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II. THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND CHRISTOLOGY IN MODERN DOGMATIC AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

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Introduction

During the past two centuries, ironically while Biblical scholarship was becoming convinced that the Fourth Gospel was less reliable than the synoptic gospels for reconstructing a historical picture of Jesus, systematic theology persisted in using the Fourth Gospel and even often *preferred* it. From Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) to the present, many Christian theologians have found the Fourth Gospel more compatible and fruitful in elucidating the Christian faith than the synoptics.

At first glance, one might suppose the reason for this was some dogmatic bias or ignorance of historical critical studies. This suggestion collapses, however, upon a closer look at the method of theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Alfred Loisy, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, and Edward Schillebeeckx, to mention only a few.² Or one might argue that their continued usage of the Fourth Gospel was from a fear that historical criticism was going to dislodge faith, so the Fourth Gospel was used as a bastion against such incursions. While it is true that most of these theologians felt that historical verification is not the equivalent of Christian faith, even this answer does not appear to be the real reason.

Finally, one might think that the reason for this continued usage of the Fourth Gospel or even preference for it, especially among Protestant theologians, was to remain faithful to the continuity of the historical theology of the church. That is, a Lutheran theologian would naturally embrace the Fourth Gospel because of the position taken by Luther³ and others similarly in different communions. But this explanation also quickly breaks down. Protestant theologians after Schleiermacher began to realize that the synoptic gospels are not just historical facts, nor does the Fourth Gospel's apparent explanation of "who" Jesus was and "why" he did what he did in any way really distinguish it from the synoptics. Further, positions taken by Loisy, Küng, and Schillebeeckx have been considered by the church as embracing at best only a fragile or questionable continuity with its official position.

Therefore, it may be that the most logical explanation is simply that the concerns of the theologians were of a wider nature than those of the Biblical scholars. That is, they felt a need not merely to explain what something once meant and how it related to the

present Christian message and experience, but in order to facilitate the latter, they were concerned to develop a systematic hermeneutic and epistemology which could include an awareness of significant historical change without being swallowed by historical relativism.

That is, the theologians seemed to be driven by the concerns of: (1) reconstructing a probable historical picture of the "Jesus" behind the gospels; (2) determining the relation any such probable picture has to Christian faith, and, in turn, to Christological assertions; which, in turn, necessitates (3) defining an inherently logical position on the question of historical diversity, pluralism, or the evolution of the thought, practices and structures involved in Christian history and life itself.

Obviously, it is highly unlikely that the problems encountered in these three broad areas could be resolved by mere reference to the Fourth Gospel or some new insight furnished either by the Fourth Gospel or by the entire Christian scriptures for that matter. These necessitate a formulation of methodological procedures which could be derived at best only from an awareness of the larger hermeneutical difficulties or the general problem of interpretation and the relativity of historical knowledge – an awareness that has been discovered significantly *only in the last two centuries*.⁴

So the theologians preferring the Fourth Gospel have not done so because they felt its writer had consciously articulated the answer to hermeneutical problems of which he could not even have been aware. But the Fourth Gospel was thought to possess other characteristics which were more compatible with this broader interpretive and theological quest than the more limited synoptic gospels.

Opinions as to what these particular characteristics or elements were have differed from theologian to theologian. Importantly, though, all three of the concerns mentioned above were usually worked out interdependently so as to produce a somewhat logical position as well as to provide a conceptual continuity for the two millennia of Christian history and theology.⁵

The theological hermeneutical problems are still being clarified from hermeneutical concerns in philosophy and critical theory in literature. But to understand the necessary breadth of the scope in which these theologians have utilized the Fourth Gospel to address the three concerns listed above, we turn briefly in a bit more depth to the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher.

Schleiermacher and the Fourth Gospel

Prior to the nineteenth century, systematic theology, which should be more properly still called only "dogmatic" theology,⁶ had fairly gone its way, oblivious to the advances in historical-critical Biblical studies as well as the implications of current epistemology. This was to be expected just as Biblical theology had been determined totally by dogmatics. Many of the nineteenth century theologians and biblical scholars, however, became

aware not simply of historical-critical method for ancient documents, but were also cognizant of the fact of change or development in history in general.

