

1-1-2015

Schleiermacher's Doctrine of Biblical Authority: An Alternative to Content-Based/Supernaturalist and Function-Based Rationalist Models

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SCHLEIERMACHER'S DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY:
AN ALTERNATIVE TO CONTENT-BASED/SUPERNATURALIST AND FUNCTION-
BASED/RATIONALIST MODELS

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD

Program

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2015

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Degree Date: August 2015

Abstract

This dissertation examines Friedrich Schleiermacher's understanding of biblical authority and argues that, as an alternative to strictly supernaturalistic and rationalistic models, his understanding allows the New Testament to speak authoritatively in Christian religion in an age of critical, historical awareness. After classifying Schleiermacher's position in a typology of the doctrine of biblical authority, this dissertation explores his conception of divine revelation and inspiration vis-à-vis scripture. It demonstrates that although he did not believe there is warrant for the claim of a direct connection between divine revelation and scripture, or that scripture is the foundation of faith, he nonetheless asserted that the New Testament is authoritative. He asserted the normative authority of the New Testament on the basis that it is the first presentation of Christian faith. This dissertation examines Schleiermacher's "canon within the canon," as well as his denial that the Old Testament shares the same normative worth and inspiration of the New. Although this dissertation finds difficulty with some of Schleiermacher's views regarding the Old Testament, it names two significant strengths of what is identified as his evangelical, content-based, and rationalist approach to biblical authority. First, it recognizes and values the co-presence and co-activity of the supernatural and the natural

in the production of the New Testament canon. This allows both scripture and the church to share religious authority. Second, it allows Christian faith and the historical-method to coexist, as it does not require people to contradict what they know to be the case about science, history, and philosophy. Thus, this dissertation asserts that Schleiermacher's understanding of biblical authority is a robust one, since, for him, the authority of scripture does not lie in some property of the texts themselves that historians or unbelievers can take away.

Acknowledgements

I was introduced to Friedrich Schleiermacher in my last quarter of coursework. My desire to know more about his theology, especially regarding biblical authority, was born in that seminar, led by Cathie Kelsey and Terry Tice. Words are inadequate to express my deep gratitude for their willingness to share an untold number of drafts from their forthcoming book of Schleiermacher's systematic theology, *Christian Faith*, for their unwavering support and assistance throughout this long journey, and for their genuine love and friendship.

I owe a great debt of thanks to Ted Vial, who has been a valued advisor and conversation partner since the day I served as his Teaching Assistant. I am certain that his academic rigor and high standard of excellence have made me a better theologian and writer. Greg Robbins provided valuable insights when this project was yet in the proposal stage. Also, I want to express my thanks to Carrie Doehring and Amy Erickson, who stepped in at the last minute to help me when I was in need.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my indebtedness to the life partner God graciously provided me. I have been going to school all of my life, and Becky has been willing to make great personal sacrifices to make that possible. Through the years, she has been supportive, encouraging, and patient with me, so that we could reach this goal together. Thanks, babe, for walking alongside and helping me to see this commitment to its completion.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
The Erosion of Biblical Authority	1
Schleiermacher’s Alternative Model of Biblical Authority	5
Significance of This Study	8
Chapter Two: Mapping the Doctrine of Biblical Authority	10
Content-Based/Supernaturalist Approaches to Biblical Authority	13
Function-Based/Rationalist Approaches to Biblical Authority	17
A Content-Based/Rationalist Approach to Biblical Authority	24
Chapter Three: Schleiermacher and the Doctrine of Revelation	32
Carl F. H. Henry’s Doctrine of Revelation Vis-à-vis Scripture	33
Schleiermacher’s Understanding of Revelation Vis-à-vis Scripture	38
The Core Criticism of Schleiermacher’s Theology of Revelation	40
Schleiermacher’s Response	46
The Revelation of God in and through the World	47
Communion with God Is Not Knowledge-Based	51
The Revelation of God in the Feeling of Absolute Dependence	56
The Revelation of God in Christ	62
Chapter Four: Schleiermacher and the Meaning of Inspiration	73
Henry’s Doctrine of Inspiration Vis-à-vis Scripture	75
Schleiermacher’s Understanding of Inspiration	79
Schleiermacher’s Conception of “Holy Spirit”	87
Criticism of Schleiermacher’s Theology of Inspiration	96
A Response to Schleiermacher’s Critics	100
Chapter Five: Schleiermacher and the Authority of Scripture	107
Schleiermacher’s Conception of Biblical Authority	108
The Core Criticism of Schleiermacher’s Conception of Biblical Authority	117
Schleiermacher’s Response	119
Scripture Is Not the Foundation of Faith	120
Schleiermacher’s Understanding of the Foundation of Faith	124
Chapter Six: Schleiermacher and the Normative Character of Scripture	139
Schleiermacher’s Understanding of “Canon”	140
Schleiermacher’s “Canon within the Canon”	147
Normative Authority: The New Testament, Not the Old	147
Normative Authority: Reports of the Words and Deeds of Christ	152
Normative Authority: Writings Related to the Concept of Love	156
What Kind of Authority?	164

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Implications: The Strengths of Schleiermacher's Understanding of Biblical Authority	174
A Weakness: Schleiermacher's Understanding of the Old Testament.....	175
Strengths of Schleiermacher's Conception of Biblical Authority	184
It Allows for a High View of Both Scripture and Church	184
It Allows Faith and Historical-Biblical Criticism to Coexist	188
References	196

Chapter One: Introduction

The Erosion of Biblical Authority

Edward Farley and Peter C. Hodgson began a chapter on the nature, authority, and function of the Bible in Christian theology with these undeniable assertions:

Until recently, almost the entire spectrum of theological opinion would have agreed that the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, together with their doctrinal interpretations, occupy a unique and indispensable place of authority for Christian faith, practice, and reflection. But this consensus now seems to be falling apart.¹

Indeed, the collapse of biblical authority since the Enlightenment is well-attested.²

What explains the erosion of biblical authority? Several reasons have been offered,³ but certainly one of the primary causes is the advent of historical criticism in the seventeenth century. Also known as the historical-critical method, a method that became the dominant approach in the study of the Bible from the mid-nineteenth century until a

¹ Edward Farley and Peter C. Hodgson, "Scripture and Tradition," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, rev. ed., ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 61.

² Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation*, Christian Foundations (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 30-33; Edward Farley and Peter C. Hodgson, "Scripture and Tradition," 61, 72-77; Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 10-13; Roy A. Harrisville, "The Loss of Biblical Authority and Its Recovery," in *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 47-48; Gordon D. Kaufman, "What Shall We Do with the Bible?" *Interpretation* 25, no. 1 (January 1971): 96.

³ Robin Scroggs, for example, identifies these reasons: biblical ethics are said to be no longer suitable for contemporary society; the theological claims of the Bible have been judged to be inadequate and outmoded; biblical scholarship, influenced by history-of-religions approaches, has questioned the uniqueness of biblical writings as compared with other ancient texts; and, liberation theologies have raised disturbing questions concerning the apparent patriarchal and sexist ideologies in the biblical text. Robin Scroggs, "The Bible as Foundational Document," *Interpretation* 49, no. 1 (January 1995): 17-19.

generation ago, historical criticism “seeks to answer a basic question: to what historical circumstances does this text refer, and out of what historical circumstances did it emerge?”⁴

The historical-critical method has shed much light on many areas of vital importance to Christian thought. Nevertheless, some have asserted that it has also fostered a rationalistic skepticism of the biblical text.⁵ One way it did so was to question the historical nature of the text.⁶ Is the Bible historically accurate? Not exactly, said many historical critics.⁷ They asserted further, that biblical texts were never intended to be historical documents. Rather, such texts are only expressions of faith narrowly defined, sometimes couched in myth, and bearing historical inaccuracies of various

⁴ Richard E. Burnett, “Historical Criticism,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 290. For the features normally said to be central to historical-critical study of the Bible, cf., John Barton, “Historical-Critical Approaches,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9-12.

⁵ N.T. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005), 82. Wright claims that the Enlightenment made Reason the arbiter of religious and theological claims, that it renounced the authority of the church and the Bible, and that it avowed faith in the authority of nature and reason.

⁶ Regarding challenges to the Bible, Rowan A. Greer claims that both history and nature have been enemies of the Bible since the eighteenth century. He suggests that nature was the preoccupation of the eighteenth century and history in the nineteenth century. See Rowan A. Greer, *Anglican Approaches to Scripture: From the Reformation to the Present* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 62. Van A. Harvey addresses the problem historical inquiry raises for Christian belief and documents the shift from Christianity’s will to belief to the Enlightenment’s will to truth in *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1996; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1966), 3-37. Harvey’s book is a classic discussion of the conflict between the morality of historical knowledge and traditional Christian belief. Cf., e.g., 102-126.

⁷ That the text of the Bible reported accurately the events it describes was already seriously questioned by the early nineteenth century, popularized by the then sensationalist findings of David Friedrich Strauss. Cf. e.g., W.G. Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1972), 120-205. For more on the post-Enlightenment challenge of history to biblical authority, see Greer, *Anglican Approaches to Scripture: From the Reformation to the Present*, 112-39.

sorts.⁸ Before the Enlightenment, biblical interpretation tended to read the Gospels as “realistic narratives.”⁹ The “literal sense” of the biblical narratives and “historical reference” were identical. But the rise of modern historical criticism meant that now there were two worlds: biblical history and actual history.¹⁰

The rationalistic skepticism of the Enlightenment also challenged the Bible as revelation. During the Protestant Reformation, the Bible was generally seen to be authoritative because it was considered to be an inspired collection of writings that originated from God. In contrast, chiefly by virtue of Enlightenment inquiry, for many, scripture came to be seen primarily as a human document. Claims about a verbally inspired text came into question with the rise of textual and source criticism. Doubts were cast upon the Bible’s origins, authorship, and validity. Consequently, many concluded that the Bible is not a unique deposit of revelation, the special qualities of which would be due to its inspired origins.

Those who are skeptical of the Bible’s historicity and deny that it contains specific revelatory content may be broadly identified as post-Enlightenment rationalists.¹¹

⁸ Cf. e.g., Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, rev.ed., ed. Hans Werner Bartsch (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

⁹ Hans W. Frei surveys the ways in which biblical narrative has been read and understood from Luther to Strauss and traces the change that took place in biblical hermeneutics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, leading to a loss of the sense of realism in reading the biblical text, in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

¹⁰ Daniel J. Treier, “Scripture and Hermeneutics,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 72.

¹¹ For a more comprehensive description of this and the following group, cf. Wright, *The Last Word: Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*, 3-6.

Generally, they tend to deny biblical authority altogether or identify the locus of that authority in how scripture functions in the life of the church.¹² In contrast, those who defend the doctrine of biblical authority based on their belief in the Bible's historicity and divine origin may be broadly identified as anti-Enlightenment supernaturalists.

Generally, they tend to identify the locus of biblical authority in some property of the texts themselves, that is, in the content, rather than in the function, of Christian scripture.

Both function-based rationalists and content-based supernaturalists are open to challenge on various grounds. It is unclear, for example, upon what basis function-based rationalists who fully embrace historical criticism, but who still read the Bible with the expectation that it speaks authoritatively, can assign more authority to biblical books than to any other books if there are no distinctive properties of the biblical texts that set them apart from other texts.¹³ Also, if the historical reliability of the biblical narratives cannot be trusted,¹⁴ upon what basis could one expect them to have the power to "occasion new occurrences of revelation" or to be useful to the Christian community in other ways?

Content-based supernaturalists seem open to the challenge that they fail to take seriously what seems to be the historical nature of much of the biblical text. The inherent danger of this failure is that without critical, historical inquiry there is no check on

¹² Cf. e.g., David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

¹³ E.g., "Why should one prefer, say, Leviticus to Dante's *Inferno*, or Jude to Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*? Yet, proponents of the liberal view of the Bible rarely suggest in any serious way that such later, or even earlier, writings be used in public worship in place of Holy Writ." Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 35.

¹⁴ Of course, most would agree that it might be overly-optimistic to think that we could get back to "what actually happened," arriving at "objective" historical truth.

Christianity's propensity to remake Jesus, never mind the Christian god, in its own image.¹⁵ Furthermore, it is unclear how Christian scripture can be regarded as a unique deposit of divine revelation when the biblical texts also contain factual errors, discrepancies, and contradictions.¹⁶

If neither function-based rationalists nor content-based supernaturalists are able to present a convincing case for biblical authority, can the Bible speak authoritatively in Christian religion in an age of critical, historical awareness? And if so, how? These are the overarching questions this dissertation answers.

Schleiermacher's Alternative Model of Biblical Authority

This study argues that there is an alternative to strictly rationalistic and supernaturalistic models of biblical authority, an alternative which successfully makes the case for that authority. Friedrich Schleiermacher, nineteenth-century philosopher, theologian, and biblical critic, provides us with a third way of understanding biblical authority that has significant advantages to models which are strictly function- or content-based.¹⁷

¹⁵ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 10.

¹⁶ See Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, 45-61.

¹⁷ I argue in this dissertation that Schleiermacher's model of biblical authority is neither *strictly* nor *absolutely* content- or function-based. For him, it is the event that Jesus represents that has authority. However, because Schleiermacher understands the New Testament to be somewhat of a record or interpretation of that event, one may legitimately argue that in some sense, he does locate some authority in the content of scripture, although not because it contains divine revelation. His claim, however, is that whatever authority resides within the text is that of the event of Jesus' conscious relationship with God, which occurred, of course, before there was any text or church. One of Schleiermacher's strongest arguments, in my opinion, is that the earliest disciples of Jesus became Christians before there was a New Testament.

Chapter Two presents a typology of biblical authority and places Schleiermacher's viewpoint on this map. I broadly classify models of biblical authority as either content- or function-based and offer a description of each. Content-based theories view scripture as authoritative by virtue of a content that is in some sense divinely disclosed. Function-based theories derive biblical authority from the way scripture is used in the life of the Christian community. Then, I briefly explain Schleiermacher's third way, which I broadly identify as evangelical, since its focus and center is what God did in Christ the Redeemer.

Chapter Three examines Schleiermacher's doctrine of revelation. I show that although he has a robust understanding of divine revelation, he does not believe there is warrant for the claim of a direct connection between divine revelation and the Bible. Also, I take a look at the core criticism of Schleiermacher's position: it does not allow for a knowledge of God. Then, I conclude the chapter by responding to this fundamental criticism.

In Chapter Four, I analyze his understanding of the meaning of "inspiration." Again, I demonstrate that although he believes in divine inspiration, this does not mean that he views the Bible as a deposit of divinely-revealed truths. Rather, for him, the locus of inspiration is the authors of scripture, not their words, and the agent of inspiration is the common spirit of the church.

Chapter Five introduces Schleiermacher's understanding of what makes scripture authoritative: it is the first recorded expression of Christian faith. For him, the New

Testament is composed of reports of the experience of redemption in Christ and of the revelation of Jesus' perfect God-consciousness. As such, Schleiermacher considered those reports to be the original interpretation of Jesus' consciousness of God, an interpretation which was embodied in Christ's words and deeds. The authority of scripture for Schleiermacher, then, lies not in some property of the texts themselves, nor strictly in the way scripture functions in the Christian community, but rather in our faith that through them and in the community of faith we meet Christ.¹⁸ Also in this chapter, I lay out the principal criticism of his understanding of biblical authority, that it rejects scripture as the foundation of Christian faith. Then, after a close examination of one of his sermons, I trace out his response to this criticism and the reasoning which underlies it.

Chapter Six continues the investigation into Schleiermacher's conception of scripture's authority by examining what he believed regarding the normative character of scripture. I identify his "canon within the canon," and why he ascribed normative authority to some parts of scripture over other parts. Also, I lay out his controversial claim that the Old Testament does not share the normative worth and inspiration of the New.

¹⁸ Schleiermacher's assumption, fundamental to his entire dogmatic project, *Christian Faith*, is that Christian faith is always and everywhere brought about in the same way, namely, by the personal impact of Christ on persons of faith. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, trans. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler, ed. Terrence N. Tice (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, forthcoming), §127.2, §14.1. For the apostles, this impact was direct, while for us it is mediated. Also, faith in Christ, for Schleiermacher, is rooted in community experience. That is where one is confronted with Christ. Terrence N. Tice, *Schleiermacher* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 28, 37-38.

In Chapter Seven, I review his doctrine of biblical authority, respond to his view of the Old Testament, and discuss what I see as two major strengths of his conception of biblical authority.

The focus of this study, then, is a careful analysis and evaluation of Schleiermacher's understanding of the nature, function, and authority of Christian scripture. The primary source for this inquiry is his systematic theology, found in *Christian Faith*. His theology on the doctrine of scripture may be found there, in §§127-132. Other primary sources upon which I rely heavily are *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, *On Religion: Addresses in Response to Its Cultured Critics*, and *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, as well as many of Schleiermacher's published sermons.

Significance of This Study

The significance of this research is two-fold. First, it makes a contribution to the field of Schleiermacher studies, especially to those studies that relate to his understanding of the doctrines of scripture and biblical authority. In reference to these subjects, Dawn DeVries notes that although Schleiermacher works out a sophisticated doctrine of scripture in several of his writings, and although he himself lectured more frequently on the New Testament than on dogmatics, little attention has been given by biblical scholars and theologians to his observations on scripture.¹⁹

¹⁹ Dawn DeVries, "Rethinking the Scripture Principle: Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Role of the Bible in the Church," in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, ed. Wallace Alston, Jr. and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 296.

Second, this research contributes to a better understanding of the nature of scripture and biblical authority in Protestantism and Evangelicalism. Earlier, I noted that even though some believe that “the house of biblical authority has collapsed,” many still try to live in it. This research, then, contributes to the ongoing Evangelical conversation regarding biblical authority and its role in theological method, a significant methodological issue still debated within Evangelicalism today.²⁰ For many who doggedly continue to look to scripture as an authority in Christian religion and who continue to give scripture a central role in the church, this study provides valid reasons for doing so.

What this study demonstrates is that it is possible for Christians to maintain a robust doctrine of biblical authority without requiring them to contradict what they know about science, history, and philosophy. Accordingly, I am convinced that critical reflection on Schleiermacher’s conception of the authority of scripture has the potential to affirm and clarify its nature and central role in Christian religion today.

²⁰ For more information on the ongoing debate on the issue of biblical authority in Evangelicalism, see Alister E. McGrath, “Evangelical Theological Method: The State of the Art,” in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 28.

Chapter Two: Mapping the Doctrine of Biblical Authority

The thesis of this dissertation is that Schleiermacher provides us with a third way of understanding the doctrine of biblical authority, which has significant advantages over content-based/supernaturalist and function-based/rationalist models. Before I delve into a closer examination of this “third way,” however, I think the sensible move is to consider in some small measure an aerial view of the field. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to introduce a conceptual framework of the range of views on the doctrine of biblical authority and then to locate Schleiermacher in this framework.

Because of the variety and complexity of the proposals defended on this subject from the Enlightenment to the present day, to synthesize and do justice to them in one brief chapter would be a formidable task and one which I will not undertake. So, in no way will this be an exhaustive examination of any or all views of biblical authority. My modest aim in this chapter is merely to explain a meaningful typology and illustrate the content of those categories by offering an example of the type of theories which belong there. Although I will refer to a handful of theologians and their conceptions of the authority of scripture, my primary focus will be upon one theologian in each class. I will use that theologian’s understanding of the authority of scripture to describe each category. I have chosen Kevin Vanhoozer’s viewpoint to depict the content-based/supernaturalist model and David H. Kelsey’s to describe the function-based/rationalist category. I will

close the chapter with a classification of and brief introduction to Schleiermacher's alternative position.

The conceptual structure of the map of biblical authority models in this chapter is my own contrivance, but in its design I have often referred to and leaned heavily upon the typologies of others.¹ I am suggesting that one way to classify most views on this subject is to categorize them as either content- or function-based, and I am delineating them in three ways. First, this classification differentiates theories based on their locus of authority. Content-based approaches tend to identify the locus of authority in some

¹ See the following sources for discussions of some of the more commonly-known systematic classifications of biblical authority: Robert Gnuse, *The Authority of the Bible: Theories of Inspiration Revelation and the Canon of Scripture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985). Gnuse groups theories of biblical authority into five categories: 1) Inspiration—Theologians in this camp affirm the priority of the divine authorship of the Bible and assert that it is authoritative because of its inspired, revelatory content; 2) Salvation history—Theories in this category view the Bible as an account of salvific events rather than as a repository of ideational or propositional content. The source of authority may be the salvific events, the interpretation of the events by biblical theologians, or history itself as the revelation of God; 3) Existentialism—Theories of biblical authority in this category shy away from the notion that inspiration is a quality of the text, but rather see in the text an occasion for a divine-human encounter. Here, the locus of authority is the modern existential situation; 4) Christocentrism—In models in this category, a selected norm is taken from part of the biblical text, or a crucial theological concept in the text serves as a norm to interpret the rest of the Bible. Usually, these models favor the Christ event, the gospel, or the kerygma as the locus of authority; 5) Limited authority—Gnuse places theories in this category that tend to view scripture as authoritative because of what scripture does for the church, rather than because of what it is; David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999). Although his work is technically an analysis of how theologians construe the scripture they actually use to help them authorize theological proposals, I believe it may also serve as somewhat of a systematic classification of biblical authority theories. Here are Kelsey's categories: 1) Scripture may be construed as containing inspired, inerrant doctrine; 2) It may be construed as containing distinctive concepts; 3) Scripture may be construed as the recital of salvation history; 4) Scripture may produce or foster an encounter with Christ; 5) It mediates a new revelatory occurrence by the poetic images of scripture, religious symbols, and/or kerygmatic statements; Markus Barth, "Sola Scriptura," in *Scripture and Ecumenism*, vol. 3 of Duquesne Studies Theological Studies, ed. Leonard Swidler (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne, 1965), 86-92; David Bartlett, *The Shape of Scriptural Authority* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). Bartlett's work evaluates the authority behind various types of literature found in the Bible; Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999); and, Avery Dulles, "Scripture: Recent Protestant and Catholic Views," in *The Authoritative Word: Essays on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1983), 239-261.

property of the biblical texts themselves, whereas function-based approaches recognize that locus in how scripture functions in the life of the church.

Second, another way to describe the difference between content- and function-based conceptions of biblical authority is to ask where authority is concentrated. For example, is religious authority to be found in the canon or the church? This is a key question that continues to be discussed in theology to the present day. Admittedly, this is a false dichotomy to some extent, since the church decided which Christian writings merited canonical standing. Thus, one could argue that there is a sense in which the church has ultimate authority over the canon. (I will show how this is both true, albeit not the full truth for Schleiermacher, in Chapter Seven.) That said, content-based theories tend to place religious authority in scripture. Function-based approaches are apt to identify the church as having overriding authority.

Third, I am identifying content-based models as supernaturalist and function-based models as rationalist. I am defining a supernaturalist understanding of biblical authority as one which asserts that the production of scripture is due primarily, if not entirely, to divine agency. We may identify this view of scripture as the traditional view; it tends to see the Bible as a divinely-inspired source of revealed truths. Supernaturalists, then, tend to insist upon an identical relationship between divine revelation and the Bible. Conversely, I am defining a rationalist understanding of biblical authority as one in which rational reasoning and critical inquiry reign. It tends to subjugate scripture to the claims of reason, the result of which is that biblical writings are viewed as human documents.

Now, let us turn to a description of theories that fall into the content-based/supernaturalist class.

Content-Based/Supernaturalist Approaches to Biblical Authority

In this inquiry I am defining content-based/supernaturalist models as those that view scripture as authoritative by virtue of a content that is in some sense identical with divine revelation. Proponents of these models tend to argue that scripture contains divinely-disclosed revelatory content and that, consequently, its underlying source of authority lies in a certain property or characteristic of the biblical text itself. For example, content-based models include those theories that construe scripture as containing inspired, inerrant doctrine, distinctive concepts, or as the recital of certain notable acts of God in history.²

I have chosen Kevin Vanhoozer's theology of biblical authority to serve as an illustration of the content-based/supernaturalist model.³ Vanhoozer asserts the authority of the canon over the community of faith when he writes that "[i]f Scripture enjoys final authority . . . it is because authority finally resides in the divinely authorized and

² These are the initial categories that David Kelsey identifies in his typology. The representatives he selects to exemplify these approaches are B. B. Warfield (scripture construed as inerrant doctrine), Hans Werner Bartsch (scripture as containing distinctive concepts), and G. Ernest Wright (scripture as the recital of historical events as the acts of God). See David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 14-55.

³ Vanhoozer is Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* and *The Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. He is also the author of *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* and *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine*.

appropriated discourse of the canon.”⁴ Here, he not only affirms his belief in the authority of scripture, but also acknowledges a reason for it: the canon is “divinely authorized.”

He ties that authority to scripture’s content. For Vanhoozer, the biblical texts narrate and explain God’s story—what God began in the history of Israel and completed in the history of Jesus Christ—which is also the story of humanity. Scripture is a polyphonic testimony to what God has done, is doing, and will do in Christ for the salvation of the world.⁵

Similarly, he suggests: “Scripture is Christ’s own witness to himself via the commissioned agency of the prophets and apostles who authored it in the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ He asserts that scripture is divine revelation, but he believes it is more: “Scripture is holy not simply because its content is revealed or because God on occasion uses its content to make himself known. Rather, it is holy because it is part of God’s broader plan to give access to himself through Jesus Christ.”⁷

⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 166. Vanhoozer claims that a properly theological account of scripture begins from the premise that God is a communicative agent, able to use language for communicative purposes.

⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Scripture and Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 167. His understanding of the nature and authoritative element of scripture is similar to G. Ernest Wright’s in *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology As Recital* (London: SCM Press, 1952).

⁶ Vanhoozer, “Scripture and Tradition,” 165. Vanhoozer would surely agree with Luther that “Christ is the subject matter of theology.” (Cited in Vanhoozer, “Scripture and Tradition,” 166.) Vanhoozer adds: “Where can we find Christ? In the Gospel. The Gospel is not simply propositional information, but narrative; not simply narrative, but promise; not simply promise, but summons. The purpose of these various illocutions is to preach and present Christ: the wisdom and salvation of God. The Scriptures are the ‘swaddling clothes’ of Christ, the ‘manger’ to which we come to adore him” (Ibid.).

⁷ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 45.

He further explains his understanding of the nature of scripture when he writes:

The Bible is the means by which the apostolic memory of what God was doing in Christ is given specificity and substance. For, as Calvin rightly says, the only Christ we have is the Christ of the Scriptures. Hence the ground of Scripture's indispensable role in the economy of the gospel is ultimately christological. The Bible—not only the Gospels but all of Scripture—is the (divinely) authorized version of the gospel, the necessary framework for understanding what God was doing in Jesus Christ. Scripture is the voice of God that articulates the Word of God: Jesus Christ.⁸

Certainly, Vanhoozer understands scripture to be authoritative because of its divine origin and discourse and because it is a record of what God did in Christ. But his conception of the nature of scripture is nuanced: God uses the *human* discourse in the canon to perform certain actions. He writes: “In sum: it is the divine illocutions—God’s use— that constitute biblical authority. Let us posit the notion of a “canonical illocution” to refer to “what God is doing by means of the human discourse in the biblical texts *at the level of the canon.*”⁹ He adds that

[a]ccording to our revitalized Scripture principle, then, the divine author is not merely a teacher who passes on propositional truths or a narrator who conveys

⁸ Ibid., 46.

⁹ Ibid., 179. Italics his.

the discourse of others but a dramatist who does things in and through the dialogical action of others.¹⁰

When Vanhoozer asks: “Why privilege the church’s use of Scripture?” his answer exemplifies the content-based/supernaturalist understanding of scripture’s authority. It is that the Bible “is a text of divine discourse.” He elaborates:

The Bible is not Scripture simply because an interpretive community decides to use it as such. On the contrary, it is the divine decision to authorize, appropriate, assume, and annex these human communicative acts into the economy of revelation and reconciliation.¹¹

He goes on to assert that the church acknowledges what the Bible is, that it is divine discourse, but that this acknowledgment does not make it so. In other words, he holds fast to the notion that scripture’s authority is not conferred upon it by the church. Rather,

¹⁰ Ibid. One of the reasons I chose Vanhoozer’s theory to represent the content-based/supernaturalist model is found just here in this quotation. Vanhoozer is an evangelical theologian who supports a “revitalized scripture principle” in which “the divine author is not merely a teacher who passes on propositional truths.” In comparison, consider B. B. Warfield’s theology, which Kelsey selected to represent the position that scripture contains inspired, inerrant doctrine. Warfield is probably best known for his vigorous defense of the doctrine of the plenary verbal inspiration of the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. He believes that scripture was directly created by the power of God to produce a book consisting quite literally of the words or oracles of God uttered directly to people. For example, regarding the prophets of the Christian Bible, he writes: “What the prophets are solicitous that their readers shall understand is that they are in no sense co-authors with God of their messages. Their messages are given them, given them entire, and given them precisely as they are given out by them. God speaks through them: they are not merely His messengers, but ‘His mouth.’” [Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), 113.] It is not relevant to this project to explain why Warfield believed in the divine inspiration of scripture. However, because it is interesting to me and instructive, I will include his reasons here. First, he argued that one reason to accept the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration of the Christian Bible is that this doctrine has always been the church’s doctrine. Second, he argued that the Bible itself teaches it. In a statement that seems to beg the issue, he writes: “The church doctrine of inspiration was the Bible doctrine before it was the church doctrine; and the church doctrine only because it was the Bible doctrine.” (Ibid., 174.)

¹¹ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 165. In this very quotation one can almost sense Vanhoozer’s struggle to hold in tension his convictions that scripture is both a divine and a human product. This position is certainly evangelical, but represents several steps away from Warfield’s extreme position.

he explains, scripture's authority is inherent and due principally to its inspiration by the Holy Spirit, a fundamental theme of content-based/supernaturalist perspectives.¹²

As it turns out, what is authoritative for him is biblical content that relates to what he calls "the great drama of redemption."¹³ He asserts that scripture is the supreme norm for Christian faith and life, but not, he writes, "as an epistemic norm that caters to modernity's craving for certainty, but as a *sapiential* norm that provides direction for one's fitting participation in the great evangelical drama of redemption."¹⁴

Function-Based/Rationalist Approaches to Biblical Authority

Whereas most content-based/supernaturalist theories derive the authority of scripture from its perceived divine origins, a second category of theories express an explicitly functional understanding of scripture. I am labeling models that derive authority from the uses of scripture in the life of the Christian community as function-based and rationalist.¹⁵ I broadly identify these as "rationalist" because they tend to champion the post-Enlightenment skepticism that challenged the Bible as revelation and

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 141-150.

¹⁴ Vanhoozer, "Scripture and Tradition," 167.

¹⁵ This category would include theories that Gnuse classifies as "limited authority" and "existential" models. According to the former, scripture is authoritative because of what it does for the church, rather than what it is. See Gnuse, *The Authority of the Bible*, 123. According to theories in Gnuse's existential category, the locus of authority is the modern existential situation. Here, "inspiration" does not refer to a quality or property of the text, but rather to God's ability to use a text as an occasion for a divine-human encounter. In such cases, the ordinary words which humans author, become the word of God. Gnuse places Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and the Bultmannian school in this category.

history. Theories in this class view biblical writings as human documents rather than divine products.

Models in this category understand the authority of scripture in functional terms. That is, “[t]he texts are authoritative not in virtue of any inherent property they may have, such as being inerrant or inspired, but in virtue of a function they fill in the life of the Christian community.”¹⁶ For example, for Karl Barth, scripture is authoritative not because the Bible communicates divinely inspired information about God and God’s ways, but because “it provides our normative link with God’s self-disclosure.”¹⁷ He believes that, sometimes, biblical texts may function as occasions in which people may encounter God when those texts are used in a Christian assembly as the basis of preaching and worship. According to Barth, then, texts have the potential to render God’s personal presence. Scripture is a fallible witness through which God in Christ personally encounters the trusting reader or hearer. For Barth, to say that scripture is “inspired” is to say that “God has promised that sometimes, at his gracious pleasure, the ordinary human words of the biblical texts will become the Word of God, the occasion for rendering an agent present to us in a Divine-human encounter.”¹⁸

According to Barth, the aspect of scripture that has the potential for rendering a divine-human encounter is biblical narrative. Kelsey explains:

¹⁶ Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, 47.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 47.

Narrative is taken to be the authoritative aspect of scripture; it is authoritative in so far as it functions as the occasion for encounter with an agent in history, viz., the Risen Lord. Hence we may say that scripture is taken to have the logical force of stories that render a character, that offer an identity description of an agent. Scripture does this by means of certain formal features of the writing, certain patterns in the narrated sequences of intentions and actions. It is to these patterns that the theologian appeals to authorize his proposals.¹⁹

Barth affirms, then, that in view of God's personal presence in the world, a series of theological proposals not expressly found in scripture, may be indirectly authorized "by the patterns in biblical narrative that render an agent and sometimes occasion an encounter with him."²⁰

David H. Kelsey shares Barth's functionalist understanding of the authority of scripture.²¹ Although neither Barth nor Kelsey are rationalists, I am using Kelsey's understanding of the nature of scripture to describe models in the function-based/rationalist category.²² Kelsey asserts, for example, that biblical writings are authoritative

¹⁹ Ibid., 48.

²⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson, vol. 4, pt. 2, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 165.

²¹ For example, Paul Dafydd Jones suggests that Kelsey's work, *Eccentric Existence*, marks a new phase in the intellectual trajectory associated with Karl Barth, H. Richard Niebuhr, Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, and so-called postliberal thinkers. See Paul Dafydd Jones, review of *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, by David H. Kelsey, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 3 (September 2012): 787.

²² Clearly, neither Barth nor Kelsey are rationalists since they believe in the supernatural and in God's activity in the world. As a narrative theologian, for example, Kelsey strongly affirms the notion of divine disclosure in the narratives of scripture. However, although Kelsey is not a clear fit for the function-based/rationalist category, his understanding of biblical authority may be described as "rationalist," as I am defining the term in this study, on the basis that he accepts the skepticism that challenges the Bible as divine revelation and history. So, while Kelsey is not a rationalist, his approach to scripture may be characterized as such. Kelsey is Luther Weigle Professor Emeritus of Theology at Yale Divinity School. He is the author of one of the classics in biblical-theological studies, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), as well as *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, 2 vols. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009). Kelsey's understanding of biblical authority is sketched out in "The Bible and Christian Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48 (September 1980): 393-401.

when they shape individual and communal life and thereby author new identities.²³ Thus, scripture's authority is manifest when it functions to define the identity of the Christian community and when it is used to nurture and reform the community's common life. For these reasons and on these bases, he holds that scripture also functions to authorize theological proposals. He writes:

[T]o call certain texts 'scripture' is to acknowledge that they are authoritative *de facto* in the church and that that authority is *functional*. That is, its authority consists in its functioning to "author" or shape decisively communal and individual identities. And to call them 'scripture' is to say that the community is in fact committed to use them in this way in the course of Christian *praxis*.²⁴

Kelsey also speaks of scripture's authority *de jure* when he asserts that biblical writings ought to be used in the common life of the Christian community "because the power of God's kingly rule graciously shapes human identity and empowers new forms of life in persons through scripture."²⁵ He clarifies that this authority has little to do with the content of scripture, but rather has everything to do with how scripture is used. He

²³ Kelsey, "The Bible and Christian Theology," 393. James Barr is another theologian who shares Kelsey's functionalist perspective of scripture's authority. Barr attributes the Bible's relevance in the modern world to its power to evoke fresh disclosures of the reality of God and the meaning of human existence. But, he clearly does not believe this influence is due to any inherent property in the text itself. He acknowledges that his account of the authority of the Bible is framed very much in *human* terms: "It has not required any appeal to supernatural interventions, such as inspiration by God extending only to certain books and no others, or the giving by God of the right list of canonical books. The formation of tradition within ancient Israel and the early church, the committing of the tradition to writing, and the decision to collect a group of chosen books and form a 'scripture,' are all human decisions, decisions made by men of faith but still human decisions and describable as such." See James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 118-122.

²⁴ Kelsey, "The Bible and Christian Theology," 394. I appreciate the distinction Kelsey identifies between "biblical writings" and "scripture." "The distinction between 'biblical writing' and 'scripture' no doubt is artificial; but it is useful to make a central point about the relation between Bible and theology. To describe a writing as a 'biblical writing' is to identify it as one of a set of more or less ancient writings customarily published together as the Bible and historically rooted partly in the religious life of the early Christian church. . . . To say 'This is our scripture' is to say, 'These are the texts that present to us the promise and call that define our communal identity'" (Ibid., 393).

