action *ad intra* and *ad extra*. In so doing, Schlatter proposes a highly creative, Christocentric, and cross-centred Trinitarian perspective. Through his *Menschen dienst*, Jesus establishes the new community of faith on the cross; this task, however, is not the sole work of the second person of the Godhead; rather, Schlatter involves the whole Trinity in the community's foundation and he offers here novel ways of thinking about it as the outcome of the divine interaction in love on the cross. The cross is central: "The cross of Christ is the revelatory act; here God's will is visible; the question: What is God? is answered here: he gave Christ into death; here, you recognise him."¹¹³ Here, on the cross, we encounter divine agency in action, harmonious activity in distinction, directed towards us. Although it is at times difficult to discern Schlatter's underlying Trinitarian structure, and his (sometimes) cryptic language does not make things easier, we can recognise his intention to strike a balance between the unity and distinction of the Trinitarian persons in action. Overall, it seems, Schlatter's model seeks to do justice to the inherent complexities of the Trinitarian relationship as displayed in the New Testament, where we read of unity, distinction, subordination, intimacy and forsakenness. To argue that Schlatter's creative way of relating the divine relations *ad intra* to their action *ad extra* proves stimulating for today's discussion of Trinitarian theology would certainly not be an overstatement.

Having examined the Trinitarian foundations of the new community's creation, we now proceed to discuss the key characteristics of the new community.

Relational Oneness: Vertical and Horizontal

In Schlatter's view, the community's main feature is relational oneness; this does not come as a surprise by now, given the prominence of relationality and unity in Schlatter's opus. The ultimate goal of the harmonious Trinitarian action concerning the community is to establish relational unity, both vertically, between the community and God, and horizontally, between the members of the community. In our concluding considerations in this chapter, we shall discuss *first* Schlatter's

¹¹³ *Jesus und Paulus*, 54.

Christocentric perspective on our (vertical) relational union with God, and *secondly*, trace how Schlatter roots (horizontal) ecclesial unity in Trinitarian oneness.

Oneness with Christ, the Father and the Holy Spirit

First of all, Schlatter argues that the community's new, vertical, fellowship with God is shaped by Jesus Christ. The new community enjoys an essentially new kind of relationship with God through its union with Christ. Through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus Christ has not only established the new community, but has also connected the community with himself, and thus thereby demonstrated his divinity: "When Jesus is, on the cross, the creator of communion with God [*Gottesgemeinschaft*] for us, then certainly he possesses, as the crucified one, divinity, because no one grants communion with God but God."¹¹⁴ Hence, the community's "whole possession consists in its connection with Jesus and the value of this connection is defined by its share in Jesus [*was sie an Jesus hat*]."¹¹⁵ According to Schlatter's view, Christ, as the head of the body, not only unites the community under his Lordship, but is also the one who sustains and indwells the new community. Schlatter thus speaks of Christ's "being-with-us" (*bei-uns-sein*) and our "being in him" (*in-ihm-sein*).¹¹⁶ In this sense, Schlatter is even prepared to speak of the church as being "perfect" (*vollkommen*) since "Christ unites himself with us and us with one another in perfect grace."¹¹⁷ And through Christ, we participate in the Trinitarian fellowship, as the community's oneness with Christ rests on Christ's oneness with the Father. "The one who, in his sovereign grace, made the man Jesus one with him," writes Schlatter, "is also willing to unify those who are with one another in him."¹¹⁸ Of course, Schlatter also points to the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the establishment of relational unity; he writes:

¹¹⁴ *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, 13-14; cf. "Das Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," 37.

¹¹⁵ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 522.

¹¹⁶ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 536.

¹¹⁷ *Ethik*, 177.

¹¹⁸ *Do we know Jesus*, 493.

By the giving of his blood, God's fellowship with humanity is revealed in a completely new way. This is a new will of God, a new grace, a new union of human beings with God, a life of humanity from God by the Spirit for the accomplishing of his will. Under the old covenant, God was not so close to the human being and humans were not so close with God. Now, because Jesus ended his life in free obedience, God has made new his relation to humanity.¹¹⁹

On this basis, then, Schlatter claims that the community of faith enjoys a new, unprecedented quality of fellowship with God. There is no higher status, no more elevated position than the one we enjoy through relational union with God in Christ as members of the community.¹²⁰

Trinitarian Oneness and Communal Oneness

From the community's new vertical connection with God follows, Schlatter contends, its inherent horizontal unity, since the unity of the Trinity defines the horizontal unity of the community. As the Father is one with the Son (John 10.30), the community displays, within itself, this very same oneness. Commenting on the words of Jesus' high-priestly prayer, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17.20-21), Schlatter remarks:

This is why here [John 17.21] the community's unity rests on Jesus' oneness with the Father. From Jesus' love arises for the church the source of its love; his connection with the Father is its foundation and rule for its own harmony [*Eintracht*].¹²¹

Furthermore, as the Trinity is characterised by the 'unity in distinction,' as discussed earlier, so too is the new community of faith. The inner unity and harmony of the new community of faith is thus rooted in the loving fellowship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—this is Schlatter's version of an *analogia relationis*.¹²²

¹¹⁹ *Kennen wir Jesus*, 396-397.

¹²⁰ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 10, 7.

¹²¹ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 3, 226. The German noun *Eintracht*, what we have here translated as 'harmony,' also points to 'peaceful unity,' or 'brotherly unanimity.'

¹²² Loos, "Divine Action, Christ and the Doctrine of God," 228.

Horizontal oneness, as it is rooted in the Trinitarian oneness, is in fact the key characteristic of Christianity. Again referring to the oneness of the church as expressed in John 17, Schlatter writes: “We know of no more complete, catholic [*umfassend*] and yet at the same time simple lesson of what ‘Christianity’ is than in what John has given us with Jesus’ last prayer.”¹²³ Now at this point one wonders if there might be a considerable discrepancy between theory and reality. For if one contemplates the present state of the church, one looks in vain for Schlatter’s notion of ‘oneness,’ as substantial ecclesiastical disagreement and disunity seem to prevail.¹²⁴ Does Schlatter’s vision perhaps merely reflect wishful thinking? Two things might be said in answer to this challenge.

On the one hand, we have introduced Schlatter as a critical empirical realist; hence, one can rest assured that his assumption of ecclesial unity rooted in Triune unity is not a position of naivety. Again, the notion of polarity emerges as Schlatter clearly opts for an already-but-not-yet view of ecclesial reality. The new community, though in a sense already perfect, lives in hope, looking forward to its final completion (and thus perfect unification) upon Jesus’ return.¹²⁵ Christian eschatological hope is thus central for Schlatter; it is, in fact a central function of the community.¹²⁶ “God has appointed him [Jesus] the completer [*Vollender*] of the community,” Schlatter affirms, “and he will fulfil his calling [*Beruf*] by completing it.”¹²⁷ This completion, however, Schlatter admits, has not yet been realised through his “work on earth . . . or by his veiled omnipresence, but this will happen through his new revelation. This is why Christianity’s hope is as much set on him as its faith.”¹²⁸ On the other hand, if one reads Schlatter’s agenda pragmatically, that is, as a goal to which to aspire, one can detect a distinct ecumenical impulse. This is not

¹²³ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 3, 228.

¹²⁴ See, for example, the recent contributions in Michael Root and James J. Buckley (eds.), *The Morally Divided Body: Ethical Disagreement and the Disunity of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

¹²⁵ *Dogma*, 533.

¹²⁶ *Dogma*, 526.

¹²⁷ *Dogma*, 533.

¹²⁸ *Dogma*, 533.

far-fetched, as Schlatter was throughout his life, as noted earlier, at pains to work towards ecumenical understanding. In various speeches and essays, Schlatter continually reminded his contemporaries of the inter-confessional precept of an ethics of love which must be the key element of the new community of faith.¹²⁹ Overall, Schlatter's emphasis on the oneness of the community of faith offers here much by way of ecumenical promise.¹³⁰ Schlatter's explorations of the Trinitarian basis of ecclesial unity can provide significant material for inter-denominational understanding.

Conclusion

In this chapter we continued our exploration of Schlatter's *Denkakt*. Focussing in particular on Jesus in relation to humanity, we established how in Schlatter's view, Jesus' *Gottesdienst* forms the basis for his *Menschen dienst*. Our observations in this context focused on the cross of Christ, as the cross is the cardinal point for his Christology. Schlatter undoubtedly offers a unique and highly creative *theologia crucis* with his relational-volitional trajectory. The cross, for Schlatter, is first and foremost a matter between the Father and the Son. At the heart of Schlatter's theology of the cross lies the divine exchange in love, mediated by the Holy Spirit, which unites Father and Son even in the most extreme moment of dereliction. The cross, in fact, is the quintessential litmus test for Schlatter's relational Christology. It constitutes the apex of Jesus' obedience to the Father, and at the same time it reveals the perfection of his communion of will and of essence with the Father in spite of forsakenness. Having presented himself as the perfect offering to his Father on the cross, the divine Son receives as a gift from his Father the new community of faith, over which he is declared Lord. The establishment of the new community is the key element of Jesus' *Menschen dienst*, and Schlatter thereby points to the communal aspect of his theology. In the same way as the Trinity does not consist of

¹²⁹ See, for example his "Der Dienst des Christen in der älteren Dogmatik," "Noch ein Wort über den christlichen Dienst," and "Die Dienstpflicht des Christen in der apostolischen Gemeinde" (in *Der Dienst des Christen: Beiträge zu einer Theologie der Liebe*).