Theology⁷ took a quantum leap forward with Schleiermacher's combination of: (1) a historical-critical examination of the scriptures,⁸ (2) the new Kantian epistemology,⁹ and (3) a devotion to the church's present understanding of the essence of the gospel, which was found in its most recent definitive creed – which is the way he defined "dogmaties."¹⁰

Schleiermacher's View of the Gospels

Schleiermacher was far ahead of his day in his understanding and appropriation of the gospel material in reconstructing a probable historical picture of Jesus, of relating this to Christological assertions in general, and to historical development or the pluralism and apparent relativity of life in general. Whereas most theologians in his day regarded all four gospels of fairly equal weight for the construction of the picture of Jesus and thus for Christian theology, Schleiermacher emphasized: (1) the general fragmentary and biased nature of the gospels for a purely historical reconstruction; (2) the paucity of genuine source material from opponents of Christianity that could be used in such a reconstruction; (3) the ruthless historical demand laid upon Christian theologians to examine every possible source, including apocryphal gospels; and (4) the radical and irreconcilable differences between the synoptics and the Fourth Gospel.

More importantly than even these insights, he showed a keen awareness of the long period of oral tradition lying behind the various gospels. He formulated general principles for redaction and tendency criticism,¹¹ approximately a century ahead of the general acceptance of such methods among Biblical scholars. His understanding of the complexity and method of incorporation of each pericope by the synoptists enabled him to see that although they appeared to be in considerable agreement, the picture that could be reconstructed through a critical use of them was not as historically credible as that supplied by the author of the Fourth Gospel.¹²

Not only were the synoptics "more aggregates of individual narratives than continuous presentations,"¹³ but until the reasons or rules could be discovered to explain why each of the synoptists combined individual "narratives" (pericopes) in his own peculiar way, no chronology of the development of the traditions could be ascertained.¹⁴ Since, as a matter of fact, the historian will naturally seek to reconstruct a *single* picture from the comparison of the synoptists,¹⁵ Schleiermacher thought it was an accurate assessment of the situation to say that we have only "two sources" for reconstructing the life of Jesus: the source of the three synoptics, and source of the Fourth Gospel. And the first is more difficult to recover by the "aggregative" nature of the synoptics.

Another important consideration for him were the credentials of the writers of these materials. He admitted that the church very early on attributed only the first and fourth gospels to two of the immediate disciples of Jesus: Matthew and John. Historical evaluation naturally prefers eyewitnesses where possible. When one compares these two, however, the radical differences between the locality or geographical situations and

the temporal durations attributed to Jesus' ministry are irreconcilable. Since Matthew, however, unlike John, was considered a mere aggregation of separate discourses and events without any real coherence,¹⁶ one would naturally have to prefer John's picture where they differed so radically.

Schleiermacher emphasized that regarding these sources, the Gospel of John had always given him the impression of being a "coherent, comprehensive presentation" of Jesus' life. But even so, he acknowledged that it had too many inherent gaps – even skipping entirely over Jesus' life prior to his public ministry – to be an adequate source. He concluded:

Therefore it is undeniable that we cannot achieve a connected presentation of the life of Jesus. We must limit our task in accordance with the material at our disposal. Consequently the only question remaining is: How far can we unite the reports that we have in order to form an outline by which we wish to proceed?¹⁷

Two examples, then, will illustrate his method of reconstruction. First, regarding the question of whether Jesus was born in Jerusalem or Bethlehem or was raised in Bethlehem or Nazareth, Schleiermacher, upon close examination of the two evangelists, found them in hopeless contradiction. Since the synoptics are only "aggregations of individual accounts," whereas the Fourth Gospel is a "connected narrative" or one which gives a coherent or whole picture, the Fourth Gospel must be preferred.¹⁸ That does not indict Matthew and Luke for falsifying a story. They did the best they could with what was at their disposal in light of the absence of any extant authentic reports of Jesus' birth. But since references to the birth or life of Jesus in Bethlehem or Nazareth are missing from John, and the latter is a coherent whole, the only conclusion is that the question of Christ's birthplace or the place he was raised "has no essential place in the gospel narrative."¹⁹