²⁵ Ibid., 395.

asserts that “biblical writings have authority, but the authority derives not . . . from their ‘content,’ but rather from the *end* to which they are used., viz., by God’s power to empower new human identities.”²⁶

Moreover, Kelsey denies that the authority of biblical writings is based on the supernaturalist understanding that scripture is a deposit of divine revelation. In his discussion of the nature of scripture, he explains that

what is authoritative about scripture is not a systematizable set of doctrines about transcendent status [sic] of affairs and about arcane metahistorical histories, nor is it a systematically elusive “word.” It is a heterogeneous collection of images, parables, metaphors, principles for action, beliefs, emotion-concepts, etc., each of which is determinately particular and concrete.²⁷

Like Barth, then, Kelsey denies that scripture is divinely inspired, as Vanhoozer or Warfield understand the term.²⁸ Accordingly, in his model of biblical authority, God is not “saying” or “revealing,” but God is “shaping identity,” “using” the uses of scripture toward a specific end: the actualization of God’s eschatological rule.²⁹

That Kelsey does not believe that God authors scripture, does not mean that he rejects the notion of God’s active presence there. For example, he affirms that

the practices that compose the common life of ecclesial communities seek to be appropriate responses to the ways in which God relates to all that is not God, including God’s way of relating in the person of Jesus, as those ways of relating

²⁶ Ibid., 396. See fn. 16 on Kelsey’s rationalist understanding of scripture.

²⁷ Ibid., 398.

²⁸ See his discussion of the inspiration of scripture in *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology*, 207-212.

²⁹ Ibid., 215.

are explicitly or implicitly narrated, commented on, celebrated, longed for, alluded to, or assumed in various parts of canonical Holy Scripture.³⁰

In fact, he believes the church ascribes authority to the biblical canon because to do so is deemed, first and foremost, an “appropriate response” to God and to God’s way of relating that is disclosed in and through texts that are first regarded as Bible, then Scripture, then, ultimately as Holy Scripture.³¹

To recapitulate, then, for the traditional content-based/supernaturalist view of the Bible as a divinely inspired source of revealed truths, Kelsey would substitute a functional view. This view is oriented to the life of the church and correlates scripture and its authority with the existential concerns of the believing community and individual.

He writes:

The functionalist analysis of “scriptural authority over the church” brings with it an important implication concerning the conceptual home of some doctrines of scripture in some theological positions. Scripture’s authority specifically for theology . . . is a function of its authority for the common life of the church. It’s authority for the church’s common life consists in its being used in certain ritual and normative ways so that it helps to nurture and reform the community’s self-identity and the personal identities of her members.³²

Again, what is “normative,” according to Kelsey, is neither the content of the Bible, nor that the Bible contains propositional revelation in the form of divinely given information about God and his ways. Rather, as he explains:

Our analysis suggests that it is the *patterns* in scripture, not its “content,” that make it “normative” for theology. . . . So scripture is authority for theological

³⁰ Kelsey, *Ecclesial Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, 133. Cf. also, 14-15.

³¹ For Kelsey’s discussion of these terms, see *Ecclesial Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, 135-56.

³² Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, 208.

proposals, not by being the perfect source of the content that they fully preserve, but by providing a pattern by which the proposal's adequacy as elaboration can be assessed.³³

Interestingly, Kelsey's concept of biblical authority, which looks to "patterns in scripture" for the basis of that authority, is that such patterns are "decisively shaped by an imaginative judgment about the mode in which God makes himself present."³⁴ Further, that imaginative judgment "is logically prior to any exegetical judgments about the [biblical] texts."³⁵

Kelsey contends that scripture "deserves" to be considered the theological norm and that theologians "ought" (he puts both these verbs in quotes) so to regard it. But he quickly adds that "this 'objective normativity' of scriptural authority is not undercut by taking its 'authority' in terms of scripture's functions rather than of its properties."³⁶ He acknowledges that theologians who agree that scripture—in diverse ways, to be sure—is "authority" for theological proposals disagree widely over the extent, content, and meaning of canonical scripture other than to assert its "sufficiency" for an indicated use, "the occasion for the presence of God among the faithful."³⁷

As illustrated by Barth and Kelsey, and to sum up, function-based models of biblical authority are those that, broadly speaking, tend to understand that the authority of

³³ Ibid., 195-6.

³⁴ Ibid., 198-9.

³⁵ Ibid., 199.

³⁶ Ibid., 152.

³⁷ Ibid., 106.

scripture derives from its uses in the life of the Christian church. Further, these models may be labeled as rationalist because they defend the post-Enlightenment skepticism that challenged the Bible as revelation and history. Theories in this class, therefore, view biblical writings as human documents rather than divine products.

A Content-Based/Rationalist Approach to Biblical Authority

I have already let the cat out of the bag by describing Schleiermacher's perspective as a "third way" to conceive of scripture's authority. Although one could make the case that his approach might seem to borrow from or be suggestive of both content-based/supernaturalist and function-based/rationalist models, I am suggesting that his understanding of biblical authority will not fit neatly in either category. Why is this so?

To begin with, we may identify his perspective as more content-based/supernaturalist than function-based/rationalist, in some respects, since he considers the New Testament to be authoritative by reason of its being a reliable witness to the revelation of Jesus' perfect God-consciousness and the first in a series of presentations of Christian faith. However, in other respects, his understanding fails to meet the test of a content-based/supernaturalist model, according to the way I am defining it. Those who advocate content-based/supernaturalist models also tend to view scripture as authoritative by virtue of a content that is in some sense divinely disclosed. Further, they tend to ascribe greater authority to the biblical canon than to the church, asserting that the former has authority over the latter. As I will demonstrate in later chapters, however,

Schleiermacher does not affirm a direct connection between divine revelation and the Bible. Moreover, in some respects, he affirms ecclesial over biblical authority. Thus, at least for these reasons, his understanding seems to exhibit characteristics of function-based/rationalist models. Hence, his conception of biblical authority is neither *absolutely* content-based nor function-based, but borrows from both.

So, how should we label Schleiermacher's doctrine of biblical authority? At the outset, we may broadly identify his third way as evangelical, since according to his theology, everything in Christianity is connected in one way or another to redemption through Christ. His theology revolves around Jesus' perfect God-consciousness and its influence upon the community of faith that Jesus founded. Therefore, Schleiermacher's approach may be classified as a thoroughly evangelical one.

Before suggesting a more specific label to his approach to biblical authority, I believe it may be helpful to discuss how some in Schleiermacher's own day characterized him and how he characterized himself. To do so will cast some light on how and how not to classify him. At the same time, it will demonstrate the difficulty of identifying an appropriate category for his views.

Was he a supernaturalist or a rationalist? Cathie Kelsey suggests in her book, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher*, that the opponents he primarily had in mind as he wrote *Brief Outline* and *Christian Faith*, for example, were what he called supernaturalists on the one hand and rationalists on the other. Regarding his understanding of Christ, Kelsey claims that Schleiermacher "takes a path between super-

naturalism and rationalism, distinguishing his understanding from both.”³⁸ Although Kelsey is referring to a doctrine not extensively considered in this study, I am suggesting here that what she noticed about Schleiermacher’s christology could very well be said of his approach to scripture.³⁹

Moreover, Schleiermacher discusses this same subject, the conflict in his day between rationalism and supernaturalism, near the close of a letter to his friend, Friedrich Lücke. He mentions that many who read his understanding of the supernatural in Christian revelation and the natural development of the divine plan of salvation in the *Glaubenslehre*⁴⁰ had a difficult time deciding where he stood in regard to the rationalism/supernaturalism controversy. It surely may have seemed that he shared an interest in both worlds. And, of course, as a churchman and a post-Enlightenment theologian, he did. He writes, albeit tongue in cheek:

Quite recently a new type of rationalism has been devised—I would almost like to think it was done for me especially, but that would be to give me too much

³⁸ Catherine L. Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 38. Similarly, Ted Vial suggests that “Schleiermacher’s generation found itself confronted with two ways of approaching answers” to the christological questions of his day, and that he was satisfied with neither.” Vial identifies those two ways as confessionalist/traditionalist, which view Schleiermacher labels as “magical,” and rationalists. [Theodore Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 88.]

³⁹ Regarding Schleiermacher’s view of biblical authority, I will explain the path he takes “between supernaturalism and rationalism” in the remaining chapters, especially in Chapter Seven.

⁴⁰ See Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §§13, 47.1, 88.4, 89.

honor. It seems to me that it is called ‘ideal rationalism,’⁴¹ and it refers to the belief that something natural could at the same time be something supernatural.⁴²

Schleiermacher informs Lücke that he is grateful for the suggestion, but he has a better idea: he wishes someone would devise a position for him in which what is supernatural can at the same time be natural. He suggests that whenever he speaks of the supernatural, he does so with reference to whatever comes first. Afterwards, however, it becomes something natural. For example, he suggests that “creation is supernatural, but it afterwards becomes the natural order.” Likewise, he asserts: “[I]n his origin Christ is supernatural, but he also becomes natural, as a genuine human being.” He suggests that the Holy Spirit and the Christian church can be treated in the same way.⁴³ He concludes by labeling himself as a “real supernaturalist”:

If the former view was called rationalism, this view would have to be a supernaturalism, and why should it not be called real? And so I want to say that I consider myself to be a real supernaturalist, and I think this label is as good as any other.⁴⁴

⁴¹ According to James Duke and Francis Fiorenza, the reference here is a term used by Ferdinand Christian Baur, who differentiated two types of rationalism. “There is the ‘ordinary rationalism’ of the Enlightenment, which is based upon the autonomy of reason, and an ‘ideal rationalism,’ based on historical forms proper to supernaturalism. This ideal rationalism represents those historical forms of consciousness in which the ideas of reason appear in the course of temporal-historical development. Despite Schleiermacher’s assertions to the contrary, the *Glaubenslehre* exemplifies ideal rationalism because it seeks to mediate between the supernaturalism of traditional church doctrine and the claims of reason.” [Cited in Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, trans. James Duke and Francis Fiorenza, American Academy of Religion Texts and Translations Series 3 (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars Press, 1981), 98.]

⁴² Ibid., 88-89. This is key to understanding Schleiermacher’s entire theology. I will explain his understanding that “something natural could at the same time be something supernatural” in Chapter Three, where I discuss his understanding of the revelation of God in Christ.

⁴³ Ibid., 89.

⁴⁴ Ibid. A. F. Schott called Schleiermacher’s position, “rational supernaturalist,” although in the above quotation, Schleiermacher denies the merits of this description. (Cited in Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 130.)

To sum up, Schleiermacher self-identified as a “real supernaturalist,” although his writings indicate that regarding many Christian doctrines, at least, he wanted to steer a path between supernaturalists and rationalists. In fact, Schleiermacher was neither an *absolute* supernaturalist nor an *absolute* rationalist.

In light of the above, then, how should we classify Schleiermacher’s doctrine of biblical authority? First, I believe we may identify his perspective as, in the main, content-based. For Schleiermacher, the New Testament is authoritative because it is a witness to the revelation of Jesus’ perfect God-consciousness and the first in a series of presentations of Christian faith. I am proposing that what this means is that since the New Testament provides a picture of Jesus’ consciousness of God, embodied in his words and deeds, and since it is a record of the first expression of faith in Christ, one may conclude that Schleiermacher’s conception of the locus of biblical authority is found in that particular New Testament content. Granted, one could make the case that his perspective is neither *strictly* nor *absolutely* content-based. However, I am arguing in this study that because the locus of authority is the record of the Christ event, his understanding of scripture’s authority is *substantially* content-based.

This understanding is what separates Schleiermacher’s conception of biblical authority from Kelsey’s and other function-based models. While Schleiermacher views the record of the Christ event as the locus of biblical authority, Kelsey asserts that the actual locus of authority is ecclesial communities who, in their common life, ascribe authority to scripture. According to Kelsey, communities of faith ascribe authority to

scripture, in part, “because [they believe that] *God is self-committed to work through the communities’ ways of living with these texts* to author life for them by forming new communal and personal identities.”⁴⁵ That is, Kelsey’s understanding is that ecclesial communities choose to “live with these texts” because they believe God is active in them.

But, why do ecclesial communities make this choice? Upon what basis do they believe God is active in the biblical texts? Kelsey’s answer seems to be that the church recognizes “the constitutive patterns of [biblical] texts.”⁴⁶ Like Barth, Kelsey seems to understand that “the patterns in biblical narrative,” to use a Barthian phrase,⁴⁷ are the basis for the decision of ecclesial communities to live with these texts, and thus, ascribe authority to them.⁴⁸ This represents a fine distinction between Kelsey’s and Schleiermacher’s understanding of the locus of biblical authority, but a real one, nonetheless. For Schleiermacher, biblical writings have authority, not because of their narrative patterns or literary forms, but because of their content: they contain reliable information about the God-consciousness of Christ and his influence on others. While Kelsey pushes for a functional usage of scripture in which it is not scripture’s content that is normative but the “patterns” that are found there, Schleiermacher, in contrast, claims that it is the actual content of scripture that is authoritative.

⁴⁵ Kelsey, *Ecclesial Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, 138. Italics mine.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴⁷ See fn. 20 in this chapter.

⁴⁸ See also Kelsey, *Ecclesial Existence, A Theological Anthropology*, 153-6 and page 22, fn. 33 of this study.

Not only may we identify Schleiermacher's conception of biblical authority as content-based, but we may also identify it as rationalist. While he may not have considered himself to be a rationalist, and while his theology may not qualify as absolutely rationalistic since it allows space for the supernatural, I firmly believe that his approach to biblical authority is deserving of the rationalist label. I have identified his view of biblical authority rationalist primarily on the basis of his denial that the Bible is a unique deposit of divine revelation. Further, his model of biblical authority demonstrates a willingness to accept, even welcome, scientific and philosophical advances, a spirit descriptive of the post-Enlightenment age. Again, he held that the phenomena of the biblical writings are such that the Holy Spirit must have chosen not to produce scripture in a "totally miraculous way"; instead "every element must be treated as purely human, and the action of the Spirit was only to produce the inner impulse."⁴⁹ Here, Schleiermacher sounds as if he is trying to qualify his supernaturalism as natural. To me, that he believed the biblical writings were human documents guardedly qualifies his perspective of biblical authority as rationalist, although he would argue that he himself was not one.

I am proposing, then, that Schleiermacher's doctrine of biblical authority merits classification in a third category. Neither content-based/supernaturalist, nor function-based/rationalist, I am identifying it as content-based/rationalist, a label that borrows

⁴⁹ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, trans. Jack Forstman and James O. Duke, ed. Heinz Kimmerle (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1977), 104.

from both of the aforementioned categories. Several advantages accrue to identifying his doctrine as such, but that discussion must wait for Chapter Seven. Before I highlight those advantages, I want to dig deeper into Schleiermacher's conception of biblical authority. What did he believe about revelation? Inspiration? What is his understanding of the locus of biblical authority? To what extent did he accept scripture's normative character? In the next chapter, I will begin to answer these questions, turning first to Schleiermacher's doctrine of revelation.

Chapter Three: Schleiermacher and the Doctrine of Revelation

In the introduction to this inquiry I asserted that content-based/supernaturalist and function-based/rationalist models of biblical authority hold conflicting views of the concept of “revelation,” as it relates to scripture. The former avers that the Bible is a unique deposit of divine revelation, which in some way originated with God. The latter denies that the Bible contains specific revelatory content and tends to see the Bible primarily as a human document. What was Schleiermacher’s conception of revelation and its connection to scripture, and why?

My aims in this chapter are threefold. First, inasmuch as the concept of revelation is often connected, if not foundational, to many models of biblical authority, I want to compare Schleiermacher’s view of revelation as it relates to scripture with a classic content-based/supernaturalist model. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, his is neither an absolutely supernaturalist nor an absolutely rationalist model of the doctrine of divine revelation. Before identifying Schleiermacher’s understanding of this concept, I want to briefly describe a representation of the latter, one championed by Carl. F. H. Henry. My purpose in doing so is to elucidate Schleiermacher’s viewpoint. Second, I want to lay out the primary criticism of Schleiermacher’s understanding of divine revelation relative to scripture. To accomplish this, I rely on the oeuvre of several conservative evangelicals,

as well as that of neo-orthodox theologian, Karl Barth.¹ Third, I want to trace out what I believe would be Schleiermacher's response to his critics and the reasoning behind it. Therefore, I want to postpone until this part of the chapter a more complete explanation of his understanding of revelation, as I believe such an explanation provides the best evidence of how he would respond to his critics. To do so, I rely heavily upon what he wrote on the subject in *Christian Faith* and *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. I do not limit my analysis to these primary sources alone, however, as I also utilize accompanying clarifications from elsewhere. I will make the case that, for Schleiermacher, God's revelation may be identified in at least three places: in and through the whole world in general, in the feeling of absolute dependence, and in Christ.

Carl F. H. Henry's Doctrine of Revelation Vis-à-vis Scripture

In his book, *Models of Revelation*, Avery Robert Dulles constructs a typology of twentieth-century revelation theology according to how and where revelation occurs. He distinguishes five different models: doctrinal, historical, experiential, dialectical presence, and new awareness.² According to the doctrinal model, as the classification suggests, the Bible is seen primarily as a source of doctrine. Thus, it equates revelation with propositional statements, that is, with truth claims from and about God and God's purposes. Consequently, the doctrinal, or as it may also be identified, the propositional

¹ While there are more contemporary critics of Schleiermacher's theology, in general, and of his understanding of revelation, in particular, I have found that for the most part they tend to share Barth's principal complaint.

² Robert Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 27-28.

model³ certainly qualifies as an appropriate representative of a classic content-based/supernaturalist model of revelation.

Carl F. H. Henry, one of the most prominent theologians of the conservative wing of American Evangelicalism, is a proponent of this model. When Gabriel Fackre discusses and draws on Avery Dulles's typological survey of the concept of revelation, he too selects Henry to represent the doctrinal model.⁴ Henry defends that model and explains the methodological groundwork for neo-evangelical theology in his six-volume magnum opus, *God, Revelation and Authority*.⁵ That primary source provides for us the pertinent features of Henry's concept of revelation and its connection to scripture.

What is relevant to this inquiry regarding Henry's concept of revelation is his strong affirmation of a direct connection between divine revelation and the Bible. That is, for Henry and others who subscribe to supernaturalist/content-based models of revelation, the Bible is an important locus of that revelation. After setting forth the nature of theology in the first volume of *God, Revelation and Authority*, Henry turns his attention in volumes two, three, and four to a delineation of fifteen foundational theses about divine revelation. These are followed in volumes five and six by a development of

³ Others designate the doctrinal model of revelation as the propositional model. See, e.g., William C. Placher, "How Do We Know What to Believe? Revelation and Authority," in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William Placher (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 14-18; Miikka Ruokanen, *Doctrina Divinitus Inspirata: Martin Luther's Position in the Ecumenical Problem of Biblical Inspiration* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1985), 19-23.

⁴ Gabriel Fackre, *The Doctrine of Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation*, Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 16.

⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976-1983). For a review of Henry's apologetic theology, cf. Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 94-110.

a largely classical orthodox approach to the doctrine of God.⁶ The eleventh thesis states:

“The Bible is a reservoir and conduit of divine truth.” In Henry’s explanation of this thesis he asserts that

the Scriptures are the authoritative written record and interpretation of God’s revelatory deeds, and the ongoing source of reliable objective knowledge concerning God’s nature and ways. . . . The Scriptures offer a comprehensive and authoritative overview of God’s revelatory disclosure and publish his purpose in the past, present and future.⁷

Clearly, Henry understands the Bible to be a deposit of divine revelation.⁸

What this means, of course, is that Henry understands the content of revelation to be information about God and his purposes.⁹ This is clear when he defines revelation as

that activity of the supernatural God whereby he communicates information essential for man’s present and future destiny. In revelation God, whose thoughts are not our thoughts, shares his mind; he communicates not only the truth about himself and his intentions, but also that concerning man’s present plight and future prospects.¹⁰

One could summarize Henry’s understanding of the content of revelation by stating that revelation consists in knowledge. For him, the reality of revelation means that God has

⁶ I believe it is significant that Henry placed his discussion of revelation prior to his discussion of God. One can make the case that he intended to make it clear that whatever may be said about the being and attributes of God arises solely out of God’s own self-disclosure as found in the Bible.

⁷ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 2:13.

⁸ Indeed, for him, true theology could be based only on the self-disclosure of God found in the Bible, for there alone can true knowledge of God be found. Henry lays down the thesis that the Bible is the sole foundation for theology. See Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:181-409. Schleiermacher challenges the notion that the Bible is the sole foundation for theology and of faith, as well, as I will explain in Chapter Five.

⁹ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:170, 269. See also Carl F. H. Henry, “The Priority of Divine Revelation: A Review Article,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27, no. 1 (March 1984): 77-78.

¹⁰ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:457.

both acted in history and spoken to humankind.¹¹ However, God's speaking takes precedence over God's acting, for the divine word provides the rationale and meaning of the divine historical acts.¹² According to this perspective then, revelation is a transcendent disclosure that gives the meaning of revelatory events and provides valid truths about God's nature and purposes.

Furthermore, Henry believes that revelation's content is both objective and propositional. Indeed, he holds that the content of the Bible is almost exclusively propositional.¹³ In *God, Revelation and Authority*, he develops the thesis that "God's revelation is rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form."¹⁴ For Henry, the reality that God has spoken means that the intellect plays an integral role in the overall revelatory process.¹⁵

By now the essence or nature of revelation according to Henry has become apparent: revelation is principally, if not strictly, in words with strict propositional meanings. So, according to the doctrinal model, divine revelation is operative in the realm of cognition or knowledge. "Revelation in the Bible," Henry declares, "is essentially a mental conception: God's disclosure is rational and intelligible communication. Issuing from the mind and will of God, revelation is addressed to the

¹¹ Ibid., 3:261-71.

¹² Carl F. H. Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 95-96, 217.

¹³ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:468

¹⁴ Ibid., 3:467.

¹⁵ Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, 97.

mind and will of human beings.”¹⁶ His belief is that “God directly and objectively manifests himself by intelligible words, commands and acts” and that “revelation is given . . . to the mind and conscience of man universally.”¹⁷

The reality that God has communicated to human beings and that God has spoken, according to Henry, means that the intellect plays an integral role in the revelatory process.¹⁸ Moreover, in contrast to what he saw as a fallacy in neo-orthodoxy, Henry asserted that this revelation is objective and available to human reason. He brought revelation, reason, and scripture together in what he set forth as his basic epistemological axiom:

Divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included; reason is the instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its verifying principle; logical consistency is a negative test for truth and coherence a subordinate test. The task of Christian theology is to exhibit the content of biblical revelation as an orderly whole.¹⁹

¹⁶ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:248. This view of the nature of revelation is, of course, Thomist. Aquinas believed that revelation was the result of God’s action on the human intellect by which “God might disclose new ideas or species to the mind of the prophet by direct action upon the senses, the imagination, or by reordering existing ideas or species in an original way, or by direct action upon the intellect.” [J. T. Forestell, “Biblical Inspiration,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Thomson Gale, 2003), 495.] Aquinas certainly believed, however, in the transcendence and utter incomprehensibility of God. For an in-depth study on Aquinas’ doctrine of revelation, see Paul Synave and Pierre Benoit, *Prophecy and Inspiration: A Commentary on the Summa Theologica II-II, Questions 171-178*,” trans. Avery Dulles (New York: Desclee, 1961).

¹⁷ Henry, “The Priority of Divine Revelation: A Review Article,” 78. By contrast, Schleiermacher does not think that he is qualified to say what we discern in God’s acts, or what his “mind” necessarily does, or that we can immediately understand “the mind” of God whenever we “see” his acts or “hear” of them.

¹⁸ Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma*, 97.

¹⁹ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 1:215. If theology is the explication of revelation as disclosed in the Bible, then in Henry’s estimation, the Bible is the central authority for theology. “Revelation is in fact a core doctrine of the Bible,” Henry claims. “Without it the entire Scriptural message would lose its authority.” See Henry, “The Priority of Divine Revelation: A Review Article,” 77. This perspective is certainly representative of the content-based/supernaturalist model of biblical authority.

To sum up, Henry believes that divine revelation is given in words with strict propositional meanings, located in the Bible, a book authored by God. His conception of revelation is an accurate depiction in general terms of the content-based/supernaturalist model of revelation and biblical authority.

Schleiermacher's Understanding of Revelation Vis-à-vis Scripture

How does Schleiermacher's understanding of revelation vis-à-vis scripture compare with Henry's? Whereas Henry's classic representation of the content-based/supernaturalist understanding of revelation typifies the doctrinal model in Dulles's typology of revelation, Schleiermacher's understanding represents what Dulles identifies as the experiential model.²⁰ In this model, the Bible is viewed, not as a deposit of divinely-revealed truths, but as a human document which chronicles and expresses the experience of God in the lives of believers. According to the experiential model, then, biblical authors are viewed as writing from their experience of the divine. This is certainly true of Schleiermacher's understanding of revelation, as will become evident later in this chapter. For now, I only want to highlight the more general dissimilarity between Schleiermacher's view of divine revelation and Henry's: whereas Henry conceives of a direct connection between divine revelation and the Bible, Schleiermacher conceives only of an indirect one.

²⁰ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 68-83, 119. Schleiermacher is also Gabriel Fackre's and William Placher's choice to typify the experiential model. See Fackre, *The Doctrine of Revelation*, 17; Placher, "How Do We Know What to Believe? Revelation and Authority," 16-18.

While Schleiermacher most certainly believes in the reality of divine revelation, for him, scripture is not *the* locus of revelation, at least not in the same sense that it is for Carl F. H. Henry and others who would classify themselves as conservative evangelicals.²¹ To attest to this, there is no warrant, according to Schleiermacher, for people to claim that scripture has a divine origin. This is clear from his discussion of the doctrine of scripture in *Christian Faith*.²² Although there is no doctrine of revelation *per se* in this or any other section of *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher makes, what only seems to be at first glance, a passing comment regarding the meaning of revelation when he discusses the concept of “inspiration.” As it turns out, this comment is not insignificant, but it is rather crucial for his entire doctrine of scripture. He contends that the general custom of calling sacred scripture (*die heilige Schrift*) “revelation” leads to a misconception: that the two concepts, revelation (*Offenbarung*) and inspiration (*Eingebung*), may be used interchangeably. But these terms are not synonymous, he asserts, and to treat them as such only leads to confusion. He explains:

[I]f one should understand the matter in such a way that by writing down sacred scripture in a state of inspiration these authors would declare its content in a special divine fashion, this would be an entirely groundless claim. This is the

²¹ As I will show below, that Schleiermacher does not conceive the Bible to be *a* locus of revelation is an inaccurate claim, since he believes that divine revelation is ubiquitous. Similarly, to claim that Schleiermacher does not accept a direct connection between divine revelation and scripture, is not to say that he rejects an indirect one. In contrast to Henry, however, he does not affirm that the Bible is a deposit of divinely-disclosed truths.

²² Schleiermacher’s discussion of the doctrine of scripture in *Christian Faith* falls under the rubric of ecclesiology in the second part. Along with the ministry of the Word of God, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the power of the Keys of the Kingdom, and prayer in the name of Jesus, scripture is identified as one of the essential and unchanging marks of the Christian church.

case whether one looks more at the act of composing a sacred book itself or more at the arousal of thoughts that precede and underlie that act.²³

Besides his reasoning that there is no evidence to support the claim that God somehow revealed scripture's content to its authors, Schleiermacher adds that because everything which those authors teach is traceable to Christ, God's original act of disclosure (*Kundmachung*) of whatever is contained in the sacred scriptures must already be present in Christ himself. Revelation in this case, then, would be manifested "not as a series of discrete bits of inspired information, but rather as a single and indivisible revelation that develops organically (that is to say, under the conditions of space and time)."²⁴ He concludes: "Thus, the speaking and writing of the apostles, moved as they were by the Spirit, was also a communicating (*Mittheilen*) of the divine revelation that existed in Christ (*der göttlichen Offenbarung in Christo*)."²⁵

The Core Criticism of Schleiermacher's Theology of Revelation

Before I develop a more complete picture of Schleiermacher's understanding of revelation, I want to introduce the core criticism of his position. What objections have his critics raised regarding his conception of revelation as it relates to scripture? What follows are a few samples.

²³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, trans. Terrence N. Tice, Catherine L. Kelsey, and Edwina Lawler, ed. Terrence N. Tice (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, forthcoming), §130.1. I have checked translations of *Christian Faith* against the original, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt, Zweite Auflage (1830/31)*, ed. Rolf Schäfer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008).

²⁴ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.1; See also Dawn DeVries, "Rethinking the Scripture Principle: Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Role of the Bible in the Church," 302.

²⁵ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.1. I will have more to say below about the meaning of this claim.

This is what conservative evangelical theologian, Millard J. Erickson, writes about Schleiermacher's understanding of revelation under the heading, "Modern Versions of Immanentism," and the sub-heading, "Classical Liberalism":

The definition of revelation . . . has become more generalized. In an extreme form, that of Schleiermacher, revelation is any instance of conscious insight. Thus, the Bible is a book recording God's revelations to humanity. As such, however, it is not unique; that is, it is not qualitatively different from other pieces of religious literature, or even literature that does not claim to be religious. Isaiah, the Sermon on the Mount, Plato, Marcus Aurelius, Carlyle, Goethe, all are vehicles of divine revelation. Any truth, no matter where you find it, is divine truth. This position virtually obliterates the traditional distinction between special and general revelation.²⁶

There is much in the above quotation that is inaccurate and unfair to Schleiermacher's conception of revelation. However, Erickson summarizes well, in a general way, the core criticism of Schleiermacher's position: it "virtually obliterates the traditional distinction between special and general revelation."

Another related and somewhat incorrect explanation and appraisal of Schleiermacher's position is that although he

does not deny the out-there existence of God as certain moderns have done . . . all man receives from God [according to Schleiermacher] is a feeling. Man cannot, as the result, locate God out there, but all he receives from God is what he finds within. Revelation therefore has to do neither with propositions nor events in history, but with a feeling of dependence.²⁷

Olbricht adds that since Schleiermacher withdraws revelation from the category of knowledge and locates it in feeling, "the theologian cannot pretend to speak about God

²⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 331-332.

²⁷ Thomas H. Olbricht, "The Bible as Revelation," *Restoration Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (1965): 215.

but only about the human feeling of independence [sic] on God.”²⁸ Similarly, Charles Hodge feels that the logical result of Schleiermacher’s approach to religion with its feeling of absolute dependence greatly undermined the authority of the Scripture, which for Hodge robs theology of its factual, objective base for data.²⁹ Likewise, James I. Packer shares this fundamental criticism, that Schleiermacher’s doctrine of revelation removes it from the category of knowledge:

To side-step Kant’s critique of the idea of revealed truth, he [Schleiermacher] abandoned the notion altogether, and argued that Christianity is essentially not knowledge but a feeling of dependence on God through Christ. . . . Man’s self-consciousness is the reference-point of all theological statements; to make them is simply a way of talking about oneself; they tell us nothing of God, but only what men feel about God. Theology is thus dogmatically agnostic about God and his world. As a science, it knows nothing of any events but states of mind. . . . Schleiermacher’s position made the idea of revelation really superfluous, for it actually amounted to a denial that anything is revealed.³⁰

Ted Vial makes the claim in *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed* that “[t]he most wholesale criticism of Schleiermacher’s theology comes from Karl Barth.”³¹ Then Vial identifies the core of Barth’s objection to Schleiermacher: “that theology must be grounded on the revealed Word of God, it cannot be grounded on the experience of the community.”³² While it is true that Barth is not technically referring to scripture when he

²⁸ Ibid., 214.

²⁹ Charles A. Jones, III, “Charles Hodge, the Keeper of Orthodoxy: The Method, Purpose and Meaning of His Apologetic” (PhD diss., Drew University, 1989), 211.

³⁰ James I. Packer, “Contemporary Views of Revelation,” in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1958), 92.

³¹ Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 99.

³² Ibid.

speaks of the “Word of God,” that he does not share the aforementioned’s view of the Bible as revelation,³³ and that Dulles in his revelation typology classifies Barth, not as a representative of the doctrinal, but rather, along with Emil Brunner and Rudolf Bultmann, of the dialectical presence model,³⁴ Schleiermacher’s content-based/supernaturalist critics would readily agree with the general complaint that Barth articulates. Barth judged that Schleiermacher’s theology did not allow for God’s speaking to humankind. On one occasion, for instance, Barth asserted that the “ancestral line” which runs back through “Kierkegaard to Luther and Calvin, and so to Paul and Jeremiah” does not include Schleiermacher. “With all due respect to the genius shown in his work,” he explained, “I cannot consider Schleiermacher a good teacher in the realm of theology because, so far as I can see . . . one can not speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice.”³⁵

After reviewing Schleiermacher’s conception of revelation in *Christian Faith*, Barth claimed that “[n]one of the different definitions of the concept of revelation holds up.” Why did he feel this way? He explains:

³³ For Barth, the Bible and the preaching of the Church bear witness to divine revelation but are not themselves revelation. In Barth’s well-known terminology, Bible and proclamation as such are not the word of God, but they can become God’s word and his revelation if and insofar as Jesus Christ, the revealed Word of God, is pleased to speak to us through these chosen witnesses. See Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, vol. 1/1 of *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), 131-133.

³⁴ Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 84-97.

³⁵ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1928), 195-196. Indeed, to traditionalists, Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith* represented a capitulation to the anti-supernaturalist spirit of the Enlightenment age. As Barth described *Christian Faith*, it is “a thinly disguised attempt to talk about humanity as if it were talk about God.” The same could very well be asserted specifically of his doctrine of revelation. See also Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, “The Reconstruction of Transcendence: Immanence in Nineteenth-Century Theology,” in *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 42.

When he [Schleiermacher] calls revelation a *divine* impartation and communication, this has a hopeful ring, but it is only by way of summary. Greeks, Egyptians, and Indians all claim to have a communication, and the only thing that seriously remains is the ‘fact’ underlying the religion. A fact, not a *teaching*.³⁶

Barth explains: “Divine communication as a fact sounds adequate, but what follows shows that it is no real communication but part of a series of facts already present, that is, of the world.”³⁷ Another way of describing Barth’s appraisal of Schleiermacher’s theology is to consider the way he saw his theology compared with Schleiermacher’s: he considered his to be “from above” and Schleiermacher’s, “from below.”³⁸

Barth asserts that when Schleiermacher thinks of revelation, he is not thinking about the encounter between God and humans, but the encounter between those who teach and those who are taught. Barth feels that according to Schleiermacher’s theory, then, revelation “can only be a matter of direct (personal) impact and not of the communication of thoughts and words.”³⁹ Hence, Barth does not believe that Schleiermacher subscribes to “true revelation.” His conclusion is that if everything is revelation, nothing is revelation.⁴⁰

³⁶ Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923/24*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 234-235.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Barth made this clear in an interview with Terrence N. Tice on July 27, 1960. Cf. Terrence N. Tice, “Interviews with Karl Barth and Reflections on His Interpretations of Schleiermacher” in *Barth and Schleiermacher: Beyond the Impasse?*, ed. James O. Duke and Robert F. Streetman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 49-50.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

That Schleiermacher's understanding of revelation obliterates the traditional distinction between special and general revelation, that if one accepts his understanding one cannot pretend to speak about God, that his conception is basically a denial that anything is revealed, that his understanding allows no communication of thoughts and words—all of these objections are generally articulating the same core criticism of Schleiermacher's theology of revelation, at least of his asseveration that the connection between divine revelation and scripture is only indirect.⁴¹ That principal criticism is this: Schleiermacher's viewpoint robs Christianity of its content because it does not allow for a knowledge of God.

⁴¹ In this section, it should be clear that I focus primarily on the criticisms of Schleiermacher's doctrine of revelation vis-à-vis scripture, and only secondarily on the criticisms of his understanding of revelation in general. The reason for this choice is that the former is more pertinent to my inquiry. That said, here are some of the most common criticisms of his doctrine of revelation: 1) It leads to the loss of transcendence. The argument is that his model tells us more about human subjectivity and its functions than it does about God. This criticism, of course, is similar to the one articulated in the body of this chapter. The general criticism is this: If reference to the transcendent is made something achievable by autonomous human beings as they reflect on the workings of their consciousness, then in the end, the transcendent is made non-transcendent. Schleiermacher's approach, then, it is claimed, confuses the transcendence of God with the transcendence of the human mind. See Ben Quash, "Revelation," in *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. J. B. Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain R. Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 327-330; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 330-333, where he identifies Schleiermacher's theology as a modern version of Immanentism. See also Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, "The Reconstruction of Transcendence: Immanence in Nineteenth-Century Theology," 24-62. 2) His identification of the feeling of absolute dependence with an experience of God is unwarranted. Cf., Ronald F. Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 26-31. Thiemann writes: "That an experience of absolute dependence is an experience of God is a judgment which must be warranted. Appeals to perceived uniqueness or degree of intensity are insufficient to establish the veridical character of the claim. . . . [Schleiermacher's] defense of revelation founders on the incoherence of the notion of intuition or immediate self-consciousness. . . . Schleiermacher's attempt to ground revelation in universal immediate experience is thwarted by his inability to demonstrate that the experience stems from a divine origin" (Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology*, 31); 3) His conception of revelation, which includes a supernatural/natural explanation for the appearance of Christ, is incompatible with historical science. For example, Walter E. Wyman, Jr. asks: "Can the historical thinker who adheres strictly to historical modes of thought acknowledge anything supernatural in history, even something that becomes natural?" [Walter E. Wyman, Jr., "Revelation and the Doctrine of Faith: Historical Revelation within the Limits of Historical Consciousness," *Journal of Religion* 78, no. 1 (January 1998), 51.]; See David Friedrich Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*, trans. and ed. Leander E. Keck, Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 29.