¹³⁰ See Neuer, "Die ökumenische Bedeutung der Theologie Adolf Schlatters," 71-92 and Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 427-436.

Chapter V

‘individuals,’ but distinct persons in unity, so too does the community represent distinct members who live in harmony with God and with each other. Schlatter sees a relational analogy between Trinitarian oneness in distinction and the community’s oneness in distinction. In the following, final chapter, we move to the individual believer as she experiences her *Anschluss an Christus*, her union with Jesus Christ, in the ‘life-act.’ In doing so, however, we do not leave the sphere of the community behind, since, as highlighted at the outset of this chapter, the life of the individual Christian is always intricately linked to the new community of faith; it is, though, particularly with a view to the personal and individual experience of the Christian that Schlatter makes central assertions which shed more light on his Christological outlook, calling for a closer investigation in the following and final chapter.

VI. The *Lebensakt*: Organic Volitional Union with Christ

Adolf Schlatter's vision was to arrive at a holistic understanding of theology in general and Christology in particular. He sought to unite exegetical observation (biblical studies), theological examination (systematic theology) and theological application (ethics) under one single banner. So far, we have studied the first two elements of this method: the 'seeing-act' (*Sehakt*), by which the theologian perceives the history of Jesus Christ, and the 'thinking-act' (*Denkakt*), through which she is prompted to analyse her findings systematically in order to arrive at a Christology proper. Seeing and thinking however do not suffice. The exegetical seeing-act and the dogmatic thinking-act lead in an organic way to the existential 'life-act' (*Lebensakt*), in which we assimilate the observed and processed material. For Schlatter, New Testament theology and dogmatics go hand in hand with ethics, the application of theology in real-life situations. As noted earlier, Schlatter not only produced a New Testament theology and a dogmatics, but also an ethics (*Die christliche Ethik*, 1914/1929).¹ Whilst Schlatter first hesitated to pen the *Ethik*, as he felt he had to "respect the boundaries of the disciplines,"² his friend Karl Holl finally succeeded in convincing Schlatter that he was the right candidate to do it.³ In his third (and successful) attempt, Holl writes to Schlatter:

It is my firm conviction that Protestantism will perish if does not renew itself based on ethics. If I could, I would tell you, like Farel told Calvin, that you will be guilty of a severe sin of negligence if you shirk your duties.⁴

¹ For the context see Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 498-508.

² Schlatter to Lütgert, 23 April 1913, in Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 499.

³ See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 500.

⁴ Holl to Schlatter, 17 August 1913, in Stupperich, "Briefe Karl Holls an Adolf Schlatter," 213.

Schlatter obviously agreed that ethics was a sore point in contemporary Protestantism;⁵ he articulated, like Holl, a serious need for improvement since the “Reformation doctrine did not bequeath us with an adequate ethics.”⁶ In the previous chapter, we alluded to Schlatter’s critique of individualistic and introspective tendencies in post-Reformation Protestantism and contemporary German pietism. He feared that the introspective and isolationist tendencies in pietism would lead to a “listless passivity” (*unbewegliche Ruhe*),⁷ to an isolated believer and to a passive church.⁸ Schlatter in fact caricatures the passive ‘pious quietist’ as one who regards the Christian life as “a journey of tears until we reach a blessed death.”⁹ In the words of Stephen F. Dintaman, Schlatter “saw in Luther an emphasis on the totality of human sin . . . which had the effect of overemphasizing the passivity of the believer in faith and the Christian life. He saw a tendency in Luther toward an egoistic perversion of faith where the justification of the individual is made the center of personal and theological concern.”¹⁰ While this language is perhaps slightly exaggerated, Dintaman certainly points to the crux of Schlatter’s critique. The energetic Swiss theologian thus focuses on the active human being as an active member of the new community of faith. Echoing his Tübingen teacher Johann T. Beck, Schlatter thus calls for a “completion of the Reformation” (*Vollendung der Reformation*),¹¹ in such a way that ethics becomes the completion of dogmatics. Beck’s credo, “Go and do what you have heard,” clearly resonates in Schlatter’s

⁵ “Selbstdarstellungen,” 150; see also 165-166.

⁶ *Erlebtes*, 117.

⁷ “Noch ein Wort,” 68 [*Dienst des Christen*, 110].

⁸ “Noch ein Wort,” 69 [*Dienst des Christen*, 110].

⁹ Quoted in Dintaman, *Creative Grace*, 163n5. In this respect, Karl Barth uses similar language when he speaks of a “lazy quietism” (*faulen Quietismus*). *KD IV/2*, 571. Herman Bavinck’s criticism of contemporary pietism in the Netherlands is reminiscent of Schlatter’s; he writes of the pietists: “They spoke of earthly life as a life of trouble and grief. The world was to them nothing but a vale of tears, a desert, a Meshech. They would have preferred to withdraw from it completely and restrict themselves to the narrow circle of like-minded people. Family and society, science and art, state and church were given up to unbelief and revolution as wholly spoiled and unredeemable.” Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, trans. Harry der Nederlanden (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1980), 44-45.

¹⁰ Dintaman, *Creative Grace*, 152.

¹¹ “Becks theologische Arbeit,” 34, 41-42; *Rückblick*, 67, 107; see also Bernhard Riggenbach, *Johann Tobias Beck*, 18, 270.

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works.¹² As Schlatter recalls, Beck combined the ‘preservation’ (*Bewahrung*) of the given word and the fulfilment of the ethical norm,¹³ which resulted in the “lived-out word of Scripture.”¹⁴ And Beck indeed saw the “Christian teaching science as an organic union of dogmatics and ethics,” with ethics as the goal of dogmatics.¹⁵ In Beck’s view, then, and Schlatter is happy to follow his former teacher here, it is “[n]ot the right knowledge but the right action [that] determines the relation to God and the condition of life [*Lebensstand*].”¹⁶ For Schlatter, then, theology is a dead discipline if it is not applied to one’s own life in the life-act.¹⁷ “Theology,” Schlatter contends, “that declines to create an ethic does not completely carry out its duty.”¹⁸ In his view, “dogmatics is given to us so that we would have an ethics.”¹⁹ In terms of Schlatter’s threefold method of seeing-act, thinking-act, and life-act, one could put it like this: The theologian only takes her vocation seriously when she exhibits the

¹² “Geh’ nun hin und thue, was du gehöret hast.” Beck, *Die christliche Liebeslehre. Erste Abtheilung* (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf, 1872), 8. See also Neuer, “Das Verhältnis Adolf Schlatters zu Johann Tobias Beck,” 85-95.

¹³ “Becks theologische Arbeit,” 38.

¹⁴ “Becks theologische Arbeit,” 28.

¹⁵ Beck, *Einleitung in das System der Christlichen Lehre, oder, propädeutische Entwicklung der christlichen Lehr-Wissenschaft: ein Versuch* (Stuttgart: C. Belser, 1838), 45. See also Schlatter, “Becks theologische Arbeit,” 40. Schlatter’s Dutch contemporary, neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper, notes likewise: “The Calvinist . . . does not hold to religion, with its dogmatics, as a separate entity, and then place his moral life with its ethics as a second entity alongside of religion, but he holds to religion as placing him in the presence of God Himself, Who thereby embues him with His divine will.” Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1931), 72. On significant theological overlaps between Schlatter and Kuyper see my essay, “The Pilgrimage to Kuyper? Adolf Schlatter and Abraham Kuyper on Theology, Culture and Art,” in *The Kuyper Center Review*, vol. 3, ed. Gordon Graham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 32-50.

¹⁶ “Becks theologische Arbeit,” 34.

¹⁷ See also my article, “Good Will Hunting: Adolf Schlatter on Organic Volitional Sanctification,” 125-143.

¹⁸ “Briefe über das Dogma,” 45. “For this reason,” Schlatter writes, “every dogmatics that does without ethics is an aberration [*Verirrung*] as it denies the will, duty before God and love for God.” *Dogma*, 212. Elsewhere, Schlatter argues that “the New Testament does not know of a concern with the divine that would not create an ethics.” “Theologie des NT und Dogmatik,” 80 [*Die Bibel verstehen*, 202]. This ethical agenda was not simply a theoretical construct for Schlatter but had a concrete impact on his personal life-act. Schlatter was, for instance, closely connected with the Christian relief organisation Bethel, which was founded by his friend Friedrich von Bodelschwingh and offered care for the socially disadvantaged. Bodelschwingh’s son, Friedrich Jr., praised Schlatter’s energetic support for the ‘Betheler Anstalten’ in his speech at Schlatter’s funeral. See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 819-820.