Other narratives related to Jesus' birth were just as problematic. The slaughter of children in Bethlehem, and Jesus' flight to Egypt are typical. Schleiermacher, after intensive examination, concluded that these are best explained as "facts" of some kind rather than some mere production on the basis of the Messianic idea in the Old Testament passages. That is, nothing in the Old Testament necessitated either of these stories, despite the evangelists' mistaken notion that it did. Nevertheless, Schleiermacher continued,

You see how skeptically I go to work. If we cannot recognize any original authentic source and it is improbable that the narrative as it stands has come from immediate eyewitnesses, then we are obliged, because we are engaged in a piece of historical research, to place no weight on the difference between canonical and apocryphal writings. On the contrary we must presuppose as possible that these narratives have an apocryphal character because they are based on such a definite tendency.²⁰

More specifically, Schleiermacher argued that had the events occurred in the unambiguous way the evangelists describe, then even though Jesus did not begin his public ministry until years later, people would have dug up those earlier incidents and identified him immediately with these Messianic happenings.

But there is no trace of any such identification at the time of Christ's public appearance. Consequently the birth stories must have been restricted to a very narrow circle and must later accidentally have come again to light, and these events had nothing to do with the appearance of Christ or the origin of faith in him.²¹

Time and again, then, Schleiermacher noted that the accounts of the synoptists contradict the Gospel of John. Sometimes the contradiction can be worked out; other times it cannot so John is preferred. For example, only Luke mentions Jesus' trial before Herod. The only way this trial could be explained, yet omitted by John, who was an eyewitness at Jesus' trials before Annas and Pilate, is by positing the possibility that when John said that Pilate called Christ into the praetorium, from that point his actions could not be traced by John, so Pilate might have sent him out another exit to go see Herod. Otherwise, it is inconceivable why only Luke mentions it.²²

The contradictory statements made about Jesus' resurrection pose the same problem. Here, Schleiermacher repeated that sometimes a way of resolving them can be found, but other times it cannot, and then John must be followed.²³ At other times, it is not just the absence of the pericope in John but either (1) the total incongruity of the picture, or (2) the lack of connection such a pericope has to the Messianic dignity,²⁴ that caused Schleiermacher not to accept it as required by the faith. Examples of this are the stories of the rending of the veil of the temple and the resurrection of the bodies from tombs at the time of Jesus' crucifixion, the bribing of the guard, and the words of despair assigned mistakenly to Christ on the cross, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?"²⁵

The Relation of the Reconstructed Picture to Christological Assertions

With Schleiermacher's reference to "faith in him," we have moved from a mere historical reconstruction to Christology. Of course, the Christology is based upon the actual history of Jesus, his person and work, but it is corroborated by the power of Christ in the life of the present believer. What one has to believe in the present is therefore no more than what the early disciples had to believe about this Jesus, but it must be as much. What this means is that he insists that the faith of the early Christians was grounded on their actual *historical* experience with Jesus – the "being of God" in Jesus, or his potent God-consciousness which redeemed or transformed their ineffective God-consciousness. That is, Christology must trace itself back to the actual way he *affected them in history*. This guards against the alternative of Christology merely being faith in faith.²⁶

If, conversely, Christology were grounded in something like his virgin birth or his crucifixion and resurrection, it would be possible to think that the Christian faith is based merely upon an *idea* of something supernatural or an *image* rather than *real event*. People could have been overwhelmed by the enthusiastic preaching of such fantastic things, so that their faith was rooted in *ideas* which were in no way corroborated either by historical evidence about Jesus nor by one's personal experience. This is the reason, for example, that Schleiermacher insisted that faith in the resurrection, ascension, and future judgment by Jesus is *not essential* to the Christian faith – that is, because Jesus had redeemed people or had disciples who believed in him *prior* to those alleged events and whose belief was *independent* of any such events ever occurring.²⁷ He wrote:

Belief in these facts, accordingly, is no independent element in the original faith in Christ, of such a kind that we could not accept Him as Redeemer or recognize the being of God in Him, if we did not know that He had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, or if He had not promised that He would return for judgment. Further, this belief is not to be derived from those original elements; we cannot conclude that because God was in Christ He must have risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, or that because He was essentially sinless He must come again to act as judge. Rather they are accepted only because they are found in the Scriptures; and all that can be required of any Protestant Christian is that he shall believe them in so far as they seem to him to be adequately attested. Here the sacred writers are to be regarded only as reporters; accordingly, belief in these statements belongs, immediately and originally, rather to the doctrine of Scripture than to the doctrine of the Person of Christ. Yet an indirect connection with that doctrine is not to be denied to such belief, in so far, that is, as our judgment about the disciples as original reporters reacts upon our judgment about the Redeemer.²⁸

This, to Schleiermacher, assures us that the faith is based on the actual Jesus and actual influence he exercised rather than upon supposed events which were unintentionally misconstrued, exaggerated, or simply concocted from Messianic ideas. He was historically astute enough to know that a religion's sacred scriptures are not totally immune to the latter. Thus faith ultimately has to lie in the *historical Christ* rather than even the Scriptures.

We can further elucidate his *Christological method* by looking more closely at his treatment of Jesus' "virgin birth." He found this idea superfluous for faith as well as insufficiently attested historically. He stressed that from the standpoint of faith, there are two legitimate concerns involved: (1) that Scripture contain the truth; and (2) that "nothing sinful entered into the origin of the life of Christ."²⁹ But the mere absence of the physical influence of Joseph does not suffice to break the chain of hereditary sin; for that would have necessitated a dissolution of any physical connection, even Mary's. Thus, Schleiermacher concluded:

The indwelling of the divine in him cannot rest only on the proposition,

viewed in and for itself, that Christ was begotten without the cooperation of a man, but rather on a positive, divine act. Therefore the divine act must also have availed to make Christ free from all connection with hereditary sin, regardless of the physical influence which must have played its part if his life was to be truly a human one. We can therefore discuss this question without having to fear a disadvantage for the Christian faith, even if we have to say that it cannot be maintained that the narrative of the supernatural conception of Christ is a wholly historically founded statement.³⁰

Schleiermacher's historical criticism was rigorous, but one could hardly accuse his *historical method* thus far of being arbitrary or inconsistent, especially since the first thorough-going rejection of Johannine authorship had appeared only in 1820 by Karl Bretschneider, and was directly opposed by Schleiermacher's lectures on the *Life of Jesus*. Perhaps the distinction he drew between the coherence of John vis-à-vis the piecemeal compilation by the synoptists could be considered his basic move to validate *Christological assertions* by connecting them with the reconstructed historical picture. He deplored the fact that so many scholars were viewing the synoptics as earlier than the Fourth Gospel and therefore more accurate.³¹ This not only left them in a chaotic mess because of the inaccessibility of the synoptists' particular selection and disparate use of various pericopes; but more importantly, it virtually *left Christology without any foundation* since the synoptists provided almost nothing in the way of a universally applicable picture of *Jesus' awareness of his own person*. They rather focused on his teaching about the coming Kingdom of God, presented in light of the Jewish theocracy, thereby lacking universalizable analogies from which sufficient Christological grounds could be obtained.³²

In fact, Schleiermacher argued, since no convincing reason can be given for the assertion of some that John concocted these discourses and then ascribed them to Jesus, "what John represents as the content of the discourses of Christ must have been what Christ really said."³³ Among other reasons, Schleiermacher reached this conclusion because he held that John was the only one of the circle of Jesus' disciples who communicated his account directly in written form. The synoptics, on the other hand, are "only end results of a process of oral transmission," a process that consisted of rather unplanned incorporation of certain traditions as well as failures to gain access to other narratives (e.g. the apostles who reported the discourses orally would probably have suppressed those things that might easily be misconstrued).³⁴

So as Schleiermacher saw it, one appears to have a choice between reconstructing the life of Jesus, and therefore *grounding Christology* on the synoptists' rather fortuitous collection of pericopes which in themselves only indirectly tell us what Jesus thought of himself, or reconstructing that life from the Gospel of John which seems planned, reasonable, and trustworthy, giving us a credible picture of *Jesus' self-consciousness*.