Schleiermacher's Response

How would Schleiermacher respond to the criticism that his doctrine of revelation does not allow for a knowledge of God? How would he respond to the charge that his understanding of the connection between divine revelation and scripture, in effect, robs Christianity of its content? In this section I want to answer these questions. Accordingly, I will need to offer a more complete explanation of his conception of revelation in order to do so. As we will see, Schleiermacher's understanding of revelation is interconnected with his soteriology and christology. In general, I believe Schleiermacher's response to his critics would be twofold: 1) He would disagree with them, to this extent: Inasmuch as God is revealed in and through the world and inasmuch as scripture is a part of the world, he would argue that his understanding of revelation does allow for "knowledge of God,"⁴² albeit knowledge that is limited and based only on an indirect connection between revelation and scripture. 2) He would argue that their criticism is moot, since his claim is that communion with God is not knowledge-based. Rather, it is the experience

⁴² In 1787, Schleiermacher entered the University of Halle, where he was introduced fully into the Enlightenment climate of the day in philosophy and theology. It was here that he became familiar with the biblical criticism of the Halle scholar J.S. Semler, whose aim was to interpret the Bible as historical writings, free from any dogmatic considerations about the special status of the biblical writings as scripture. Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* had appeared only six years earlier in 1781, and the philosopher J.A. Eberhard gave Schleiermacher a thorough grounding in Kant's philosophy. Bruce L. McCormack notes that the question of whether and how God is known stood at the heart of theological reflection in this period. He suggests that the issue was created by two developments: the rise of biblical criticism with its concomitant distinction of revelation from the Bible, and the much celebrated "turn to the subject," which occurred in philosophy from Descartes through Kant. It was above all, Kant's limitation of theoretical knowing to the intuitable which made knowledge of God so deeply problematic to modern theologians. For if God is a transcendent, wholly spiritual being as the Christian tradition maintains, then God is unintuitable, and—if Kant's restriction holds—cannot be known. See Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 23-25. In the Kantian tradition, represented in some ways by Schleiermacher, there was a tendency to stress faith rather than revelation. For more on Schleiermacher's epistemology and its relationship to Kant's, see Vial, *Schleiermacher*, 25-41, 67-74; Grenz, *Twentieth-Century Theology*, 24-51.

Christians have of Christ as the mediator of a relationship to God that is salvific. Vial well summarizes this point when he writes:

The essence of Christianity, for Schleiermacher, is . . . [the] experience of redemption. It is not a set of intellectual propositions about the world to which one must subscribe. . . . [R]eligion for Schleiermacher is not thinking or doing, not metaphysics or morality, but feeling. The Christian religion is an experience of redemption linked to the person Jesus.⁴³

The Revelation of God in and through the World

Upon what basis would Schleiermacher disagree with his critics? First, he would do so upon the basis that God is revealed in and through the world. What is the significance of this understanding of revelation? If God is revealed in and through the world, that would include scripture, even though it is a human document. Furthermore, for Schleiermacher, scripture is witness to Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, there remains a special, not just a general quality to his understanding of revelation. Both scripture and creation allow for a knowledge of God in Schleiermacher's theology.

According to him, to given observers who had conscious insight, revelation is found in and through the world, in the whole of finite and temporal reality. Over and over again in *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher makes this clear:

[T]he world is the most abundant revelation of God that we can possibly imagine. . . . [T]he world is a complete manifestation [*Offenbarung*] of the attributes of God. . . . [E]verything in the world, precisely insofar as it is ascribed to divine wisdom, must also be referred to God's redemptive or newly creating revelation. . . . Divine wisdom is the ground by virtue of which the world, viewed

⁴³ Vial, *Schleiermacher*, 90.

as the theater of redemption, is also the absolute revelation of Supreme Being, and, consequently, the world is good.⁴⁴

He conveys the same understanding of revelation—that the infinite is revealed in and through the finite—in *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. In the second Speech, an artistic discursus on the nature of true religion, Schleiermacher asserts that religion's essence “is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling.”⁴⁵ Then, he entreats his readers to become familiar with this concept, which he identifies as the hinge of his whole speech: “intuition of the universe.”⁴⁶ This is what he asserts about the universe:

[It] exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to us in every moment. Every form that it brings forth, every being to which it gives separate existence according to the fullness of life, every occurrence that spills forth from its rich, ever-fruitful womb, is an action of the same upon us. Thus to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion.⁴⁷

Again, he writes this about revelation:

What we feel and perceive in the stirrings of religion is not the nature of things but their operation upon us. . . . The universe is ceaselessly active. It is revealing itself to us every instant of our lives. . . . Religion is the process of receiving all these influences and of adopting their effects within us; and it is the process of letting them move us . . . as a representation of the infinite in our lives.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §164.2, §92.3, §168.2, §169.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799), trans. and ed. Richard Crouter, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 22. Hereafter, I will abbreviate this source as *On Religion*, (Crouter).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Addresses in Response to Its Cultured Critics* (1821), trans. and ed. Terrence N. Tice (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969), 93. From this point, I will abbreviate this source as *On Religion*, (Tice).

As Schleiermacher nears the end of the second Speech, he reflects upon some of the concepts—“miracles,” “inspirations,” “revelations,” “supernatural experiences”—which underlie the propositions that are created to explain or reflect upon the essence of religion. He asserts that these concepts are not necessary for religion itself, but that reflection needs and therefore creates them. He also acknowledges that there is often controversy over the meaning of these concepts. What is a “miracle”? he asks. His answer once again hints at his belief in the everywhere-ness of the infinite: a miracle is a sign, and “every finite entity is a sign of the infinite.”⁴⁹ Then, he adds:

The more religious you become the more of the miraculous you are likely to see all around you. Accordingly all disputing over whether certain events deserve to be called miracles or not—no matter where it occurs—simply gives me a painful impression of how poor and paltry the religious sense of the combatants is. . . . In this way, they simply indicate that they do not wish to see anything of that immediate relation to the infinite, and thus to the deity, which exists in the world.⁵⁰

Then, he asks: “What is “revelation”? Here is his well-known and classic answer: “Every new and original intuition of the universe.”⁵¹ He concludes with this zinger:

What can we say of the person who does not see miracles for himself, from his own standpoint of viewing the world, of the person whose soul yearns to draw in the world’s beauty and to be permeated by its Spirit but for whom no revelation

⁴⁹ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Crouter), 49. Schleiermacher added the following to the second edition of *On Religion*: “Thus every moment such as I have pointed out above can be seen to be revelatory, if you are properly conscious of its special character. But, in fact, every combination of perspective and feeling that has originally developed out of such a moment emerges as a revelation. To be sure, we cannot openly demonstrate it to be so, because it lies beyond conscious observation. Nonetheless, we must not only presuppose the existence of revelation in general terms. We must also assert that each person knows best for himself whether an event is merely experienced as a repetition of something from a non-revelatory source or whether that event is original and new.” Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 142.

seems to arise deep within . . . what can we say of the person who is not at least conscious of his feelings as immediate influences of the universe upon him . . . [w]hat can we say but that such a person has no religion?⁵²

In a handful of his sermons, Schleiermacher affirms this same understanding that God is revealed in and through the world. For instance, he speaks of how God is revealed in a family and wherever else love is present:

Just as God is love and God is most clearly revealed to human beings in all that love is, so it is especially true of any human love worthy of the name that it can attach itself to our feeling for the Supreme Being in our innermost selves and thereby sanctify us.⁵³

In a sermon entitled, “From a Sermon in a Time of Trouble,” he seems to implore his listeners to measure the worth of events, not in terms of pleasure or sensual well-being but “whether they contain revelations of the divine will and illuminations toward self-knowledge that make us wiser and better.”⁵⁴ He notes that love is the most common revelation of the eternal essence (*vernehmlichste Offenbarung des ewigen Wesens ist*).⁵⁵

Schleiermacher’s acceptance of an indirect connection between divine revelation and scripture must be subsumed under his conviction that divine revelation is ubiquitous in and through the whole world. Because of this, I believe he would deny that scripture

⁵² Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 143.

⁵³ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Household: A Sermonic Treatise*, trans. and ed. Dietrich Seidel and Terrence N. Tice, Schleiermacher Studies and Translations 3 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991), 188.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 203-4.

⁵⁵ Schleiermacher, *Kleine Schriften und Predigten*, ed. Hayo Gerdes and Emanuel Hirsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970), 405. Here, he refers to 1 John 4:16, that God is love, and that this is the way Christians should live their whole lives. “Love,” he writes, “is a revelation of God.”

did not provide information about God, although he would deny that God had provided the exact words to scripture's authors.⁵⁶

Communion with God Is Not Knowledge-Based

The second response that I believe Schleiermacher would make to those who claim that his understanding of revelation does not allow for a knowledge of God is this: one's theology is flawed if it is based on the assertion, as is often the case, that knowledge of God precedes communion with God. In other words, Schleiermacher would argue that a relationship with God is not knowledge-based. It is not the product of accepting a set of intellectual propositions about the world or assenting to an assortment of doctrines and dogmas about God and religion.⁵⁷

Upon what basis would Schleiermacher argue the above? First, he would assert that the essence of religion is not a knowledge of God. Rather, it is piety, and piety is not based upon knowledge. The title page to *Christian Faith* itself provides an early clue to Schleiermacher's understanding of religion's essence. There, Schleiermacher includes this quote from Anselm: "I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. . . . For those who do not believe will not experience, and those who

⁵⁶ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.1.

⁵⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton claims that Schleiermacher seems to share with the spirit of Romanticism "a distrust of how much can be achieved by rational argument and reflection alone. . . . [H]e believed in the creative power of human feeling and in the importance of lived experience, in contrast to the more cerebral rationalism of the Enlightenment. . . . He never lost the conviction characteristic of pietism that Christian faith lies neither in the acceptance of certain doctrinal ideas, nor in adopting some pattern of moral conduct, but in a trustful and experiential relationship with God." Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 210-11.

have not experienced will not understand.”⁵⁸ In *On Religion*, Schleiermacher identifies the essence of religion and the “contemplation of pious men” as

the immediate consciousness of the universal being of all finite things in and through the infinite, of all temporal things in and through the eternal. To seek and to find this infinite and eternal factor in all that lives and moves, in all growth and change, in all action and passion, and to have and to know life itself only in immediate feeling—this is religion. . . . [R]eligion is, indeed, a life in the infinite nature of the whole, in the one and all, in God—a having and possessing of all in God and of God in all. Knowledge and knowing, however, it is not, either of the world or of God; it only acknowledges these things without being either.⁵⁹

Again, he claims:

[At base] religion could not and would not ever originate as pure knowledge. It does not arise from the sheer drive to know. What we feel and perceive in the stirrings of religion is not the nature of things but their operation upon us. What you may know or believe about the nature of things, therefore, lies far outside the sphere of religion.⁶⁰

Under the propositions borrowed from Ethics in the Introduction of *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher claims: “The piety that constitutes the basis of all ecclesial communities, regarded purely in and of itself, is neither a knowing nor a doing but a distinct formation of feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness.”⁶¹ He does not deny the connection of

⁵⁸ Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt, Zweite Auflage (1830/31)*, ed. Rolf Schäfer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 1. This quote is omitted from the title page of the English translation.

⁵⁹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 79.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶¹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §3.

piety to knowing and doing, but asserts that “neither of these constitutes the essence of piety.”⁶²

Naturally, Schleiermacher was criticized in his day for holding this position. For example, among those who held a different view of the relation of knowledge to piety was Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider (1776-1848), a German theologian who evaluated the *Glaubenslehre* in two essays and in an Appendix to his theological textbook.⁶³ He held that

the essence of piety is not feeling, but a combination of knowledge, action, and feeling. Sense objects are to be distinguished from ideas or religious objects. The former make impressions that produce either pleasure or pain. Prior to this impression upon us, no knowledge of the object is required. An idea, however, must first be apprehended before it can influence the feeling. Otherwise, one would have a feeling only of something obscure or indefinite rather than a feeling of God. Therefore, a knowledge of God rather than a feeling is essential to piety.⁶⁴

Schleiermacher writes a rebuttal to Bretschneider’s critique and a defense of his own understanding of the relation between knowledge and piety in his first letter to Dr. Lücke. His rebuttal seems to be founded upon what sensible people would conclude after thoughtful reflection upon their own experience. He writes that when there are so many

⁶² Ibid., §3.4.

⁶³ James Duke and Francis Fiorenza described Bretschneider’s textbook, *Handbuch der Dogmatik der evangelischen lutherischen Kirche; oder Versuch einer beurtheilenden Darstellung der Grundsätze welche diese Kirche in ihren symbolischen Schriften ausgesprochen hat* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1814-18), “among the most widely used texts of its day.” Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, trans. James Duke and Francis Fiorenza, American Academy of Religion Texts and Translations Series 3 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 97. Hereafter, this source will be abbreviated as *On the Glaubenslehre*.

⁶⁴ Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 105. See Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, “Über das Princip der christlichen Glaubenslehre des H. Prof. Schleiermacher: Ein Versuch,” *Journal für Prediger* 66 (1825): 9-16; *Grundansichten* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1828), 15-18.

thousands of people whose representations of God are highly imperfect, yet whose piety is simple and pure, “may I then not believe that piety as the determination of the self-consciousness could be present even before one has come to a concept of the idea of God?”⁶⁵ Then, he imagines the possibility of

a group of intellectuals who have conceived of the idea of God and who, as they do with every other important idea, have worked it out intellectually and drawn the consequences from it, but whose feeling for the idea never emerges and never makes any impact on their lives, should I nevertheless not be allowed to say that the conception of the idea of God, considered in and by itself, is not part of piety and is not necessarily the first element in piety?⁶⁶

A second reason Schleiermacher holds that communion with God must not be knowledge-based is his strong conviction that saving faith must be accessible to all, which it would not be, he claims, if the acquisition of knowledge necessarily precedes relationship with God.⁶⁷ We could legitimately infer that Schleiermacher’s claim here is due to his strong belief in spiritual egalitarianism. Because he believes saving faith is equally accessible to all, he is convinced that it cannot come by knowing. He feels strongly about this: “I could never confess that my faith in Christ is derived from knowledge or philosophy,” he adamantly acknowledges to Dr. Lücke.⁶⁸

Rejecting the notion that “religion is the daughter of theology,” he powerfully claims that this assertion must be rejected by those who have experienced piety in their

⁶⁵ Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 39.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Schleiermacher follows a similar line of reasoning in *Christian Faith*, §128, when he argues that the authority of scripture cannot be the foundation of faith in Christ. I will discuss his reasoning there in Chapter Five, “Schleiermacher and the Authority of Scripture.”

⁶⁸ Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 63.

youth before they even had any thought of their future vocation and who, therefore, know from their own particular history that “piety is independent of every insight into any system of comprehended ideas.”⁶⁹ “Do we not have every reason to thank God,” he asks, “that he has revealed piety to the immature especially, that is, to those whose piety would not amount to much at all if it were to be based upon a *complexus* of ideas?”⁷⁰ Again, he probes:

[H]ow would our evangelical church fare if living evangelical Christianity had not struck such deep roots in unspeculative and unphilosophical persons whose piety is so far from being based on thought and grounded in an insight into a system of ideas that by and large they came only gradually to think about their piety? Thanks be to God, many others now share my conviction that our piety is not really that different from that of such persons after all.⁷¹

Schleiermacher reasons that the position that an idea of God must precede an experience of God presupposes that those who are unable to be affected inwardly first by an object of thought and to grasp a set of ideas other than those related to their own concerns either have no piety at all or have only a piety derived from that of the theologians rather than from their own personal lives. If this were the case, he argues, there would then emerge “a hierarchy of intellectual cultured, a priesthood of speculation, which for my part cannot find to be very Protestant and which, whenever I had the fate to encounter it, has never appeared without a certain popish tinge.”⁷² Then, he adds, that

⁶⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 41.

such a position naturally entails a different view of the ministry of the Word: it makes every Christian sermon into an instruction. Schleiermacher saw the task of ministry as that of giving “a clear and enlivening description of a common inner experience.”⁷³ He explains:

[W]hat emerges as doctrinal teaching is really only a preparation and a means to this end [to the end of giving a “clear and enlivening description of a common inner experience”]. We do not fancy that we are introducing into our church communities something completely new, as though in the first course of study we communicate the ideas to them and then in a second course we base piety on the ideas. Rather, what is possessed is shared in common, and we serve our brothers only by explaining more clearly to them what it is and so awaken in them the joy in it as well as concern for it.⁷⁴

If communion with God, saving faith, and a relationship to God is not preceded by knowledge, upon what does Schleiermacher believe it is based? The answer to this question represents a third reason why Schleiermacher argues against a content/knowledge-based piety. His answer is this: what is redemptive is the experience Christians have of Christ as the mediator of a relationship to God.⁷⁵ For him, experience, rather than knowledge, is the locus of revelation.

The Revelation of God in the Feeling of Absolute Dependence

I have demonstrated that, in general, Schleiermacher believes that the revelation of God may be found in and through the whole world. Now, I want to explain his understanding of a second and more specific locus of revelation: the feeling of absolute

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ I will have more to say about Schleiermacher’s christology in Chapter Five.

dependence. Under the Propositions borrowed from Ethics in the Introduction of

Christian Faith, Schleiermacher writes:

God is given to us in feeling in an original way; and if we speak of an original revelation (*Offenbarung*) of God to man or in man, the meaning will always be just this, that, along with the absolute dependence which characterizes not only man but all temporal existence, there is given to man also the immediate self-consciousness of it, which becomes a consciousness of God.⁷⁶

What is the content of this “original revelation”? Schleiermacher’s answer is that it is nothing less than a consciousness of God. How is this consciousness of God manifested?

His answer is that the consciousness of God is embodied or expressed in the feeling of absolute dependence. He writes: “[T]o feel oneself absolutely dependent and to be conscious of being in relation with God are one and the same thing.”⁷⁷

One may wonder upon what basis Schleiermacher can call the feeling of absolute dependence an original revelation of God. His explanation is grounded in the way he perceives the psychological makeup of human beings. He asserts that in every self-consciousness there are two elements, which we might call, respectively, a self-caused element (*ein Sichselbstsetzen*) and a non-self-caused element (*ein Sichselbstnichtsogesetzhaben*).⁷⁸ These two elements correspond, respectively, to activity and receptivity in every person. That is, human beings are aware that in every subject there is an element that acts upon the world and another element upon which the

⁷⁶ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §4.4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, §4.1.

world acts. In brief, there is a part that is active and a part that is passive in every self-consciousness.

The element which expresses movement and activity is the feeling of freedom. According to Schleiermacher, however, humans do not have a feeling of absolute freedom.⁷⁹ This is evident, he claims, because even when we are exercising freedom we know that our existence is not due to our own spontaneous activity alone. Rather, our existence is given to us. Alternatively, the element in the self-consciousness which expresses a receptivity from some outside quarter is the feeling of dependence. And, contrary to the fact that humans do not have a feeling of absolute freedom, they do have a feeling of absolute dependence. Here is Schleiermacher's argument:

[T]he self-consciousness which accompanies all our activity, and therefore, since that is never zero, accompanies our whole existence, and negatives absolute freedom, is itself precisely a consciousness of absolute dependence; for it is the consciousness that the whole of our spontaneous activity comes from a source outside of us in just the same sense in which anything towards which we should have a feeling of absolute freedom must have proceeded entirely from ourselves.⁸⁰

Schleiermacher grounds his understanding of the equivalence of the feeling of absolute dependence and a feeling of being related to God on the meaning of "God." He explains that "God" is the term we use to designate the "Whence of our receptive and active existence." He adds: "[T]his is for us the really original signification of that word."⁸¹ This "whence," however, cannot be the world or any single part of the world

⁷⁹ Ibid., §4.3.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., §4.4.

because “we have a feeling of freedom (though, indeed, a limited one) in relation to the world.” Furthermore, we are parts of the world and we exercise an influence on parts of the world. Schleiermacher points out that “God signifies for us simply that which is the co-determinant in this feeling,” the feeling of absolute dependence. According to this line of reasoning, original revelation is “a disclosure of the ‘whence’ of the feeling of absolute dependence.”⁸² In other words, the feeling of absolute dependence is to be identified with consciousness of God.

There seems to be an exact structural parallel between the argument in proposition 4 and the argument of the second Speech in *On Religion*.⁸³ Schleiermacher’s aim in the second Speech is to explain the essence, or basic nature, of piety. He says that the nature of real religion “is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition (*Anschauung*) and feeling (*Gefühl*).”⁸⁴ Then, near the end of that Speech he asks: “What is revelation?” His answer is, “Every original and new intuition of the universe is one.”⁸⁵

What did Schleiermacher mean by the term, *Anschauung*? Vial believes that Schleiermacher defined and used the term as Kant had.⁸⁶ For Kant, “[A]n intuition is

⁸² Wyman, “Revelation and the Doctrine of Faith: Historical Revelation within the Limits of Historical Consciousness,” 45. See also Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §94.2: “[T]o ascribe to Christ an absolutely powerful God-consciousness, and to attribute to Him an existence of God in Him, are exactly the same thing. The expression, ‘the existence of God in anyone,’ can only express the relation of the omnipresence of God to this one.”

⁸³ I am indebted to Wyman for pointing this out.

⁸⁴ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Crouter), 22.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 49. Schleiermacher adds the following to the second edition of *On Religion*: “Thus every moment such as I have pointed out above can be seen to be revelatory, if you are properly conscious of its special character. But, in fact, every combination of perspective and feeling that has originally developed out of such a moment emerges as a revelation.” Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 141-142.

⁸⁶ Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 68.

such a representation as immediately depends upon the presence of the object.”⁸⁷ One could say that “impression” could be another synonym for what Schleiermacher believes *Anschauung* means.⁸⁸ This is so because Schleiermacher speaks of the influence of the object upon the subject in revelation. He says: “All intuition proceeds from an influence of the intuited on the one who intuits, from an original and independent activity of the former, which is then grasped, apprehended, and conceived by the latter according to one’s own nature.”⁸⁹ Again, he says: “[W]hat you thus intuit and perceive is not the nature of things, but their action upon you. What you know or believe about the nature of things lies far beyond the realm of intuition.”⁹⁰

What does Schleiermacher mean when he writes that revelation is an intuition of the universe? He seems to mean that the universe is that object—in this case the whole of finite and temporal reality—which presents itself or is presented to a subject. He writes:

⁸⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, ed. Beryl Logan, Routledge Philosophers in Focus Series (London: Routledge, 1996), 51. Kant writes: “Cognition refers to or ‘presents’ objects in many different ways, but it is ‘intuition’ (*Anschauung*) by which it refers to them *directly*, or *without mediation*. An intuition is a direct presentation (*Vorstellung*) of an object. Or, in other words, an intuition is the object as given.” Douglas Burnham, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, Indiana Philosophical Guides (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 37. Tice gives the basic definition of *Anschauung* as “perception.” He writes: “For Schleiermacher, *Anschauung* is indeed always a relatively internal phenomenon, because it is an internal mental function that registers what comes into the sensorium from relatively external sources, including the body. Nevertheless, the referent is always external relative to any given affective state. This is why the most frequent, ordinary uses of *Anschauung* must be translated ‘perception,’ as they tend to be wherever the word is placed.” (Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 23-24.)

⁸⁸ “To register the impression from without is the function of *Anschauung*.” Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 23.

⁸⁹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Crouter), 24-25.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25. Vial notes that Schleiermacher shares Kant’s conviction that one cannot know things-in-themselves. “Schleiermacher does not think that, by intuiting something, we pierce the Kantian veil and have direct contact with a thing-in-itself.” Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 68.

The universe exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to us in every moment. Every form that it brings forth, every being to which it gives separate existence according to the fullness of life, every occurrence that spills forth from its rich, every-fruitful womb, is an action of the same upon us. Thus to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion.⁹¹

Elsewhere, he explains further:

What we feel and perceive in the stirrings of religion is not the nature of things but their operation upon us. . . . The universe is ceaselessly active. It is revealing itself to us every instant of our lives. . . . Religion is the process of receiving all these influences and of adopting their effects within us; and it is the process of letting them move us . . . as a representation of the infinite in our lives.⁹²

Anschauung and *Gefühl* are certainly key terms in Schleiermacher's lexicon.

Schleiermacher clearly makes a distinction between the two, though they reside at the same level of mental functioning and can add components as they extend to thinking, willing, and acting. He writes:

[R]ecall that every intuition (*Anschauung*) is, by its very nature, connected with a feeling (*Gefühl*). Your senses mediate the connection between the object and yourselves; the same influence of the object, which reveals its existence to you, must stimulate them in various ways and produce a change in your inner consciousness. . . . The same actions of the universe through which it reveals itself to you in the finite also bring it into a new relationship to your mind and your condition; in the act of intuiting it, you must necessarily be seized by various feelings.⁹³

⁹¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Crouter), 25..

⁹² Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 93.

⁹³Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Crouter), 29.

Vial understands *Anschauung* and *Gefühl* to be “two sides of the same coin of experience.”⁹⁴ He writes: “One can understand intuition, for Schleiermacher, as the objective side of experience (the action on us of something outside us). ‘Feeling’ he defines not primarily as emotion but as the subjective side of experience.”⁹⁵

The Revelation of God in Christ

A third locus of revelation, and the principal one for Schleiermacher, is Christ. He describes Christ as “the supreme divine revelation” (*die höchste göttliche Offenbarung*).⁹⁶ In his second letter to Lücke, and just after wondering what challenges will be posed to Christianity by natural science, he encourages Lücke to see if he can dismiss, in light of the modern worldview,

what has been until now essential to Christianity: belief in a divine revelation in the person of Jesus (*des Glaubens an eine göttliche Offenbarung in der Person Jesu*) from whom everyone can and should derive a new, powerful heavenly life.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Vial, *Schleiermacher*, 69. See also, Wyman, “Revelation and the Doctrine of Faith,” 41-42. Tice defines these two words as perception (*Anschauung*) and feeling — “an immediate awareness of God’s presence within communities of Christians, transforming and motivating one’s innermost being.” Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study: Revised Translation of the 1811 and 1830 Editions*, trans. and ed. Terrence N. Tice, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 134. Hereafter, this source will be abbreviated as *Brief Outline*.

⁹⁵ Vial, *Schleiermacher*, 69.

⁹⁶ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §14, p.s. Interestingly, Wyman asserts that there does not need to be a doctrine of revelation in the body of the *Glaubenslehre*, since there is a christology. His point is that Schleiermacher’s christology embodies his doctrine of divine revelation. Wyman, “Revelation and the Doctrine of Faith,” 49.

⁹⁷ Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 62.

Several times in *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher refers to “the revelation of God in Christ (*die Offenbarung Gottes in Christo*).”⁹⁸ What is his understanding of this concept? First, he believes it is Christ’s God-consciousness that is the revelation of God in him. Christ’s God-consciousness is his awareness that arises from God; it is the presence of God in him.⁹⁹ It is the level of that God-consciousness that makes Christ’s experience of God unique. Schleiermacher explains:

[T]he Redeemer¹⁰⁰ is the same as all human beings by virtue of the selfsame character of human nature, but he is distinguished from all other human beings by the steady strength (*stetige Kräftigkeit*) of his God-consciousness, a strength that was an actual being of God in him.¹⁰¹

Not wanting his readers to misunderstand what he means by this, he adds that “to attribute an absolutely strong God-consciousness to Christ and to ascribe to him a being of God in him are entirely one and the same thing.”¹⁰² According to Schleiermacher’s understanding, this God-consciousness was “co-positd” (*mitgesezten*) in Christ’s self-consciousness.¹⁰³ Furthermore, it exists uniquely in him alone. After explaining that

⁹⁸ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §§14, p.s., 47.1, 103.2, 164.2, 168.2.

⁹⁹ See Catherine L. Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 17-18.

¹⁰⁰ It is not the aim of this dissertation to examine Schleiermacher’s christology or his soteriology. However, I will add here that what is redemptive in Schleiermacher’s theology is that disciples of Jesus encounter his perfect God-consciousness. This is related to the reason scripture is an authoritative norm for theology: it is the first expression of this experience. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Six.

¹⁰¹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §94. The phrase, which is translated, “an actual being of God in him,” is *ein eigentliches Sein Gottes in ihm*. This phrase may be a bit misleading. Schleiermacher is only expressing his belief that Christ is a be-ing (*Sein*) of God, not that there is a strict identity between the two.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, §94.2. For other references to the “being of God” in Christ, see *Christian Faith*, §100.1 and §103.2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

God's being can be conceived only as "pure activity" and that there is "no being of God in any individual thing, but only a being of God in the world," Schleiermacher asserts that

Christ is deemed to be the sole and original locus for the being of God in human nature, and he alone is the "other" in whom there is an actual being of God—that is, he does so inasmuch as we posit God-consciousness in his self-consciousness as determining every element of his life steadily and exclusively. In consequence, he has this status inasmuch as we also posit this complete indwelling of Supreme Being as his distinctive nature and his innermost self.¹⁰⁴

Second, Schleiermacher believes that this revelation, the appearance in history of this perfect God-consciousness is, indeed, due to divine causality.¹⁰⁵ When Schleiermacher discusses revelation under the propositions borrowed from the Philosophy of Religion in the Introduction to *Christian Faith*,¹⁰⁶ he asserts that all will agree that the term "revealed" is never applied either to what is uncovered by one person and passed on to others or to what one person works out for himself and passes on to others. It "presupposes a divine communication (*Mittheilung*) and declaration

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Tice includes this note just here in his translation of *Christian Faith*: "Cf., the statement at this place in the first edition (KGA I/7.2, 29): 'God was in him [the Redeemer] in the highest sense in which God can ever be in anyone' (*dass Gott in ihm war in dem höchsten Sinne, in welchem überall Gott in Einem sein kann*). At this place in this second edition Schleiermacher clarifies the point that no one else actually reaches the same level of God-consciousness that is to be seen in Christ."

¹⁰⁵ Schleiermacher describes "the divine causality" as "the divine government of the world," which is expressed as divine love and wisdom. Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §§164-165; See also Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Schleiermacher's discussion of revelation in the Introduction of the *Glaubenslehre* appears under propositions which belong to Ethics, the Philosophy of Religion, and Apologetics. Ethics, in Schleiermacher's architectonic of knowledge, has to do with the science of reason and history, or the human sciences, and runs parallel to Physics, the science of nature. He understands the science of Ethics as a field, which encompasses all human activity, most particularly the activity that furthers the interpenetration of reason and the material world. By Philosophy of Religion, Schleiermacher refers to the study of the phenomenon of piety in human nature and the different forms of religion. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, §39. Apologetics has to do with the study of Christianity, in general, and Protestantism, in particular. For a discussion of Schleiermacher's architectonic of knowledge, see Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 33-34.

(*Kundmachung*).”¹⁰⁷ In this sense, he adds, the word is generally applied to the origin of religious communions. Then, he provides a definition of historical revelation that is not only applicable to Christianity but also to all positive religions. He claims that “the concept ‘revelation’ designates the originative character of the fact that underlies a given religious community.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, he defines revelation as that which explains the starting point from which any religion can be traced.

Schleiermacher adds that the “original fact” which shapes the life of any new community cannot be explained by historical antecedents. In the Christian community, of course, this original fact is Jesus Christ and the redemption accomplished in and through him. According to Schleiermacher, this original fact, which is the foundation of the community’s life, cannot be explained wholly in terms of the natural forces and causes that precede it. Appeal must therefore be made to divine causality as its ultimate source.¹⁰⁹

In fact, Schleiermacher calls the appearance of the Redeemer in history “that one great miracle”¹¹⁰ and “the miracle of miracles.”¹¹¹ He writes that the redemption accomplished by Christ is through his influence, through the communication of his

¹⁰⁷ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §10, p.s.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. For Schleiermacher, this also explains why the content of revelation cannot be information. He reasons that if revelation is equated with doctrine and propositions, “then nothing supernatural was required for their production” (Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §10, p.s.). Naturally, Schleiermacher also traces to the divine causality “our consciousness of fellowship with God.” See *Christian Faith*, §164.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., §47.1

¹¹¹ Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 64.

sinless perfection, and because of the potency of his God-consciousness. So, he explains the warrant for believing that the appearance of Jesus was “supernatural”:

This God-consciousness, manifesting itself in this potency, can have come into existence only outside the sinful corporate life. And since the whole human race is included in this sinful corporate life, we must believe that this God-consciousness had a supernatural origin, though only in the sense which has been postulated above.¹¹²

In what sense does Schleiermacher believe that the appearance of an archetypal God-consciousness in history had a supernatural origin? He elaborates in the *Glaubenslehre*, §13. At first glance, the proposition may sound like a denial that Christian revelation is “outside the human and natural order.”¹¹³ The proposition states: “As divine revelation, the appearance of the Redeemer in history is neither something absolutely supernatural nor something absolutely superrational.”¹¹⁴ Although Schleiermacher begins his discussion of this proposition by asserting again that the origin of any religious communion can never be explained by “the condition of the circle in which it arose and progressed,” he quickly suggests that there is nothing to prevent us from assuming “that the emergence of such a life would be the effect of the force for development that indwells our nature as a species.”¹¹⁵ He claims that founders of

¹¹² Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §88.4. Just here, Schleiermacher includes a footnote to compare §13.1.

¹¹³ This is the language Schleiermacher uses to describe the sense in which we find the word “revelation” as it is applied to the origin of religious societies, “that they originally came from heaven or were proclaimed by Deity in some way which fell outside the human and natural order” (*Christian Faith*, §10, p.s.).

¹¹⁴ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §13. Tice notes here that “it might be clearer to say ‘supra’ (above and beyond) rather than ‘super’ (which could mean ‘heightened.’)” For a fine summary and explanation of *Christian Faith*, §13, see Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 41-42. See also *Christian Faith*, §92.4.

¹¹⁵ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §13.

religious communions are specially-endowed individuals, who “are made fruitful from the general wellspring of life (*Lebensquell*).”¹¹⁶ Then, he adds, that we have to regard the fact that such individuals do appear from time to time to be a natural occurrence (*Gesetzmäßiges*).

For Schleiermacher, there is no real comparison between Christ and the founders of other religions, even though it may be said that all have special endowments. Christ and Christianity are distinctively different. Schleiermacher reasons that the contributions of other founders of religious societies are limited to particular times and places and are destined to be submerged in Christ. Too, only Christ is in a position to enliven the entire human race to its higher state. He asserts that a person who does not accept Christ as providing divine revelation in this generally extended sense cannot intend Christianity to be a permanent phenomenon.¹¹⁷

Notwithstanding this claim that there is a distinction between Christ and all other human beings, Schleiermacher insists that there is nothing to prohibit one from saying that Christ’s appearance, “even as the becoming human (*Menschwerden*) of the Son of God, would be something natural.”¹¹⁸ This is true for two reasons, according to Schleiermacher. First, it must be possible for there to be a natural explanation for Christ’s appearance or for an accompanying Christian revelation since it has been proven

¹¹⁶ Ibid., §13.1.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Schleiermacher does not feel the need to “draw boundaries between what is natural and what is absolutely supernatural in actual reality.” See Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 64-65.

possible for human beings to “take up what is divine into oneself (*das göttliche . . . in sich aufzunehmen*).”¹¹⁹ Christ was and he did; he was a human being who received, and thus, took up the divine into himself. Second, if one rules out the possibility of a natural explanation for the appearance of Christ, one would have to say that what is restoratively divine made its appearance in Jesus and in no other because of an arbitrary act of God. Schleiermacher cannot accept this explanation. To do so would necessitate an anthropathic (*anthropopathische*) view of God, which, he asserts, even scripture does not support. Rather, Schleiermacher refers to Galatians 4:4 and claims that scripture views the appearance of Christ as a conditional event, that is, as an action of human nature and one that developed naturally.¹²⁰

Schleiermacher explains that he subscribes to the notion that the appearance of Christ was due to “an initiating divine activity” which is supernatural, but that, at the same time, what was supernatural became historically natural.¹²¹ He adds:

[T]he appearance of the Redeemer in the midst of this natural development is no longer a supernatural emergence of a new state of development, but simply one conditioned by that which precedes—though certainly its connection with the former is to be found only in the unity of the divine thought.¹²²

Again, Schleiermacher asserts the supernatural origin of Christ, but in a natural way:

Now this second Adam is placed within the historical interconnectedness of human nature, and indeed simply as an individual human being, though not from

¹¹⁹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §13.1.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, §88.4.

¹²² *Ibid.* See also *Christian Faith*, §47.1.

within this earlier interconnectedness of human nature but in relation to it as a supernatural phenomenon. This being the case, he, as well as his entire efficacious action, stands under the law of historical development, and that development is completed through its gradual spread outward from the point of his appearance over the whole of humanity.¹²³

Schleiermacher views the appearance of Christ and the new corporate life made possible by him as the completion of the creation of human nature.¹²⁴

Although he asserts that the appearance of Christ in history is not *absolutely* supernatural, he claims that it is, nonetheless, supernatural. For Schleiermacher, Christ is the Redeemer. Because he believes that no one else is able to accomplish redemption, he reasons that the state of God-consciousness by which the Redeemer accomplishes redemption is inexplicable on the basis of “reason that uniformly indwells all other human beings.”¹²⁵ If it were otherwise, then others could effect redemption, which, of course, he believes they cannot do. Moreover, he asserts that in redeemed people there are states of mind which are caused solely by Christ’s communication or influence. How shall these mental states be explained? Schleiermacher here asserts that these states cannot be explained solely by the reason which has dwelled within them from birth. Tice

¹²³ Ibid., §89.2.