¹⁹ “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 78; cf. “Briefe über das Dogma,” 41, 44.

threefold pursuit of seeing, thinking *and living*. “To me,” Schlatter writes, “observation was valid as the process that gave us the dogmatic knowledge and that created duty [*Pflicht*].”²⁰ ‘Observation’ in the seeing-act, the analysis of ‘dogmatic knowledge’ in the thinking-act, and the performance of ‘duty’ in the life-act are inseparably united, in particular, as these acts converge in the person and work of Jesus Christ.²¹ For Schlatter, the New Testament question of the history of the Christ, the dogmatic question of Christology, and the existential question of what human beings become (and are called to do) through their union with him are one: “When we define our relation to Jesus,” he writes, “we are faced with a new question, namely: what is he? and what becomes of us through our union with him [*Anschluß an ihn*]?”²² The Christological task is thus not finished when one merely ‘sees Christ’ in history and ‘thinks him’ in dogmatic elaboration. Rather, the theologian’s goal, as that of any individual, is to experience fundamental experiential and ethical change through the encounter with Jesus Christ. And this ethical change, in Schlatter’s view, is confirmed by a substantial volitional change in us. We act differently because of a new will in us. How does this come about? How are we empowered to act with a new volition? And how does this volitional transformation tie in with his relational Christology?

This is what we intend to explore in this chapter according to the following outline: *First*, we introduce briefly the basic elements of Schlatter’s model of our volitional union, exploring the significance of volition, and its relation to cognition and history. We then turn, *secondly*, to the crucial question of how our volitional union with God comes about, and we discuss Schlatter’s significant emphasis on the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in this context. *Thirdly*, moving even deeper into the intricacies of volitional union with God, we clarify whether Schlatter is able to offer a balanced account of volitional union that takes our anthropology seriously while at the same time doing justice to the divine work in us. This will allow us,

²⁰ “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 44, 55; see also *Rückblick*, 102 on the unity of thinking-act and life-act.

²¹ See “Entstehung der Beiträge,” 8.

²² *Dogma*, 278.

fourthly and finally, to weave the threads together, offering a full picture of Schlatter's understanding of our *Anschluss an Christus*.

1. Human Volition, Cognition, and History

Both in the seeing-act and the thinking-act we considered the relevance of volition for Schlatter's Christology. We discussed the importance of Jesus' volitional union with the Father and through the Holy Spirit, in particular with a view to the cross. Now, with a view to our existential volitional connection with God, volition seems equally significant. Human volition in general is central for Schlatter, who speaks of the "primacy of the will,"²³ and claims that the will is "the highest function of our life."²⁴ And in order to perform the right action the human being needs the right will, namely the good will, which is in harmony with God's will. "Not the extinction of our will," writes Schlatter, "but its creation arises through God's redeeming grace; not the absence of will [*Willenlosigkeit*], but a good will is its goal."²⁵ And we receive this good will, this sanctified volition through volitional union with God. Through our 'volitional union' (*Willenseinigung*),²⁶ or 'volitional communion' (*Willensgemeinschaft*)²⁷ with God, Schlatter claims, we are enabled to perform the ethical deed within our life-act and thereby glorify God. And as volitional transformation allows us to glorify God, Schlatter contends it is in fact one of the greatest gifts that God gives (more on this later).²⁸

²³ *Rückblick*, 93.

²⁴ "Moral oder Evangelium," in *Gesunde Lehre*, 98; cf. *Rückblick*, 172-173; see also *Gründe der christlichen Gewißheit*, 59 and Schlatter's dictionary entry on "Wille, Wollen" in the *Calwer Bibelllexikon*, 1011-1012.

²⁵ *Dogma*, 456.

²⁶ *Philosophische Arbeit*, 95; see also "Moral oder Evangelium," in *Gesunde Lehre*, 97-98; *Dogma*, 148-162; cf. Schlatter's elaborate description in the *Ethik*, 22-29, 34-49, 49.

²⁷ *Ethik*, 29.

²⁸ "There is no greater gift for us than the one in which our will is united with God's will," says Schlatter. *Hilfe in Bibelnot*, 8; see also *Ethik* 33-45. Commenting on Jesus' saying, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7.21), Schlatter notes: "He [Jesus] does not speak of a faith that consists in empty words, but rather talks about the highest gifts that a human being can receive through faith from above." *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 1, 98.

At this point one wonders whether Schlatter, in stressing the volitional aspect of our union with God, does not overlook the important cognitive component of this union, namely a transformation of our knowledge and understanding. According to the Apostle Paul, this cognitive transformation seems to be the prerequisite for any volitional transformation, as Romans 12.2 indicates: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” While Schlatter would probably agree that only by having received “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2.16) is one able to distinguish the good will from the bad will, his focus is clearly more on the actual outworking of a transformed cognition as it plays out in a new volition. In fact, Schlatter warns of a dogmatism that reduces faith to its cognitive elements. Based on our earlier comments, it seems likely that Schlatter intended with his volitional emphasis to correct what he considered a pietistic overemphasis on cognitive introspection. For Schlatter, the Christian faith comprised more than that. Obviously, he writes, in order to believe “we also need a brain.”²⁹ “Faith needs cognition,” he argues, “but is not identical to it. It is a plus because it contains an energetic and comprehensive activation of the will.”³⁰ That is, whilst Schlatter does not downplay the cognitive aspect of the renewal of our minds, he is keen to stress that cognitive renewal always goes hand in hand with a transformed volition that embraces the divine will as its own. “The renewal of our reason [*Vernunft*],” he writes, “means that it now asks for God’s will and that it utilises all its knowledge of the world and of human nature so that the healthy will of God might be done through us.”³¹ Of course, Schlatter admits, Jesus’ disciples, then and now, “should learn from him [Jesus], but not merely [in terms of] insights . . . His influence on them was directed toward the entire person, not merely toward their cognition but also toward their will.”³² The goal is then not only a renewed mind, but also ultimately a “new will that obeys God” and finds expression in concrete action

²⁹ *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*, 47.

³⁰ “Christologie und Soteriologie,” 23.

³¹ *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*, 27.

³² *History of the Christ*, 240.

to the glory of God in the context of concrete history.³³ This latter aspect of ‘concrete history’ is, of course, of special significance to Schlatter.

Throughout his works, Schlatter is keen to emphasise our dependence on history, that is, both on history in general and, significantly, on the concrete history of the Christ in particular (as we have discussed in the seeing-act).³⁴ Any ‘connection with Jesus’ (*Anschluß an Jesus*) is in Schlatter’s view only achievable in conjunction with a ‘connection with history’ (*Anschluß an die Geschichte*).³⁵ “Our participation in God [*Anteil an Gott*],” notes Schlatter, “is not established through theories, through abstract, timeless concepts, but through history.”³⁶ As laid out in our chapter on the seeing-act, for Schlatter there is no ugly broad ditch between historical and universal truths, between history and faith, or between *Historie* and *Geschichte*.³⁷ The history of the Son of God, who became flesh and lived on this earth in a distinct period in time, is existentially relevant for the believer in his or her concrete historical context. It is precisely in our specific historical setting that we encounter God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Hence, our point of contact (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) with Jesus Christ, to borrow Brunner’s language, lies within concrete history, and volitional union, which can be considered the key element of our *Anschluss an Jesus*, similarly works against the backdrop of concrete history.

Emerging from our observations thus far is Schlatter’s clear focus on ethics as the goal of dogmatics and his emphasis on volitional renewal working through our volitional union with God in history. In what follows, we shall take a closer look at the nature of this volitional union with God, considering in the *first* place Schlatter’s distinct emphasis on Christ and the Spirit and *secondly* the organic nature of volitional union.

³³ *History of the Christ*, 245.

³⁴ For a discussion of the existentially relevant factor of history in Schlatter’s *Dogma*, see Klaus Bockmühl’s essay, “Die Wahrnehmung der Geschichte in der Dogmatik Adolf Schlatters,” in *Die Aktualität der Theologie Adolf Schlatters*, ed. Klaus Bockmühl (Gießen: Brunnen, 1988), 93-112.

³⁵ “Selbstdarstellungen,” 162-163; see also *Dogma*, 300.

³⁶ *Dogma*, 300.

³⁷ “Briefe über das Dogma,” 18-19.

2. Christ, the Spirit and Volitional Union

How does Schlatter conceive of volitional union with God in detail? That is, how exactly is our will united with God's will? According to Schlatter, both the work of Jesus Christ and the involvement of the Holy Spirit are central: we unite our will with God's will on the basis of Christ's work and through the Holy Spirit. It is in particular Schlatter's strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit that deserves closer scrutiny in our following discussion—both in this section and the subsequent one. In times when pneumatology has tended to be sidelined in the theological debate, Schlatter directs our attention to the significant contribution of the Holy Spirit in our volitional union with God. Of course, much has been said about the neglect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in theology and church life.³⁸ And Schlatter clearly noticed a similar disregard for pneumatology in his own day and age. Instead of assimilating the “concept of the Spirit” (*Geistgedanken*), Schlatter laments, the church has “anxiously rejected it again and again.”³⁹ By giving due prominence to the Holy Spirit, Schlatter seeks to fulfil his goal of ameliorating the shortcomings of contemporary Protestantism as mentioned earlier. Even today, it seems, Schlatter's distinct reference to the Holy Spirit has much to offer today's theological debate, as will become evident in our discussion.