Or, even more to the point, Schleiermacher argued that to reconstruct a biography of a person, it is not enough to lay hold on disconnected events of his or her life, even if one

could recover every single event. These externals themselves provide only the framework. The person is discovered only to the degree that we find behind these events a *unity of the person* driven by a *constant inner force*, an identity that remains throughout the variety of confrontation with externals and through the historical changes encountered even with the person's own being itself.³⁵

That is, the explanation for one's responses to the externals cannot be adequately given by pointing merely to the externals, but rather to the inner directing force and identity known to the person as himself or herself. No one would accept a biography written of himself or herself that explained his or her character strictly by reciting otherwise perceptible unattached, externals, historical episodes or narratives. This would either open up the possibility that such externals could elicit similar responses from others, so people could be exactly alike, or would make one's character totally fortuitous, depending upon the convergence of unique combinations of externals, denying free will and real human uniqueness. Schleiermacher opted instead for the *unity and uniqueness* of the person that is somehow preserved through any kind or number of external stimuli.

This is the "tendency" involved in Schleiermacher's "psychological" hermeneutic approach which proves that his hermeneutic was *not* merely some romanticistic empathizing nor purely subjective idealism. The biography³⁶ demands distinguishing the particular unity of one individual from the unity of all others, and this requires being able to form an *image* of the whole person³⁷ that is coherent enough that one can calculate to a degree how the person would respond to externals which he or she, in fact, did *not* encounter. Without this ability to calculate, one really does not know the person.³⁸

On the other hand, Schleiermacher insisted that this abstraction of the inner unity of Christ or his "disposition," must be derived *only* from the most graphic picture possible – which meant seeing him entirely within the *particular circumstances of his own time*. So he was not giving any license to attempts to view Jesus *in the present* under the circumstances of his life. These attempts *impose foreign circumstances* on him or our picture of him.

The only proper method is instead to utilize *only* the circumstances of *his own time*, and to try to penetrate to what is exemplary in his, which is found in *his actual disposition*, which, in turn, we find articulated in his "maxims." Since the "maxims" transcend the particular circumstances of Jesus, by their assistance we can *apply this disposition to our own circumstances*.³⁹ The degree to which this knowledge of his inner nature or disposition was acquired by either the earliest disciples or by any subsequent disciples, it must have been due to *Christ's own initiative* or his disclosure. Therefore it was "his work," rather than a disciple manipulating the facts or "standing higher" than Jesus, as Schleiermacher puts it.⁴⁰ As *Christ's "work,"* this knowledge through the Spirit, as well as the experience of redemption through the Spirit, gives *objective continuity* to the Christian community and its theology, as it continues to manifest itself through the Word.

Or, put slightly differently, if one cannot be removed hypothetically from his or her individual existence or specific time and place, and placed into another, then knowledge of such person would "have no practical value, for he ceases to have exemplary character."⁴¹ But, if by the impetus of one's own life, the person "exercises an influence which extends beyond his people and his age," or the more universalizable his exemplary character, the greater the dignity of the person.⁴²

For Christ to carry Messianic dignity, his exemplary character must be *universally intelligible and affective*. This means that we must have a knowledge of his inner person that is separate from any if not every actual external stimuli, a picture of the whole Christ. When one understands this, it is quite clear why Schleiermacher argued that there are *no single events* in Jesus' life and no unique combination of them that in themselves prove his dignity or his "sinlessness" or absolutely-potent God-consciousness.⁴³ That can be proven only as his Spirit operates on our spirit in a direct confrontation through the community he founded,⁴⁴ his whole unique person influencing us. Again, to think otherwise, would lay one open to the possibility of basing faith only upon reports of some types of events that easily catch the imagination or are supernatural if not wholly mythological.