¹²⁴ Ibid., §89.

¹²⁵ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §13.2.

summarizes it well: “The appearance of the Redeemer in history is indeed supernatural, but not as if the possibility for assimilating it did not already exist in human nature.”¹²⁶

When Schleiermacher discusses the prophetic office of Christ and his teaching activity in *Christian Faith* he asserts that the source of Jesus’s teaching was not the law, as it was for the prophets of Israel, nor was it a development of the ethics current among the people. It did not spring from universal human reason. Rather, the source of his teaching was “the absolutely original revelation of God in him.”¹²⁷ Schleiermacher adds that Christ’s self-determination to teach was the task of satisfying fully the powerful God-consciousness in him.

This is one additional reason why Schleiermacher does not see a direct connection of identity between revelation and Scripture. All that the writers of the New Testament scriptures taught, Schleiermacher believed, must have derived from Christ. For, “the original divine declaration of whatever is contained in the sacred scriptures also has to be present in Christ himself.”¹²⁸ Schleiermacher’s conclusion is that “the speaking and writing of the apostles moved as they were by the Spirit, was also a communicating of the divine revelation that existed in Christ.”¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 41. Here is how Kelsey describes the appearance of Jesus: “Miracles are superfluous for redemption through Christ; they don’t help us to receive his God-consciousness ([*Christian Faith*,] §103.1). The only miracle that matters is the appearance of Christ’s sinless perfection in a living human person, which is not really a miracle. Instead, the appearance of the Redeemer is part of the unfolding of God’s original creation—part of the intention for nature, though not an intention we could achieve on our own.” (Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher*, 93.)

¹²⁷ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §103.2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, §130.1.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

It should be obvious by now, that Schleiermacher's understanding of the nature or essence of revelation is in stark contrast to the content-based/supernaturalist model of revelation, generally, or to Carl F. H. Henry's doctrinal model, specifically. One of the chief differences is that for Schleiermacher, revelation does not operate in the activity of knowing, but in the activity of feeling.¹³⁰ Therefore, we might say that, for him, the nature of revelation is not cognitive, but experiential. This partially explains his disinclination to equate revelation to dogma, doctrine, facts, or information. For him, revelation does not occur on the level of knowing. After granting in the Introduction to *Christian Faith* that "there is a divine causality" to revelation and that revelation is "an activity which aims at and furthers the salvation of human beings," Schleiermacher states: "But I am unwilling to accept . . . that it operates upon any human being as a knowing being. For that would make the revelation to be originally and essentially doctrine; and I do not believe that we can adopt that position."¹³¹

In discussing Schleiermacher's understanding of the relationship of divine revelation to scripture—that there is only an indirect connection of identity between the two—I have compared his understanding of this concept to the content-based/supernaturalist model of revelation. The latter tends to affirm a direct connection between revelation and scripture and asserts that divine revelation is given in words with

¹³⁰ Just here I am intentionally using terms that Schleiermacher used to describe the tripartite division of selfhood (feeling, knowing, and willing). This terminology is found in *Christian Faith*, §3.2. Also, I refer to his understanding of the two forms of consciousness, knowing and feeling, which constitute the "abiding in self" (*Insichbleiben*). See *Christian Faith*, §3.3.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, §10, p.s.

strict propositional meanings, which are authored by God. Schleiermacher does not share this perspective. His understanding of divine revelation is that it is located in the experience of God in the world, in the feeling of absolute dependence, and in Christ, the appearance of the archetypal God-consciousness in history. I have shown that the chief criticism of Schleiermacher's understanding of revelation, that it does not allow for a knowledge of God, is an unfair one. Moreover, I have demonstrated that this criticism, according to Schleiermacher, arises from what seems to be a flawed understanding of how relationship with God is achieved. In the next chapter, I turn to a discussion of Schleiermacher's understanding of "inspiration" and the identity and influence of the Spirit.

Chapter Four: Schleiermacher and the Meaning of Inspiration

In the previous chapter I showed that it is erroneous to claim that Schleiermacher did not believe in the reality of divine revelation. He believed that God is revealed in and through the world, in the experience of God in the world, in the feeling of absolute dependence, and in Christ. I also demonstrated that while he accepted an indirect connection between scripture and divine revelation, since scripture is a part of the world in which God is revealed, he did not believe that scripture is its locus. For him, there is no warrant to support the claim of a direct connection between divine revelation and the New Testament.

Similarly, I will argue in this chapter that it is erroneous to claim that Schleiermacher did not believe in divine inspiration. As I did in Chapter Three, I will begin by comparing his view of inspiration as it relates to scripture with a standard content-based/supernaturalist one. In doing so, I will also be describing the basic features of his conception of this doctrine. I will then point out some of the primary criticisms of his understanding, in particular the complaints that his interpretation renders God to be relatively inactive in the process of writing down scripture and that it over exaggerates the immanence of God. Finally, I want to trace out what I believe would be his response to his critics and the reasoning that underlies it.

Before moving into the body of this chapter, I want to preface my remarks with something of a disclaimer. While the subject of divine inspiration vis-à-vis scripture is important to many content-based/supernaturalists for whom it is foundational, Schleiermacher seems to treat it as a subordinate concern in his writings. It just does not seem to be very important or crucial to him.¹ As proof of this, we might consider something he wrote in his Second Letter to Dr. Lücke:

The belief in a special inspiration or revelation of God that continued up to a certain point of time in the Jewish nation is one that contemporary studies of Jewish history do little to corroborate. Nor do I think it very likely that the results of these studies will lend that belief much more support. Consequently, it seems to me to be essential that I state as clearly as possible my view and strong feeling that faith in God's revelation in Christ is not dependent upon such belief. If our doctrine of faith were a collection or system of decisions about all the true or alleged facts of revelation, then of course a decision would have to be made about this point, too. But, since it is only an account of Christian faith as such, we ought not place this additional burden on ourselves.²

I believe Schleiermacher would also apply to New Testament scripture what he wrote above regarding the possible special inspiration of Jewish scripture: having to prove the legitimacy of biblical inspiration is an additional burden that we need not place on ourselves. As I will lay out in later chapters, for Schleiermacher, Christian faith (and biblical authority) is not based on establishing an understanding of the Christian doctrine of biblical inspiration with certainty. Having offered this disclaimer, what, then, is Schleiermacher's conception of inspiration?

¹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §14. For him, it is faith in Jesus, viewed as the Redeemer, that is primary.

² Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 65-66.

Henry's Doctrine of Inspiration Vis-à-vis Scripture

For the purpose of clarifying Schleiermacher's understanding of a key doctrine that tends to be closely related to biblical authority by comparing this doctrine to a classic content-based/supernaturalist model, I began the last chapter with a brief description of Carl F. H. Henry's understanding of revelation. Similarly, and for the same purpose, I want to begin this chapter with a description of Henry's conception of inspiration.³

I noted in Chapter Three that the eleventh thesis of Henry's magnum opus *God, Revelation and Authority* states: "The Bible is a reservoir and conduit of divine truth."⁴ Henry's twelfth thesis must surely be intended to provide justification for the claims of thesis number eleven. It asserts: "The Holy Spirit superintends the communication of divine revelation, first as the inspirer and then as the illuminator and interpreter of the scripturally given Word of God."⁵ For Henry, the Bible is a reservoir of divine truth *because* it is divine revelation, which revelation is inspired by the Holy Spirit. What, however, does Henry mean by the phrase "inspired by the Holy Spirit"? What is his understanding of "inspiration"?

³ For a discussion of different models of inspiration see Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 497-506; Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 8-63; Robert Gnuse, *The Authority of the Bible: Theories of Inspiration, Revelation and the Canon of Scripture* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 6-62; Mark J. Zia, *What Are They Saying about Biblical Inspiration* (New York: Paulist Press, 2011); and Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972). For an excellent summary of the doctrine of inspiration since the Reformation, see William E. Nix, "The Doctrine of Inspiration Since the Reformation, Part II: Changing Climates of Opinion," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27, no. 4 (December 1984): 439-457.

⁴ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 2:13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4:129.

To provide a framework for unpacking Henry's conception of inspiration, as well as to provide points of comparison with Schleiermacher's understanding, I will now discuss some of the key features of their viewpoints by addressing these two questions: What is the essence of inspiration? and What is its locus?

First, Henry believes that, essentially, inspiration is the connection that occurs between God's power and knowledge and the literary capabilities of select human beings for the sake of producing a written account of divine revelation. "Inspiration is a supernatural influence upon divinely chosen prophets and apostles," he asserts, "whereby the Spirit of God assures the truth and trustworthiness of the oral and written proclamation."⁶ Attendant to this definition, he adds that historic evangelical Christianity considers the Bible to be the essential textbook because, in view of the aforementioned quality, it inscripturates divinely revealed truth in verbal form.

Henry finds justification for defining inspiration as a "supernatural influence" of the Holy Spirit in two biblical texts. The first is 2 Timothy 3:16, which states: "All scripture is inspired by God."⁷ The Greek word that is translated "inspired" is *theopneustos*. The literal meaning of the word is "God-breathed." Commenting on this term and scripture, Henry writes: "The Scriptures in their written form are a product of

⁶ Ibid., 4:129.

⁷ All English translations of scripture are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

divine spiration, that is, are divinely ‘breathed out’ and therefore owe their unique reality to the life-giving breath of God.”⁸ The second text is 2 Peter 1:19-21:

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Regarding this passage, Henry writes that, first of all, the apostle “disavows its human derivation,” then he affirms the origin of scripture to be divine by the phrase “men spoke from God.”⁹ His conclusion is that both passages “unqualifiedly assert the divine origin of Scripture.”¹⁰ He insists, therefore, that “God is the ultimate author of Scripture” and that “[t]he Holy Spirit is the communicator of the prophetic-apostolic writings.”¹¹ One

⁸ Ibid., 4:131. Just here, Henry sees an allusion to Genesis 2:7.

⁹ Ibid., 4:132.

¹⁰ Ibid. Henry finds support for his understanding of inspiration not only in the biblical text itself but also in the tradition of the church. He refers with approval to what Benjamin B. Warfield wrote on the subject of inspiration: “The Church . . . has held from the beginning that the Bible is the Word of God in such a sense that its words, though written by men and bearing indelibly impressed upon them the marks of their human origin, were written, nevertheless, under such an influence of the Holy Ghost as to be also the words of God, the adequate expression of His mind and will. It has always recognized that this conception of co-authorship implies that the Spirit’s superintendence extends to the choice of the words by the human authors (verbal inspiration), and preserves its product from everything inconsistent with a divine authorship” (Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 173). In fact, Henry is certainly in Warfield’s theological lineage. Warfield believed in verbal plenary inspiration because “it is the settled faith of the universal church of God” (*The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 106). To substantiate this claim, he wrote: “[T]he primary ground on which it has been held by the church as the true doctrine is that it is the doctrine of the Biblical writers themselves, and has therefore the whole mass of evidence for it which goes to show that the Biblical writers are trustworthy as doctrinal guides” (Ibid., 173). He believed that the following was sufficient evidence to support this doctrine: 1) The doctrine held and taught by the Church is the doctrine held and taught by the Biblical writers themselves; 2) There is evidence—“internal and external, objective and subjective, historical and philosophical, human and divine—which goes to show that the Biblical writers are trustworthy as doctrinal guides (Ibid., 174). He held that “[i]f criticism is to assail this doctrine . . . [i]t must either show that this doctrine is not the doctrine of the Biblical writers, or else it must show that the Biblical writers are not trustworthy as doctrinal guides” (Ibid.). This is surely a circular argument at best.

¹¹ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:159.

may conclude, then, that Henry sees somewhat of an equivalence between divine revelation and inspiration.

A second characteristic of Henry's conception of inspiration lies in his belief that the locus of inspiration is the content, rather than the authors, of scripture.¹² He writes: "But when the Scripture speaks of inspiration, it does not stop short with the inspiration of only the person; rather, it affirms something specific also about the written texts."¹³ Additionally, Henry does not understand the content of inspiration to be merely the thoughts of the authors, but rather, their actual words. He believed it frustrated the goal of inspiration to confine it to "mental concepts in distinction from words, since improperly phrased ideas fall short of being a communication of truth." He continues: "The biblical emphasis falls not on revealed concepts and ideas but on inspired Scripture."¹⁴ Thus, he affirms that

¹² One of the key questions related to the doctrine of inspiration is the locus of that inspiration. Is it the writers or the words that are inspired? James Orr is an example of those who believe that the locus of inspiration is the authors of the biblical texts. He argues that inspiration "belongs primarily to the person," and only derivatively to the book "only as it is the product of the inspired person." He writes: "There is no inspiration inhering literally in the paper, ink, or type, of the sacred volume. The inspiration was in the soul of the writer; the qualities that are communicated to the writing had their seat first in the mind or heart of the man who wrote" [James Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration* (1910; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 162-163]. Others, including Henry, assert that it is the words that those authors wrote which are inspired. They wonder how one can be sure that what the inspired author wrote is a true reflection of that inspiration if one cannot also say that the very words the author wrote were also inspired. For a fine discussion of these alternative ways of understanding inspiration, cf. John Kelman Sutherland Reid, *The Authority of Scripture* (London: Methuen, 1957), 156ff. and Paul J. Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture*, 9-22. Reid certainly sees a connection between the inspiration of the authors and their words when he writes: "If the words of Scripture are inspired, since they are admittedly written if not composed by human agents, these human agents must have been moved to their writing in some unusual way, and this can mean only inspiration. On the other hand, the view that the writers are inspired need not involve the inspiration of the words. Hence inspiration of the words seems to be inclusive of but not coincident with that of the writer's inspiration." (Reid, *The Authority of Scripture*, 157).

¹³ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:143.

¹⁴ Ibid.

the text of Scripture is divinely inspired as an objective deposit of language. . . . The biblical and evangelical view does not limit divine inspiration as an activity internal to the psyche of the writers, but recognizes its importance beyond the subjective psychology of the chosen prophets and apostles. The non biblical notions of inspiration obscure the nature of biblical inspiration by asserting the inspiration of only the writers, and not of the written truths they enunciate. The biblical doctrine of inspiration, on the other hand, connects God's activity with the express truths and words of Scripture.¹⁵

A third feature of Henry's understanding of inspiration is that it is reserved for only a select group of individuals. He holds that "divine inspiration is limited to a small company of messengers who were divinely chosen to authoritatively communicate the Word of God to mankind."¹⁶ He writes, "This inspiration is no universal phenomenon, nor is it necessarily or actually shared by all or most spiritually devout and obedient men of God."¹⁷ He may possibly have had Schleiermacher in mind as he wrote these very words, for in contrast to Henry, Schleiermacher did affirm that inspiration was a "universal phenomenon," as we will see later in this chapter.

Schleiermacher's Understanding of Inspiration

Now, I want to lay out Schliermacher's conception of inspiration and compare it to the content-based/supernaturalist model. The primary characteristics of Schleiermacher's understanding of "inspiration" may be found in *Christian Faith*, §130. Naturally, that this proposition is located in his discussion of the broader doctrine of scripture in §§128-132, is not surprising. What may surprise many is that he absolutely

¹⁵ Ibid., 4:144.

¹⁶ Ibid., 4:152. See also 4:155.

¹⁷ Ibid., 152.

did believe in this doctrine. Proof of this is the heading he gave to §130: “The individual books of the New Testament¹⁸ are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and their collection has arisen under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” What can we learn about his conception of this doctrine from this proposition?

After stating the proposition and offering evidence that it reflects the confessional tradition of the Protestant church by citing several of her creedal statements,¹⁹ Schleiermacher acknowledges the difficulty of assigning exact limits of meaning to what he calls an “ecclesial expression.” He notes that the term is not, strictly speaking, a scriptural one, and it is figurative besides.²⁰ He does admit, however, that two passages in the New Testament are commonly mentioned in connection with it. (Incidentally, those two passages, as discussed above, are the same ones mentioned as part of Carl F. H. Henry’s rationale for affirming his understanding of biblical inspiration.) The first of these is 2 Timothy 3:16, and Schleiermacher correctly notes, I think, that this text refers to Old Testament writings. He admits that this expression could lead very easily to the

¹⁸ In an addendum to his discussion of the doctrine of scripture in *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher sets out his argument that the books of the Old Testament cannot be seen as possessing the same normative worth or inspiration as the New Testament books (*Christian Faith*, §132). For now, I will set aside a discussion of this viewpoint until Chapter Six and my response to it in Chapter Seven.

¹⁹ Specifically, he cites selections from the *First Helvetic Confession* (1536), *Gallican Confession* (1559), *Scots Confession* (1560), *Belgic Confession* (1561), and *Declaratio Toruniensis* (1645). Interestingly, Schleiermacher very frequently cites creedal statements rather than scripture in the notes of *Christian Faith*. Vial offers an explanation for this when he writes: “[A]ll Christians share Scripture, but Schleiermacher is articulating the experience of faith in a particular Christian community (the evangelical community), who have defined themselves as a particular community in large part through creeds” (Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 84-85). For Schleiermacher’s use of creedal statements in *Christian Faith* rather than scripture, see *Christian Faith*, §27. For an analysis of Schleiermacher’s use of creeds in *Christian Faith* see Walter Wyman, “The Role of the Protestant Confessions in Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith*,” *Journal of Religion* 87, no. 3 (July 2007): 355-85.

²⁰ The term to which he refers is *theopneustos*, from 2 Tim. 3:16. It may be translated, “God-breathed.”

idea that in the act of writing the Holy Spirit had a special relationship with the writer that was otherwise nonexistent. But, such an interpretation does not follow so easily from 2 Peter 1:21, he claims. That passage speaks of persons “moved by the Holy Spirit” who “spoke from God.” From this passage Schleiermacher asserts that the interpretation that these persons “were already constantly moved by the Holy Spirit and in this state then also spoke and wrote” is as legitimate an interpretation as the interpretation that “they were first moved to spoken discourse and writing.”²¹ Here, Schleiermacher seems to be indicating in advance what he will discuss later in this proposition in more detail regarding the locus of inspiration.

Since the term is ambiguous, he suggests that the best way to come to an adequate understanding of the meaning of “inspiration” is to compare it with other, cognate expressions that describe the ways in which persons arrive at ideas.²² He contrasts what is inspired (*das Eingebene*) and what is learned (*das Erlernte*) with what is excogitated or thought out (*das Ersonnene*). What is thought out, he explains, is the product of the self’s own mental activity, whereas what is inspired and learned are the products of outside influences. Schleiermacher affirms, however, that at other times, usage distinguishes what is inspired from what is learned. When used in this way, what is inspired is understood to be original and “depends for its emergence solely on inward

²¹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.1.

²² In the introductory address of *On Religion: Addresses in Response to Its Cultured Critics*, Schleiermacher uses the terms “inspiration,” “idea,” and “insight,” interchangeably. See Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 58, 64.

[internal] communication.”²³ On the other hand, what is learned is derived from “external communication.” Thus, in contrast to what may approximate the more mechanical processes of learning, what emerges by inspiration can be seen as due to “the complete freedom of a person’s own productivity.”²⁴

According to Schleiermacher’s thinking, then, it follows that there is a sense in which inspired thoughts are the result of the self’s own mental activity.²⁵ However, what is inspired is not like what is excogitated, purely the product of one’s own ruminations. What seems fair to say, is that for Schleiermacher, what is inspired is to some degree the product of outside influences. In fact, in his lexicon an acceptable synonym for “inspiration” is “influence.” So, when he stands by the claim that “the individual books of the New Testament are inspired by the Holy Spirit,” he is only claiming that these books are influenced by the Holy Spirit.

This definition, of course, does not go far enough for Henry and Evangelical Christians who share his absolutely supernaturalist/content-based perspective. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Henry equates inspiration with revelation, the very thing Schleiermacher does not want to do. He does not believe these terms can be used interchangeably. In other words, he does not believe that inspiration means that God made known to the authors of scripture in detail what they were to write.

²³ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Later, Schleiermacher writes that while “our proposition ascribes to the Holy Spirit . . . the composing of the individual books [of the New Testament canon] . . . we regard the composition of a book as the intentional act of an individual” (*Christian Faith*, §130.1).

A second distinction between Henry's and Schleiermacher's conception of inspiration is its locus. For Schleiermacher, it is not the words of scripture which are inspired, but the authors themselves.^{26, 27} That is, the meaning of inspiration is not that it refers to an exact wording or quality of the New Testament writings themselves. The inspiration is in the authors, and only derivatively in their writings. Notwithstanding this observation, there is also a sense in which Schleiermacher shares the conviction that the words of the New Testament books are "inspired" by the Holy Spirit, or can be unless they are in error. How so? Since the Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritual gifts and good works, he reasons, all thinking about the kingdom of God must be traced back to and inspired by the Spirit.²⁸ He presumes that this holds true both of the apocryphal and of the canonical elements of the thinking of the apostolic age. Nevertheless, he claims, it is also true that the work of the Spirit is most profound and concentrated within the circle

²⁶ James Orr explained Schleiermacher's perspective well when he wrote: "Scripture is spoken of as 'God-inspired'; but it is important to notice that inspiration belongs primarily to the *person*, and to the *book* only as it is the product of the inspired person. There is no inspiration inhering literally in the paper, ink, or type, of the sacred volume. The inspiration was in the soul of the writer; the qualities that are communicated to the writing had their seat first in the mind or heart of the man who wrote." Orr, *Revelation and Inspiration*, 162-163.

²⁷ Actually, Schleiermacher's understanding that the authors, rather than the words, of scripture are inspired is more nuanced than this. According to him, inspiration refers to a divine influence on the writing of scripture, but the locus wherein such activity is recognized switches from the individual to the social level. Accordingly, inspiration would work, not exclusively on the individual writers, but rather on the entire community that historically conditions the contents of emotions, knowledge, and words utilized by these writers. This "social" view of inspiration, however, does not change the fact that the epistemological origin of scripture is human. See *Christian Faith*, §130.

²⁸ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.2. For Schleiermacher the Holy Spirit not only inspired the books of the New Testament but also guided the entire process of collecting them into the canon. Since, however, this process is "the result of a complex process of collaboration and counteraction in the church," not everything that has been achieved by it can be attributed to the Holy Spirit to the same degree as it can in the process of the inspiration transmitted by particular authors. For this reason, some refer to the collection of the canonical scriptures not as a case of inspiration but as a product of guidance (*Leitung*) by the Holy Spirit (*Christian Faith*, §130.1). See also Jeffrey Hensley, "Friedrich Schleiermacher," in *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 174.

of those singled out by Peter (Acts 1:21ff.) with the assent of the entire community at that time, that is, among those who had walked with Christ from shortly after the start of his public ministry. But, more than this, he asserts that inspiration, in the case of these individuals, extends beyond the writing of scripture to include “the whole of the official apostolic activity.”²⁹ Thus, inspiration is not simply a quality of the sacred writings; rather, these texts share in the wider movement of the Spirit in the shared experience of the Christian community. To think that the apostles were “less animated and moved by the Holy Spirit in other aspects of their apostolic office than in the acts of writing,” for Schleiermacher, “would destroy the unity of life among these apostolic men in the most hazardous fashion.”³⁰ For him, the apostles’ lives, not just their writings, were generally guided by inspiration, or the influence of the Spirit.

As a result, this perspective forestalls many difficult questions. For example, it allows dogmatics to ignore a whole set of questions about the extent of inspiration in the production of the text, a claim in which Schleiermacher seems to exult. When did the moment of inspiration begin? How did the impulse come? To what extent did the Holy Spirit “inspire” the authors of scripture? Did the Spirit provide the very words the authors wrote, or only their thoughts? For Schleiermacher, questions like these are irrelevant. In fact, he asserts that only a dead scholasticism would try to draw lines of distinction “along the way from the initial impulse to write . . . to the word actually put

²⁹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

down or even want to present the latter in its external form (*Äusserlichkeit*) . . . as a special product of inspiration.”³¹

The perspective that the locus of inspiration is the authors of scripture, and not their words alone, and that inspiration means that the Holy Spirit influences their actions as well as their words, leads to another, related distinction between Schleiermacher’s and Henry’s understanding of this concept. It is this: for Schleiermacher, inspiration is not limited to a select few. Whereas Henry believes that divine inspiration is limited to those who were “divinely chosen to communicate the Word of God to mankind,”³² Schleiermacher believes that every person can be inspired. He holds to the potential of universal inspiration.

Schleiermacher’s *On Religion* verifies this position. In the first Speech, in order to understand the nature of piety, Schleiermacher encourages his readers to transport themselves “into the interior depths of a pious soul, so as to try to understand its inspiration.” This is what it takes, he claims, “to apprehend that effusion of insight and ardor” which issues from such pious souls. And who are these pious souls? According to

³¹ Ibid. Regarding the mechanics of inspiration, and as a side note, Schleiermacher argues that the most suitable analogy is provided by christology. The divine essence unites with the human nature of Jesus in a person-forming way, but it does not, thereby, destroy the true humanity of the Redeemer. So, too, the divine Spirit indwells the Christian church, inspiring the thoughts and actions of the apostles, but in a way that does not obliterate their full humanity. This is why Schleiermacher rejects a special hermeneutics for the New Testament. Scripture texts, while they are assuredly disclosures of God’s self-communication in Christ, are also completely human compositions. That is, they are “fully human,” and thus they are open to being understood in the same way as any other text written by humans (See *Christian Faith*, §130.2). Regarding this text, Dawn DeVries adds an explanatory comment: “[T]he difference between God’s incarnation in Christ and in the church should not be overlooked: only in Christ was the God-consciousness absolutely powerful; in the church, given its struggle with sin within the whole process of history, the permeation of the Holy Spirit is never complete. Thus, even the church’s witness to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ can be tinged with sin and error. (DeVries, *Rethinking the Scripture Principle*, 303.)

³² Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 4:152; 4:155.

Schleiermacher, they are people whose spirits are “truly surrendered to the universe.”³³

Schleiermacher comments on this very passage in his own supplementary notes, added in 1821. There he clarifies that he was

talking about how insight and ardor are produced in such a spirit—that is, about the actual emergence of such stirrings of piety as pass over immediately into religious views and ideas (insight) or into an attitude of surrender toward God (ardor). It should have been clear to them that this is why I wanted to draw attention to the way in which such inner stirrings arise. They arise when a man surrenders himself to the universe. . . . This can be seen in the fact that we are enabled as each occasion arises to take notice of God and of his eternal power and divinity through the works of his creation.³⁴

One may conclude from this reference that Schleiermacher surely believed that insight and ardor could emerge in any person who allowed herself or himself to be stirred by the universe. These stirrings, he asserts, are inspired by God when one takes notice of God “through the works of his creation.”

In the second Speech, Schleiermacher once again expresses his conviction that inspiration may be universal when he refers to notions conjured up by the words “influence,” “inspiration,” and “a divine Spirit” in an oft-cited and beautifully-written paragraph:

What can we say of the person who does not feel in the most important moments of his life, with the most vital conviction, that a divine Spirit impels him and that he speaks and acts from sacred inspiration? Again, what can we say of the person who is not at least conscious of his feelings as immediate influences of the

³³ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 58.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 64. I like the way Tice clarifies the relationship for Schleiermacher between God and the universe: “Thus, God is sovereign and supreme over nature, is supernatural and in no sense identical with it. However, God is also experienced as coming to us only in and through the wholly interconnected world of nature. God becomes present to us, is revealed and made known, only through this ‘economy.’” Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 33.

universe upon him . . . and who does not recognize something distinctive within these influences either, something that cannot be merely imitated but that guarantees the purity of their origin deep within him? What can we say but that such a person has no religion?³⁵

Later, when he explains the concepts of “revelation” and “inspiration,” he writes:

“Decidedly pious people are always characterized by both.”³⁶

Schleiermacher’s Conception of “Holy Spirit”

Finally, there is a distinction between Schleiermacher and the majority of content-based/supernaturalists regarding the agent of inspiration. Both would agree that the Holy Spirit inspired the books of the New Testament, but their understanding of “Holy Spirit” is far from identical.³⁷ What does Schleiermacher mean by “Holy Spirit”? An introduction to his understanding of “Holy Spirit” in *Christian Faith*, found in §116 and §§121-126, is located within his discussion of the emergence of the church. It immediately precedes his treatment of the doctrine of scripture (§§127-133), an arrangement that assuredly cannot be accidental. What this ordering implies, of course, is that Schleiermacher understands there to be a close relationship between “Holy Spirit” and scripture.

A suitable place to begin to unpack his understanding of the agent of inspiration is *Christian Faith*, §116.3. This section serves as a fine introduction to and survey of what

³⁵ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 143.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁷ Since the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is only relevant to this project as it correlates with biblical authority and since, therefore, a detailed analysis of this entire doctrine itself is rather extraneous to this study, I have chosen not to compare Schleiermacher’s understanding of “Holy Spirit” with Henry’s. I believe it is sufficient simply to assert that they are different.

Schleiermacher explains in more detail in §§121-133. That subdivision of §116 begins with this claim:

[T]he term ‘Holy Spirit’³⁸ is understood to mean the unity of life that is inherent in Christian community, viewed as a moral person. Moreover, since everything that is actually law-bound is already excluded from it, we would be able to designate this presence in terms of the ‘common spirit’ (*Gemeingeist*) of that community.³⁹

I imagine that Schleiermacher knew that some would surely question his orthodoxy by use of the phrase “common spirit” for “Holy Spirit,” for he quickly affirms to his readers that by this phrase he is referring to what “in scripture is called the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ, and in our church doctrine is also presented as the third Person in the Godhead.”⁴⁰

What is behind his assertion that “common spirit” is a sufficient designation for “Holy Spirit”? What is he trying to convey by the use of this phrase? Let me permit Schleiermacher to answer these questions in his own words, after which I will draw some conclusions. First, here is his heading for *Christian Faith*, §121, which contains a fairly succinct description of this designation:

All who are living in the state of sanctification are conscious of an inner drive to become increasingly at one in a common cooperative and mutually interactive

³⁸ Tice makes this point in the Tice, Kelsey, and Lawler edition of *Christian Faith* that capitalizing ‘Holy Spirit’ does not imply that Schleiermacher attributed personhood to the divine and holy Spirit. He states: “It emphatically does not bear this implication for Schleiermacher. For him . . . writing ‘Holy’ simply indicated that he was referring to this specific, divine spirit” (*Christian Faith*, §116.1, fn. 1.) Thus, the Spirit is “holy” in the sense that the divine Spirit is active in Jesus, not as the name of a “person” in the godhead. Rather, this Spirit is “holy” because it is God’s way in Christ of being continually in relationship with the community of faith, though it certainly is, for him, an integral part of the triune God’s redemptive activity in relation to the world.

³⁹Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §116.3.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

existence, this driving force being viewed as the common spirit of the new collective life founded by Christ.⁴¹

What is noteworthy in this heading is what Schleiermacher claims about this “common spirit.” First, he describes this shared spirit as intrinsic to “the new corporate life founded by Christ.” He makes this plain in a sermon he preached before 1829, entitled “Christ in the Temple.” After making reference in that message to the biblical promise that no longer will anyone need to be taught by others, for all will be taught of God (Jer. 31:33; Jn. 6:45), he writes:

We cannot say that every soul can be taught by God in solitude, nor does each person stand as a separate work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it comes about only through the interchange of insight and feeling with others in that living fellowship in which Christ united us all. For it is this fellowship first of all, and not individual souls, that the Holy Spirit chooses for his temple, and he will illumine and sanctify individuals only through fellowship. How could it be otherwise?⁴²

Second, while it is possible that the heading of §121 may only indicate Schleiermacher’s belief that this common spirit is responsible for producing the “inner drive” (*innern Antriebes*) and “driving force” in the Christian church of which he writes, I believe it is more accurate to deduce that for him these terms are coextensive. That is, the inner drive to unite and cooperate with one another in the collective life is a driving force,

⁴¹ Ibid., §121. See also Schleiermacher’s sermon on “The Relationship of Evangelical Faith to the Law,” in *Reformed But Every Reforming: Sermons in Relation to the Celebration of the Handing Over of the Augsburg Confession (1830)*, ed. and trans. Iain G. Nicol, Schleiermacher Studies and Translations 8 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997), 59.

⁴² See Schleiermacher’s sermon on “Christ in the Temple,” in *Servant of the Word: Selected Sermons of Friedrich Schleiermacher*, trans. Dawn De Vries, Fortress Texts in Modern Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 123-24. In a sermon based on the text of Philippians 1:6-11, Schleiermacher asserts that “the Spirit . . . is nowhere else to be found than in those who have faith.” See Schleiermacher’s sermon on, “On the Goal toward Which the Effort of the Evangelical Church Is Directed,” in *Reformed But Every Reforming: Sermons in Relation to the Celebration of the Handing Over of the Augsburg Confession (1830)*, 156.)

which Schleiermacher views not as a product of the common spirit but as equivalent to it. To confirm this interpretation one need only consider Schleiermacher's descriptions of the Holy Spirit elsewhere: it is "a shared tendency to advance the whole, a tendency that in each individual is, at the same time, a distinctive love for every individual";⁴³ it is "the innermost life force of the Christian church as a whole";⁴⁴ it is communal activity, which is also "shared self-initiated activity — which indwells everyone [in the church]";⁴⁵ it is that which "animates the collective life of faithful persons";⁴⁶ and it is the power of the new life which proceeds from Christ himself.⁴⁷

The following comparison from *Christian Faith*, §121.2 clarifies Schleiermacher's understanding of "common spirit." He reports: "Now, when we designate this endeavor by the term 'common spirit,' we essentially understand by it what is meant in worldly governance."⁴⁸ For Schleiermacher, then, analogous to this common spirit in the church, is what is found in any system of government. What is that? He explains: "[I]n all who together form a moral person there exists a shared tendency to advance the whole, a tendency that in each individual is, at the same time, a distinctive

⁴³ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §121.2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., §122.1.

⁴⁵ Ibid., §122.3. Schleiermacher writes: "This communal activity corresponds to all that Christ promised concerning the Holy Spirit and to what was presented as the working of the Holy Spirit." Referring to the first disciples of Jesus who "had been taken up into Christ's community," he writes: "[O]nly thereafter could there be a true community among them, manifesting itself as the Holy Spirit."

⁴⁶ Ibid., §123.

⁴⁷ Ibid., §121.2

⁴⁸ Ibid. The German word Schleiermacher uses here is *Regiment*. Tice adds this footnote: "Usually 'church government' is used to translate *Kirchenregiment*."

love for every individual.”⁴⁹ In other words, the common spirit is, in one sense, impersonal: it is a temperament, a quality, or a disposition that permeates and characterizes an organization.⁵⁰

Consistent with this interpretation is a statement Schleiermacher made in a sermon he preached on July 4, 1830 on the relationship of Evangelical faith to the law [of Moses]. The sermon text for this message is Galatians 2:16-18. Writing about what it means to be governed by the Spirit and to bear the fruits [sic] of the Spirit, Schleiermacher notes how true it is that God’s Spirit is poured out on us through the proclamation of faith and how this very faith is alive in us and active through love. Then, he discusses two groups of people in the church: those who follow after the Spirit by faith and those who continue to bind on others the works of the law. Following this explanation, he mentions the possibility that the influence of the latter group will interrupt, hold back, and corrupt the common spirit.⁵¹ It surely seems that in this context, the “common spirit” is not a reference to God *per se* or *in se*, but to the pure, invisible influences of God’s gracious activity, to the resultant cooperative relationships of God to persons within communities of faith, and to the quality of new life in the church.

In light of the above considerations, I conclude that Schleiermacher certainly conceives of the Holy Spirit/common spirit to be a force or impulse that is shared

⁴⁹ Ibid., §121.2

⁵⁰ There are important parallels to Schleiermacher’s lectures on the state and how he believes all communities form. See Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 106-8.

⁵¹ See Schleiermacher’s sermon on, “The Relationship of Evangelical Faith to the Law,” in *Reformed But Ever Reforming*, 58-59.

between persons in the Christian church. According to him, this force which indwells and animates the church is, in fact, the person of Jesus.

Does Schleiermacher understand the Holy Spirit to be a divine being? To answer this question, let us return to *Christian Faith*, §116.3, where he briefly explains the necessary function and purpose of the Holy Spirit.

First, he concedes the simple truth that individual influences no longer proceed directly from Christ. Since that is the case, he claims that something divine must exist in the Christian church, and this something we call the “Being of God.” This Being continues the communication of the perfection and blessedness of Christ, which, he claims, is an absolute and continuous desire for the Kingdom, or Reign, of God. This is the desire or innermost impulse of individuals within the church. But more, it is the common spirit of the whole. Schleiermacher identifies this common spirit as the “divine Spirit that indwells it [the whole],” and that “has been taken up into the self-consciousness of every invigorated member [of the whole].”⁵² Then, he concludes:

This will for the Kingdom of God is the vital unity of the whole, and its common spirit in each individual; in virtue of its inwardness, it is in the whole an absolutely powerful God-consciousness, and thus the being of God therein, but conditioned by the being of God in Christ.⁵³

In short, I infer that for Schleiermacher, the Holy Spirit is the being of God in the church. Cathie Kelsey makes plain Schleiermacher’s understanding when she explains:

⁵² Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §116.3.