What then are the concrete pneumatological implications for our volitional union with God? As previously indicated, Schlatter puts forward a model of union in distinction when it comes to the divine action *ad extra*. Hence, the whole Godhead is, in his view, harmoniously united yet distinctively involved in bringing our human will into harmony with the divine will.⁴⁰ Referring to Philippians 2.13, Schlatter suggests that God works through his ‘two hands,’ namely Christ and the Spirit, in order to bring about a deep volitional change in us. The Holy Spirit, as the ‘Spirit of Jesus Christ,’ then, works in close coordination with Christ. “Paul,” Schlatter writes, “expresses the unity between Christ and the Spirit by linking their ministries through

³⁸ See, for instance, Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 224-226.

³⁹ *Dogma*, 346.

⁴⁰ *Dogma*, 466.

a complete and thus dual causal relationship.”⁴¹ Schlatter underlines that “liberation from our evil will” is equally rooted “in our portion *in Christ and in the Spirit*.”⁴² There is then close economic cooperation as Jesus and the Spirit perform their work in us. And Schlatter sees clear evidence for this in the New Testament. “[T]he New Testament directs our view to God’s Spirit,” Schlatter posits, “so that we would know God’s gift and Christ’s work, and thereby grasp what our union with God comprises and what determines our relation with him.”⁴³ Now what exactly is ‘Christ’s work’ in this context? Primarily, the work of Christ consists in the way he enables volitional union with God. The offer of volitional union with God is in fact the significant result of Jesus’ efficacious work on the cross. Jesus Christ has come, Schlatter writes, so that “we want what God wants.”⁴⁴ This is the Christocentric basis for our volitional union with God. Furthermore, Schlatter holds the view that Christ makes the Spirit the foundation of our cognition and volition. “[T]he dominion of Christ,” Schlatter writes, “manifests itself in us as he grants us in a certain situation the good will. We thereby experience that we are surrounded by his presence and that *he makes his Spirit the foundation of our thinking and willing*.”⁴⁵ Hence, Schlatter speaks of the Spirit as the “architect of the good will” (*Erzeuger des guten Willens*) in us.⁴⁶ In this way, as the Spirit works within us, Schlatter points out, we experience a fundamental inner volitional change. He writes:

Jesus’ gift comprises not only the attempt to shape the human being from the outside, but—and this is why Jesus spoke of the Spirit—[also] that human beings are gripped at the core of their personal life, at the core of their willing and thinking and thereby united with the divine thinking and willing.⁴⁷

Schlatter is eager to note that this volitional change empowers us to perform the good ethical deed. He writes:

⁴¹ *Theology of the Apostles*, 268.

⁴² *Dogma*, 452 (emphasis added).

⁴³ “Noch ein Wort,” 49-50 [*Dienst des Christen*, 96].

⁴⁴ “Dienst des Christen,” 25 [*Dienst des Christen*, 41].

⁴⁵ *Dogma*, 467 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁶ *Dogma*, 452.

⁴⁷ *Hilfe in Bibelnot*, 12.

When we really have been given the Spirit of God, it means possession, not merely poverty; this is power . . . freedom and life . . . As God's Spirit is the founder and mover of our inner life, so there arises through him faith, but also love, assurance, and deed, happiness in God, but also duty and vocation.⁴⁸

We return to this significant aspect of ethical empowerment later. For now, we note that the Father grants volitional union through the work of Christ and the Spirit, and in such way that we are empowered from within to act according to the highest command, namely to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength. Having established the Trinitarian basis for volitional union, some further questions demand answers, such as: How exactly does Schlatter conceive of the interplay between Trinitarian action and our human standpoint with a view to our volitional union with God? That is, in what way does the divine unifying action affect anthropology? Do we experience a foundational change in our human nature in the process? The next section deals with these significant issues.

3. Organic Volitional Union

Put briefly, Schlatter presents a model of organic volitional union where divine action and human response occur in harmony. To explore this thought in more detail, *first*, we attend to Schlatter's general assumption of a polarity of passivity and activity on our side as we receive God's grace of volitional union with him. *Secondly*, we address Schlatter's view of *unified grace*, which entails that God's grace is not bestowed on us in successive 'portions,' as it were, but in a holistic way. This brings us *thirdly*, to a closer examination of how volitional union relates to our human psychology, and *fourthly*, of how it ties in with our 'service to God' (*Gottesdienst*).

Grace works Calming and Moving

To begin with, Adolf Schlatter is convinced that our volitional union with God works in an organic, harmonious way. As one might imagine by now, Schlatter rejects any dualist or exclusivist modes of volitional union where the Triune action is everything

⁴⁸ "Noch ein Wort," 49 [*Dienst des Christen*, 95].

and the human being, as he put it, “disappears” (*zergeht*).⁴⁹ Schlatter complains that it was the Reformers in particular who focused primarily on God as the giver of grace while its recipients remained passive, fuzzy figures on the stage of the theatre of God.⁵⁰ In this framework, he argues, “[t]he divine action is presented as the annihilation of the human action . . . God does everything by himself and the glory of his revelation is supposed to consist in the fact that the human being dissolves through it to nothing.”⁵¹ One ought to point out in this context that Schlatter’s train of thought does not lead to semi-Pelagianism. In regards to union with Christ, the question is not whether we, in any way, *contribute* to God’s gracious work—we clearly do not, he asserts—instead, the question is how we *respond* to the grace we receive. And here, we respond with what one could call passive activity for God’s grace works in us both ‘calming’ (*beruhigend*) and ‘moving’ (*bewegend*).⁵² In this context, Benjamin Schliesser observes that for Schlatter, “the receptive nature of faith . . . is not to be equated with quietism or tranquillity . . . Here Schlatter seeks to correct a misunderstanding of Reformation theology that originated—in Schlatter’s perception—already in Luther’s own faith: the one-sided emphasis on the calming, salvation-giving function of faith, which does not release adequately its active component.”⁵³ Schlatter thus proposes a dialectical understanding of passivity *and* activity in the believer, who not only receives passively but also acts according to the grace given to her. In his “Dienst des Christen,” Schlatter explains:

The gaze upon God and his grace works in our volition both calming and moving; calming, as it satisfies our quest, for in God’s grace, gift and deed lies everything that we need . . . yet, at the same time also moving, arousing our aspiration, because God’s grace, gift and deed grants our will the goal and the power . . . and enables us to [accomplish] the deed. In that faith

⁴⁹ “Dienst des Christen,” 65 [*Dienst des Christen*, 78].

⁵⁰ He laments that “their gaze is fixed on God as the giver of grace, on Christ, on God, on what he does for us; the picture of the recipient remains rather obscure.” “Dienst des Christen,” 5 [*Dienst des Christen*, 22].

⁵¹ “Dienst des Christen,” 64-65 [*Dienst des Christen*, 78].

⁵² “Dienst des Christen,” 4 [*Dienst des Christen*, 21].

⁵³ Schliesser, *Abraham’s Faith in Romans 4: Paul’s Concept of Faith in Light of the History of Reception of Genesis 15:6* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 15.

works both in equal measure calming and moving . . . lies the health of our Christian life.⁵⁴

Faith, obviously, is central to volitional union and we will come back to this in due course. God's grace, then, always has both a passive ('calming') and active ('moving') impact on the Christian. To use a New Testament picture, and most fittingly a truly organic one, the branches in John 15.1-5 rest passively (but not lifelessly) in the vine; the branches, as it were, actively abide in it, hanging through a "living bond" (*mit lebendigem Band*) on the vine, and only thereby producing much fruit.⁵⁵ Only when they "[t]ake from him [Jesus] their thinking and willing will their service to humanity and their work in this world become a powerful blessing," Schlatter notes.⁵⁶ With his emphasis on living, activating, efficacious divine grace, Schlatter supplements what he considers the Reformation emphasis on passive, quietistic grace.⁵⁷ The believer is neither only passive nor only active, but lives in the simultaneity of passivity in the reception and activity in the consummation of divine grace.⁵⁸ Schlatter argues that there is "no work of God that would render us passive, as it would then cease to be a work of grace. With a view to God's work, as his grace enters us, we are volitionally and thus also effectively involved."⁵⁹ In this sense, then, the recipients of God's grace are 'seriously recipients' as they are moved towards vitality. In Schlatter's words:

Grace seeks and creates the recipient and thereby puts us into passivity; yet, it makes us seriously recipients, so that it holds us, endues us and moves us into vitality. There is therefore no reception of the divine gift where this gift has not previously caused its activity within us, nor is there an activity that has not before itself as its foundation, and behind itself as its fruit and its goal, the reception of the divine gift.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ "Dienst des Christen," 4 [*Dienst des Christen*, 21].

⁵⁵ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 3, 203. Based on our earlier observations, we note that the 'living bond' in Schlatter's framework points again to the Holy Spirit's activity, see chapter V/2.

⁵⁶ *Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 3, 203.

⁵⁷ "Dienst des Christen," 65 [*Dienst des Christen*, 78].

⁵⁸ "Noch ein Wort," 54 [*Dienst des Christen*, 100].