This corresponds with Schleiermacher's explanation of the beginning of a religion. He articulated a "positive-individual"⁴⁵ explanation of Christianity and religion in general, as opposed to Hegel's "historical-evolutionary" schema. The new religion was to be attributed not to externals nor to some quality that all humans have. Rather, a new religion begins by a specific occasion or moment in which the actual inner direction of an individual impacts others decisively. That which is universalizable or the *maxim* of the *whole person's behavior and particularly his words*, creates his dignity as he influences others.

This alone, accounts for a new religion. And this alone explains the birth of Christianity, according to Schleiermacher. It did not simply evolve naturally from the causal externals. To hold such would be to make Christ unnecessary since anyone else could have responded in the same way to those externals.⁴⁶ So Schleiermacher insisted that he detested the notion that Judaism was the "forerunner" of Christianity.⁴⁷

From Christological Assertion to the Issue of Historical Development and Diversity

To the contrary, Christianity came from the positive impetus of a particular individual named Jesus of Nazareth, at a particular time. His very appearance, or especially the historic reality of his "absolutely-potent Godconsciousness" was "eine wunderbare Erscheinung"⁴⁸ – by which Schleiermacher meant that it was *absolutely unique* in the history of the world. By his using "miracle" in this way – as something never before encountered in the history of the world,⁴⁹ rather than as commonly understood as a suspension or breach of natural law – the historical claim could not be dislodged merely by scientific objections or later rationalism or critical studies. Especially would this be true if one's *present experience* of redemption has as its *only* possible explanation the impetus *begun* by this *historical Christ*.

That is, Christ's person and work would not be intelligible to humans if it were absolutely supranatural or suprarational. But it would not be archtypal and exemplary if it were only natural and rational.⁵⁰ So the key, as we have already seen, is that the person of Christ must be discovered in his absolute uniqueness, which is the natural concern of a biography. But although he apparently influenced all ages and places or was totally universalizable in his influence, he nevertheless was still a concrete person subject to the general conditions of his age.

So Christ was both natural and supranatural, both fully man and fully God. Although he developed as any normal human being would, his birth was marked with his potential capacity for the absolutely-potent God-consciousness which then matured naturally and informed every moment of his life.⁵¹ Schleiermacher warned that to minimize this natural development would tend toward the most common heresy in the church, docetism. To minimize the supranatural or absolutely unique appearance of his personal unity would put one in danger of the Ebionite heresy.⁵²

As already noted, Schleiermacher contended that one does not come to this Christological conviction by simply isolating some specific incidents in Christ's life. No single event or combination of them are sufficient.⁵³ That would be again to revert too much to dependence upon externals to discover the unity of the person, a method he discounted. But by the presentation of a whole picture of Christ, as in the Gospel of John, one's experience of redemption corroborates the professed unity or dignity ascribed to that person.

If this be true – that the redemptive experience of each Christian in all subsequent generations was *historically derived* from this *original historical event* of the absolutely-potent God-consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth, and that each person redeemed was and is aware of this – then this impress of Christ or his Spirit is the *same* for all subsequent generations.⁵⁴ What this means is that no generation has an advantage on any other as regards redemption through Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, if any generation suffered a disadvantage, it was the original one since (1) while Jesus' original disciples were still with him, changing circumstances made any abstract universalizing of him or any formulation of his inner character virtually impossible;⁵⁵ and (2) the most likely time for influences foreign to Jesus' dignity to enter the stream of the Christian community were in its beginning stages when it had been as of yet incapable of formulating thoroughly the full meaning of Christ.⁵⁶

So the historical encounter of the earliest disciples – the redemption they experienced in Jesus of Nazareth, by his awakening their ineffective God-consciousness – was normative for all time, but not in a heteronomous way. Its normative status was simply corroborated by the redemptive experience of all subsequent disciples. Thus the essence of Christianity was present in the very origins of the religion. But because the experience of subsequent Christians is the same, though in a historically-derivative way, it would not be transcended, contradicted, or outgrown by any amount of later historical-critical studies.