⁵³ Ibid. See also, *Christian Faith*, §122.3.

[T]he being of God is in the Christian church. . . . [It] works in the church through its influence on the regenerate. In other words, the life of Christ is in us as a common spirit. A third way to say the same thing is that the Holy Spirit is leading us as a community of faith ([*Christian Faith*,] §124.1, §124.2). Any one of those ways of speaking is acceptable in the church. However, we clearly cannot do without Christ or go beyond Christ, nor can we do without the community of faith. After Christ physically left the earth following his resurrection, the effectiveness of Christ came to be and is manifest through the community of faith, the church. The effectiveness of Christ is the being of God in him, so his effectiveness in the church must be the being of God in it as the common Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit are two ways of referring to the same reality in the church (§121.2). Thus, being taken up into the life of Christ and participating in the Holy Spirit are the same thing.⁵⁴

This brings us to a dilemma, which is only apparent, and to an important distinction in Schleiermacher's understanding of the Holy Spirit. I have concluded that he conceives the Holy Spirit to be both the common spirit, that is a force or impulse held in common by those in the church, as well as a divine activity of God's being in the world. The question arises, however: Is it possible for the Spirit to be both? First, I reiterate that while Schleiermacher believes that the Holy Spirit is an expression, or extension, of divine being, he does not believe the Holy Spirit is a person with separate being and activity.⁵⁵ He suggests that "Holy Spirit" is simply the name we give to the

⁵⁴ Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher*, 99. See also, Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 42.

⁵⁵ As referenced above, Schleiermacher understands the expression "Holy Spirit" to mean the vital unity of the Christian community, regarded as a moral personality (*Christian Faith*, §116.3). Some may think this implies that he attributes personhood to the Holy Spirit. However, the word he uses, *Person*, could designate a human organization, such as a church or a state, that bears characteristics of individual agency. See *Christian Faith*, §121.2, ed. note, fn. 8. According to Tice, Schleiermacher conceives the 'Holy Spirit' not as a third person (*prosopos*) in a divine 'Trinity' (*Christian Faith*, §§55, 65.1, 74.2, 97.2, 105. p.s. and 108.5) but as the 'common spirit'" (*Christian Faith*, §116.3, fn. 1).

being of God present in and influencing the community of faith.⁵⁶ This corresponds, as Kelsey notes, in the same way we attach the name “Christ” to the being of God in a human being who is perfectly open to the being of God and whose person is completely formed by the presence of the being of God in him.⁵⁷

But note, secondly, how Schleiermacher seems to anticipate the question of whether or not the Holy Spirit is a divine being and his answer in *Christian Faith*, §123. The heading of that proposition is as follows: “The Holy Spirit is the uniting of the divine being with human nature in the form of the common spirit that animates the collective life of faithful persons.”⁵⁸ In short, Schleiermacher believes the Holy Spirit is both an activity of divine being and the common spirit, that is, a force, in the church. How does he arrive at this seemingly incongruous conviction?

To explain this, Schleiermacher asks his readers to consider the relation between a Supreme Being and human nature insofar as this relation is present in a Christian self-consciousness.⁵⁹ He then asserts that in the church’s experience, and indeed, in the New

⁵⁶ Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher*, 99. See also, Tice: “The visible church is not itself the Redeemer, but the Redeemer is now visibly present in the whole world, notably and ideally in and through the visible church. To say, therefore, that Christ continues to dwell among us through the succession of generations since Jesus was alive is exactly the same thing as to say that the Holy Spirit indwells the church as its common spirit.” (Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 33.)

⁵⁷ Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher*, 99.

⁵⁸ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §123.

⁵⁹ He is only willing here to discuss the meaning of “Holy Spirit” in its relation to the church. He grants that when used outside of this relation, for example, when referring to the divine participation in the creation of the world or to its indwelling from which gifts or talents of all sorts issue, the expression and its identification may mean something wholly different. Also, he does not feel obliged to identify the common spirit altogether in the Christian church with the Holy Spirit, which is presented as active in the prophets before Christ’s appearance or even with “the common spirit of the Jewish theocracy” (*Christian Faith*, §123.1). Indeed, he believes that the New Testament presents the Holy Spirit as something experienced within the community, never as something purely external to it. See *Christian Faith*, §121.1-2.

Testament scriptures, all powers that are efficacious in the Christian church have been traced back to the Holy Spirit. This must be true, he claims, for otherwise Christ would have been superfluous. Furthermore, it must be the case, he reasons, that the Holy Spirit exists in and works from within Christians rather than from outside them. From these considerations Schleiermacher concludes that those who first possessed the Holy Spirit presented this Spirit as a divine action in persons of faith, yet one not to be separated from recognition of the being of God in Christ. However, if the Holy Spirit is a spiritual power in persons of faith, it must be represented as united in them with their human nature, or else “we must abrogate the unity of their existence.”⁶⁰ This “total split in human life” is unimaginable, Schleiermacher asserts.

The union, then, of the Holy Spirit in human nature must persist in the form of the common spirit. And since each person attains to the new life only in and through the community, so also each person shares in the Holy Spirit, not in one’s personal self-consciousness, but only as one is conscious of one’s being in this whole—that is, as a consciousness held in common. Therefore, the union of the divine with human nature in persons of faith is not a person-forming union, because otherwise it would not be distinguishable from the union that is in Christ, and the distinction between Redeemer and redeemed would be abrogated.

To summarize, the Holy Spirit is an agency and activity of divine being, but its presence in the Christian church is something that works naturally in community-forming

⁶⁰ Ibid., §123.3.

experiences among persons of faith, experience that may be regarded as the life force of the church.⁶¹ Steven R. Jungkeit vouches for this perspective when he writes that the church “hums to life through the activity of the Spirit, which thereafter is characterized as a power located within the system itself.”⁶² One could say, then, that what once had a supernaturally-effected advent and has continued via the influence of Christ, now has a natural explanation or extension, as well. In other words, as in Jesus Christ himself, Schleiermacher’s conception of the activity of Holy Spirit is both supernatural and natural, referring to both a divine being and a life force experienced between persons in the community of faith.⁶³ This is what he identifies as the common or shared spirit of the collective life of the church.

Criticism of Schleiermacher’s Theology of Inspiration

The core and general criticism of Schleiermacher’s understanding of inspiration is that, for him, God is relatively inactive in the process. More specifically, his critics chide him for maintaining that the process of writing down scripture is essentially an exclusively human activity. Since this is the case, one could argue that the overarching criticism of Schleiermacher’s perspective has to do with the relationship between the

⁶¹ For confirmation of this, see *Christian Faith*, §124.3.

⁶² Steven R. Jungkeit, *Spaces of Modern Theology: Geography and Power in Schleiermacher’s World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 185.

⁶³ As pointed out earlier, Schleiermacher believed that something supernatural could at the same time be natural. This was true of his understanding of the Holy Spirit. He claims: “Whenever I speak of the supernatural, I do so with reference to whatever comes first, but afterwards it becomes secondly something natural. Thus creation is supernatural, but it afterwards becomes the natural order. Likewise, in his origin Christ is supernatural, but he also becomes natural, as a genuine human being. The Holy Spirit and the Christian church can be treated in the same way” (Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 89).

supernatural and the natural.⁶⁴ (This is not surprising, as this relationship has remained at the center of theological debate throughout the modern period.) Even though this is a false distinction for Schleiermacher, for his critics the crux of the issue is the extent to which God and human beings are active in the process of inspiration. For them, the point in question is this: Is scripture primarily a divine or a human product?

For his critics, Schleiermacher's supposed unwillingness to grant the supernatural an active role in the process of inspiration is a slippery slope. For example, according to one critic, to disallow divine activity leaves Christianity without objective foundations. If Christianity is without such foundations, either scripture is rendered practically irrelevant as a source of theology or the Christian religion is driven to draw the contents for its doctrines more from science, philosophy, experience, and tradition than from scripture. Ultimately, scripture loses its authority as a source of theology.⁶⁵

According to those who disapprove of Schleiermacher's stance on inspiration, the slippery slope begins with his alleged view of God. Consider what Carl F. H. Henry claims is the problem with Schleiermacher's theology, in general, which also pertains,

⁶⁴ This was true of the criticisms of Schleiermacher offered by his students, J. A. Möhler and F. A. Staudenmaier, by J. S. Drey, and by critics who are more contemporary, including Carl F. H. Henry, Geoffrey Bromiley, and Donald Bloesch. For criticisms of Schleiermacher's theology from Möhler, Staudenmaier, and Drey, I follow Bradford E. Hinze, "Johann Sebastian Drey's Critique of Friedrich Schleiermacher's Theology," *The Heythrop Journal* (January 1996): 1-23. For more contemporary critics, see Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976-1983); G.C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975); and Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994).

⁶⁵ This line of argument is articulated by Fernando L. Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Liberal Model," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 32, no. 1 (Autumn 1994): 169-95.

specifically, to his understanding of inspiration: it over exaggerates the immanence of God:

What made it possible for modernism to elevate man to the level of prophet and apostle was its philosophy of exaggerated divine immanence; first, it put all men and history on the same plane, then, by exalting empirical methodology and evolutionary dogma, it raised the modernist to superior religious insight. Schleiermacher's deference to pantheism was already evident in his *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, in which he sought to give religion universal significance but did so by trivializing God's special initiative and activity.⁶⁶

Breaking down Henry's criticism, but leaving aside the oft-repeated and spurious charge that Schleiermacher was a pantheist, a criticism unwarranted by his exposition in *Christian Faith*, Henry's problem with Schleiermacher's viewpoint, is that it makes "God's special initiative and activity" seem less important. How is this minimization of God's activity in the process of inspiration demonstrable? By the elevation of "man to the level of prophet and apostle." What made it possible for theologians to do such a thing? Henry's answer: modernism's philosophy of exaggerated divine immanence. That Henry is disapproving of Schleiermacher's belief in universal inspiration is evident when he writes that "inspiration is no universal phenomenon, nor is it necessarily or actually shared by all or most spiritually devout and obedient men of God."⁶⁷

Another Evangelical, Donald Bloesch, agrees with Henry's assessment. Bloesch is referring to "a modernist view of revelation and inspiration," as well as to Schleiermacher's theology when he writes:

⁶⁶ Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 2:154.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

[I]t stresses the inseparability of the infinite and the finite and sees the infinite as residing in the finite as its ground and depth. . . . It's orientation is anthropological and psychological rather than theological in that its primary concern is the effect of the divine on humanity rather than the nature of divinity as such.⁶⁸

Critics not only disapprove of what they suppose to be Schleiermacher's view of God and God's lack of involvement in the inspiration process, but also with his understanding of inspiration's locus. They reject that it is found primarily in scripture's authors. Henry asserts: "Inspiration is primarily a statement about God's relationship to Scripture, and only secondarily about the relationship of God to the writers."⁶⁹ Again, they believe that Schleiermacher's perspective leads to a slippery slope. For example, defenders of verbal inspiration wonder: How can we be sure that what the inspired author wrote was a true reflection of that inspiration if we cannot also say that the very words he or she put down were also inspired?⁷⁰ They assert that if God inspired authors rather than the text itself, there is nothing to make the text itself special. Furthermore, if only the authors are inspired, how can one assign more spiritual authority to biblical books than to any other books written under the power of some great religious experience?⁷¹

A third criticism sometimes leveled against Schleiermacher's doctrine of inspiration is that since biblical words and meanings are wholly human, biblical exegesis

⁶⁸ Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation*, 40.

⁶⁹ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 2:143.

⁷⁰ See Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture*, 10; Stephen T. Davis, *The Debate about the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977): 54, 114-15.

⁷¹ Achtemeier, *Inspiration and Authority*, 35.

is to be undertaken with the same tools and procedures utilized by the historical and literary sciences.⁷² Many are not happy with this possibility.

A Response to Schleiermacher's Critics

How does or how would Schleiermacher respond to the above criticisms?

First, he would certainly agree that the process of scripture creation and collection was essentially a human activity. He believes the words of scripture are human words. No special divine charism is claimed by him to have assisted biblical writers. However, Schleiermacher would not agree that his conception of inspiration makes God virtually inactive in the process. While it is surely a challenge to articulate the co-presence and co-activity of the supernatural and the natural in this or any other process, he does believe that God was part of the process.

There is a way in which Schleiermacher's model traces religious discourse back to God. First, as noted above, he does believe that the Holy Spirit, which he identified as the common spirit of the church, influenced the writers of the New Testament. Second, the inner felt encounter of absolute dependence is considered to be the ultimate cause that motivates the origination of all genuinely Christian religious discourse, including, of course, scripture.⁷³ Schleiermacher connects the feeling of absolute dependence with the origin of biblical and dogmatic writings by claiming that human self-consciousness includes two inseparable, interconnected levels, one sensible and the other absolute. He

⁷² See Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §27.3 and §130.2.

⁷³ See Canale, "Revelation and Inspiration: The Liberal Model," 188-195.

speaks of an absolute and a sensible self-consciousness of feeling.⁷⁴ Absolute self-consciousness is able “to manifest itself in time, by entering into relation with the sensible self-consciousness so as to constitute a moment.”⁷⁵ Thus, since within human self-consciousness the feeling of absolute dependence (originated by a timeless God) always occurs with feelings of pleasure and pain (originated by sensory temporal experiences), the feeling of absolute dependence is always linked to the content of the sensible self-consciousness through which it expresses itself. In the very instant of its origination, this content becomes the content of its external historical manifestation, and when the feeling of absolute dependence is linked to it, the result is emotion.⁷⁶ It is true that emotions, even when they express the feeling of absolute dependence, are not knowledge. But, the writing down of religious literature becomes “the attempt to translate the inward emotions into thoughts.”⁷⁷ Biblical teachings and Christian doctrines as well, are “nothing but the expressions given to the Christian self-consciousness and its connections.”⁷⁸ Consequently, it is not accurate to say that God is inactive in Schleiermacher’s conception of inspiration. God’s mode of activity in Schleiermacher’s model of inspiration may not be the way in which God is thought to be active in the

⁷⁴ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §5.4,5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, §5.4.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, §5.5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, §13, p.s.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

content-based/supernaturalist model, but Schleiermacher certainly believes that God is active in the process.

One of the reasons Schleiermacher is unwilling to attribute more activity to God in the process of inspiration must surely be that he proposes a pious modesty and speculative restraint regarding what can be known about God. In keeping with this position, his acceptance of some key elements in Kant's epistemology is well-documented.⁷⁹ According to Kant, pure reason is limited to the realm of objects of sense experience, so that what lies beyond sense experience is simply not knowable by human reason. Accepting the limitation Kant placed on reason, Schleiermacher follows Kant in restricting knowledge of God to what can be experienced and in eschewing speculation about God *in se*.⁸⁰

Consistent with this, Schleiermacher reconstructed the doctrine of God.⁸¹ According to him, the attributes of God are not to be taken as actually describing God, for to "describe" is to limit and divide, thereby taking away from God's infinity and implying a dependence of God upon the world. He writes: "None of the attributes that we ascribe to God is to designate something particular in God; rather, they are to designate only

⁷⁹ Cf., Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 24-41; Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age*, 22-51.

⁸⁰ James Duke and Francis Fiorenza write: "In the *Dialektik* Schleiermacher clarifies his own position vis-à-vis Kant's critique of rational theology. He is critical of Kant for positing God solely as a postulate of practical reason, and as a corrective he argues that God is a necessary postulate of theoretical reason as well. Yet he agrees with Kant's basic position insofar as it denies the possibility of a speculative knowledge of God" (Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 25). See also Richard B. Brant, *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher: The Development of his Theory of Scientific and Religious Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), especially Chapter 6.

⁸¹ For a brief introduction to Schleiermacher's doctrine of God and God's attributes, see Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 32-35.

something particular in the way in which the feeling of absolute dependence is to be referred to God.”⁸² In other words, talk about God is always talk about human experience of God. Such statements describe not God-in-God’s-self but a certain mode of experiencing God.

What this means, of course, is that one response to the criticism that Schleiermacher’s conception of inspiration overly exaggerates the immanence of God, lies in the belief that God *in se* cannot be known.⁸³ The irony of this is that many of Schleiermacher’s critics believe that an infinite and wholly transcendent God can be known *in se* by finite human beings. So, if God is knowable on any level, it makes more sense to emphasize God’s immanent activity over God’s transcendence.

How would Schleiermacher respond to the charge that his viewpoint does not limit inspiration to a select few, but that it has the potential to be universal in scope? To respond to this question I will quote what Schleiermacher writes regarding a philosopher whom he highly respected:

Respectfully offer up with me a lock of hair to the manes of the holy rejected Spinoza! The high world spirit permeated him, the infinite was his beginning and end, the universe his only and eternal love; in holy innocence and deep humility he was reflected in the eternal world and saw how he too was its most lovable mirror; he was full of religion and full of holy spirit.⁸⁴

⁸² Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §50.

⁸³ Another obvious response is that scripture itself affirms both the transcendence and immanence of God, e.g., Isa. 55:8-9; 6:1-5; Ps. 97:9; 108:5; Eph. 4:6; Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:27-28; Jn. 1:14. Perhaps Schleiermacher’s belief in the transcendence of God also had a profound affect on his doctrine of inspiration.

⁸⁴ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Crouter), 24. The “holy spirit” was originally an Old Testament ascription (e.g., Judg. 3:10; 13:25; 1 Sam. 10:6; 1 Kngs. 22:24) referring to the “divine spirit,” which Schleiermacher frequently spoke of, not to the Nicene third person of the Trinity.

Later, in the supplementary notes affixed to the 1821 edition of *On Religion*, Schleiermacher praises Spinoza again, indicating that “the mind and heart of this great man seemed to be permeated with piety, even though it was not Christian piety.”⁸⁵ But, wait. Did not Schleiermacher write in the 1799 edition that Spinoza was full of holy spirit? How is it that one who is full of holy spirit does not possess Christian piety? Schleiermacher goes on to explain that “[n]othing I said should have led one to suppose that I was ascribing the Holy Spirit to Spinoza in the distinctively Christian sense of the word.”⁸⁶ Immediately following his praise of Spinoza, he pens this famous passage:

I entreat you to become familiar with this concept: intuition of the universe. It is the hinge of my whole speech; it is the highest and most universal formula of religion on the basis of which you should be able to find every place in religion from which you may determine its essence and its limits. All intuition proceeds from an influence of the intuited on the one who intuits, from an original and independent action of the former, which is then grasped, apprehended, and conceived by the latter according to one’s own nature.⁸⁷

What are we to make of these intriguing references to Spinoza? What may we reasonably surmise about Schleiermacher’s understanding of the Holy Spirit in the world from his remark that Spinoza was full of holy spirit, yet not “in the distinctively Christian sense of the word”? And what may we reasonably infer about Schleiermacher’s understanding of inspiration from his phrase “influence of the intuited on the one who intuits,” which is found in the very same context in which he praises Spinoza and

⁸⁵ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 160.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁸⁷ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Crouter), 24-25.

Novalis? First, it seems to me that Schleiermacher at least entertains the notion that the Holy Spirit is active at various levels and to various degrees in the world. For example, he believes that there is a sense in which the spirit of God is active in the lives of philosophers and poets, like Spinoza and Novalis, and there is a sense in which the spirit of God is active in the lives of disciples of Christ. The level of engagement may be different, as well as the degree of activity. But, Schleiermacher affirms the possibility that God or God's spirit is active in some sense in the lives of all people.

We might easily call this activity of the spirit of God "influence." Schleiermacher does not use the word *Eingebung* or "inspiration" in the aforementioned passage, but he is surely referring to the influence of God in this context. Therefore, I believe we can reasonably infer from this and other passages in Schleiermacher's works that he believes in various levels of inspiration. To express this claim another way, Schleiermacher understands "inspiration" to have several layers of meaning. The word "inspiration" can refer to prophets and apostles as they are influenced by the spirit of God to compose religious literature, and it can also refer to the influence of God's holy Spirit in the lives of those who may not even be characterized as possessing Christian piety.

Finally, how would Schleiermacher respond to the criticism that if the locus of inspiration is the authors, rather than the words of scripture, there is no way to be certain that what the inspired author wrote was a true reflection of that inspiration? Surely, his answer would be: "Correct! There is no absolute certainty regarding such things! The

affirmation that scripture is inspired is a matter of faith. ‘All scripture is inspired of God’ is a proposition that cannot be proven. It can only be accepted on the basis of faith.”

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, Schleiermacher’s understanding of the meaning of inspiration fits neither in the content-based/supernaturalist category, nor the function-based/rationalist category of the doctrine of biblical authority. Because he believes the authors of New Testament were influenced by divine spirit and because he believes the Holy Spirit played a role in both the writing and the collection of the books of the New Testament, one could say that his understanding borrows from the supernaturalists. However, since he does not believe scripture is a deposit of divinely-revealed truths, his position may be said to borrow from the rationalist category. Hence, it is more accurate to place his understanding in a third category, one which I have identified as content-based and rationalist.

The question to be discussed in the next chapter is this: How would Schleiermacher respond to the charge that if only the authors are inspired, the text cannot serve as a norm, authority, or source of theology? His answer would be that the text is authoritative on other grounds. If the biblical text is neither exclusively divine revelation nor an exclusively divine product, and if the authority of scripture does not lie in some property of the text itself, the question arises: Upon what basis can it be authoritative? This is the subject to which we turn in the next chapter: Schleiermacher’s Doctrine of Biblical Authority.

Chapter Five: Schleiermacher and the Authority of Scripture

As I demonstrated in Chapters Three and Four, although Schleiermacher believed in the reality of divine revelation and held a concept of divine inspiration, he did not view the Bible as a deposit of divinely-revealed truths. Rather, he understood it to be a human document, which expresses the experience of God in the lives of believers. As a result, his critics suggest that such a position robs scripture of its ability to serve as any kind of authority in the Christian religion. Schleiermacher begs to differ. He believed in biblical authority.

In Chapters Five and Six, I go into more detail regarding the three-fold schema that I introduced in Chapter Two. That is, in these two chapters, I explain more fully how Schleiermacher's understanding of biblical authority is neither content-based/supernaturalist nor function-based/rationalist, but content-based/rationalist.

I have three aims in this chapter. First, I want to lay out Schleiermacher's understanding of biblical authority.¹ Therefore, in this section I will discuss his conception of scripture as an expression of Christian faith and as "Word of God," a phrase often found in his sermons, and one which, I believe, he identified on occasion with scripture. Second, I want to lay out what I consider to be the core criticism of his

¹ To be more precise, in this chapter I want to explicate his conception of the authority of the New Testament. Schleiermacher argued that the Old Testament did not have the same normative status as the New, but I will save the discussion of his understanding of the Old Testament for Chapter Six, "Schleiermacher and the Normative Character of Scripture."

understanding of biblical authority from those who regard scripture as divinely-inspired revelation: it rejects scripture as the foundation of Christian faith. Third, I want to trace out Schleiermacher's response to this criticism and the reasoning which underlies it. To effect this, I will scrutinize *Christian Faith*, §128 and examine in some detail one of his sermons. Schleiermacher was almost universally hailed in his own day as a great preacher. He filled the pulpit weekly for most of his life, and perhaps there we learn most about his view of the Bible—that it is a book that still speaks. Dawn DeVries makes this discriminating and factual comment regarding Schleiermacher, the preacher:

As a historical critic and philologist, Schleiermacher could be very skeptical. As a dogmatician, he stayed away from what he perceived to be the imprecision of biblical language. But as a preacher, he lived in the text in much the same way as the great Reformation exegetes and theologians had. Biblical allusions saturate his sermons, texts interpret other texts, and that fusion of horizons occurs that allows an ancient book to become a living voice.²

Schleiermacher's Conception of Biblical Authority

To the surprise of many, that Schleiermacher believed in the authority of scripture in the Christian church is undeniably true. To confirm this, a study of Schleiermacher, the preacher, is an appropriate starting point. During his lifetime, Schleiermacher published seven collections of sermons. These *Sammlungen*, together with separately published sermons, represent in full about one-third of his collected works. Almost all of these published sermons are based upon a biblical text, which is explicitly set forth just

² Dawn DeVries, "Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst (1768-1834)," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 890.

below the sermon title.³ Moreover, references to and citations of scripture in his sermons are plentiful. For example, the editors of *Reformed But Ever Reforming*, count over 380 references to scripture in this ten-sermon collection.⁴ Additionally, Schleiermacher felt that preachers should conform their language to two norms, the most important of which, is the norm of scripture.⁵ He writes: “It is really quite impossible to imagine a proper Christian ministry without diligent occupation with the Bible. . . . It must become the center of all combinations of thought.”⁶

Further confirmation of Schleiermacher’s acceptance of scripture’s authority is found in *Christian Faith*. There, he acknowledges the authority of scripture in the heading of §128: “The authority of holy scripture cannot be the basis of faith in Christ; rather, in order to accord special authority to holy scripture, this fact already must be presupposed.” Then, he explains the basis of that authority in §129: “On the one hand, the holy scriptures of the New Testament are the first member in the whole series of

³ See, for example, Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Servant of the Word: Selected Sermons of Friedrich Schleiermacher*, trans. Dawn DeVries, Fortress Texts in Modern Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); *Reformed But Ever Reforming: Sermons in Relation to the Celebration of the Handing Over of the Augsburg Confession (1830)*, ed. and trans. Iain G. Nicol, Schleiermacher Studies and Translations 8 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997); *The Christian Household: A Sermonic Treatise*, ed. and trans. Dietrich Seidel and Terrence N. Tice, Schleiermacher Studies and Translations 3 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991); and *Selected Sermons of Schleiermacher*, trans. Mary F. Wilson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890).

⁴ Nicol, *Reformed But Ever Reforming*, 182-85.

⁵ I will discuss Schleiermacher’s understanding of how scripture functions as a norm for the Christian church in Chapter Six. Incidentally, the second norm to which preachers should conform their language, according to Schleiermacher, is the intellectual capacity of the congregation and their life situation. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Die praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, ed. Jacob Frerichs (Berlin: Reimer, 1850), 240.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 242.

presentations of Christian faith, continued ever since. On the other hand, they comprise the norm for all succeeding presentations.”⁷

The basis of biblical authority for Schleiermacher, therefore, is that the New Testament is the first recorded expression of Christian faith. Working under the assumption that scripture is an authentic expression of faith, as he does, the New Testament serves as a kind of touchstone or check on later generations. For Schleiermacher, then, later expressions of faith must accord with what we know to be the authentic expression of faith in the New Testament. If they do not, either one is not articulating her or his faith correctly, or the later expression of faith is not Christian faith. This is what he means when he claims that scripture is normative.⁸ Kelsey clearly and succinctly explains Schleiermacher’s understanding:

Scripture has a premier place in Christianity because it is the earliest written testimony of Christians to the influence of Christ. Scripture is the record of early faith through Christ, and for this reason we check our own testimony to Christ against it.⁹

Certainly, the principal reason that scripture has authority for Schleiermacher is that he regards it as an expression of faith in Christ, the first in a series of such expressions, but normative in a way that later presentations of faith are not.¹⁰ In addition,

⁷ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §128 and §129.

⁸ I will have much more to add regarding Schleiermacher’s understanding of the normative authority of the New Testament in the next chapter.

⁹ Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher*, 89-90.

¹⁰ To me, the explication of Schleiermacher’s understanding of the basis of scripture’s authority and his conception of how or in what way(s) scripture is authoritative in the Christian church are closely-related topics. I believe, however, that they are topics which are more effectively treated separately. Therefore, I will defer the discussion of the latter until the next chapter, as my aim in this one is primarily to demonstrate that Schleiermacher ascribes authority to scripture and why.

I believe there is another reason, one that is closely related to the aforementioned. It has to do with Schleiermacher's use of the phrase, "Word of God." What is the meaning of this phrase, in what sense or senses did Schleiermacher use it, and what is the relevance of this discussion to the subject of biblical authority? These are the questions to which I now turn.

In common parlance, "Word of God" is used as a synonym for revelation or for the Bible. In the technical vocabulary of theology, the "Word of God" may refer to Christ. Sometimes, the Word of God is also used to describe a contemporary divine communication—particularly in the act of preaching.

Schleiermacher himself uses the phrase "Word of God" in several senses.¹¹ First and foremost, in Schleiermacher's preaching, the phrase often corresponds to Christ. For example, this seems apparent in a sermon he preached, entitled, "On the Public Ministry of the Word of God." His message is based on this scripture text: "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12). Upon close examination, one may discover that the function of this sermon is to explain the rationale for and benefits of the "ministry of the Word of God," a ministry that refers to the teaching office of pastors and teachers.¹² In this sermon, Schleiermacher

¹¹ For a very fine treatment of Schleiermacher's use of "Word of God," see Dawn DeVries, "The Word of God in the Theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher," in *Papers of the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology*, vol. 4, ed. Matthew Zyniewicz (Pittsburgh, PA: Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, 2000), 45-69.

¹² See Schleiermacher's sermon entitled "On the Public Ministry of the Word of God," in *Reformed But Ever Reforming*, 111. He calls those who fill these roles "servants of God's Word" (111), "ministers of the divine Word" (120), and "ministers of the Word" (120, 124).

equates “the divine Word” with Christ: “[Christians] are united in a blessed community under the protection and guidance of the divine Word, which has become active in all of them to bring about a true spiritual life.”¹³ Of people who are not called to the office of pastor and teacher, he asserts that they should not “interpret the Word of God in public or dispense the holy pledges of *his* promise.”¹⁴ In another sermon, titled, “Sermon at Nathanael’s Grave,” after writing that this world “is glorified through the life of the Redeemer and hallowed through the efficacy of his Spirit,” Schleiermacher confesses that his highest goal was “to be nothing but a servant of *this* divine Word.”¹⁵ Tice agrees with this identification:

The word is whatever God proclaims in Christ. Schleiermacher uses this term of scripture only insofar as it represents and serves this purpose. “Ministry of the Word” refers precisely to this word. The word become flesh is God’s word spoken and enacted in Christ, not a preexistent part of the Godhead become incarnate. “The word became flesh” is God’s word proclaimed by word and deed by and through the Redeemer.¹⁶

DeVries agrees. She claims that “Word of God” is a reference to Christ in the preached word:

For present-day Christians, this powerful influence of the Redeemer is no longer exerted by his corporeal presence, but by the “picture” of him that is present within the church. And the sermon is the location of that picture. Carrying on the prophetic and priestly work of the Redeemer, preachers, by presenting their

¹³ Ibid., 107.

¹⁴ Ibid., 108. See also 111-112, 116, 124. Italics mine.

¹⁵ See Schleiermacher’s eulogy entitled “Sermon at Nathanael’s Grave,” in *Servant of the Word*, 211. Italicized words are mine. I am presuming that the antecedent of “this” is “the Redeemer.” Here, Schleiermacher could very well be using the phrase to refer to divine communication in the act of preaching.

¹⁶ Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 76.

own Christian consciousness, almost seductively “assume” their hearers into the power of their own experience of Christ and exert a powerful influence over them, just as Christ influenced his disciples. And since any success they have in affecting their hearers is due to the presence of the Holy Spirit in their proclamation, it is certain that their congregations are encountering the Redeemer himself in the sermon. Thus for Schleiermacher, the sermon was the “Word of God,” but not in the sense of a new declaration from God the Father. Rather, the sermon is the transparent medium through which we encounter the Redeemer, who is himself God’s incarnate Word.¹⁷

Second, Schleiermacher’s use of the phrase seems to correspond to scripture in some of his sermons. For instance, in the aforementioned sermon, “On the Public Ministry of the Word of God,” he asks: “Why apostles and prophets if the divine Word is already alive in all of us? Why evangelists if we can everywhere call to mind the life of the Redeemer and the fullness of his holy image from the written Word of God?”¹⁸ Clearly, the first usage of the phrase in this quotation is a reference to Christ, while the second reference—“the written Word of God”—is a reference to scripture.¹⁹ Also, he writes that one of the responsibilities of pastors is

to place the Word of God in the hands of young Christians, urging them to observe it so that they themselves may derive from it the standards that will govern their lives and should test and understand themselves in the light from Christ that everywhere shines forth from it.²⁰

¹⁷ DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 11.

¹⁸ See Schleiermacher’s sermon entitled “On the Public Ministry of the Word,” in *Reformed But Ever Reforming*, 107.

¹⁹ When I believe Schleiermacher applies the phrase to scripture, I will render the phrase, “word of God.” However, when I quote from one of his sermons as they are found, for example, in *Reformed But Ever Reforming* and *Servant of the Word*, I will render the phrase as it generally appears there: “Word of God.” My opinion is that for the sake of clarity, “word of God” should be used when the phrase refers to scripture, and “Word of God” when it refers to Christ.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

In this passage, we may reasonably conclude that Schleiermacher is alluding to scripture as that from which the light of Christ shines.

There seems to be a similar correlation of scripture and “word of God” in a sermon Schleiermacher preached in 1817, which celebrated the three hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. It was entitled, “Teaching the Reformation Faith to Our Children.” Emphasizing the blessings that came to the church via the Reformation, he writes that these blessings can be traced chiefly

to the recovery of the free use of God’s Word and to the reaffirmation of the great Christian doctrine concerning the futility of all outward works—the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Accordingly, today’s meditation requires two resolutions of us: first, that we must assist our children in the free use of God’s Word, and second, that we must teach them the righteousness that comes from faith.²¹

He adds that during the festival days of 1817 each one “sought to recall the stories from which we know how deeply the Word of God was buried in darkness for ages before the Reformation of the church.” Is this a reference to Christ or to scripture? At the very least, Schleiermacher demonstrates in the very next sentence the close association of the two: “In its original language, scripture was seldom sufficiently available even to biblical scholars, and it was as good as unavailable to the common people in their native tongue.” Schleiermacher is rejoicing in the fact that the Reformation restored the faded picture of the Redeemer. How so? By making scripture available to common people. Also, noting that stories of Jesus make an impression upon children as well, he encourages parents to

²¹ See Schleiermacher’s sermon on “Teaching the Reformation Faith to Our Children,” in *Servant of the Word*, 90.

lead their children to “the treasures of God’s Word.”²² For it is the duty of parents, he charges, to expose their children to scripture:

We have persuaded ourselves . . . that our children can only understand holy scripture rather late in childhood. We are afraid that if we offered it to them too early they would be robbed of the desire and love for scripture later on; we fear that the holy reverence and awe with which they ought one day to approach God’s Word would be undermined in advance.²³

He concludes the sermon with this plea: “[W]e must solemnly pledge to educate young people in the fear and knowledge of the Lord as much as we can, and to give them early in life his Word as a light on their way.”²⁴

In yet another sermon entitled “The Effects of Scripture and of the Redeemer,”

Schleiermacher clearly identifies the “Word of God” with scripture:

The Word contains above all the original testimony about the life and existence of the Redeemer, and it is by this testimony alone that we must judge whether something is taken from what is his. . . . If someone wants to remain within this fellowship but still boasts much or little about what the Lord has effected immediately in his soul . . . he must prove this for his congregation from God’s Word.²⁵

²² Ibid., 91.

²³ Ibid. Throughout this particular sermon, Schleiermacher equates the word of God with scripture. He writes: “What do we mean when we say young people should first be able to understand the Word of God? Should we take it in the fullest sense, that they must be able to comprehend everything one can offer them from scripture in all its ramifications? Must they know the precise definition of the meaning of each word and phrase, so that neither too much nor too little sticks in their souls? We know well that such an understanding of the divine Word is solely the business of biblical scholars, and it is, even for them, a task to which they must dedicate their efforts unceasingly. They do not claim to have explained scripture fully.” He encourages parents to feed and nurture in their children the first longings for a higher life. He states: “When we observe this longing, what better thing could we do than to meet it with the pure milk of the divine Word? Therefore, if today we are thanking God the Lord more fervently than ever for the blessing of his Word, we must also vow not to hinder and delay the salvific effects of that Word! We should recognize the sacred duty not to hold our children back from the Word of God with an all too questionable cautiousness” (DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 91-93).

²⁴ Ibid., 94.

²⁵ See Schleiermacher’s sermon on “The Effects of Scripture and of the Redeemer,” in DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 112-113.

What did Schleiermacher intend to convey when he referred to scripture as “word of God”? Assuredly, he did not mean that scripture is *of* God in the sense that it is *from* God. As I demonstrated in Chapter Three, although he had a concept of revelation, he did not accept that scripture was a deposit of divinely and supernaturally revealed truths. Does German grammar provide some clarity on the meaning of this phrase? I do not believe it does. “Word of God,” or “divine word” (*göttlichen Wort*) is in the genitive case, which is commonly used to indicate possession.²⁶ Also, the genitive case can take the preposition “regarding” or “concerning.”²⁷ According to the German construction of this phrase, then, the meaning of “word of God” could be the word or message that belongs to God (Possessive Genitive) or the word or message regarding or concerning God (Objective Genitive).

One thing is certain: one cannot read Schleiermacher’s sermons without coming to the conclusion that here was a theologian and preacher who held a high view of scripture. The fact that he correlates “Word of God” and scripture is ample evidence of his belief that scripture is special, indeed, authoritative.