⁵⁹ *Rückblick*, 109.

⁶⁰ "Noch ein Wort," 55 [*Dienst des Christen*, 100].

With this balanced understanding of passivity and activity, Schlatter aims to resolve the latent dualism between passive faith and active works, passive dogmatics and active ethics, that had weakened, as he thinks, contemporary theology and church.⁶¹ The Christian therefore lives in the dialectic or duality—not the dualism!—of *Rezeption* through faith and *Aktion* through the performance of the concrete volitional act.⁶² For this reason, it is “impossible that one could regard oneself only as the recipient of grace but not at the same time as its instrument.”⁶³

Unified Grace: Justification and Sanctification

At this point one wonders whether Schlatter’s reading does justice to the theological tradition. It is questionable whether he was correct in his judgement that the human being was in danger of ‘dissolving’ into passivity in the Reformers. By contrast, Schlatter’s proposal of grace as ‘calming’ and ‘moving’ in fact reveals significant parallels to John Calvin’s account of the *duplex gratia* of justification and sanctification.⁶⁴ Calvin understands sanctification as a “grateful fulfilment of the law of love, empowered by the life-giving Spirit.”⁶⁵ According to J. Todd Billings’ recent work, Calvin thus holds the view that “grace fulfils rather than destroys human nature,”⁶⁶ a dictum which Calvin seems to have adopted from Thomas Aquinas,⁶⁷ and which Schlatter is happy to reiterate (as we shall see below). At least in Calvin’s

⁶¹ Schlatter opposes any dualistic attempts that could lead to a “separation of the gospel into ‘dogmatics’ and ‘ethics.’” “Dienst des Christen,” 56 [*Dienst des Christen*, 70].

⁶² Schlatter speaks of the “indissoluble relation between reception and action, between faith and work.” “Noch ein Wort,” 57 [*Dienst des Christen*, 101]. One observes a significant parallel to Schleiermacher here, who writes: “The activity of the self [*Selbstthätigkeit*] in [one’s] communion of life with Christ thus begins immediately, and without interval, when one is received into it; thus one could say that conversion is nothing other than the evocation of the self’s activity which is united with Christ, that is, lively receptivity gives way to lively self-activity [*die lebendige Empfänglichkeit geht über in belebte Selbstthätigkeit*].” Schleiermacher, *Der Christliche Glaube*, §108, II:190.

⁶³ “Dienst des Christen,” 58-59 [*Dienst des Christen*, 72].

⁶⁴ See Calvin, *Institutes*, III.11.1. See also the discussion in Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin’s Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008).

⁶⁵ Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15-16.

⁶⁶ Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, 17.

⁶⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica I*, Q 1, A 8, ad 2.

framework of union with Christ, it seems, the human being is depicted less passively than Schlatter perhaps assumed.

Nevertheless, we note in Schlatter the clear emphasis on the ‘wholeness’ of God’s grace. This reflects again Schlatter’s overall motif of unity and his aversion to anything remotely associated with dualisms. Regarding the traditional distinction between justification and sanctification, then, Schlatter remarks that “[t]he dissection of grace into two succeeding gifts is not Pauline.”⁶⁸ Referring to the Apostle Paul’s remarks in 1 Corinthians 1.30, “He [God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption,” Schlatter writes: “The liberation from guilt, which arose from the reprehensibility of our desires, through the granting of righteousness [*Rechtbeschaffenheit*] . . . and the removal of our separation from God through the bestowal of fellowship with him . . . are both received through the same experience.”⁶⁹ To Schlatter, it seems, justification and sanctification form one experiential entity of grace. One can recognise Schlatter’s intention to avoid a ‘lifeless,’ or artificial understanding of justification which occurs over and above the individual. By contrast, Schlatter develops a relational doctrine of justification which is closely related to sanctification. While justification includes a forensic aspect (as Schlatter claimed against his teacher Beck, see chapter II/1), Schlatter argues that the whole point of justification is relation, namely reconciliation with the divine judge. For Schlatter, then, justification aims at our communion with God.⁷⁰ In fact, “connectedness with God” (*Verbundenheit mit Gott*) is according to Schlatter the greatest gift brought about by justification.⁷¹ In his commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans, Schlatter claims that “with the declaration of righteousness . . . is also specified the relation in which believers now stand to God.”⁷² Elsewhere, Schlatter put it similarly: “Since God unites himself completely with the one he declares to be

⁶⁸ *Gottes Gerechtigkeit*, 221-222.

⁶⁹ *Paulus der Bote Jesu*, 97.

⁷⁰ See Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 412.

⁷¹ *Theologie der Apostel*, 301, 313.

⁷² *Gottes Gerechtigkeit*, 194.

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righteous, the human being receives, together with the justification awarded him by God's affirmation of his conduct, the full communion with God, his entire love and gift."⁷³

While this might be a creative recasting of the classic doctrines, Schlatter, and this is noteworthy, is in fact consistent within his own paradigm. As discussed in our previous section on the *Denkakt* (chapter V/1), Schlatter sees a close unity between the person and work of Jesus Christ, from which follows that there is, likewise, an inseparable bond between our participation in Christ's own righteousness by faith in justification and in his righteousness present within us through his Spirit in sanctification. Sanctification is not an artificial 'plus' but already enveloped, as it were, in the gift of justification. "A saint is nothing else than a justified [person]" (*Ein Heiliger ist nicht mehr als ein Gerechter*), Schlatter insists.⁷⁴ From this perspective, one finds it plausible that Schlatter does not find the idea of an *ordo salutis* very helpful. However, space does not allow us to offer a more detailed account of Schlatter's highly creative understanding of justification and sanctification.⁷⁵ Suffice to note Schlatter's distinct emphasis on relationality and unity when it comes to the grace which works both 'calming' and 'moving.' Yet how exactly does Schlatter apply the 'calming' and 'moving' effects of grace to our volitional union with God? In what follows we shall discuss Schlatter's suggestion of the organic, harmonious way in which God's grace transforms us as human beings in volitional union.

The Spirit and Organic Union

Having already pointed to the crucial involvement of the Holy Spirit in our volitional union with God in Schlatter's framework, we now return to pneumatology. Given the

⁷³ *Theologie der Apostel*, 300. Consider also the following quote: "Paul's juxtaposition of justification and reconciliation with God's sanctifying work does not suggest that he conceived of the divine gift as divided in parts, such as that justification made help possible without actually granting it, so that it required sanctification as the second exercise of divine grace in order to make that grace effective. Paul sees in God's justifying verdict that divine will that removes everything that separates us from God and grants as our aim everything that is assigned to us." *Theology of the Apostles*, 248.

⁷⁴ *Theologie der Apostel*, 328.

⁷⁵ We refer to Rieger's treatment in *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 150-174.

special organic way the Spirit acts within us, Schlatter's argument goes, our human will is neither destroyed nor neglected, but organically united with God's will, through faith. How exactly does Schlatter develop this thought in detail?

First of all, Schlatter is keen to take our human nature seriously, because he feels that God takes it seriously.⁷⁶ In agreement with Aquinas and Calvin, as mentioned before, Schlatter is convinced that God's grace does not destroy but fulfils our human nature, and on this basis he suggests an organic understanding of our volitional union with God. It is evidently not the case, he asserts, that "this new *life*" is simply "*planted in us* apart from our will."⁷⁷ God does not perform his good work in us artificially, miraculously bypassing our human volition, which would necessarily lead to a "life without a subject."⁷⁸ Such a view, says Schlatter, neither takes our natural condition of life seriously nor displays the biblical data correctly.⁷⁹

By contrast, Schlatter assumes that volitional union happens in such a way that God does not annihilate but rather sanctifies what he has created. That means, God neither overpowers nor replaces the human will. Rather, God puts his gift "into our thinking and willing" in such a way that it does not violate our human psychology.⁸⁰ With 'gift', Schlatter is here obviously referring to the Holy Spirit's involvement in our union of will with God as introduced earlier. Schlatter affirms that the Apostle Paul "does not conceive of the Spirit as a power that substitutes, overcomes, or makes the will of human beings superfluous by force. The Spirit does not assault the individual."⁸¹ Instead, he argues, the Holy Spirit establishes our responsibility in making the conscious volitional decision possible.⁸² "The activity of the Spirit engages our personal life in its unity; thus it does not suppress or

⁷⁶ *Gründe der christlichen Gewißheit/Das Gebet*, 127.

⁷⁷ "Noch ein Wort," 67 [*Dienst des Christen*, 110] (emphasis original).

⁷⁸ "Noch ein Wort," 67 [*Dienst des Christen*, 109].

⁷⁹ "Noch ein Wort," 80 [*Dienst des Christen*, 120].

⁸⁰ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 191. It seems that Schlatter has Calvin on his side here, for Calvin writes: "I say the will is abolished, but not in so far as it is will, for in conversion everything essential to our original nature remains: I also say, that it is created anew, not because the will then begins to exist, but because it is turned from evil to good." Calvin, *Institutes*, III.3.6.

⁸¹ *Jesus und Paulus*, 78.