His contributions to exegetical studies only confirm this.²⁸ From the beginning of his teaching career in 1804, he lectured almost continuously in New Testament studies.

At Halle he offered courses on Galatians, Thessalonians, Corinthians, Romans,

²⁶ April Wilson, *German Quickly: A Grammar for Reading German*, rev. ed. (Peter Lang Publishing: New York: 2007), 18.

²⁷ Terrence N. Tice, interview by author, Denver, CO, December 11, 2014.

²⁸ The following biographical information was taken from DeVries, “Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst (1768-1834),” in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, 886.

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews. At the University of Berlin, from 1810 to 1834, he lectured at least once each academic year (except in 1827) on some theme in New Testament studies. He offered eleven semester-long courses on the Gospels, six on Acts, nineteen on the Pauline, Pastoral and Catholic Epistles and Hebrews, four on the life of Jesus, and two on introduction to the New Testament.

The Core Criticism of Schleiermacher's Conception of Biblical Authority

As I did in the last two chapters, I want to identify and address the criticisms of those who tend to align with the content-based/supernaturalist approach to biblical authority. Generally, their chief criticism of Schleiermacher's view of scripture and its authority is that it severely limits the role of the Bible in theology and church.²⁹ More specifically, they argue that his position does not grant to scripture its fundamental and essential role as the foundation of Christian faith. This is key to understanding the viewpoint of Schleiermacher's critics. For content-based supernaturalists like Henry and many others who are critical of Schleiermacher's theology, scripture is the starting point of faith.

Now, to be clear, both content-based supernaturalists and function-based rationalists acknowledge the authority of scripture, at least to some degree.

Schleiermacher himself, as noted above in this chapter, believed in the authority of the New Testament. Indeed, one could make the case that all evangelicals believe in biblical

²⁹ Cf., DeVries, "The Word of God in the Theology of Schleiermacher," 49-52.

authority.³⁰ The central issue and point of controversy, of course, is the *locus* of that authority.

Stanley Grenz helps us to understand one of the chief criticisms of Schleiermacher, in his essay in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority, and Hermeneutics*. There, he argues that two approaches to the role of scripture have prevailed among evangelicals since the Reformation. On the one hand, some have held that the Bible is a “source of correct doctrine.”³¹ Others, characterized more by Pietism and Puritanism, see the Bible as a “source of spiritual sustenance.”³² This typology may be overly simplistic, but I believe there is value in it. In general, I would say that it typifies models of biblical authority advocated by content-based supernaturalists and function-based rationalists.

The criticism of Schleiermacher’s position is that since, for him, the New Testament is authoritative because it is an expression, indeed, the first expression, of the faith of the early Christian community, the locus of biblical authority is found in the community of believers, rather than in the text of scripture. In other words, Schleiermacher is often presented as a theologian who radically subordinated the authority of scripture to that of experience. As one critic asserts: “Scripture is not

³⁰ Chad Owen Brand, “Defining Evangelicalism” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 296-304.

³¹ Stanley J. Grenz, “Nurturing the Soul, Informing the Mind: The Genesis of the Evangelical Scripture Principle,” in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent E. Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Ekholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 23.

³² *Ibid.*

ultimately about us, but about God and his redemptive work to rescue human beings from their lost condition.”³³ Schleiermacher’s critics wonder: If scripture is not a divinely revealed deposit of correct doctrine then how can it serve as the foundation of faith? How can it function as the ground of theology and life? This is the reasoning behind this chief criticism.³⁴

Schleiermacher’s Response

How would Schleiermacher respond to this criticism? First, although he would certainly deny that his position diminishes the role of the Bible in the church, he would wholeheartedly agree with his critics that his position does not grant scripture the role that they think it must. Schleiermacher rejects the notion that scripture is the starting point or foundation of faith. Much of what makes him unique in theological history, as well as the one who ushered in the distinctively modern phase of Protestant theology, is his formulation of an alternative starting point: the shared faith experience of Christians in community understood and communicated through the “apostolic witness” in the New Testament. Schleiermacher roots his accounts of Christian faith and life in an “immediate existential relationship” with God, experienced distinctively by each individual within a distinct religious community.³⁵

³³ Brand, “Defining Evangelicalism,” 302.

³⁴ For more on this particular criticism and the reasoning that underlies the position that scripture is the foundation of faith, see Stephen J. Wellum, “Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-Doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis,” in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 161-197.

³⁵ Terrence Tice, *Schleiermacher*, xiv.

Scripture Is Not the Foundation of Faith

For Schleiermacher, scripture³⁶ cannot be the foundation of Christian faith.³⁷ He declared this explicitly in §128 of *Christian Faith*: “The authority of holy scripture cannot be the basis of faith in Christ; rather, in order to accord special authority to holy scripture, this fact already must be presupposed.”³⁸ Why was Schleiermacher unwilling to grant scripture this role?

First, he believed that if it were foundational to faith, it would be necessary to prove scripture’s authority on the ground of reason.³⁹ For him, this was unacceptable in the first place, because he felt it would make scripture inaccessible to some. To establish biblical authority on the ground of reason would presuppose a “critical and scientific use of the intellect, of which not all persons are capable.”⁴⁰ One of the problems of this approach to scripture for Schleiermacher is that “only persons who are competent in these skills could have faith handed down to them in an original and authentic fashion.”⁴¹ He

³⁶ Likely, this has been recognized already, but I will make the claim here: When Schleiermacher uses the term “scripture,” he always, I think, has the New Testament in mind.

³⁷ For a provocative discussion of the ground of faith and an introduction to Schleiermacher’s view that scripture cannot fill that role, see Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher*, 88-90. Also, for Schleiermacher, almost everywhere in his writings, the term “faith” (*Glaube*), which in ordinary German usage can refer either to belief or faith, means faith, or religious experience, that is, what is immediately present or directly rooted in Christian “religious self-consciousness.” In contrast, belief is a cognitive activity, issuing in opinion and information or supporting facts or knowledge (See Tice, *Schleiermacher*, 58). So, for Schleiermacher, “Christian faith is not about what we believe; Christian faith is about our relationship with God” (Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher*, 71).

³⁸ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §128.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, §128.1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

felt this approach would force people to rely upon the authority of experts and, thus, could generate only a second-hand faith.

This over-reliance on “the experts,” he asserts, is incongruous with the Evangelical Church’s belief in the equality of all Christians. It would demand from the laity an unqualified and submissive trust in those who alone would have access to the ground of faith due to their ability to apply their rational faculties to biblical interpretation. This was unacceptable to Schleiermacher, who believed that scripture should be accessible to all. He writes:

[T]he right of access to the divine word that we afford to all Christians and the zeal with which we seek to keep it in vital circulation in no way relate to a supposition that everyone is supposed to be able to offer proof that these books contain a divine revelation.⁴²

Schleiermacher’s second objection to proving the authority of scripture on the ground of reason is based on his contention that if such proof could be given and if faith could be established in this fashion, then faith could be implanted by argument. The problem with this scenario, he argues, is that it would mean that faith could exist in those who felt no need of redemption.⁴³ The need of redemption, repentance, a change of mind and heart—these are things that accompany a genuine faith, according to Schleiermacher. Consequently, and in other words, he believed that “faith,” which could be implanted by argument, would not be a genuine faith at all.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

But upon what basis does he make this claim? What norm informed his understanding of “genuine faith”? From his study of the Gospels in the Reformed tradition, Schleiermacher came to believe that the earliest disciples of Jesus had genuine faith. Because their faith was real, Schleiermacher was sure that the “ground of faith must be the same among us as among the first Christians.”⁴⁴ This meant, then, that faith must be generated, not by the New Testament, since the earliest disciples did not have the New Testament, but by the personal influences of Christ.⁴⁵

But some might argue, Schleiermacher writes, that the faith of the earliest Christians was grounded on scripture, Old Testament scripture.⁴⁶ “Didn’t the Apostles describe Jesus as the figure whom the prophets foretold?” some must have argued. Schleiermacher’s response is that it is impossible to take this as meaning that the earliest Christians had been led to faith in Jesus by the study of those prophecies and by the comparison of their contents with what they saw and heard in Jesus. On the contrary, he asserts, it was a direct impression that awakened faith in those who had been prepared by

⁴⁴ Ibid., §128.2.

⁴⁵ Ibid. A key argument against those who hold a content-based/supernaturalist approach to biblical authority is that the earliest disciples were saved without scripture. I believe this is a decisive argument in Schleiermacher’s doctrine of biblical authority. If one grants that people since the time of Christ develop faith and are, therefore, saved in the same way as the earliest Christians, then scripture cannot be the foundation of faith. Again, Schleiermacher explains: “If we proceed from the principle that our Christianity is to be the same as that of the apostles, then ours too must arise through the personal influences of Christ, since *spiritual states are not independent of the way in which they emerge* (italics mine)” (*Christian Faith*, §127.2).

⁴⁶ Ibid., §128.2.

the testimony of John the Baptist. Moreover, their description of Jesus was only an expression of this faith combined with their faith in the prophets.⁴⁷

Is it not possible, some might claim, that today faith begins from the acceptance of the doctrine that the preaching of Christ by the “inspired” Apostles is “revealed by God” in the writings of the New Testament? Schleiermacher’s reply is that such faith does not spring from the acceptance of a special doctrine about these writings, as if these writings had their origin in special divine revelation or inspiration. In *Christian Faith*, §14, he writes:

[R]egarding *inspiration*, in Christianity this concept bears a thoroughly subordinate meaning. This is the case, for reference of the concept to Christ finds no place in Christianity at all, in that divine revelation through him, however it might be conceived, is always taken to be identical with his entire existence, not as appearing in a fragmentary manner in scattered instances. What the Spirit gave to the apostles, however, Christ himself spoke of as derived entirely from his own instruction. Moreover, those who became persons of faith through the apostolic witness did not become so because this witness had arisen through inspiration, for they knew nothing of that.⁴⁸

As further proof that faith does not come from believing in the inspiration of the New Testament authors, Schleiermacher notes that “[a]s for the New Testament . . . faith had been communicated over the length of two centuries before any agreement was set forth as to its distinctive currency.”⁴⁹ In fact, he argues that one must have faith before

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., §14, p.s.

⁴⁹ Ibid. The word “currency” is a translation of the word “*Gültigkeit*.” Tice notes that this term refers to “an agreed-upon set of writings that would have general currency for the churches represented in the decision-making.”

reading scripture as containing and conveying divine revelation as a generally trustworthy witness to Christ. He makes this point in one of his sermons:

It is not altogether true to say, as we often enough put it, that scripture is the first witness to faith to have come down to us. Faith in Christ arose through Christ himself, in response to how he lived, spoke, and acted. It was only afterward that scripture arose, as it proceeded from faith. Thus, it is Christ who ever remains the source of faith, even still today, and to this we must hold firm.⁵⁰

Moreover a doctrine of the divine inspiration of scripture, he claimed, can be credible only to those who are already believers.⁵¹

Schleiermacher's Understanding of the Foundation of Faith

Another reason Schleiermacher refused to view scripture as the faith-forming foundation is that he had the strong conviction that something else and something better had to be that foundation. For him, that “something better” is the experience of redemption. To explain this point of view, I want to examine in some detail a sermon Schleiermacher preached before 1826, entitled, “The Effects of Scripture and the Immediate Effects of the Redeemer.” Based upon Luke 24:30-32, a text which describes Jesus’ post-resurrection appearance to a couple of disciples on the road to Emmaus, the sermon clearly articulates Schleiermacher’s understanding of the foundation of faith.

He begins the sermon by highlighting two elements in the story. First, he notes that Jesus deliberately took special care to make clear to his disciples the scripture that

⁵⁰ See Schleiermacher’s sermon entitled, “On the Handing Over of the Confession As Giving an Account for the Ground of Hope, in Nicol, *Reformed But Every Reforming*, 41.

⁵¹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §14, p.s.

bore witness to him. However, second, Schleiermacher asserts that there was something else which neither the scripture in itself nor even Christ's explanation of it could bring about. He writes:

Despite the fact that the disciples' hearts had burned along the way when he opened the scripture to them, they still did not recognize him. That happened only when he sat at table with them, broke the bread with the customary thanksgiving, and divided it among them. Only then did they recognize him.⁵²

From this, Schleiermacher infers that the disciples did not attribute even the burning of their hearts within them to the scripture, but rather to Christ's way of using it and expounding it. Then, he articulates his thesis: "We see here, then, two things: the effects of scripture and the immediate effects of the Lord, *which radiate purely from his person in the company of his own.*"⁵³ Schleiermacher devotes the remainder of the sermon to an explanation of these two effects and the relationship between them.

How does he explain or describe the effects of scripture? He praises scripture as "a treasure shared by us all."⁵⁴ He affirms its value when he asserts:

[T]he right way of contending for the truth and integrity of our evangelical Christianity is and always will be what it was when our church began: to prove

⁵² See Schleiermacher's sermon on "The Effects of Scripture and the Immediate Effects of the Redeemer," DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 100-101.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 101. Italics mine.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 102-103, 105, 114. In addition to his praise of scripture, Schleiermacher praises those who expound it. He emphasizes the value and necessity of ministers of the word, who like Christ, "join the explanation of scripture to the scripture itself." He asserts that the Lord never fails "to produce in his church those students of scripture, well-educated to the Kingdom of Heaven, to whom God's Spirit gives from his treasure, along with the old and proven things, new insights (Matt. 13:52) that enlighten us and make our hearts burn within us." He affirms the value of those Christians who are "the most zealous guardians of the great and common treasure we all possess in the written Word of the Lord. . . . They draw from this Word because they know that it is the well that never runs dry, the well that holds the Water of Life" (DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 114.).

our good cause from scripture, just as Paul, and Stephen before him, did for the cause of Christianity.⁵⁵

He explicitly states his conviction that scripture is authoritative and again expresses the function of scripture when he asserts that “the holy authority of the Word must provide a firm rule for all that happens in the hearts of Christians.”⁵⁶

How does Schleiermacher describe the effects of the Redeemer? First, he asserts that they are impressions, independent of scripture, made by Christ’s personality. He notes that while Christ walked the earth, “his distinctive nature however it might express itself, never failed to create such impressions.”⁵⁷ Again, Schleiermacher draws the conclusion that this is how the disciples’ faith first arose: through the impression of Christ. He makes this interesting distinction in this beautiful passage:

Now if this impression came to them [the first disciples] as the Lord spoke words of doctrine and admonition to them which afterward became the source of their own instruction to Christians, then this is something that in essence belongs for us entirely to the effects of scripture. Yet, the reason why their hearts burned within them was precisely because of the immediacy of his impression: the way in which the loving movements of the divine disposition were reflected in Jesus’ outward bearing, the strength of conviction expressed in his heavenly, clear eyes, and everything else we could mention by which the glory of the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth, was to be beheld in him (John 1:14).⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 113. In Schleiermacher’s theology, scripture is the norm for experience, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 104.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Elsewhere in this sermon, he describes these immediate and personal effects of the Redeemer as a light that sparks “immediately in the human soul by the Son of God,”⁵⁹ as something that stirs the depths of the soul,⁶⁰ as “immediate inner experiences of the heart,”⁶¹ and as “pious impulses of the soul.”⁶² He equates these effects with that which “arises through the inner working of the Redeemer in the soul.”⁶³ Schleiermacher’s understanding of the effects of the Redeemer is nothing less than “the immediate spiritual presence of the Lord in the soul.”⁶⁴

At one point in the sermon, he seems to anticipate an objection, or at the very least, a question, which he surely understands must be materializing in the minds of his hearers. He wonders if these impressions, connected as they were with Christ’s personal appearance, are available to those who did not live during the period of his earthly life. His initial response, likely rhetorical in nature, is that it seems they are not. But, did not Christ promise that “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20) and that “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matt. 28:20)? Schleiermacher asks. Then, he challenges the skeptics:

Could Christ have meant by these words nothing but the effects that the Word portraying him in the New Testament (and before that was written, the reports of those who had lived with him and under him) must bring about in the hearts of

⁵⁹ Ibid., 112.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 113.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 114.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 115.

those who longed for salvation but had not been able to enjoy his personal acquaintance and influence? And is this all he has left for us? We can scarcely think so!⁶⁵

One reason he trusts that the personal influence of the Redeemer is available since the period Christ walked the earth is because he feels that if it is unavailable, it would be unfair to all who have lived since that time.⁶⁶ But, he also realizes that there are some in every church who want to abandon the hope that immediate experiences of the Lord are possible. They want to listen exclusively to the word of the Lord⁶⁷ because “they are rightly concerned that many things totally alien to the spirit and intention of the Redeemer could insinuate themselves into the faith and life of Christians through such imagined or alleged influences of Christ.”⁶⁸ Schleiermacher notes that these same people argue that every Christian must be fully satisfied with scripture alone.

At this point in the sermon, he accepts the challenge to prove that the availability of these effects is reasonable and that they are unconnected to words. He begins with a reference to the Eucharist. He asks:

⁶⁵ Ibid., 104.

⁶⁶ He grants that to specify exactly what the immediate influences of the Lord could be, since Christ no longer walks in person on earth, is problematic. It would be easier, he states, to understand why Christians have not split into separate communions over this issue. He writes: “In every Christian communion there are those who boast much of the spiritual nearness, the immediate influence, of the Lord as experiences of their own souls. But in every Christian church, there are others who are entirely lacking in such experiences and who know how to cite all kinds of examples of how much that is purely human, (or to put it bluntly) how many illusions, creep in along with what is usually represented as such an extraordinary and immediate effect of the Lord” (DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 104-105).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 105. This is yet another example of where this phrase refers to scripture, as the context indicates. For example, just here, Schleiermacher adds: “[W]e could say that anyone who has rightly recognized the treasure given to us in God’s Word and has submitted to its effects in purity and honesty, faithfulness and obedience, will testify that he has complete satisfaction in this treasure and that Christ works so powerfully through his Word that we require nothing beside it.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

[D]oes not this narrative [Luke 24:30-32] remind us particularly of the Holy Supper that was connected with just such a meal? And does not the special effect that many believers (not to say all of them) credit to this sacrament have a strong resemblance to the experience of the disciples? Is it not a true recognition after the eyes had long been held shut? A lively representation that all at once renews a host of earlier moments when our hearts burned within us? . . . [W]hat else can we say than that these are continuations and consequences of the immediate, personal influence of Christ?⁶⁹

His second illustration comes from the days of the resurrection when the Lord approached his disciples several times and called out to them: “Peace be with you” (John 20:19; 21:26). He said, “My peace I give to you” (John 14:27). After citing these passages, Schleiermacher concludes that the peace that came over the disciples was the immediate effect of the Lord himself. Then he asks, “[M]ust this effect be tied to his bodily, personal presence? Or should we not all be capable of having this experience in special moments? . . . All devout Christians have surely had such experiences!”⁷⁰ Here is his conclusion of the matter:

[B]eside the immediate effects of the Word there are also distinctive effects of the Redeemer that issue, so to say, from his whole and undivided being. And this is not dependent on his bodily appearance for its efficacy. The original spiritual efficacy of his existence is, of course, mediated only through the Word; but it is maintained in its characteristic nature within the communion of the faithful. Thus the original impression constantly takes shape anew in individual hearts, and on particular occasions it becomes efficacious in them in a wonderful way.⁷¹

The final illustration in his apologetic comes from the domain of ordinary, human life. He argues that people often feel the effects of distant loved ones, even without the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 106-107.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 107.

⁷¹ Ibid., 108.

written word and even of those who are no longer alive. Regarding these, he asserts:

“They warn, encourage, correct, and illumine us, so that we are compelled to say, ‘This comes to me because of my union with this friend; this is his word and work in my inner self.’”⁷² Moreover, he adds, people encounter the same thing in connection with those whom they know only through their influence in the world, people who are set up as heroes and examples. Then, Schleiermacher drives home his point:

If we count among the marks of human greatness the fact that the total being of one individual can affect the inner lives of many others decisively and to an extraordinary degree, how can we fail to include the same mark in the greatness of One who is exalted above all others? How can we fail to expect similar effects from him, who should be the hero and model for us all, the One whom we may all most rightly call the friend of our soul in a sense and measure we accord to no other?⁷³

Why was it so important for one who acknowledged the authority and value of scripture and who often wrote of “the glorious treasure we have in God’s Word”⁷⁴ to feel the need to defend the continued availability of the personal and immediate effects of the Redeemer? The answer is that he believed faith springs from the effects of the Redeemer, rather than from scripture.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 110.

⁷⁵ In the introduction of this sermon, Schleiermacher declares plainly that scripture cannot do what the immediate influence of the Redeemer can. Referring to the Luke 24:30-32 narrative and others, he asserts: “[W]e see . . . that, as in almost all these narratives, there was something else which neither the scripture in itself nor even Christ’s explanation of it could bring about. Despite the fact that the disciples’ hearts had burned along the way when he opened the scripture to them, they still did not recognize him” (DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 100).

For Schleiermacher, true and vital Christianity is based on the experience of redemption in Christ. He asks: “If this [proving the cause of evangelical Christianity from scripture] were all, would we be certain that we had and held true and vital Christianity among us?”⁷⁶ At this point one might ask: How would Schleiermacher define “true and vital Christianity”? As if to anticipate the question, he continues:

[D]oes not each of us admit that there are many people who share this good fight with us; many who, like us, strive against all works-righteousness and all power of human authority, and do so from the scripture, but of whom we cannot say that the love of Christ constrains them (2 Cor. 5:14).⁷⁷

He imagines people who “when they behold from a distance the commandments Christ gave to his own, the ordinances he established in the early church, the exemplary nature of his life, and the characteristic features of the way he acted as a person” feel that something special is there, “so that their heart likewise burns within them.” But, he adds, their eyes remain closed, and “they do not come to that joyous, immediate recognition that this is the Lord.”⁷⁸ Is it important that people come to such a recognition? Here is his answer:

True and vital Christianity rests on this recognition alone; we must admit that Christianity cannot be preserved or spread among us unless the effects that come from the living memory and spiritual presence of Christ and are based upon the whole of his nature and manifestation are added to what is, in the narrowest and most particular sense, the effect of Word and doctrine.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 111.

Schleiermacher claims that he does not mean to argue that if one takes Christ's teachings from scripture but separates them from his personal influence, scripture must necessarily degenerate into "a dead letter."⁸⁰ But, he recognizes that this has indeed happened. From personal experience, he asserts that "in our own church we have been—perhaps still are—content with the mere letter of orthodox doctrine, without giving effective evidence of a true Christian disposition."⁸¹ Then, he adds: "But we do not usually find this problem in those who are susceptible to the personal influences of Christ."⁸²

Not only in this sermon, but elsewhere, Schleiermacher expresses his firm conviction that scripture is unable to produce piety. In *On Religion*, he excoriates those "who get their so-called religion from an external source or who depend on some dead writing, swearing on it and using it for proof texts."⁸³ In one of his more famous quotations, he both praises scripture while also noting its inability to equal the influence of the original spirit that inspired it:

Every sacred scripture is in itself a glorious production, a monument in speech from the heroic ages of religion. Servile devotion, however, makes a mausoleum out of it—a monument to a great spirit formerly present but there no longer. If that spirit still has its vital effect, surely it is rather by inspiring a sense of fond objectivity toward that written work from earlier times, for that work can never be more than a weak impress of the spirit that initially produced it.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 144.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Why did Schleiermacher feel that scripture is so limited? A partial answer is that he thought “[t]oo much of the pure impression contained in the original experience is lost in books.”⁸⁵ He utilizes an interesting metaphor to explain this concept:

We know how dark material absorbs most of the light rays striking it. Written signs are like that. Everything having to do with the pious stirring of the spirit is swallowed up by them. Because *the medium is insufficient to embrace the experience*, the expected reflection does not occur.⁸⁶

One of the problems with written communications of piety, Schleiermacher avers, is that “everything has to be repeated two and three times removed from the original experience.”⁸⁷ This means that, essentially, the initial “reflection” is refracted too many times, leading Schleiermacher to ask: “Must religion inevitably lose its abundant life in the dead letter, then?” Naturally, his answer is, “Not at all,” since his conviction is that true religion is produced, not by words on a page, but by the immediate and personal effects of the Redeemer.⁸⁸

He further explains why he believes it is necessary “that scripture be complemented by something from the inside” in his sermon, “The Effects of Scripture

⁸⁵ Ibid., 210.

⁸⁶ Ibid. Italics mine.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid. We should not conclude that Schleiermacher thought that scripture was *necessarily* “a dead letter,” even though he acknowledged this possibility. In his Supplementary Notes on this very section of the Fourth speech, he notes the presence of a “great quickening spirit” in the sacred writings, which, he adds, “is the clearest possible testimony to their divine power.” Nevertheless, he adds: “Nor will it be denied, however, that the living word in a community and the religious stirrings of a community have a far higher power than the written letter. . . . [L]et no one suppose he can replace the church’s life with a dead letter” (Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 244-45).

and the Immediate Effects of the Redeemer.” He asks his hearers to consider how many difficulties one finds in interpreting the Word of scripture:

It comes from a remote time, deals with strange customs, and was written in a language only slightly related to our own. What risky scope for human caprice opens up there! How many sad examples do we see in which caprice actually has been exerted on scripture to make dead and dull what reflects the true essence of Christianity most brightly, or to read into scripture something not in accord with the original spirit of Christian faith. But every attempt, however well-intentioned, to restrain this caprice by external means has proved to be in vain!⁸⁹

His presumption is that only the personal, immediate, and continuing effects of the Redeemer on individual souls is able to counteract the possibility of such human caprice.

Again, Schleiermacher is convinced that faith begins when “a light is sparked immediately in the human soul by the Son of God.”⁹⁰ Moreover, he believes that regardless of when or how this illumination happens, if it happens, one may easily dispense with God’s Word.⁹¹ Why so? To reiterate, he believes that “this is how Christ glorifies and reveals himself immediately in the soul *with greater clarity and certainty*.”⁹²

Kelsey summarizes well Schleiermacher’s firm conviction:

Scripture cannot be the foundation for Christian faith; faith in Christ must exist before someone gives Scripture special authority ([*Christian Faith*], §128). The experience of redemption is the ground of our faith. . . . That experience of redemption is the same for us as it was for Christ’s first followers. They received the experience through personal encounter, seeing in the words and the actions of Jesus what the fulfillment of human life is like. . . . Faith passes from person to

⁸⁹ See Schleiermacher’s sermon in DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 111.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁹¹ Again, the use of “God’s Word” here is a reference to scripture.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 112. Italics mine.

person and generation to generation, because God-consciousness is articulated and otherwise made visible in the lives of faithful people.⁹³

Just here, I want to say a brief word concerning Schleiermacher's christology. As Kelsey observed, for Schleiermacher, the experience of redemption for all Christians since Jesus' day must be the same as it was for his first disciples. What was the experience of the first Christians? As I have demonstrated, they experienced the strength and drawing power of Jesus' personality. They saw something in him that was so compelling and attractive. That something, that critical aspect of his personality, according to Schleiermacher, was Christ's perfect God-consciousness. Thus, Jesus expressed his experience of God to others, and the impression of this experience was redemptive. As Vial summarizes: "What was redemptive for the disciples who were face-to-face with Jesus was his personality and the power of his God-consciousness."⁹⁴

So, since Christ is gone, how can people since then experience redemption in the same way as the first disciples? No, according to Schleiermacher's christology, Christ is not gone; he is present in the community that he founded. Vial writes:

The Christian community, formed by Jesus . . . continues to embody his ways of speaking, gesturing, experiencing. The Christian community carries in it the picture (*Bild*) of Jesus. And so, when latter day people enter into that community they are confronted, in just the way the disciples were, by the redemptive personality of Jesus.⁹⁵

⁹³ "The redeeming influence of Christ today thus does not occur primarily through the biblical text. The redeeming influence of Christ extends today through the visible power of redemption in the lives of the redeemed community of faith" (Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher*, 89, 11).

⁹⁴ Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 89.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

In short, Schleiermacher's christology allows him to think about the ongoing presence of Jesus and the redeeming effects of that presence.

Schleiermacher closes his sermon on "The Effects of Scripture and the Immediate Effects of the Redeemer" with a plea for unity. First, he asserts his belief that it is optimal for both effects to be present in the church:

We should thank God, then, if both effects are always together in the Christian church and are always reacting upon each other. The immediate testimony of the Lord's efficacy in the soul must continually animate the effects of the Word; the holy authority of the Word must provide a firm rule for all that happens in the hearts of Christians, so that all may be held together in the unity of faith and each may submit to the consensus of the community. So may we all remain in the truth that makes us free.⁹⁶

Then he poses one final provocative question: "[H]ow should each individual relate to these two effects that our spiritual life rests upon?" Surely he is being strategic when he first answers the question by referring to scripture: "The body is one and has many members" (1 Cor. 12:12). In other words, he believes that both the person who is scripture-centered and the one who focuses upon the immediate effects of Christ are needed. He urges: "In the Christian church, both effects must be united: the clear, intelligible, and easily communicable efficacy of the Word, and the more mysterious but immediate truth of the Redeemer that stirs the depths of the soul."⁹⁷

Even as he pleads for unity and for Christians to value those among them who "cling to God's Word," he simultaneously removes any doubt as to which effects he

⁹⁶ See Schleiermacher's sermon in DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 113.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

prefers. Is it those that come from scripture or those that come from the Redeemer himself? He affirms that he considers the immediate effects of the Redeemer to have greater value. He acknowledges that perhaps those who are more scripture-oriented in their outlook are too suspicious of immediate inner experiences of the heart. His hope is that they will continue to “nourish themselves with the Word, so that the Word of scripture that bears witness to Christ may become clear in their innermost being.”⁹⁸ As for those who have never experienced the personal effects of Christ, he asks: “How could we despise them for lacking something that others have attained, when they are striving for the same goal as the others? How could they not be valuable to us as the most zealous guardians of the great and common treasure we all possess in the written Word of the Lord?”⁹⁹ Schleiermacher is content to conclude that “the blessing that can arise *only through this inner working of the Redeemer in the soul* is dispersed on these fellow Christians as well, at least indirectly, by means of the many contacts they have in Christian fellowship.”¹⁰⁰

Finally, he appeals to the practice of Christian love in the church. He instructs that love requires that both groups—those who experience more abundantly the blessing of the Word and those who experience the immediate spiritual presence of the Lord—remain open to the special gift of the other.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 114.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Italics mine.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 115.

To recapitulate, Schleiermacher most certainly accepts the authority of scripture, one, because it is the first expression of Christian faith, and two, because it is in some sense the “word of God,” a message regarding redemption in Christ. Although his understanding of the authority of scripture may not be robust enough for some, since he denies that it is the foundation of faith, he certainly held God’s word in high regard. For him, however, the ground of faith is the experience of redemption in Christ.

But if scripture is not the foundation of Christian faith, what is its role in the church? In what sense is it authoritative in Schleiermacher’s theology? He believed it is normative, but what is the nature and extent of its normative character, according to him? Why did he accept the authority of the New Testament, but not of the Old? These are some of the questions which I hope to answer in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: Schleiermacher and the Normative Character of Scripture

Thusfar in my explication of Schleiermacher's doctrine of biblical authority I have demonstrated that although he held doctrines of both inspiration and revelation, he did not hold the supernaturalist/content-based view that scripture is a deposit of divinely-revealed truths. Nevertheless, I have also shown that he most certainly believed in the authority of scripture on the basis that it is a record of the experience of God in the lives of believers. Indeed, Schleiermacher understood scripture to possess *normative* authority, as I introduced in the previous chapter.

In this chapter, I want to unpack his understanding of the normative character of scripture. In order to accomplish this objective, I will attend to three lines of inquiry. First, what is Schleiermacher's conception of "canon"? I believe it is necessary and helpful to lay out his understanding of "canon" as the essence or primary subject matter of Christianity and the relation of this essence to the biblical text. This explanation will lay the foundation for understanding why he ascribed normative authority to some parts of Christian scripture over other parts. Second, to which parts of scripture does Schleiermacher ascribe normative authority? Since he did not grant it to all of scripture, I want to identify what qualified, for him, as an authoritative, biblical norm for Christian faith. This will require an examination of his controversial opinion that the Old Testament should not have canonical standing in the Christian Bible as well as an

identification of the subject matter in the New Testament, which, I believe, became his “canon within the canon.” Third, what kind of authority does scripture exert? I want to explain how scripture functions as a norm for the church and in what sense it is authoritative in Schleiermacher’s theology. I will begin with an examination of his notion of “canon.”

Schleiermacher’s Understanding of “Canon”

An appropriate starting point from which to unpack Schleiermacher’s concept of “canon” is his discussion of philosophical theology in *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*.¹ There, he identifies “canon” as an idea, identified by philosophical theology, which ensures the unity of a religious tradition over time. He acknowledges that the Christian church, like every historical phenomenon, is necessarily subject to change. What will ensure that the unity of any religious tradition, including Christianity, will remain intact in a changing world? What will safeguard its authenticity and integrity in the face of certain change? For Schleiermacher, it is the identification of the idea that accounts for the essence of Christianity.² Helmer summarizes this perspective when she

¹ Schleiermacher identifies three theological sub-disciplines in his *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*: philosophical theology, exegetical theology, and systematic theology. In this section, I am indebted to Christine Helmer, “Transhistorical Unity of the New Testament Canon from Philosophical, Exegetical, and Systematic-Theological Perspectives,” in *One Scripture or Many? Canon from Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Christine Helmer and Christof Landmesser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

² Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study: Revised Translation of the 1811 and 1830 Editions*, 3d. ed., trans. and ed. Terrence N. Tice (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), §47. Hereafter, I will abbreviate this source as *Brief Outline*.

writes that “canon,” for Schleiermacher, is a “philosophical-theological concept derived from a theory of religion in order to account for the transhistorical essence of a religion.”³

That Schleiermacher begins his discussion of “canon” in this way must be significant. After all, one might have expected him to begin his discourse with reference to the biblical text itself. Eventually, he will address the notion of “canon” as it relates to the biblical text, but first he identifies philosophical theology’s determination of “canon” as concept. What is the significance of this?

At the very least, this shows that Schleiermacher differentiates between the subject matter and the text in which it is fixed. Helmer confirms this following her study of this section of *Brief Outline*:

It must be stressed from the onset that Schleiermacher does not identify the canon with the Bible. The Christian Bible is understood in pragmatic-ecclesial terms as the literary text composed of both Old and New Testaments and used by the church since its early history [*Brief Outline*, §115]. The canon, however, is an idea concerned with the unity of the Christian tradition as the identity of an experience that is expressed in a variety of ways and subsequently fixed in literature.⁴

³ Helmer, “Transhistorical Unity of the New Testament Canon from Philosophical, Exegetical, and Systematic-Theological Perspectives,” 27.

⁴ Ibid.

But why the differentiation?⁵ Schleiermacher is once again demonstrating that which occupies his focus: the experience of redemption. Were we to ask him what he considers the main idea that accounts for Christianity and distinguishes it from all other historical religions, undoubtedly, this would be his answer. The experiential identity of the Christian tradition is related to the historical appearance of Jesus of Nazareth.⁶ It is that appearance in history and the experience of redemption that followed as a consequence, which “ensures the unity of Christianity.” He plainly asserts this conviction in *Christian Faith*: “Christianity is a monotheistic faith, belonging to the teleological type of religion, and is essentially distinguished from other such faiths by the fact that in it *everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.*”⁷ Furthermore, Schleiermacher is making a statement about the value of this singular idea, even when compared to and over against the biblical text. He seems always to prefer the experience of Christ over the record of it.⁸

⁵ I must include Helmer’s comments here, which are so appropriate to this study: “The differentiation between text and subject matter represents a crucial shift in understanding the relation of text to its critical investigation. In the early nineteenth century, Schleiermacher saw the challenge posed by historical and natural-scientific theories against a supernaturalistic view of biblical inspiration and an inspired canonical text. To salvage an aspect of Christianity against its cultured despisers, Schleiermacher takes its ‘inner fire’ to be both the subject matter of theology as well as the referent of scripture (see John 5:39). The ‘inner power’ of Christianity is the experiential factor funding the unity of the Christian tradition as a whole, and urging its communication in speech and text” (Helmer, 30). Later in her fine essay, Helmer notes that on the basis of this text-subject matter differentiation, the text can be the object of critical investigation, “the study of the subjective construals of an experience that critical methods cannot falsify.” However, she documents that this relation between text and subject matter presents exegetical-theological difficulties, namely, the problem of an historical gap between Jesus and the New Testament record. Cf., Helmer, 31-37.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §11. Italics mine.

⁸ Catherine Kelsey observes that in Schleiermacher’s preaching on John 1:35-51, for example, it is evident that his interest lies not in the text but in the faith experience which the text describes. Catherine L. Kelsey, “Calling Disciples: Schleiermacher’s Application of His Hermeneutics to John 1:35-51,” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 34.