⁸² *Jesus und Paulus*, 78-79.

substitute our natural capacities, but the Spirit preserves, wills and uses the whole range of our natural vitality.”⁸³

Volitional union, then, does not happen ‘automatically’ (“wie von selbst,” “von selber”),⁸⁴ without or even against our human will. Schlatter is emphatic that volitional union with God is not about the passive acknowledgement of a foreign, divine will working through us, but, on the contrary, about an existential affirmation, a ‘Yes of faith.’ Faith, as indicated earlier, is central in volitional union with God, for we unite our will with God’s will through faith in Jesus Christ. Here, Schlatter’s dialectic of passivity and activity also applies. That is, whilst Schlatter affirms that faith is truly “an act of the subject” (*Akt des Subjekts*),⁸⁵ it is also—as faith is a gift of God—a “receptive act” (*rezeptives Verhalten*).⁸⁶ The Father in granting faith draws us to his Son, and the Son brings us to the Father, through the Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ From this perspective then, faith is not so much an act of our human will but a divine decision upon that what affects our will, as Schlatter put it.⁸⁸ “God’s pulling, which creates faith,” Schlatter clarifies, “must not be considered a physical process but a spiritual act whereby the conscious, free movements of [our] will are not repressed but created.”⁸⁹ One notices again Schlatter’s eagerness to bring out the harmonious Trinitarian divine activity in respect of our organic volitional union with God. The Father draws, the Son mediates and the Spirit forms the new person with a view to “cognition, volition and action” (*im Erkennen, im Wollen, im Wirken*).⁹⁰ Again, note that this divine activity does not meet the believer’s resistance; instead, the Spirit’s work is a welcome divine activity due to the Father’s preparatory activity of drawing the believer to himself. In an organic, harmonious way, then, the Spirit “works in the human being in that he creates the good volition, [yet] not by breaking the

⁸³ *Dogma*, 348.

⁸⁴ “Noch ein Wort,” 64 [*Dienst des Christen*, 107].

⁸⁵ “Noch ein Wort,” 57 [*Dienst des Christen*, 102].

⁸⁶ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 218.

⁸⁷ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 207; see also *Ruf Jesu*, 25-27.

⁸⁸ “Noch ein Wort,” 60 [*Dienst des Christen*, 104].

⁸⁹ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 207.

⁹⁰ *Jesus und Paulus*, 77.

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psychological principles; the whole human organisation of our inner life remains [intact].”⁹¹ The believer then acts according to the received, efficacious faith and organically unites his will with the divine will, precisely in such a way that the divine will is organically assimilated as his own.⁹² Schlatter explains:

[T]he purpose of grace were not fully recognised when its recipient remains insignificant in the shadow, as if grace did not elevate us into the individual, free vitality, as if it not wanted, elected, loved and grasped by us. Our volition is given to us in a manner such that it is *our* volition; this volition is therefore established in our consciousness as the one to be contemplated and chosen as the one with which we can, may and should unite ourselves, with our own being and possession.⁹³

Thus, according to Schlatter, volitional union with God does not nullify but preserves and sanctifies our human psychology. He writes:

We think, feel and want formally in the same manner as in every other aspect of life. Through the working of the Holy Spirit there does not arise a special psychology, but with the same cognitive and volitional capacities we now think and will another content; now, we think of God and we desire not egoistically, but [we desire to] love him.⁹⁴

Understood in this way, Schlatter argues, we do not have to fear a loss of control, as if our volitional capacity is delegated to a higher authority and then out of our reach. This is a dualistic misunderstanding that does not represent the teaching of the New Testament, he feels. The Apostle Paul’s exhortation, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2.12-13), has thus often been misunderstood, Schlatter claims. It is a sentence that has been regarded as if the Apostle “is speaking rubbish here,” that is, as if this divine volitional activity in us were “self-destructive.”⁹⁵ On the contrary, Schlatter clarifies:

⁹¹ *Jesus und Paulus*, 78.

⁹² See *Jesus und Paulus*, 44 and “Noch ein Wort,” 55-57 [*Dienst des Christen*, 100-101].

⁹³ “Dienst des Christen,” 28 [*Dienst des Christen*, 43-44] (emphasis original).

⁹⁴ “Noch ein Wort,” 80 [*Dienst des Christen*, 120]. See also *Jesus und Paulus*, 78 and “Dienst des Christen,” 27-28 [*Dienst des Christen*, 43].

⁹⁵ *Do we know Jesus*, 511.

But when it is granted to us to believe in God, we no longer see in God the destroyer of our lives, and we no longer see in his creative power the defiler of our wills. Through faith in God we have recognized in Christ the love of God. Love gives not just things, not just fate, not just assistance that helps us from the outside, but much more: love gives his Spirit, the one who awakens our thinking and willing, the one through whom his love is poured out into our hearts. In this way we remain in fellowship with God, a fellowship through which God will be the ‘Saviour’ – the one who works the salvation he calls us to work out.⁹⁶

Overall, then, through our organic volitional union with God there are no qualitative features added to our humanity (*Menschsein*), rather we are being transformed as God’s own creatures.⁹⁷ “The Spirit effectively grasps our personal life in its unity; therefore, it neither inhibits our natural functions nor becomes a substitute for it, rather the Spirit sustains, wills and uses the whole scope of our natural vitality.”⁹⁸ Hence, Schlatter claims, “Someone who is led by the Spirit thinks differently, but not with a different logic, or with a different mental mechanism.”⁹⁹ Through our *Anschluss an Christus*, then, we perceive the divine law not “without our will, but through our will.”¹⁰⁰ One clearly notes how Schlatter here puts forward a distinct appreciation of creatureliness (*Geschöpfsein*).¹⁰¹ As God’s creation, fallen humans still image God, and his divine action in volitional union seems, from Schlatter’s perspective, to work towards a healing transformation (instead of a total re-creation) of our natural capacities. In this regard, Schlatter feels, the Reformers introduced too broad an understanding of ‘total depravity.’ Of course, with a view to salvation, we owe everything to God: “Our repentance is God’s victory over our antipathy against him,” Schlatter confirms.¹⁰² Still, the human being has not lost its ontology; it

⁹⁶ *Do we know Jesus*, 512.

⁹⁷ Schlatter writes: “What Jesus grants us causes the unity, which is implanted as a law in our personal life-act [*Lebensakt*], to persist . . . What Jesus grants us is not an addition to our being human [*menschlichen Wesen*] and does not lie alongside our human capacity and calling.” “Briefe über das Dogma,” 41-42.

⁹⁸ *Dogma*, 348.

⁹⁹ *Dogma*, 350.

¹⁰⁰ *Ethik*, 29.

¹⁰¹ See Bailer, *Das systematische Prinzip*, 142-146.

¹⁰² “Dienst des Christen,” 22 [*Dienst des Christen*, 39].

remains God's image and instrument. For Schlatter, volitional union with God is thus not an elimination of human life but the realisation of true human life within our personhood. "Jesus," Schlatter concludes, "addresses the human being, he mobilises the capacities that are available to him; it is with human thinking that we ought to think God's will; it is with the human will that we ought to obey; we do not arrive at a supranatural religion, but at a religion that puts the human being into God's service [*Dienst Gottes*]." ¹⁰³ This leads us our *fourth* point, namely to the ultimate goal of organic volitional union with God: 'service to God,' *Gottes-Dienst*. ¹⁰⁴

Organic Union and *Gottesdienst*

"Our role" as human beings, Schlatter claims, "is the service of God" (*Unsere Funktion ist Dienst Gottes*). ¹⁰⁵ This service of God, however, is not a 'dull piety' but an energetic volitional activity which finds expression in active love of God and neighbour. "This is why God's work has only happened in us," writes Schlatter, "when we are moved to perform the deed; God's love has not reached its goal until we are enabled to love." ¹⁰⁶ For those who enjoy volitional union with God the following applies:

[E]very act is worked by the Spirit, who turns us with our consciousness and our volition towards God, and with this insight we walk on the same path as the Apostle, who described love as spiritual in the highest possible sense, precisely because with love, everything that is in us thinking, willing, acting receives its determination from God. ¹⁰⁷

In the end, love of God is according to Schlatter the apex of our volitional union with him. It is the result of the Triune action in us. We are invited through our union with God into the Triune mutual love and glorification. More precisely, we mirror to an extent Jesus Christ, who has gone before us in his 'service of God' and 'service to humanity,' as we have seen earlier in the *Denkakt*. Hence, through our union with

¹⁰³ *Jesus und Paulus*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ "Dienst des Christen," 3 [*Dienst des Christen*, 21].

¹⁰⁵ *Ethik*, 124; see also *Dogma*, 519.

¹⁰⁶ "Dienst des Christen," 56 [*Dienst des Christen*, 69].

¹⁰⁷ "Noch ein Wort," 81 [*Dienst des Christen*, 120].

Christ, who loved the Father as the obedient Son (Jesus' *Gottesdienst*) and who also loved humanity as the Christ (Jesus' *Menschen dienst*), we are likewise enabled to love God and neighbour. Only in this way will we fulfil the highest command, living to the glory of God, performing true *Gottesdienst*. And this happens organically and practically, Schlatter is eager to add, with our own sanctified will, in concrete history and in the concrete situations and relations in which we find ourselves in our life-act. "God's grace sustains us at our place in history; it does not give us any perfections according to our wishful thinking, but the ability to perform, at the place where we are, what is now good and right before God."¹⁰⁸ Schlatter thus speaks of "the glory of divine grace that makes us an instrument of God with a free movement of our knowledge and love at the place that is assigned to us."¹⁰⁹ As sanctified people who enjoy union of will with God, we worship God, says Schlatter, "in that we are what he [God] makes us to be" (*indem wir das sind, wozu er uns macht*).¹¹⁰ Our worship consists in giving God what is already his in the first place.¹¹¹ There is here the culmination of Schlatter's emphasis on the organic harmony of our volitional union with God. Through our *Anschluss an Jesus*, we organically share in the divine creative activity and are thereby elevated to a new degree of fruitfulness. "[T]he one who has become obedient to God by faith," writes Schlatter, "and for whom Christ has become Lord, produces works in a new dimension; and, compared with the natural condition, he does so to an incomparably greater degree because he now shares in the divine activity."¹¹² Schlatter's understanding of participation, then, has a clear practical, ethical impetus. He does not promote a spiritual account of *theosis*, but focuses on a changed will through our participation in the divine action. On the whole, then, Adolf Schlatter's perspective of organic volitional union with God is a blueprint for an active, relational Christian ethics of love of God and of neighbour that is free from any dualist notions but rather suggests a harmonious view of divine

¹⁰⁸ *Dogma*, 473-474, cf. 471.

¹⁰⁹ *Erlebtes*, 117-118; see also *Ethik*, 87.

¹¹⁰ *Dogma*, 33; see also "Briefe über das Dogma," 47.

¹¹¹ *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*, 24.

¹¹² *Romans*, 51.

action and human response. Having said that, one must not forget Schlatter's communal emphasis highlighted earlier. As we are saved not as individuals but as members of the community, part of the body of Christ, so too we glorify God as members of the community. "The congregation was established as the cooperative [*Genossenschaft*] which performs, conjointly, the will of God."¹¹³ The ethical imperative, 'the ought,' is rooted in "the being of the congregation" (*im Sein der Gemeinde*).¹¹⁴ This, remarks Schlatter, is the "triumph of Paul's ethics."¹¹⁵ United with God through volitional union with him, we glorify him by acting according to what he makes us to be as members of the new community of faith.

4. Expressive Realism and Union with Christ

It is now time to pause and consider Schlatter's overall picture of our 'connection with Jesus' in the life-act. At the present stage, the picture might perhaps remind us more of an abstract painting than of an accurate drawing. Schlatter's sketch of our union with Christ in the life-act, it seems, conveys a complexity of different shapes, sizes and colours: there is Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology, not forgetting, a distinct appreciation of anthropology; we have also mentioned justification, sanctification, active volition and ethics. One wonders whether Schlatter is able to weave all these threads together to a 'unified whole,' as he time and again describes his intention. Does Schlatter actually arrive at a harmonious and holistic account of our union with Christ? This is what we attempt to clarify in this final section.

We have mentioned earlier a similarity between Vincent van Gogh's expressionist style and Schlatter's theological method (see chapter III/1). Perhaps it is not beside the point to remain for a moment in the realm of the visual arts, as this might illumine our understanding of Schlatter's overall approach. It is, in fact, the modernist movement of expressionism which serves particularly well as a comparison for Schlatter's theology of union with Christ. For one, there is a clear modernist streak in Schlatter's theology, mirrored in his attempt to balance

¹¹³ *Hilfe in Bibelnot*, 13.

¹¹⁴ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 380.

¹¹⁵ *Glaube im Neuen Testament*, 380.

faithfulness to the theological tradition with the attempt to correct what he considered the shortcomings of the same. Bruce L. McCormack describes modern theologians as those who tried to “defend and protect the received orthodoxies of the past against erosion and took up the more fundamental challenge of asking how the theological values resident in those orthodoxies might be given an altogether new expression, dressed out in new categories for reflection.”¹¹⁶ This clearly applies to Schlatter, who is particularly creative in dressing out ‘new categories for reflection.’ Yet how does his endeavour to offer a ‘new expression’ of ‘theological values,’ in particular with regard to union with Christ, look? In short, what would Schlatter’s painting look like?

First of all, one has by now an inkling of how it would *not* look. Schlatter’s is clearly not an impressionist work. His vision of our union with Christ is undoubtedly not tinted by a romantic, idealist notion of our mystical union with Christ.¹¹⁷ While the union itself, of course, remains a mystery—Schlatter is happy to admit that—he feels that this has been sufficiently emphasised in the past. Thus, it is difficult to imagine the believer, in Schlatter’s painting, standing at Monet’s bridge of Giverny, gazing at the beautiful flowers, completely absorbed in the romantic experience. One imagines Schlatter’s technique involving swifter, more vivid brushstrokes, creating more movement in the whole scene. Hence, Schlatter’s painting would perhaps be more at home in the exhibition hall of expressive realism. His work is realistic, as Schlatter’s method is indeed, as noted earlier, empirical-realist. It is also expressive, since his interpretation of what he sees in the seeing-act is always subjective and existential. Schlatter’s work then is a modern work of avant-garde, endeavouring to arrive at new forms of theological expression while staying true to the orthodox tradition. That is, Schlatter without doubt speaks, for instance, of the doctrines of justification and sanctification, yet he puts his own spin on these doctrines,

¹¹⁶ McCormack, “On ‘Modernity’ as a Theological Concept,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, ed. Kelly M. Kopic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 3.

¹¹⁷ Schlatter writes: “Union with Jesus is not the result of a mystical experience; it is rather grounded in the outcome of Jesus’ earthly life: his cross, resurrection, exaltation, and return. What the congregations possess, perform, and suffer is determined by Jesus’ life and suffering.” *Theology of the Apostles*, 53.

emphasising their unity and the activating aspect of God's 'creative grace.'¹¹⁸ Speaking of the divine agency in our *Anschluss*, Schlatter would undoubtedly bring out vividly the work of Christ and of the Spirit (as outlined above): we enjoy union with Christ by faith (a gift from the Father) and through the Holy Spirit. Schlatter would then attempt to draw our attention to the organic way in which God unites us with himself. Hence, through the Spirit's organic work in us our volition is not ruined but revitalised. And, having thus been united with Christ, we are empowered with a new volitional ethical impetus to perform good deeds to the glory of God.¹¹⁹ Schlatter's picture then differs considerably from what Kant and neo-Kantian theology offers on its canvas. *Imitatio Christi* is not based on Kant's maxims or Christ's external moral example but on our experience of internal change through the Spirit. Schlatter writes:

Because Jesus' commandments arise from what he is for us, they are not difficult. If they approach us solely from the outside, they are not merely difficult; they are impossible. For they run counter to our nature. Yet now they are commandments of the One who moves us from within by his Word and Spirit, and therefore they are easy.¹²⁰

One would also, surely, recognise the human being in the picture; while it would not be in the centre, it would also not fall out of the canvas, or 'dissolve to nothing.' Moreover, Schlatter would be keen to draw not just one individual, but to depict persons in communion, since salvific *Anschluss* works only by the individual being part of the new community of faith.

Finally, stepping even nearer to the painting, an even closer examination reveals also some surreal elements in Schlatter's oeuvre. Schlatter clearly draws out eschatological elements in our union with Christ. The new community, he argues, lives in eschatological hope, trusting in the "New Testament promise that the perfection of divine grace grants us, even in death and after death, connectedness with Christ [*Verbundenheit mit Christus*]."¹²¹ Still, Schlatter could have perhaps

¹¹⁸ Dintaman, *Creative Grace*.

¹¹⁹ *Dogma*, 344.

¹²⁰ *Do we know Jesus*, 145.

¹²¹ *Dogma*, 541.

offered a more elaborate treatment of eschatology in his *Dogma*, in particular with regard to our union with Christ. It is plausible to assume that Schlatter was here somewhat limited by the empirical-realist presupposition of his ‘seeing-act.’ Schlatter, it seems, was slightly uncomfortable in making eschatological statements in his dogmatics. “Thoughts, which describe future things,” he writes, “inevitably contain uncertainty.”¹²² Based on this truism, Schlatter perhaps feared his realist expressionism might devolve into abstract expressionism or even outright surrealism and he somewhat decides to leave it at that, perhaps a regrettable decision.¹²³

Conclusion

Schlatter succeeds in presenting a creative account of our union with Christ which reminds us that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Union with Christ is, at least from our perspective, at this side of the eschaton, a complex issue. Schlatter does not shy away from dealing with these complexities: the dialectic of receptivity and activity, the divine grace as calming and moving, the divine economic action which is indivisible yet distinct. Moreover, Schlatter does not get lost in details, but keeps the big picture in view, namely God’s grace which moves us to action. In this sense, Schlatter’s work is relevant for us today. Today, our problem is probably not the predominance of a German pietistic quietism or ascetism. What we observe today is rather a global postmodern individualistic passivism that challenges the fabric of the church. In times of declining church membership, Schlatter’s passionate plea for

¹²² *Dogma*, 525.