After his discussion in *Brief Outline* of “canon” as the idea which explains the essence of an historical religion, he turns to the sub-discipline of exegetical theology and the task of determining the canon in its relation to a text.⁹ (Of course, the text he has in mind is the New Testament. He writes that it is the canon of the Christian church because it is the collection of writings “which contain the normative presentation of Christianity.”¹⁰) Regarding the content of the literary canon, Schleiermacher notes:

Within the New Testament canon belong essentially both those normative documents which concern the action and effect of Christ both on and with his disciples and also those which concern the common actions and effect of his disciples toward the establishing of Christianity.¹¹

Here, he indicates that he agrees with the early church’s canonical distinction between the New Testament Gospels (*evangelion*) and the apostolic epistles (*apostolos*). Also, what he makes plain here is his belief that the writings of the New Testament are a record of the experience of Christ, fixed in literary form. For him, the text chronicles the experience of redemption through the Redeemer and the subsequent creation of the church.

⁹ As a consequence of the fact that the New Testament is the canon of the Christian church, Schleiermacher suggests that the unique and essential task of exegetical theology is to determine the correct understanding of this canon (Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, §104). Furthermore, he believes that one of the tools for use by the exegetical theologian is higher criticism, which may be utilized to more exactly determine the canon. He identifies this as higher criticism’s “greatest theological-exegetical task” (*Brief Outline*, §113).

¹⁰ Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, §104.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, §105.

In addition, Schleiermacher suggests that there must necessarily be a lack of certainty regarding the books that are accepted as canonical.¹² He recognizes that the canon has obtained its present form through the decision of the church, and that, therefore, the decision as to what belongs in the canon is not immutable or sacrosanct. Consequently, he asserts that the church is justified in starting fresh investigations into it.¹³ For instance, he asserts that an uncanonical book may contain canonical passages, just as most of what has been interpolated by a later hand within a canonical book will be uncanonical.¹⁴

One of the reasons he believes that what belongs in the canon is and will always be an open question is his conviction that “the sense for what is truly apostolic is, as history teaches us, a gift of the Spirit that gradually ascends within the church.”¹⁵ For, he writes, “much can have slipped into the sacred books through people’s oversight or blunders, things which, in turn, can be recognized and definitely proved to be uncanonical only at a later time.”¹⁶ Thus, it would be a mistake, he claims, to try to

¹² See Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.4. Schleiermacher held that what belongs in the canon is and will always be an open question. First, he insists that since its determination was made after the age of the apostles, there is no genuinely apostolic indication for how one might distinguish what is canonical. Second, through the natural, gradual process of sifting the early church writings, he believed that many things could have crept into the sacred books that could be recognized and definitely proved as uncanonical in a later age. See also Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, §§106-109.

¹³ Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, §110. Again, these “fresh investigations” represent the greatest task and use of higher criticism for Schleiermacher. He also asserts in §110 that for him, it is more important to determine whether a piece of writing is canonical than to determine authorship, acknowledging that it could still be canonical no matter who authored it.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, §112.

¹⁵ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

prevent further unrestricted research into the matter, even though several of the confessional standards represent the canon as closed. It can only contribute to the well-being of the church if what does not truly belong to Holy Scripture is distinguished clearly from it.¹⁷

At the same time, Schleiermacher attributed the determination of the canon to the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ This may appear surprising in the face of his repeated rejection of a supernaturalistic understanding of the biblical text. And yet, he refers to the Holy Spirit as the unifying principle behind the canon as a collection. He writes: “[S]cripture—both each individual book in and of itself as well as the collection, a treasure laid up for all subsequent generations of the church—is always the work of the Holy Spirit as the common spirit of the church.”¹⁹

He claims that this common spirit is that which enlivens the New Testament authors and all subsequent believers in the church’s history and that, therefore, the canon

¹⁷ He seems to hint at what he believes should go into the canon when he writes that placing scripture under careful scrutiny does not hurt the church. Such an investigation, he writes, will ensure that “nothing essential to the preservation and well-being of the church” will have been withdrawn by such an investigation. His warrant is that “the well-being of the church can only be advanced if what does not truly belong in sacred scripture is differentiated from it” (Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.4). So, it would seem that one criterion for canonicity, as well as possibly for scripture that merits the badge of having normative authority, is the contribution that scripture makes to the preservation and well-being of the church. This line of thinking raises an important and relevant question regarding Schleiermacher’s doctrine of biblical authority: Is it scripture that has norming authority, or the church, since it determined which writings were given canonical standing? I will save this discussion for the next chapter.

¹⁸ I established in Chapter Four that Schleiermacher believed that the Holy Spirit was active in the creation of the biblical canon. In *Christian Faith*, §130, he asserts: “The individual books of the New Testament are inspired by the Holy Spirit, and their collection has arisen under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” He goes on to acknowledge that the formation of the canon is the result of a complex process of collaboration and counteraction in the church, and not everything that has contributed to that compilation can be attributed in the same measure to the Holy Spirit. For this reason, some refer to the collection of the canonical scriptures not as a case of inspiration (*Eingebung*), but as a product of the guiding activity (*Leitung*) of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §127.2.

must be attributed to a power that continues to render Christ to every generation of believers. His position is that the relation of the canon as idea (subject matter) to canon as text is just this: the New Testament canon communicates an experience that remains the same through the centuries.²⁰

While Schleiermacher is convinced of the Holy Spirit's involvement in the collection of the canon, he simultaneously understands that the church had a role in deciding those writings which merited canonical standing and those which did not. He is well aware that the process of canon collection must be understood as a thoroughly human and historical one. While he admits that "no tidy apostolic limit regarding what is canonical and normative can have been transmitted to us,"²¹ he accepts the role of the church in establishing what is canonical and normative. For example, he asserts that the church in some regions might consider some biblical books to be disposable, in comparison with other books that were acceptable among isolated congregations and that were effective for them alone. The collection of the books came into being only gradually and persisted in the careful adjusting of the various degrees of normative worth that people would assign to particular components of scripture. So, it is true that in Schleiermacher's estimation, the church decided which books had canonical standing and which parts of scripture possessed normative value.

²⁰ For more on the relation of subject matter and text, see Helmer, "Transhistorical Unity of the New Testament Canon from Philosophical, Exegetical, and Systematic-Theological Perspectives," 38.

²¹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.4.

Schleiermacher's "Canon within the Canon"

Now that some groundwork has been laid concerning Schleiermacher's concept of "canon," I believe we are in a better position to explain his understanding of what, for him, has normative authority in the Christian church. Many Christians grant normative authority to all sixty-six books of the Protestant Christian Bible, some adding the Apocrypha.²² Schleiermacher does not. He not only clearly asserts that not all scripture has the same normative worth,²³ he also demonstrates a greater reliance on some parts of the Christian Bible than on other parts. That is, he has a "canon within the canon." To which parts of scripture does he attribute normative authority in the Christian church?

Normative Authority: The New Testament, Not the Old

First, Schleiermacher asserts that the New Testament is authoritative. This is his claim in *Christian Faith*, §129: "On the one hand, *the holy scriptures of the New Testament* are the first member in the whole series of Christian faith, continued ever since. On the other hand, they comprise the norm for all succeeding presentations."²⁴ Hence, Schleiermacher argues that the Old Testament does not share the normative status

²² For representative sources that advocate this position, see *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

²³ "[I]f we consider the canonical writings in and of themselves, these do bear in themselves a normative value for all times. We do not ascribe this value to every aspect of our holy scriptures equally" (Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §129.2). This statement and others from Schleiermacher's pen, when taken together, seem to imply that while he ascribed normative authority to the canonical writings in general, he at the same time ascribed greater normative worth to some canonical writings over others. Or, one could make the case that he did not ascribe normative authority to the entire canon. I believe that whichever interpretive option one chooses, the consequence is the same: like most theologians and Bible students, Schleiermacher had a "canon within the canon."

²⁴ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §129. Italics mine.

of the New. He does so on the grounds that the Old Testament expresses Jewish, not Christian, religion.²⁵ He understands Christianity not as a development of Judaism, but as a genuinely new faith.²⁶ The Old Testament, therefore, cannot provide the scriptural basis for peculiarly Christian doctrines, though it could be a help to understanding them. Moreover, he thinks that treating Jewish scripture as an authoritative source for Christian doctrines necessarily required dishonesty on the part of the interpreter, who would try to read Christian themes into pre-Christian texts and thus obscure their genuine historical and linguistic sense.²⁷

In a postscript to the doctrine of scripture in *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher sets out his view against the canonical standing of the Old Testament. After acknowledging that the Old Testament writings owe their place in our Bible in part to New Testament references to them and in part to the historical connection between Jewish and Christian worship, he makes the controversial claim that the Old Testament writings on that account do not share the normative worth or the inspiration of the New. Although he was

²⁵ For a discussion of Schleiermacher's view of the Old Testament, see Paul E. Capetz, "Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Old Testament," *Harvard Theological Review* 102, no. 3 (July 2009): 297-326; Horst Dietrich Preuss, "Vom Verlust des Alten Testaments und seinen Folgen: dargestellt anhand der Theologie und Predigt F. D. Schleiermachers," in *Lebendiger Umgang mit Schrift und Bekenntnis: Theologische Beiträge zur Beziehung von Schrift und Bekenntnis und zu ihrer Bedeutung für das Leben der Kirche*, ed. Joachim Track (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1980), 127-160; Martin Stiere, "Das Alte Testament im theologischen Denken Schleiermachers," in *Altes Testament Forschung und Wirkung: Festschrift für Henning Graf Reventlow*, ed. Peter Sommer and Winfried Thiele (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994), 329-336.

²⁶ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §12.2.

²⁷ DeVries, "Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst (1768-1834)," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, 887. Interestingly, Schleiermacher did preach on the Old Testament, but not frequently, and usually only when Old Testament texts were stipulated for special worship services by order of the king. See F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Die praktische Theologie nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, ed. Jacob Frerichs (Berlin: Reimer, 1850), 238.

well aware that this view was not yet generally recognized by church theologians, he felt sure that it was destined in some future time to be widely shared.

His argument against the authority of the Old Testament in *Christian Faith* rests on three grounds. First, he asserts that the inspiration of the Old Testament texts, with the possible exception of messianic prophecies,²⁸ was not the activity of the same Spirit of Christ at work in the church. He bases his case on a reading of Paul's treatment of the Law in Galatians and Romans. If we suppose, he argues, that Paul is right to claim that the Law lacks the power of the Spirit from which the Christian life must spring,²⁹ then it cannot be claimed that the Law is inspired by the same Spirit. Rather, it reflects the common spirit of the people of Israel who wrote it, and, thus, not the Christian common spirit. Also, he notes that Paul writes that God sends the Spirit into our hearts by virtue of our joining with Christ. Moreover, he notes that Christ himself never represents the sending of the Spirit "as the return of something that was already present before and then afterward disappeared for a time."³⁰

²⁸ Schleiermacher "was convinced that the Christian effort to prove Jesus' messianic status on the basis of Old Testament prophecy was a mistake and that the New Testament's appeal to it was strictly an intra-Jewish affair of the first century" (Capetz, "Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Old Testament," 300). He writes: "I cannot regard the attempt to prove Christ from prophecies as a joyful task, and I regret that so many prominent scholars still bother with it. For this reason I cannot help but suspect that such an attempt is basically wrong and that placing great value on these external proofs is due at least to a lack of trust in the inner power of Christianity" (Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 66).

²⁹ Here, Schleiermacher makes reference to Romans 7:6ff and 8:3: "But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit. . . . For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."

³⁰ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §132.2.

Second, the Old Testament cannot, strictly speaking, serve as a productive or language-forming norm for Christian piety. That is, the Old Testament cannot function as a *constitutive* norm, one which constitutes or forms the language and thought of Christian faith. According to Schleiermacher, ideas are present there that Christians cannot appropriate as pure expressions of their piety, even in the noblest Psalms. Consequently, only after deluding oneself through unconscious additions and subtractions could one construct a Christian doctrine of God from the Prophets and the Psalms, he claims.

Third, in addition to not being a constitutive norm for Christian faith, the Old Testament is ill-suited to function as a *critical* norm. In other words, the Old Testament is in no position to evaluate or measure religious thinking that intends to be Christian. Schleiermacher grants that there are few Christian doctrines that people throughout the history of the church have not attempted to prove from the Old Testament. But, he asks, why should we use the less clear premonitions of the prophets alongside the clear proclamations of Christ himself or his disciples? He suggests that the history of Christian theology shows plainly enough how much these efforts to find Christian faith in the Old Testament has actually hindered honest exegesis and raised a myriad of complex problems that Christian theology had no need to address. The best course of action, then, would be to give up Old Testament proofs for specifically Christian doctrines, and to wholly set aside whatever chiefly relies on such proofs for support.³¹

³¹ Ibid.

Why, then, is the Old Testament in the Christian canon at all? Schleiermacher cites two historical reasons for its inclusion. First, the preaching of Christ himself and of the apostles was based on portions of the Old Testament read aloud, and this practice continued in the early Christian community before the formation of the New Testament canon. He argues, however, that it does not follow from this fact, that the same homiletical use of the Old Testament should persist or “that we have to consider it a corruption of the church if our own generation of Christians is not just as conversant with the Old Testament as with the New Testament.”³² On the contrary, precisely because the relationship between the Old Testament and the New is historical, it is natural to expect that “the gradual, every broadening subsidence of the Old Testament lies in the nature of the matter.” Because the connection between the apostolic proclamation and the Old Testament writings is an historical one, it could be expected that gradually the need for references to the Old Testament would diminish, and accordingly it would retreat behind the New Testament in the church’s usage. Least of all, Schleiermacher asserts, is this connection able to guarantee the normative worth and inspiration of the Old Testament books.³³

Another reason he claims that the Old Testament is in the Christian Bible is that Christ himself and the apostles refer to the Old Testament books as divine authorities

³² Ibid.

³³ Schleiermacher asserts just here that the Pauline passages that attest to the usefulness of the Old Testament writings—Rom. 15:4, 1 Cor. 10:11, and 2 Tim. 3:16—refer to the usage cited above. He states that the author of these Pauline passages “would surely give us witness for the claim that we no longer have any need for such proofs” (*Christian Faith*, §132.3).

favorable to Christianity. Again, however, he suggests that it does not follow “that we still have need of these preliminary intimations [of Christian piety], since we have the experience [of that piety in the New Testament].” Again, he demonstrates his preference for the experience of Christian faith when he writes: “one ceases to have faith on account of such testimonies if one has gained immediate certitude based on one’s own perception (*Anschauung*).”³⁴

Although Schleiermacher did not recommend the removal of the Old Testament from the Christian Bible, he thought it would perhaps be better to include it as an appendix after the New. Then, he opines, it would be clear that it is in no way necessary first to work through all of the Old Testament “in order to get onto the right path to the New Testament.”³⁵ So, in the first place, Schleiermacher attributes normative authority to the New Testament, and not to the Old.

Normative Authority: Reports of the Words and Deeds of Christ

Second, he attributes greater normative worth to the sections of the New Testament that report the words and deeds of Christ. This is not surprising after an examination of his concept of “canon” earlier in this chapter. His strong conviction is that one is able to establish what is normative in the New Testament by comparing it to

³⁴ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §132.3.

³⁵ Ibid. He also maintained that candidates for the Protestant ministry needed to learn Hebrew and Aramaic, since the New Testament authors articulated their faith in Christ in language and themes borrowed from the Hebrew scripture. See DeVries, “Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst (1768-1834),” 887. Moreover, he believed that the Old Testament books are the most general aid for understanding the New (*Brief Outline*, §141).

the essence of Christianity identified by philosophical theology. That essence, that core of Christian faith, is his standard for what is normative.³⁶ Again, the essence of Christianity for Schleiermacher, is what God did in Christ the Redeemer as reported in the four Gospels.³⁷

I noted earlier in this chapter that Schleiermacher agrees with the early church's canonical distinction between the New Testament Gospels and the apostolic epistles. In *Brief Outline*, he ascribes normative authority to both the Gospels and the epistles when he asserts that there is no inherent reason for stipulating any difference in canonical standing between these two constituent parts of the New Testament canon. Yet, he can imagine the possibility of doing so "if one were able to deny normative standing to the action and effect of the disciples when left to themselves."³⁸ What the disciples do/effect/write when left to themselves may or may not be normative, Schleiermacher asserts. If we ask what he means by the phrase, "when left to themselves," we might well assume

³⁶ See the discussion on pp. 134-36 in this chapter and Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ with Schleiermacher*, 30.

³⁷ *The Life of Jesus* is additional evidence of Schleiermacher's understanding of the canon's primary subject matter, and, thus, his conception of Christianity's essence. (Cf., Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus*, ed. Jack C. Verheyden, trans. S. Maclean Gilmour, Lives of Jesus Series (1975; repr., Mifflintown, PA: Sigler, 1997). Schleiermacher was the first theologian to offer public lectures on the life of Jesus, lectures which were published in 1864, just before David Friedrich Strauss's critique the following year (Cf., David Friedrich Strauss, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher's The Life of Jesus*, ed. and trans. Leander E. Keck, Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). Notwithstanding Strauss's critique, the *Life of Jesus* lectures are a key piece in Schleiermacher's understanding of the Christ event as the New Testament canon's common referent. For more on Schleiermacher's understanding of Jesus as "the person 'behind' the New Testament," see Helmer, "Transhistorical Unity of the New Testament Canon from Philosophical, Exegetical, and Systematic-Theological Perspectives," 13-39.

³⁸ Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, §105.

from the immediate context that he is referring to what the disciples might do/effect/write after Jesus was no longer in their midst.

In fact, when Schleiermacher considers which canonical writings have authority, he places great value on proximity to Jesus. He admits that the concept of normative standing cannot be reduced to fixed, immutable formulas. However, he asserts that

[i]f we figure that the normative character of particular propositions includes perfect purity, on the one hand, and the fullness of inferences and applications that may develop from them, on the other, we have no reason to suppose that the first attribute will exist, absolutely, anywhere but in Christ alone.³⁹

What he seems to suggest here is that the purest expressions of what is normative in the canon are related to Christ. Here, “pure” means the most immediate expressions at a site historically proximate to Christ with as little intervening material as possible.⁴⁰ “Pure” does not mean canonical in the sense of the text’s dignity. Rather, it refers to the text’s transparency to the experience behind it that motivates the text’s production.⁴¹

Clearly, he regards “the holy scriptures of the New Testament” as normative,⁴² but he would not claim that this is true of everything written in the New Testament, even though he identifies these writings as canonical. For although he can assert that the canonical writings bear “a normative value for all times,” he writes that “we do not ascribe this [normative] value to every aspect of our holy scriptures equally but only to

³⁹ Ibid., §108.

⁴⁰ Ibid., §83.

⁴¹ Helmer, “Transhistorical Unity of the New Testament Canon from Philosophical, Exegetical, and Systematic-Theological Perspectives,” 29.

⁴² Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §129.

the degree that the authors are found to be in the situation just described.”⁴³ To what situation does he refer? The context indicates that he is referring to authors of the apostolic age, authors who enjoyed spatiotemporal proximity to Christ and his teachings. That is, Schleiermacher is making the claim that the canonical writings of those who lived in the apostolic age, who had firsthand exposure to Christ and his teachings, are ascribed greater normative value than other New Testament writings.

After plainly suggesting that the normative value (*normale Würde*) granted to the canon⁴⁴ does not extend to every word of the New Testament, he seems to require another criterion of literature that merits the normative stamp. He writes: “[O]ccasional utterances (*gelegentliche Äusserungen*) and purely incidental thoughts (*bloße Nebengedanken*) do not accrue the same degree of normative value as what belongs to the main subject in each instance.”⁴⁵ Here, Schleiermacher seems to open the door to an interpretation of this text which allows greater normative worth to “the main subject” of the New Testament scriptures.⁴⁶

Schleiermacher’s instructions to those entrusted with the ministry of the word of God confirms this theory of his standard of normativity. He advises them to focus on the

⁴³ Ibid., §129.2

⁴⁴ DeVries assumes that the peculiar normative dignity Schleiermacher refers to here is reserved for materials produced to restrain error or corruption (DeVries, “Rethinking the Scripture Principle,” 300-301). It seems to me, however, that in this context Schleiermacher is discussing canonical writings in general, rather than only those which may have been produced to counter error.

⁴⁵ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §129.2. Italics mine.

⁴⁶ The meaning of the phrase, “what belongs to the main subject in each instance” is ambiguous, and is arguably, debatable. However, I will suggest later in this chapter that what constitutes the main subject of the New Testament for Schleiermacher has greater normative worth, for him, than other subjects which may be addressed in scripture. I believe there is evidence in this very text for advocating this position.

gospel of Jesus in their teaching and preaching. Regarding the content of their ministry, he writes: “Everything must be referred to the conception of Christ that comes from scripture.”⁴⁷ Apparently, Christ’s words have the utmost normative worth for Schleiermacher:

The scripture that presents the Lord to us in his life and works on earth, that preserves for us the precious words of his mouth—the scripture of the New Testament—is greater and far more important for us than the Old Testament. These apostolic scriptures are for us the firm prophetic word on which we depend and the foundation of our faith.⁴⁸

Normative Authority: Writings Related to the Concept of Love

I have demonstrated that the New Testament and the words and deeds of Christ that are recorded there function as norms for Schleiermacher. Finally, I want to show that he attributes greater normative authority to other parts of the New Testament, specifically, writings that are related to the concept of “love,” both divine and human. The New Testament writings that discuss the subjects of Christian love for each other and the world, the love that God has for the world, and the love that Christians have for God, for example, seem to carry added normative weight, for Schleiermacher.

His focus on love may be found throughout *On Religion*, *Schleiermacher’s Soliloquies*, and many of his sermons. I have discovered in my study of these sources that for him, “love” is a central topic. Others, too, have noticed that it is one of his key

⁴⁷ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §133.1.

⁴⁸ See Schleiermacher’s sermon on “The Effects of Scripture and of the Redeemer,” in DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 102.

emphases. For example, besides the fact that Steven Jungkeit puts forward the interesting and controversial theory that Schleiermacher's theological contribution is more pneumatocentric than christocentric, Jungkeit highlights Schleiermacher's focus on love in his writings. He draws the following conclusion from his study of *Christian Faith*:

When read carefully, Schleiermacher's doctrine of the Spirit runs throughout the final third of *The Christian Faith*, such that pneumatology and ecclesiology dominate the book. This suggests that Schleiermacher's theological contribution is far more pneumatocentric than christocentric or anthropocentric. As we recall, the Spirit for Schleiermacher binds human beings into a common project, a network of love. . . . Being bound in such a fashion gives rise to a universal love of humanity.⁴⁹

Near the end of his *On Religion: Addresses in Response to Its Cultured Critics*, Schleiermacher sums up the essence of Christianity and Christian feeling. Among the attributes that he claims are dominant in Christians and were dominant in its founder is love.⁵⁰ Elaborating in the supplementary notes added in 1821, he plainly asserts: "Love is the mark of the Christian."⁵¹ His emphasis on love, of course, is unsurprising since he believes that love is one of the principal, divine attributes:

Within the divine government of the world the divine causality presents itself as love and as wisdom. . . . Love is the orientation of wanting to unite with others and wanting to be in the other. Hence, if the pivotal point of the divine government of the world is redemption and the establishment of God's reign,

⁴⁹ Jungkeit, *Spaces of Modern Theology: Geography and Power in Schleiermacher's World*, 210.

⁵⁰ Another dominant attribute, which he mentions in this context, is humility.

⁵¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 332. In one of his sermons, Schleiermacher states that one of the signs of true and vital Christianity is that the love of Christ constrains a person. He then refers to 2 Cor. 5:14. See Schleiermacher's sermon on "The Effects of Scripture and of the Redeemer," *Servant of the Word*, 110.

whereby union of divine being with human nature is what is occurring, the underlying disposition in that process can be represented only as love.⁵²

Certainly, one of the types of love he believes is core to Christianity is love for, or openness to, God. In fact, he submits that “the aim of all religion is to love the World Spirit.”⁵³ Earlier in *On Religion*, Schleiermacher asserts the need of men and women for a deity-sent mediator, one who “can show to their flittery anxious self-love another love—a love by which man loves the highest and eternal in the very midst of earthly life.”⁵⁴ One of the callings of such a mediator, he writes, “is to awaken the slumbering seed of a better humanity, to kindle love for higher things.”⁵⁵

Another type of love which he believes is central to the Christian faith is love for people. He alludes to this in a reference to the Old Testament story of Adam and Eve:

The story of us all is related in this sacred saga. One gets nowhere by trying to stand alone. To receive the life of the World Spirit within oneself and thus to have religion, a man must first have discovered humanity, and this he can do only in love and through love.⁵⁶

Indeed, he asserts that it is the longing for love that brings one inevitably to religion.⁵⁷

⁵² Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §165 and §165.1.

⁵³ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 112. Not wishing to leave any doubt as to what he means by “World Spirit,” he writes in his supplementary notes: “It should hardly be necessary to justify use of the expression “World Spirit” (*Weltgeist*) for designating that object of pious reverence which is common among all men” (*On Religion*, 167). He uses this expression as a designation of the supreme being.

⁵⁴ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, (Tice), 46.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

A brief perusal of Schleiermacher's *Soliloquies* also demonstrates the importance of love in his theology. Tice provides somewhat of an introduction to *Soliloquies* in his Introduction to *On Religion*. There, he suggests that the *Soliloquies* present the case that sense (or, sensitivity) and love are the cardinal conditions of moral perfection.⁵⁸ Sense is receptive, the quality which at its deepest Schleiermacher describes in *On Religion* as "sense and taste for the infinite."⁵⁹ Love is predominantly active and out-going, the basis of true association, and must balance sensitivity.

In *Soliloquies*, Schleiermacher writes that without love, self-formation is problematic: "Love, thou force of gravitation in the spiritual world, no individual life and no development is possible without thee!"⁶⁰ He describes love as "sacred," and for Christians, "the alpha and the omega."⁶¹ Upon self-reflection, he writes of the place he has cleared in his own soul for genuine love and friendship:

Wherever I notice an aptitude for individuality, inasmuch as love and sensitiveness, its highest guarantees, are present, there I also find an object for my love. I would have my love embrace every unique self, from the unsophisticated youth, in whom freedom is but beginning to germinate, to the ripest and most finished type of man. Whenever I see such a one, I give him the salutation of the love within me, even if our brief meeting and parting permit no more than this gesture of spiritual greeting.⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid., 18-19. Tice notes that the same pair of terms was also used in the *Addresses*.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher's Soliloquies: An English Translation of the Monologues*, trans. Horace Leland Friess (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1926), 38-39.

⁶¹ Ibid., 39.

⁶² Ibid., 45-46.

Schleiermacher writes that whether he to whom he would be a friend is already receptive to the infinite or not, or whether he is or is not far advanced in his development, or whether he has many achievements to his credit or not, none of these things determine his attitude toward him. "I love him in the measure that I find," he writes. For Schleiermacher, then, love focuses on one's relationship with other people. It is one's embrace of all people.

Finally, Schleiermacher makes it plain in several of his sermons that love is a central tenet in Christianity, and that he attaches normative value to scripture that suggests as much. For example, in his 1830 sermon entitled "Evangelical Faith and the Law," a sermon based on Galatians 2:16-18, Schleiermacher's focus of the message is that Christians are not justified before God by law-keeping. In the conclusion of this sermon that warns against the making of laws which Christians are expected to obey, he adds this: "Christ established only one commandment: that we should love one another with the love with which he loved us (John 13:34)."⁶³ Then, he asks: How can followers of Christ obey this one commandment? He answers: "When the love for him in whom we see the Father constrains and impels us (2 Cor. 5:14), we will also be effective in that love," adding that faith reveals itself in love.⁶⁴ From another most touching message, an 1829 eulogy entitled "Sermon at Nathanael's Grave," Schleiermacher concludes with this benediction:

⁶³ See Schleiermacher's sermon on "Evangelical Faith and the Law," in DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 151.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Now, thou God who art *love*, let me not only resign myself to thy omnipotence, not only submit to thy impenetrable wisdom, but also know thy fatherly *love*! Make even this grievous trial a new blessing for me in my vocation! For me and all of mine let this communal pain become wherever possible a new bond of *still more intimate love*, and let it issue in a new apprehension of thy Spirit in all my household! Grant that even this grave hour may become a blessing for all who are gathered here. Let us all more and more mature to that wisdom which, looking beyond the void, sees and *loves only the eternal in all things earthly and perishable*, and in all thy decrees finds thy peace as well, and eternal life, to which through faith we are delivered out of death. Amen.⁶⁵

Permit me to offer one last example of the emphasis that Schleiermacher places upon the subject of “love” in his writings, as well as the New Testament texts that address this subject. As the following example demonstrates, he considered this subject to be one of the Redeemer’s central teachings.⁶⁶ In 1833, Schleiermacher preached a sermon entitled, “Our Community: Founded and Preserved through the Redeemer’s Love.” The sermon is based upon the text of John 13:34: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” He begins this message by explaining how it happened that he selected this particular biblical text from which to preach. He explains that he wanted to preach on the virtues of the community, the church that Christ founded. Once he had settled on this subject, and

⁶⁵ Schleiermacher’s sermon entitled, “Sermon at Nathanael’s Grave,” in DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 213-214. Italics in this quotation are mine.

⁶⁶ There are many other sermons that highlight Schleiermacher’s preoccupation, dare I call it, with New Testament references to love, including the love of God for the world, the love of Christians for one another, and the love of Christians for all of humanity. For other examples of these sermons, see the following: “Forgiveness and Love,” “Love and Service,” and “Provoking Each Other to Love and Good Works” in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Selected Sermons of Schleiermacher*, trans. Mary F. Wilson, vol. 3, Foreign Biblical Library (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.); “A Counsel to Form the Good Ever More Fully Among Us,” in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Fifteen Sermons of Friedrich Schleiermacher Delivered to Celebrate the Beginning of a New Year*, ed. and trans. Edwina Lawler (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003); “Christian Hospitality” and “Christian Charity,” in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Household: A Sermonic Treatise*, trans. and ed. Dietrich Seidel and Terrence N. Tice, Schleiermacher Studies and Translations, 3 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).

asked himself how he could join “such an exalted concept to a single text of scripture, as is the customary practice in our public sermons,”⁶⁷ he searched until “these words of the Lord came to my heart, and it seemed that *this one text sums up the whole mystery of the Christian church.*”⁶⁸ Here are some of the many statements regarding the significance of Christian love from this sermon:

“In the words of our text, he [the Redeemer] says: “A new commandment I give to you,” and adds that they should love one another. We are all well aware that he had often impressed this point on them before. . . . So what could he have meant by this expression, other than to *sum up the essence of Christian community?*”⁶⁹

Since the Redeemer had in mind here . . . this new spiritual Kingdom of God that was to be established through him, he must have compared it almost instinctively to the earlier covenant between God and his people. . . . [T]he Old Covenant rested upon a law and was made up of a mass of individual commandments, whereas *the Redeemer’s Kingdom was to rest only upon this one commandment to love.*⁷⁰

“We may be taken by surprise at first when we hear the Redeemer’s command that we should love one another with the love with which he loved us. . . . Yet it is certain that *we can only be members of this Kingdom in this way*, and that his Kingdom consists in this love alone. . . . [D]ear friends in Christ, it is certain that *a spiritual community cannot exist without love.*”⁷¹

And so he [the Redeemer] tells them [referring to John 6:67-68]: Now that I am going away, now that I will be with you a little while only, *if your community is to endure, you must love one another* with the love with which I have loved you. .

⁶⁷ Kelsey asserts that “[n]inety-nine percent of the available sermons from Schleiermacher’s forty-year preaching career were developed around a biblical text” (Kelsey, “Calling Disciples: Schleiermacher’s Application of His Hermeneutics to John 1:35-51,” 34).

⁶⁸ See Schleiermacher’s sermon based on John 13:34 in DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 215. Italicized words in this quotation and the following quotations are mine.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 215-16.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

. . This is the love that was the bond between the Redeemer and his own, and *it is also the love that maintains the community he founded.*⁷²

“He [the Redeemer] had come to seek what was lost—yes, actually to seek it, not waiting to see whether people would first turn to him. . . . *It is this seeking love that is essential* if we are to be united as Christians by our *love for one another.*”⁷³

He [the Redeemer] gives us another description of *his love*, and only when *our love for one another* has this other element does Christian community arise from *his love*. He says that the Son of Man did not come into the world to rule, but to serve (Matt. 20:28). . . . What does it mean to serve? In this context, the word cannot be taken to mean anything else but to note the need of an individual to whom we are directed, and to satisfy this need, once noticed, with every effort in our power. . . . We find so many beautiful examples in the Gospels of how the Redeemer turned to individuals to serve them in their spiritual life. . . . [T]his *servicing love of the Redeemer* has not ceased and will never cease. . . . Without this *servicing love* . . . the community of believers could not exist either, and even less could it become what it should be.⁷⁴

But we must not forget one more thing that is an essential component of *the Redeemer’s love*. He says to his disciples: I have placed you here and chosen you so that you will bring forth much fruit, and so your fruit will abide (John 15:16). . . . The Redeemer’s love could—indeed had to—turn affectionately to individuals. . . . His eyes were directed to something further; his vision—and it was always *the vision of love—took in the whole human race*. . . . The individual vanishes and must vanish, when the Lord’s gaze is directed to the totality of the human race.⁷⁵

What I have tried to show in this long discussion of “love” is that this subject is a central focus in Schleiermacher’s writings and sermons. Not only is the subject itself somewhat of a theological nucleus, for him, but so are also the writings of the New

⁷² Ibid., 217.

⁷³ Ibid., 221.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 222-25.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 226.

Testament that discuss this pivotal topic. The logical corollary to this is that because of his affinity for the subject of “love,” Schleiermacher seems to attach greater normative worth to passages that discuss this subject. In this case, of course, he views these writings as an authority, not for Christian *faith, per se*, but for Christian *life*. Just how scripture functions as a norming authority for faith and life in the Christian church in Schleiermacher’s doctrine of biblical authority is the subject of the next section.

What *Kind* of Authority?

I have explained Schleiermacher’s notion of “canon” and have established what I consider to be his “canon within the canon.” But what is the nature of the normative authority that he ascribes to the New Testament, to the words and deeds of Christ, and to the passages that discuss the principle of love found there? Many, if not most, would agree with Schleiermacher that the Bible has authority. The question is: What *kind* of authority does scripture possess? How does scripture function as a norm for Christian faith and life in the Christian church? To answer these questions, I will first take a look at two relevant propositions in *Christian Faith*. After unpacking them, I will draw some conclusions regarding Schleiermacher’s understanding of how scripture is normative for the church. The first proposition is one I referred to earlier in Chapter Five: “On the one hand, the holy scriptures of the New Testament are the first member in the whole series of presentations of Christian faith, continued ever since. On the other hand, they comprise the norm for all succeeding presentations.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §129.

What is the meaning of this proposition? To begin with, the New Testament is an expression of faith in Christ, in fact, the first in a series of such presentations. That it is the first presentation of the experience of Christian faith is part of the reason Schleiermacher perceives it as unparalleled. For although it is succeeded by other presentations of the same kind (*gleichartig*), he contends that it is not superseded by them. Why is this so? It is because he considers the likelihood that religious presentations during the apostolic age could have arisen very easily that came more from Jewish or Gentile thought than from Christianity itself. Consequently, he views these latter presentations, when regarded as Christian presentations, as “imperfect to the highest degree.”⁷⁷

Alongside these imperfect/incomplete presentations—imperfect because they were not properly “Christian,” but rather were hybrid presentations, particular modifications of Jewish or Hellenistic religious ideas—the teaching and preaching of Christ’s immediate disciples stood as a corrective, Schleiermacher argues. This provides a partial clue as to Schleiermacher’s understanding of the normative nature of scripture: it is grounded in the proximity of the New Testament authors to Christ and his teachings. His argument is that this nearness to Christ purified the early disciples’ presentation of Christianity from “the danger of an unconscious, contaminating influence from their previous Jewish forms of thought and life.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ibid., §129.2.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Schleiermacher recognizes, then, that from the earliest times within the Christian religion there have been different, and sometimes competing, presentations of Christian faith. These presentations came to be distinguished from one another and designated as canonical and apocryphal texts. Those that were classified as canonical were viewed as preserving the most complete elements of the original witness to Christ. Apocryphal texts were seen as preserving the most incomplete elements of that testimony. The spirit of Christ as a living presence in the fellowship of the Christian community, he affirms, is ultimately the source of sorting out the canonical from the apocryphal works.

Furthermore, that same spirit remains the ground for a continuous determination of the normative character of the various contents of these works. But this ongoing process of determination is not exactly the same as distinguishing between canonical and apocryphal texts. For, he argues, the tendency toward apocryphal corruption of that witness to Christ from “foreign” or non-Christian elements decreases in proportion to the number of Christians who are born and raised in the church. Further, he suggests, it is impossible for later Christians to generate truly canonical materials “because the living perception of Christ could no longer ward off contaminating influences in the same immediate way” as was true in the apostolic age.⁷⁹

Interestingly, although Schleiermacher values the “original” presentation of Christian faith, he believes that the normative authority of scripture does not imply that every later presentation of Christ must be derived from the canon in the same way. What

⁷⁹ Ibid. See also Hensley, “Friedrich Schleiermacher,” 171-172.

is his reasoning? Since the Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, no age can be without its own peculiar originality in Christian thought, he contends.