¹²³ There are obviously other elements in Schlatter’s picture of our union with Jesus which are worthy of contemplation, yet space does not allow us to go into more detail here. In focussing on Schlatter’s key emphasis, namely the relational-volitional aspect of our union with Christ, no space at all has been given, for example, to Schlatter’s view of regeneration or election in respect of our union of Christ, although Schlatter has much to offer here. See *Dogma*, 460-466 and 474-479 respectively. Moreover, we could have explored to a greater extent the concrete ramifications of our volitional union with Christ in everyday life. Acknowledging that our observations focused more on Schlatter’s meta-ethic, we must rest content in referring to his *Ethik*, where he in fact exhibits a clear vision of how volitional union with Christ plays out in everyday life. He there covers a whole range of possible applications, suggesting how volitional union applies to marriage, family and the workplace, for instance (*Ethik*, 393-422). Also contemplating issues such as alcoholism, compulsive gambling, and even legal protection of sex workers, Schlatter’s ethics remains a fresh and timeless work today (*Ethik*, 366-369).

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active ethics through organic volitional union with God is a wake-up call for theology and the church.

Epilogue: Christology after Schlatter

This study set out to explore both the shape and the cogency of Adolf Schlatter's relational Christology. In so doing, we have also paid attention to the context of Schlatter's life, since we believe that theology and biography are intimately connected. In the work's first part, we thus traced the *Sitz im Leben* of Schlatter's relational motif while in the second part we examined its distinct dogmatic impetus.

Schlatter's characteristic life-long focus on Christology is certainly to a great degree rooted in his family's Christocentric piety. Given his grandmother Anna's heritage and his parents' example, it is certainly not surprising to encounter Schlatter as someone for whom personal union with Christ was pivotal, transcending confessional barriers. This Christocentric trajectory allowed Schlatter to adopt a rather independent, eclectic position that was somewhat 'in between,' that is, neither explicitly 'positive-orthodox' nor obviously 'liberal.' At one point, we made the bold claim that Schlatter's relational Christology is seminal for our theological conversation today and it is now time to assess briefly whether this hypothesis is correct. Christoph Schwöbel recently expressed the following grievance:

Modern Christology seems to be increasingly unable to conceive and to conceptualize the unity of the person of Christ and seems to be left with the fragments of the 'historical Jesus,' the 'Christ of faith' and the 'Son of God' of christological Dogma. Therefore modern Christological reflection seems mainly concerned with finding ways of integrating the fragments in a new synthesis, of joining together what has been put asunder.¹

This study has presented Adolf Schlatter as a theologian who was strongly committed to joining 'together what has been put asunder.' Pursuing his *Richtung auf das Ganze*, Schlatter's Christology reveals a clear 'direction to the whole,' by

¹ Schwöbel, "Christology and Trinitarian Thought," 119.

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attempting to offer a holistic representation of Jesus Christ based on the New Testament narrative. Returning to our test criteria outlined earlier, we conclude that Schlatter's Christological account indeed adequately integrates the person and work of Jesus Christ, sufficiently describes the relation between the humanity and the divinity in him, offers a substantial explanation for the problem of God-forsakenness, and approaches these issues from a clear Trinitarian framework. We arrive at this assessment by the following route: To begin with, the results of this investigation illustrate that Schlatter presents a unified Christ where person and work are closely integrated. We have observed how Schlatter opposed any influx into theology of German idealism, which, in his view, resulted in a limited account of Jesus Christ, in which his humanity was stressed at the expense of his divinity. Over against any Ritschlian tendencies to separate Jesus' vocation (*Beruf*) from his duty (*Pflicht*), or any attempts to distinguish between a Jesus of history and a Christ of faith, Schlatter introduces a unified account of the Son of God who stands in perfect relation to God and to humanity. Proceeding in this way, this study has also found that Schlatter suggests a creative, yet robust account of the unity of Christ's divinity and humanity. Ascribing only limited explanatory power to the classic two-natures exposition, Schlatter moves—based on his New Testament seeing-act—towards a narrative, relational understanding of Jesus Christ which allows him to make inferences concerning Christ's essence from his relations. While subscribing to the Symbol of Chalcedon, Schlatter offers new avenues of thinking about the unity of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ. The unique feature of his account is his notion of Jesus in 'double communion,' namely both with the Father and with us. Jesus' volitional union with the Father, through the Holy Spirit finds its expression in perfect obedience and submission against the backdrop of concrete history. While this clearly underlines Jesus' humanity, it does not jeopardise his divinity. On the contrary, and this is crucial for Schlatter, Jesus' submissive obedience actually reveals his divinity. Since the intra-Trinitarian relationship is characterised by love, there is no divine identity-loss on the part of the Son. The polarity of distinction in unity is not only tolerated, but, in fact, central to Jesus' being and status as the divine Son. Schlatter shows how it is possible to construct a coherent Christology based on

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a narrative empirical method that makes a strong case for Jesus' humanity, while also—in particular—safeguarding his divinity and the unity of both natures in the person of Jesus Christ.

The cross is for Schlatter the ultimate revelation of Jesus' divinity, for here Jesus demonstrates his divinity by remaining in fellowship with the Father, mediated by the Holy Spirit, even in the midst of God-forsakenness. Schlatter develops a careful model of fellowship in forsakenness by arguing that even in the depths of God-forsakenness on the cross there is still something like fellowship through the divine mutual exchange of gifts in love: The Son gives himself as a gift to the Father and the Father responds by handing the new community of faith to the Son. Schlatter's language of relation and volition is promising for future theological Christological exploration of the person and work of Jesus Christ, and one must applaud his successful attempt to move beyond a simple two-natures approach towards a relational Trinitarian understanding of Jesus' being in action on the cross. It is specifically Schlatter's creative move to infer essence from relation that presents a significant addition to traditional, more substance-focused, accounts. This unique *modus operandi* allows him to open a new window into Christological research. Schlatter manages to strike a balance between suggesting novel ways of speaking about God creatively and intelligibly, and remaining faithful to the New Testament narrative. A group of feminist theologians recently encouraged the development of "relational theologies in the twenty-first century."² For a successful pursuit of this goal, theological scholarship ought not to ignore Schlatter's profound contribution. It is thus recommended that future research specifically focus on the intriguing aspect of Schlatter's relational motif. It is a particularly promising endeavour to bring Schlatter into conversation with the proponents of similar relational approaches, such as those of Christoph Schwöbel (*Gott in Beziehung*) and John Zizioulas (*Being as Communion*), for example. Future investigations could also pay attention to the intriguing parallels between Schlatter's programme and Jürgen Moltmann's *theologia crucis*. It would be fruitful to assess more closely the ways in which

² Lisa Isherwood and Elaine Bellchambers (eds.), *Through us, With us, In us: Relational Theologies in the Twenty-First Century* (London: SCM, 2010).

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Moltmann, while adopting the Schlatterian relational-volitional vocabulary, might in fact abandon central premises dear to the latter (such as the Son's filial obedience and subordination in love and the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity). In this respect, a closer comparison of their views on divine impassibility also seems promising. Overall, this work thus not only claims to close a serious gap in Schlatter research by offering his hitherto unexplored Christological programme to the public, but also hopes to stimulate our Christological discussion today.

However, as we have seen throughout this work, we would not do justice to Schlatter if we remembered him simply in terms of his contribution to our Christological *Denkakt*. It thus seems appropriate to close this work on a Schlatterian note by offering some reflections about the *Lebensakt*. In our view, it is particularly noteworthy how Schlatter manages to arrive at both an existential and an ecclesial application of his Christology. That means, for Schlatter, that union with Christ is on the one hand obviously 'designed' for us as individual persons. God grants us personally in our own life-act *Anschluss an Jesus* by faith. In this sense, Schlatter surely aims at the centre of the whole plan of creation and redemption, as we humans were made for a relationship with God, one that is consummated and perfected in Jesus Christ. Still, and this is Schlatter's important reminder for us today: God not only connects us with himself but also with one another. Horizontal oneness at the level of the community represents an analogue to the Trinitarian oneness. We enjoy harmonious oneness by participating in the Trinity's oneness. It is here that Schlatter's Christology reveals its powerful ecumenical potential, for Schlatter's Christology is certainly a Christology of and for the church. The church as Schlatter envisages it, with Christ as its head and Lord, is an active church as it consists of members who possess a new will through union with Christ and thus act to the glory of God. 'Completion of the Reformation' as Schlatter pictured it, is thus only possible with an active church that enjoys volitional union with its Creator. Schlatter once said that "[t]he church is being assessed by those who do not attend it, not on

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the basis of what the church *says*, but according to what it *does*.”³ If we were to take this call seriously today, Schlatter would indeed have succeeded in making a valuable contribution towards what he called a ‘completion of the Reformation.’ With his own life, an active life dedicated to theology, the church and society, Adolf Schlatter exemplified how organic volitional union with Jesus Christ to the glory of God and the good of humanity can indeed, by God’s grace, be realised in one’s life.

³ “Dienstpflicht des Christen,” 11 [*Dienst des Christen*, 128] (emphasis mine).

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