Still, Schleiermacher asserts that scripture norms all subsequent accounts of the faith in two ways:

[First] nothing is to be regarded as a pure product of the Christian spirit unless it is possible to demonstrate that it is in accord with those original products . . . [and second] no later product accrues an authority equal to those original writings if the aim is to ensure the Christian character of a given presentation or to point out the non-Christian character of one.⁸⁰

That is, later presentations of Christian faith must harmonize with the canonical presentation. The original presentation guarantees the Christian character of later presentations or exposes what is non-Christian in them with a degree of certainty granted to no later presentation.

The idea that the New Testament presentation of Christian faith is the standard by which all other presentations are judged is also echoed in Schleiermacher's sermons. For example, in a sermon he preached before 1826, one that was discussed in the last chapter, he warns of the danger of leaning solely on the immediate influences of the Redeemer without paying attention to the biblical record. His concern is that alleged immediate influences of the Redeemer match those of the biblical record. For, he admits, that "from time immemorial much that betrays the unruliness, fanaticism, and excesses of the human

⁸⁰ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §129.1-2.

heart has often crept into what is supposed to be the Lord's immediate effects of the soul."⁸¹

His yardstick for measuring the "immediate effects of the soul," that they are of divine rather than human origin, is scripture. He warns:

God's Word must ever remain the standard for measuring and judging everything else if we are to avoid deceiving ourselves into unintentionally confusing the human and the divine, or falling into the danger of becoming prey to those who intentionally substitute or pass off the human for the divine.⁸²

Schleiermacher is adamant that for any experience of Christ to be authentic, it must mimic the experience of Christ in the New Testament record. He writes: "The Lord cannot be different in his effects in believers' souls than he reveals himself to be in his Word."⁸³ In fact, he bluntly asserts that if a person wanted to claim as Christ's work anything that is in conflict with "this rule of God's Word," that person would be a liar.

Nothing that contradicts "the divine Word of scripture," he adds, can be thought to come from God. Why is this the case if Schleiermacher does not believe scripture is inspired revelation? He believes that scripture is a reliable witness to the words and

⁸¹ See Schleiermacher's sermon on "The Effects of Scripture and of the Redeemer," in DeVries, *Servant of the Word*, 111-12.

⁸² Ibid., 112. Schleiermacher often refers to scripture as a "standard." For example, he warns those who lay special claim to experiences of the Redeemer's spiritual presence of the need to "hold on to the standard of God's Word" and to not "remove their own special experiences from its judgment and supervision!" It is important, he writes, that those experiences are in agreement with God's Word. Of those who lay special claim to such experiences he instructs: "May they only guard themselves from evil and not presume to be above God's revelation!" (*Servant of the Word*, 114-15).

⁸³ Ibid.

deeds of the Redeemer. For Schleiermacher, one of the functions of scripture is to judge the validity of any purported effects of the Redeemer.⁸⁴

He makes the point in *Brief Outline* that the Christian writings which come from the age of primitive Christianity are the proper subject-matter of exegetical theology “only insofar as they are held capable of contributing to the original, consequently for all times normative presentation of Christianity.”⁸⁵ Thus, as pointed out above, what makes some of the writings of the New Testament normative is that they are a record of the original expression of Christian faith. Why does Schleiermacher value the original or first presentation of faith in Christ? He supplies an answer in *Brief Outline*, §83: in order to preserve the inner unity of Christianity as it expands over time one must apperceive “the purest perception of its distinctive nature, [which] can come only in relation to its earliest expression.”⁸⁶ That is, to apprehend the original presentation of Christian faith is the first step to ensuring that all subsequent presentations are authentic.

The second relevant proposition in *Christian Faith*, which clarifies Schleiermacher’s understanding of the normative authority of scripture reads: “The Scriptures of the New Testament are authentic in their origination and sufficient as norm for Christian doctrine.”⁸⁷ It is the second half of the proposition that is relevant to this

⁸⁴ “[T]he holy authority of the Word must provide a firm rule for all that happens in the hearts of Christians” (Schleiermacher’s sermon entitled, “On the Handing Over of the Confession As Giving an Account for the Ground of Hope,” in Nicol, *Reformed but Ever Reforming*, 41).

⁸⁵ Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, §103.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, §83.

⁸⁷ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §131.

study. What does Schleiermacher mean when he asserts that the New Testament writings are sufficient as a norm for Christian doctrine?

First, he is obviously equating the normative authority of scripture and its influence upon Christians. That is, when scripture influences God's people, it functions as an authoritative norm. What kind of influence do these writings exert?

Schleiermacher suggests that the doctrinal books⁸⁸ or "books of teachings" of the New Testament are "to be grasped in terms of the life circumstances of Christians at that time, and in such a way that the apostles' expressions bore influence upon the formation of the guiding thoughts as well as of the practical purposes of Christians."⁸⁹ The historical books on the other hand, are intended to rehearse the similarly influential words and deeds of Christ and the Apostles.

Second, Schleiermacher asserts that what makes the writings sufficient is that through our use of sacred scripture "the Holy Spirit can guide us into all truth . . . just as the Holy Spirit did the apostles themselves and all others who were gladdened by the direct instructions of Christ."⁹⁰ When this thought is combined with the idea that scripture has influence, it is clear that Schleiermacher is describing how scripture functions as a *constitutive* norm. It actually creates Christian thought and language. The language of Christian piety is rooted in scripture, and the common Christian orthodoxy of

⁸⁸ As I noted earlier in this chapter, in *Brief Outline*, Schleiermacher identifies Gospels and apostolic epistles as the two types of books in the New Testament canon. The historical books correspond to the Gospels, and the epistles, to the doctrinal books.

⁸⁹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §131.2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

every age is formed this way by the reigning interpretation of Christian faith called forth by scripture.⁹¹ Thus, as DeVries notes, for Schleiermacher, the language of piety is not created anew by each individual believer, or chosen freely to express inner experiences. Rather, it is formed in every age through the encounter with scripture. Furthermore, each age's articulation of the faith must be appropriate to the distinctive expressions of scripture.⁹²

Third, Schleiermacher understands a second kind of normative sufficiency. He calls it the *critical* sufficiency of scripture, which, he writes, is often the only kind of normativity one has in mind when discussing the concept of sufficiency. This relates to the constitutive function of scripture as a strictly subordinate function, almost as a shadow. As a critical norm, scripture tests the adequacy of any thought that purports to be Christian but was not produced under the influence of the Holy Spirit in scripture.⁹³ Schleiermacher believes that as the constitutive use of scripture in the church grows, there will be less need for scripture's critical role to sort out misinterpretations.

In summation, Schleiermacher argues for the norming authority of scripture regarding Christian faith, based on its witness to faith in Christ. Since the canonical writings are proximate to the direct influence of Jesus and his ministry, they serve as an authoritative standard for all succeeding expressions of faith in Christ. This normative

⁹¹ Thus, Schleiermacher claims that if one day the church came to possess a complete image of Christ's living knowledge of God, we could understand this to be the fruit of scripture.

⁹² DeVries, "*Rethinking the Scripture Principle*," 306.

⁹³ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §131.2.

authority is both constitutive and critical. As constitutive of the language and thought of Christian faith and as critical of any religious thinking that means to be Christian, scripture is a sufficient norm for the Christian church.

Schleiermacher himself provides a succinct summary of the nature of the normative authority of scripture for Christian faith in remarks he made in a June 25, 1830 sermon in which he discusses the ground of hope. What is the source of faith and hope? Is it scripture or is it Christ himself? Schleiermacher affirms that it is Christ who ever remains the source of faith. Then, he explains what is the normative value of scripture:

[I]f any dispute should arise about whether some specific item of doctrine or practice in the Christian church is proper or not, the apostolic scripture gives us the norm by which this can be judged, insofar as it shows that from the beginning this norm has arisen from the Christian spirit and faith. Thus, we have an important and permanent safeguard in scripture insofar as we truly have concord solely in our faith in Christ, setting aside all human authority, and acknowledge that no witness is valid for *the development of doctrine* and for *the ordering of life* other than what is expressed in these writings.⁹⁴

The kind of authority, then, which Schleiermacher understands scripture to possess, is the kind of authority that norms “the development of doctrine” and “the ordering of life.” According to him, scripture has constitutive authority as a language-forming norm for Christian thought and piety. It also has critical authority, which enables the Christian church to sort out, by the standard of scripture, misinterpretations of that language and thought. As scripture is used in these ways, it exerts authority that norms the development of doctrine.

⁹⁴ Cf., Schleiermacher’s sermon entitled, “On the Handing Over of the Confession As Giving an Account for the Ground of Hope,” in Nicol, *Reformed but Ever Reforming*, 41. Italics are mine.

But in addition, according to Schleiermacher, scripture has authority not only to norm Christian faith or *doctrine*, but also to norm Christian *life*. This is so because, for him, the New Testament provides a “divine” template for a particular way of life, a way of living that is based upon the words and actions of one whose life is worthy of imitation due to his perfect God-consciousness. This is the sense, for Schleiermacher, in which the principle of love as it is articulated and defined in the writings of the New Testament, exerts normative authority. Moreover, those passages that underscore the high importance of this concept, the concept of love, define the church’s identity and mission in the world: to love God and all of humanity, as Jesus did. These are some of the ways in which scripture exerts authority that norms the ordering of life.

In the next and final chapter, I will offer an evaluation of Schleiermacher’s doctrine of biblical authority. Also, I will identify some of the advantages that accrue to his “third way” of understanding the authority of scripture.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Implications: The Strengths of Schleiermacher's Understanding of Biblical Authority

In Chapter Two of this study, I asserted that Schleiermacher's understanding of biblical authority represents a third way to consider this much-discussed doctrine in Christian theology, as it does not fit neatly in either content-based/supernaturalist or function-based/rationalist categories. In subsequent chapters I have tried to explicate his conception of biblical authority. Chapter Three focused on his doctrine of revelation and his understanding that God is revealed in and through the world, in the feeling of absolute dependence, and in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. I presented evidence to the effect that, although Schleiermacher believes in divine revelation, he nonetheless does not believe there is warrant for the claim of a direct connection between divine revelation and scripture. I unpacked his understanding of the meaning of inspiration in Chapter Four. Here, I made the case that, for Schleiermacher, the locus of inspiration is the authors of scripture, rather than their words, and that he understands the agent of inspiration, the Holy Spirit, to be the common spirit of the church.

Chapter Five launched a more focused view of Schleiermacher's doctrine of biblical authority. Here, I introduced his view that the New Testament is the first recorded expression of Christian faith, and, that as such, it serves as a kind of touchstone or check on later generations. I explained in this chapter why Schleiermacher does not

regard scripture as the starting point for Christian faith. Among other reasons, he believes that faith springs from the effects of the Redeemer, rather than from scripture. In brief, he feels that people catch the faith from seeing it at work in people they know rather than by reading about it in a book.

Chapter Six continued the explanation of Schleiermacher's understanding of scripture by zeroing in on why he believes it has normative authority in the church. Here, I identified what I believe to be Schleiermacher's "canon within the canon," and why he ascribed normative authority to some parts of scripture over other parts. I discussed his dismissal of the notion that the Old Testament shares the same normative worth as the New and the priority he placed upon sections of the New Testament that reported the words and deeds of Christ and that discussed the subjects of Christian and divine love.

My aims in this final chapter are twofold. First, I want to respond to Schleiermacher's controversial view regarding the status of the Old Testament in the Christian canon and its normative worth and inspiration in comparison to the New. Second, I want to discuss what I see as two significant strengths of his understanding of biblical authority.

A Weakness: Schleiermacher's Understanding of the Old Testament

In *Christian Faith*, §132, Schleiermacher makes two declarations regarding the Old Testament as it compares to the New. First, he asserts that the Old Testament

writings do not share the normative worth of the New Testament writings. Second, he asserts that they do not share the inspiration of the New Testament writings.¹

Regarding the non-inspiration of the Old Testament, he contends that the inspiration of the Old Testament texts was not the activity of the same Spirit of Christ at work in the church. From Paul's treatment of the Law in Galatians and Romans, he argues that if Paul is right to claim that the Law lacks the power of the Spirit from which the Christian life must spring, then it cannot be claimed that the Law is inspired by the same Spirit. He notes that Paul writes that God sends the Spirit into our hearts by virtue of our joining with Christ. He adds that Christ himself never represents the sending of the Spirit "as the return of something that was already present before and then afterward disappeared for a time."²

Regarding the inferior status of the Old Testament as an authoritative norm, Schleiermacher argues that it can serve as neither a constitutive nor a critical norm for Christian faith. That is, the Old Testament writings cannot function as a language-forming norm, nor are they well-suited to evaluate religious thinking that purports to be Christian. If one accepts his worldview, Schleiermacher is right to assert that ideas are present in the Old Testament that Christians cannot appropriate as pure expressions of their piety. Indeed, there are some Christian doctrines, including, of course, the religious

¹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §132.

² *Ibid.*, §132.2.

significance that Jesus has for Christians, that are new to the Christian faith and are, therefore, doctrines for which there are no Old Testament proofs.

On balance, I admit that my disagreement with Schleiermacher's claim regarding the non-inspiration of the Old Testament has negligible impact on what I believe is his larger claim that the Old Testament does not share the normative worth of the New Testament. Why is this so? It is because whatever one claims regarding the inspiration of the Old Testament, its authority is for a specific community, and not for the community founded by Christ. In response to Schleiermacher's argument, however, I do not feel that for the Old Testament writings to be inspired, it is necessary that the common spirit of the church be responsible for their production. They may be inspired by the common spirit of the people of Israel, as Schleiermacher himself readily admits.³ That full divine authority came with the revelation of God in Christ, does not mean that there was no divine influence upon the writers of the Old Testament. This is especially true in light of Schleiermacher's belief in the potentiality of universal inspiration.⁴ In the New Testament passages to which Schleiermacher alludes—Romans 7:6ff. and 8:3—Paul is not making any claim regarding the inspiration of the Old Testament, or lack of it. Nor is he asserting anything regarding the presence or activity in the world of holy spirit before the coming of Christ.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See Chapter Four.

Furthermore, his argument that “God sends the Spirit into our hearts by virtue of our joining with Christ,” in no way denies that divine spirit was active before the coming of Christ. In fact, the Old Testament is replete with references to the presence and activity of “divine spirit.”⁵ Also, that Christ never represents the sending of the Spirit “as the return of something that was already present before and then afterward disappeared for a time,” does little to prove that divine spirit was not present before the advent of Christ. The silence of Jesus on this subject does not warrant the repudiation of divine influence upon the Old Testament authors.

Schleiermacher’s contention that the Old Testament is unable to act as a constitutive or critical norm for Christian doctrines is based on this underlying reason: he understands that Old Testament writings express Jewish, not Christian, religion. For him, Christianity was a completely new religion and stood in the same relation, religiously speaking, to Judaism as to paganism, notwithstanding its historical ties to the former.⁶ Since his unwillingness to grant normative authority to the Old Testament is so closely tied to his view of the church’s relation to Judaism,⁷ of chief concern is his argument that Christianity is not to be understood as a continuation or development of Judaism.

⁵ See, e.g., Genesis 6:3; Exodus 31:3; 1 Chronicles 28:12; 1 Sam. 10:6-7; Psalm 143:10; 139:7; Nehemiah 9:30; Isaiah 30:1-2; 63:10-14.

⁶ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §12.

⁷ Paul E. Capetz suggests that perhaps Schleiermacher’s insistence that the Old Testament is inferior to the New is due to his conviction that Christianity is superior to Judaism. Capetz, “Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Old Testament,” 314. For an in-depth treatment on Schleiermacher’s view of the Old Testament, see Capetz’s fine essay.

Among those who disagreed with Schleiermacher on the strict disconnection of Christianity from Judaism was D. F. Strauss. Strauss believed that in his religion Jesus was a Jew. He understood that even in its christological faith the church was still primarily a Jewish phenomenon. For him, the New Testament's witness to Jesus as the messiah was born of a continuation of motifs found in the Old Testament. Hence, for Strauss, the Old Testament and its interpretation in second-temple Judaism were the formative influences upon the presentation of Jesus in the Gospels.⁸

Whether or not Christianity was a completely new religion, standing "in the same relation, religiously speaking, to Judaism as to paganism," is arguable. And one may certainly grant Schleiermacher's assertion that Old Testament writings do not share the normative worth of the New, if only on the basis that Christ had not yet come. In this sense, he is technically correct "[t]hat the Jewish codex does not contain any normative statements of faith regarding distinctively Christian doctrines."⁹ However, one must accept the fact that Jesus was firmly rooted in the Old Testament Jewish tradition. His Jewish character is undeniably portrayed in the Gospels.

For example, Jesus' central message concerned the coming of God's sovereign reign ("the kingdom of God"), and he called his fellow Jews to be prepared to receive it.

⁸ Cf., David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. George Eliot, Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 773; Capetz, "Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Old Testament," 313-14.

⁹ Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology As a Field of Study*, §115. If one assumes that no "distinctively Christian doctrines" could have preceded the appearance of Christ, then Schleiermacher's assertion is valid.

This theme was a key Old Testament theme.¹⁰ Capetz claims that Jesus' teaching and ministry were firmly rooted in the Old Testament/Jewish tradition when he writes:

Without rejecting the Torah in principle, he differentiated between greater and lesser commandments in it. He continued aspects of the prophetic tradition in his concern for the poor and the oppressed. He pointed to God's providential care in the ordering of nature as had Israel's wisdom teachers before him.¹¹

Richard Niebuhr spoke of the faith that came to expression in Jesus' words and deeds as a paradigmatic illustration of Israel's "radical" or thoroughgoing monotheism. The historic significance of early Christianity, as Niebuhr noted, is that it made this faith available to non-Jews without requiring their conversion to Judaism.¹² This crucial step required a sifting of the Jewish scriptures for the purpose of discerning what was still valid for the new community. But this development did not negate the connection between Jesus' faith in God and the faith of Israel to which he was heir.

Rudolf Bultmann emphasized that no matter how critical Jesus may have been in relation to the other Jewish teachers of his day, the content of his preaching was

nothing else than true Old Testament-Jewish faith in God radicalized in the direction of the great prophets' preaching. . . . [T]he concepts of God, world, and man, of Law and grace, of repentance and forgiveness in the teaching of Jesus are not new in comparison with those of the Old Testament and Judaism, however radically they may be understood. And his critical interpretation of the Law, in spite of its radicality, likewise stands within the scribal discussion about it.¹³

¹⁰ See, for example, 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Isaiah 10:5-19; 45:6,7,12; 46:9-10; Psalm 103:10; Daniel 2:21; 7:13-14, 27.

¹¹ Capetz, "Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Old Testament," 315.

¹² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper, 1970), 39-40.

¹³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1955), 1:34-35.

Capetz notes that even the love-command that has been so important in Christian ethics (and in Schleiermacher's preaching) is derived from Jesus' summary of the Torah.¹⁴

Jesus' use of and reference to Old Testament writings is further evidence of his Jewish character. For example, here are just a few samples of some of his references to the Old Testament in the Gospel of John:¹⁵

—“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14; Numbers 21:9).

—“Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven” (John 6:32; Ex. 16:4, 15).

—“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God’” (John 6:45; Isaiah 54:13).

—“As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:38; Isaiah 44:3; 58:11).

When he spoke of the importance of love for God and neighbor, Jesus derived his words from a summary of the Torah (Matthew 22:34-40). Further, the New Testament records the story of a time when Jesus discussed the Old Testament with two disciples on

¹⁴ Capetz, “Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Old Testament,” 316.

¹⁵ Schleiermacher's preference for the Gospel of John has often been noted, not least by Schleiermacher himself, who tried, in his lectures on the life of Jesus to argue for the Fourth Gospel's priority to the Synoptics. Cf., Dawn DeVries, “Schleiermacher on the Word Made Flesh,” in *Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 48.

the way to Emmaus, that he began with Moses and all the prophets, and that he “interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Luke 24:27).¹⁶

In addition, there is ample evidence in the biblical text that neither Jesus nor Paul viewed their ministry as the creation of a new religion, but rather as the continuation, even the fulfillment of Judaism.¹⁷ For instance, the Gospel of Matthew attributes to Jesus this saying: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

Certainly, although Schleiermacher was right to locate what is new about Christianity in the religious significance that Jesus has for Christians, to say that Jesus is of central importance to them is not to say that everything important in Christianity began with him.¹⁸ Neither can it be said that Jesus was not rooted in Jewish tradition. Jesus’ Jewish character is undeniable. This means that Jesus’ upbringing in the Jewish tradition and his exposure to and use of Old Testament writings must have played an undeniable role in his God-consciousness. This, of course, leaves in doubt the magnitude of the chasm between the Christian and Jewish intuitions and therefore, challenges Schleiermacher’s claim that Christianity must be viewed as a totally new religion that has no significant connection to Judaism.

¹⁶ Similarly, Paul often quoted from the Old Testament in his writings. For example, in Galatians 4, he refers to an Old Testament allegory about Sarah and Hagar. Based on that Old Testament story, he commanded the Galatians to drive out the trouble-making legalists in their midst. His warrant for doing so is an Old Testament text, and he quotes it, assuming that his readers would recognize its authority: “But what does the scripture say? ‘Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman’” (Galatians 4:30; Genesis 21:10).

¹⁷ See, e.g., Matthew 5:17; Romans 11:1-27; Galatians 6:16.

¹⁸ See also, Capetz, 322.

That the Old Testament cannot be used as an authority for Christian writings does not mean that it cannot be used for devotional purposes. Schleiermacher himself acknowledges that “Christ and the apostles themselves refer to the Old Testament writings as if to divine authorities advantageous for Christianity.”¹⁹ That is, he seems willing to acknowledge the influence of Israelitish piety on Christians. He is willing to affirm that the earliest Christians found some of the Old Testament writings to be beneficial and helpful. He admits that Paul, for example, attested to the usefulness of the Old Testament writings.²⁰ In the same proposition, he writes that “even the noblest psalms always contain something that Christian piety (*christliche Frömmigkeit*) cannot appropriate as its purest expression.”²¹ So, even as he acknowledges that there are some expressions in the Psalms, which cannot serve as either a constitutive or critical norm for Christian faith, he seems to acknowledge in the same sentence that there are some expressions there, which may be so appropriated. So, while he does not accept the normative value of the Old Testament writings, he does envision the utility of at least some of those writings.

To sum up, Schleiermacher does not believe that Old Testament writings are normative for Christian faith. The Christian religious consciousness is not rooted in the Old Testament, but in the experience of Christ. This does not mean, however, that Christianity does not have its roots in Judaism, or that it is not organically related to it.

¹⁹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §132.3.

²⁰ Ibid. Schleiermacher refers to Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; and 2 Timothy 3:16 just here.

²¹ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §132.2.

Jesus was deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition, and his Jewish character surely played a significant role in his God-consciousness. Neither does this mean that the Old Testament cannot provide useful expressions of piety (*fromm, Frömmigkeit*) for Christians.²²

Strengths of Schleiermacher's Conception of Biblical Authority

Now, I want to identify what I see are two strengths of Schleiermacher's doctrine of biblical authority. The first is that it recognizes that scripture is both a human and a divine product.

It Allows for a High View of Both Scripture and Church

As I demonstrated in Chapter Three, although Schleiermacher understands that God is revealed in and through the world, in the feeling of absolute dependence, and in Christ, the supreme divine revelation, he conceives of only an indirect connection of identity between divine revelation and scripture. He argues that there is no warrant for the claim that the authoring of scripture directly and literally originated with God.

Likewise, although he believes that the individual books of the New Testament are inspired by the Holy Spirit and that their collection has arisen under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,²³ he does not subscribe to the doctrine of inspiration as it is commonly held among content-based supernaturalists: that the locus of inspiration is the words of

²² Perhaps these are questions for further study: Since the Old Testament does not directly offer the immediate literature that reflects Jesus' redemptive activity, how could it be considered as sacred literature for Christians? If there are some sections of the Old Testament that merit canonical standing in the Christian Bible, what are they? What is the Old Testament "canon within the canon" for Christians?

²³ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.

scripture. Furthermore, as I explained in Chapter Four, Schleiermacher understands the Holy Spirit much differently than do content-based supernaturalists; he views the Holy Spirit to be the common or shared spirit of the church. The bottom line of all of the above is that he understands the Christian Bible to be a human document.

However, he also holds in tension with his conviction that the divine spirit is not responsible for or the author of the words of scripture his belief that God's spirit influenced scripture's human authors. Consequently, Schleiermacher also believed that God was active at some level in the process of the writing of scripture.

This same co-presence and co-activity of the supernatural and the natural is apparent in Schleiermacher's understanding of how the biblical canon was assembled. For, although he understands the process of canon collection to be a thoroughly human process,²⁴ he also attributed its determination to the Holy Spirit.

What this means is that he takes a mediating position between the content-based supernaturalists and the function-based rationalists on the nature of scripture. For him, scripture is not the inerrant, inspired, and divinely-revealed document that many supernaturalists understand it to be. However, neither is he willing to claim that God is wholly absent from and uninvolved in the process, something which rationalists are inclined to do.

The significance of this stance is that it may allow us to formulate a reasonable, if yet murky answer to a question I raised in the last chapter: Where is authority located in

²⁴ Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, §110.

the Christian religion? Is it in the canon itself or in the community of faith? I suggested in Chapter 1 that content-based supernaturalists tend to assert the authority of scripture over that of the church. Kevin Vanhoozer, for example, claims that final authority resides in the divinely authorized and appropriated discourse of the canon.²⁵ Nor does Vanhoozer believe that scripture's authority is conferred upon it by the church, but that it possesses inherent authority due to its status as an inspired document.²⁶ On the other hand, function-based rationalists, such as David Kelsey, tend to attribute authority to the church.²⁷ They assert that whatever authority scripture exercises, it is, indeed, a conferred authority.

Once again, Schleiermacher takes a mediating position in contrast to the above perspectives. He claims that the Holy Spirit was active in the canonization process and continues to be active in the decision-making of the church. At the same time, as I demonstrated in Chapter Five, he recognizes the authority of the church since the canon obtained its present form through the decision of the church. In light of this truth, it seems unreasonable to claim that the authority of scripture is not one that is conferred upon it by the church. Moreover, Schleiermacher asserts that it is the church's responsibility to continue to investigate what is canonical and normative, based on what contributes to the preservation and well-being of the community of faith. In other words,

²⁵ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*, 166.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁷ See Farley and Hodgson, "Scripture and Tradition," 80-81; Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology*, 207-212.

according to him, the church has influence over what in scripture constitutes normative authority.²⁸ This is a high view of the church.

While he attributed authority to the church for the role it played and continues to play in the determination of the canon, there is no doubt that he also ascribed authority to some sections of the New Testament itself, as I showed in Chapters Five and Six. Those sections act as a rule or standard by which the experience of the church is to be measured. In such cases, of course, the church is submitting to the authority of scripture. This is a high view of scripture.

Therefore, to the question of where authority is located, in the biblical canon or in the church, Schleiermacher's measured answer would surely be: "It is located in both." What this means for this study is that one of the strengths of his conception of biblical authority is that it acknowledges and accentuates the value and importance of the/a faith community, while at the same time, acknowledging scripture's inherent authority.²⁹

²⁸ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §130.4. For me, part of the brilliance of Schleiermacher's position is that it is somewhat of a hybrid of the positions stated above. For him, authority is located in both scripture and the church, and the Holy Spirit both indwells the church, as its common spirit, and plays a significant role in the creation and collection of the New Testament canon.

²⁹ Stanley Hauerwas argues well for the authority of both church and scripture. He asserts that in order to read the Bible "Christianly," one needs training in Christian virtue, and this is largely the work of the Christian community. He goes on to make the claim, likely one with which Schleiermacher would disagree, that the Reformation principle *sola scriptura* is a heresy, because it assumes "that the text of Scripture makes sense separate from a Church that gives it sense." See Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 155, n. 7.

It Allows Faith and Historical-Biblical Criticism to Coexist

A second strength of Schleiermacher's doctrine of biblical authority is that it allows faith and the historical-critical method to coexist. That is, his understanding empowers scholars, students, and lay people to be thoroughly critical of the biblical text.

In the Introduction to this study I asserted that one of the factors that may explain the erosion of biblical authority since the Enlightenment is the advent of historical criticism. Accordingly, some have seen the historical-critical method as an enemy of the church and a threat to faith.³⁰ For example, one prominent evangelical declares that "orthodoxy and the historical-critical method are deadly enemies that are antithetical and cannot be reconciled without the destruction of one or the other."³¹ Alan Johnson adds: "[T]he current use of the historical-critical method even in the hands of its most responsible practitioners has led to historical-theological schizophrenia, while the articulation of an adequate basis for religious authority flounders."³²

On the contrary, Schleiermacher does not consider critical examination of the biblical text to be unfriendly to Christian faith. He acknowledges that he does not want to restrain biblical criticism.³³ Indeed, his exegetical writings demonstrate that he embraces the historical-critical method and its findings.

³⁰ Harrisville and Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, 10-13, 64.

³¹ Harold Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 82.

³² Alan F. Johnson, "The Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26, no. 1 (March 1983): 10. Johnson lists five objectionable features of radical criticism: historical skepticism, antisupernaturalism, separation of history and theology, denial of the unity of Scripture, and noncognitivism of divine revelation. Johnson, "The Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice," 10.

³³ Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 66.

Before explaining why biblical criticism does not intimidate Schleiermacher's model of biblical authority or threaten faith for him, I need to add a very brief word regarding the times in which he lived. Schleiermacher's approach to theology was certainly influenced by several factors, not the least of which is that he lived in the wake of the Enlightenment. And as Vial notes in his book, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, two of the greatest challenges left by the Enlightenment for Christian theology were the rise of science and the rise of historical consciousness.³⁴ These challenges called into question the plausibility and historicity of some of the biblical accounts.

As an heir of the Enlightenment, it was important for Schleiermacher to find a way to understand faith, as well as biblical authority, without being inconsistent with an understanding from science or history. In other words, it was important to him that faith is consistent with intellectual life and with the scientific, historical, and theological advancements of his day. Regarding his doctrine of scripture, for example, Schleiermacher admits that he is willing to accept the "scientific" findings of historical-critical research. He confirms this when he writes: "But as for our doctrine of the canon and of inspiration as a special activity of the Spirit producing the canon, we must take care not to make any claims that conflict with the universally recognized results of historical research."³⁵

³⁴ In this section, I am indebted to Ted Vial's analysis of the setting of Schleiermacher's theology in *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 85-90.

³⁵ Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 66.

To clarify what this means for him and to illustrate my point, I refer to Vial's analysis of Schleiermacher's doctrine of Christ. Vial notes that Schleiermacher's generation found itself confronted with two ways of approaching christology. On the one side were the confessionalists and traditionalists, who believed that Jesus effects salvation supernaturally. On the other side were the rationalists for whom Jesus was seen as a great moral teacher. Regarding the christology of the traditionalists, Vial asserts:

Its weakness is that it [their understanding of the work and identity of Christ] seemed to Schleiermacher to call for a sacrifice of the intellect . . . [for a denial of] all the best fruits of the human intellectual and cultural endeavors that were so exciting and empowering in his day.³⁶

On the other hand, the strength of the rationalist view, Vial suggests, "is that it does not require one to choose between scientific and philosophical advances and Jesus."³⁷

One of Schleiermacher's chief critics understood his reluctance to make that choice. Karl Barth writes of him that he was a man

who felt responsible . . . for the intellectual and moral foundations of the cultural world into which a man was born at the end of the eighteenth century. He wanted in all circumstances to be a modern man as well as a Christian theologian.³⁸

Likewise, Jack Forstman asserts that, for Schleiermacher, there was no alternative to being a modern man, for as an heir of the Enlightenment, his intention was "to guard against [making a sacrifice of the intellect] at every turn." He explains:

³⁶ Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 88.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowdon (1959; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 314.

For Schleiermacher as for the Enlightenment there can be no conflict between scientific statements (understanding 'scientific' in the wider sense) and theological statements. If there are two contradictory statements, one with and the other without solid support, then the first must be accepted and the second rejected. If one makes a theological statement that differs in no apparent way from a scientific statement but does not offer the kind of support for it that scientific statements require then that statement is suspect. It cannot be accepted without sacrificing the canons for understanding that one must continue to uphold.³⁹

Schleiermacher's explanation of positions he took in *Christian Faith* to his friend, Dr. Lücke, confirms his intention to be both "a modern man and a Christian theologian." For instance, he explains to his friend that in the *Glaubenslehre* he aimed to show "that every dogma that truly represents an element of our Christian consciousness can be so formulated that it remains free from entanglements with science."⁴⁰ Thus, it is important, for him, that Christian faith and whatever post-Enlightenment intellectual advancements of his day may prove to have been made are able to exist side-by-side.

What makes such a coexistence possible? I want to identify two justifications. First, Schleiermacher believes that it is not possible to equate scripture with divine revelation, as I have already discussed. What I am suggesting here is that there is a definite cause-effect relationship between Schleiermacher's unwillingness to accept the alleged divine origin of scripture and his willingness to embrace a worldview that did not threaten Christian faith. As I have mentioned repeatedly, for him, the biblical texts are human reports of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. They are not inerrant, inspired,

³⁹ Jack Forstman, "Barth, Schleiermacher and *The Christian Faith*," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 21, no. 1 (November 1965): 306-7.

⁴⁰ Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 64.

and revelatory in each and every word—at least, not in the sense or to the extent that many content-based supernaturalists understand them to be. We may easily theorize that one of the values of understanding Christian writings as human documents is the opportunity thus afforded to scholars to be thoroughly critical in their approach to the biblical text, without feeling the need to defend a theory of divine authorship.

A second reason that Christian faith and scientific advancements can coexist in Schleiermacher's theology, is his firm conviction that faith is not founded on a document. I addressed this subject in Chapter Five. For him, scripture is not the starting point of faith. Rather, faith begins in the shared experience of Christ in the community of Christians. This explains why Schleiermacher is not afraid of the findings of biblical criticism: they will never be able to imperil faith's validity, since faith is based on an experience instead of what may be written in a text.

Schleiermacher refers to the experience of redemption in Christ as what is “essential.” He writes that he is assured that even if criticism challenges long-held beliefs regarding the New Testament, “[w]e would not lose anything essential: Christ remains the same and our faith in him remains the same.”⁴¹ Again, he suggests that Christians must be willing to rid themselves of everything that is secondary and based on presuppositions that are no longer valid. His reason for this point of view is “so that we

⁴¹ Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 67.

might avoid becoming ensnared in useless controversies that might lead many easily to give up hope of ever grasping what is essential.”⁴²

Vial summarizes well the reason faith and science are able to exist side-by-side in Schleiermacher’s system:

By defining religion as a matter of experience (feeling) rather than a matter of knowing, like natural science and philosophy, or morals, and by defining dogmatic theology as a second-order expression of religious experience,⁴³ Schleiermacher declares some of the most troubling of these questions to be a category mistake.⁴⁴

He understood that there was “an eternal covenant between the living Christian faith and completely free, independent scientific inquiry, so that faith does not hinder science and science does not exclude faith.”⁴⁵ Vial identifies this “eternal covenant” as “a nonaggression pact, because each [Christian faith and scientific inquiry] uses its own methods to undertake different tasks, tasks that do not overlap.”⁴⁶ As a result, the historical examination of the biblical texts does not threaten Christian faith. Vial summarizes:

The Bible holds a special place for Schleiermacher because it is the first recorded expression of Christian experience. But it is that experience, the experience of redemption found in the Christian community, that is the source of faith and the bedrock of theology. If it turns out that we know less than we thought we did

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Schleiermacher suggests that theological statements are of a different order from scientific statements. He asserts that they are articulations of religious experience, rather than propositions about the world (*Christian Faith*, §15).

⁴⁴ Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 85.

⁴⁵ Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, 64.

⁴⁶ Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 85.

about certain events or certain authors, that does not call into question that experience of faith found in the community.⁴⁷

Because the experience of redemption, rather than scripture, is the foundation of faith, there is no need to divorce faith from rigorous critical thought that accepts the results and methods of the sciences. That such a significant consequence is consistent with and permitted by Schleiermacher's doctrine of biblical authority is one of the great strengths of that doctrine.

This study set out to demonstrate that Schleiermacher provides us with a third way of understanding the doctrine of biblical authority. That this alternative to content-based/supernaturalist and function-based/rationalist models has significant and distinctive advantages over models in these two categories, is clear to me. Schleiermacher's conception of the authority of scripture is a robust one.

That understanding of biblical authority claims that scripture's authority does not lie in some property of the texts themselves that historians or unbelievers can take away. It acknowledges that scripture is both a divine and a human product, and that as a corollary, ecclesial and biblical authority exist side-by-side. It claims that scripture constitutes the language of piety, viewing it as a record of experience rather than a set of propositions about the world. It articulates the communal nature of Christian faith, underscoring the value and authority of the Christian community. It does not require people to contradict what they know to be the case about science, history, and philosophy. It provides the irreplaceable witness of those who knew Jesus in the flesh, and, therefore,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 86.

supplies the norm and standard for experience and faith that purports to be Christian. It alleges that scripture is not the foundation of Christian faith, but the first expression of it, and therefore, normative in a way that other presentations of Christian faith are not. To be sure, Schleiermacher's understanding of biblical authority clarifies and affirms what may be a continuing and central role for scripture in Christian religion today.

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