That is, the immediate experience of redemption through one's response to the Spirit through the Word, corroborates the claims of the original Christians about this Jesus. The further the Christian church progresses, the more reflection via this Spirit removes from it any foreign element that contradicts the essence or power of Christ. This is not due to some inherent power of evolution or development nor to the autonomous human reason so exalted by the Enlightenment, but rather to God's Spirit and its continuing effect through Christ's continuous historical power.⁵⁷

The implications of this continuous divine power or the possibility of transcending historical relativity are many. To give one example, regarding the Christian scriptures particularly, it has to be recognized that the canonization did not occur at the impulse of the apostles. Further, history shows that different documents accepted in certain localities were later rejected by the universal church, and vice versa. The relativity of history might very well take its toll just by the process of canonization for those who fail to distinguish a genuine and potent continuity between the apostolic and post-apostolic ages. For Schleiermacher, the answer, of course, as in the case of true doctrine versus heresy, is the Spirit. The Spirit is the community Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, and "is gradually increasing in the Church."⁵⁸ This means that just because the canon has formerly been agreed on "is no guarantee-that its limits have been irrevocably fixed." Rather, the canon must stand under continual scrutiny even as the church is under obligation to take care in assigning "different grades of normative authority" to different portions of Scripture.⁵⁹

While this process of continual canonization or continual interpretation may sound like the Christian faith is simply swallowed up by relativity, Schleiermacher was convinced otherwise. To the contrary, it left the *human* element as *relative* – which included the human element in the church, the Scripture, the apostles, and even Jesus – and it marked the Absolute as One: God, manifest in Christ through the Spirit and Word – the one upon whom we are "absolutely dependent."⁶⁰

Conclusion

With this final observation, we can see how Schleiermacher's whole system reinforced his basic definition of religion as the "feeling of absolute dependence" or "being in relation to God." We have seen how the Fourth Gospel was not only acceptable but very useful in assisting Schleiermacher in the construction of this Christology, a Christology he felt that would survive historical criticism and historical relativity just as surely as it fostered historical inquiry. His theological insights, in fact, may well survive even after his understanding of the Fourth Gospel had dated itself.

Some of his insights placed him far ahead of his day and even rather *avante garde* today; other views or aspects of his method have now been outgrown. But the significance of his work was in the attempt to produce a coherent whole, a logical explanation that would address the three problems we originally delineated – to establish a Christology on the most likely historical reconstruction of the life of Christ,

and in the process to develop a hermeneutic that would both ground the Christology as well as provide a point of continuity by which understanding is not swallowed up by historical relativity. If his efforts did not satisfy everybody, they were nevertheless sincerely Christian, scholarly, and consistent. And his awareness of historical change would have made him the first to suggest that although our generation may use some of his insights, it will necessarily have to move on in the continual interdependence of Biblical scholarship and theology as we pursue the truth of the Christian faith for our generation.

Footnotes:

- ¹ Early in the nineteenth century, the historical accuracy of "John's" gospel was challenged particularly by Karl Bretschneider. *Probabilia de evangelii et epistolarum Ioannis Apostoli indole et origine cruditorum iudiciis modeste subiecit* (Leipzig, 1820). By the end of that century, critical Biblical studies had become convinced generally that the Fourth Gospel could not be used to reconstruct the historical Jesus and his message. This historical judgment reached its climax in dogmatic theology in the work of Adolph von Harnack, but was rejected by the most influential Protestant theologians of the twentieth century, Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. Harnack was, in fact, first countered by the Catholic theologian, Alfred Loisy, *L'Evangile et l'Eglise*, (1903), but Loisy was excommunicated shortly thereafter (1907) and had little influence on subsequent Catholic theology, despite the fact that his insights could have supplied a point of continuity between past and present – namely, by his understanding of the "work" of Christ in the church – that would have alleviated the fear of historical relativism the church so much feared.
- ² Even the rigorously historically-oriented theology and Christology of Wolfhart Pannenberg is able to make use of the Fourth Gospel in the development of Christology once the proleptic event of Jesus' resurrection is established by the earliest traditions and documents of the Christian faith. For Pannenberg, the openness beyond any given that is present in interpretation, as grounded in the interpretation of Jesus' resurrection, establishes the continuity and eliminates relativity by virtue of that power of the future which elicits the openness being none other than God.
- ³ Luther, of course, had insisted that the synoptic gospels only gave facts about Jesus, whereas the Fourth Gospel informs us of who he was, what he did, and why he did it.
- ⁴ The modern discussion of hermeneutic in systematic theology and the philosophy undergirding it usually looks back to F. Schleiermacher's *Hermeneutik* (1810 and years following), see Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1959), and *Dialektik* (1818 and years following), see Schleiermacher, *Dialektik*, ed. Rudolf Odebrecht (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), as the beginning point of the study in its real breadth. Hans Georg Gadamer posits Schleiermacher's hermeneutic as an advance over earlier hermeneutic in the fact that it (1) rejected any dogmatic determination, whether based upon scripture or the classics; and it (2) supplemented the purely grammatical hermeneutic with a "psychological" hermeneutic. Gadamer, however, faults Schleiermacher with (1) still being too preoccupied with the Biblical texts to develop a hermeneutic that would furnish a method that would be universally applicable to all the human sciences; (2) focusing so narrowly on knowing the author better than he knew himself that it ends up more concerned with the creative act (art) and the individual thought or text than it is with the truth of the object of the text and; (3) the universality Schleiermacher sought for his hermeneutic – based upon his presupposition that "all individuality is a manifestation of universal life so that the reader can both identify with and feel the alien aspect of the author's thought - fails to the degree that he considered understanding a text from the past no more difficult than any other kind of understanding. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 153-173.
- ⁵ While history has been important to most of the Christian theologians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the *relativity* of the historical has been continually addressed, with a variety of answers supplied. For example, for Schleiermacher, the truth of the Christian message was in the Christ's power to awaken one's God-consciousness in any generation, even as in the first, and his person can best be known from the *Fourth Gospel*. The awareness of this truth comes when one realizes that his or her experience of redemption through the Spirit in the Word corresponds to what the early

Christians experienced. This did not mean that "experience" became Schleiermacher's "norm" for theology, as Tillich often accused him, but rather that "experience" was correlated with and corroborated by historical tradition, an approach that Tillich at other times said was very similar to his method of correlation. For Hegel, the Spirit (Geist) was the power not simply in the church to give a certainty or continuity for believers, but was the driving force of history itself, thereby giving meaning to history rather than allowing it to fall into relativity. He insisted against Schleiermacher that by his conception of the Spirit, he retained reflection in the Christian faith rather than abandoning it for some supposed "immediacy." And in his earliest theological writings, *The Positivity of the Christian Religion* and *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate*, the *Fourth Gospel* supplied Hegel with proof that humans share the divine nature with God, which, of course, eliminates the relativity of history. "Spirit" was likewise the answer Strauss supplied, while criticizing Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel. For him, the certainty for the Christian was not to be found in any of the gospels, and definitely not in either literal-supernatural or oral or rational or naturalistic interpretations of even the synoptics. It was rather in the "idea" behind the Christology or Messianic myth. "Christ," therefore, is an idea supplied by God's Spirit, of the full realization of divinity, not just by one person, but rather the whole of humanity. While Kierkegaard reacted against Hegel's historical gnosticism as he saw it, he too found a certainty despite the radically different gospel pictures, but he referred to that certainty as "faith," supplied by the Absolute in the moment of relation. This enabled one to move above mere historical judgments. Although nineteenth century Biblical studies made acceptance of the *Fourth Gospel's* historical accuracy difficult, theology had tended to find in the Spirit or faith a certainty and continuity between the ancient church and the present Christian experience. So it was not any wonder that in the twentieth century Barth and Tillich took their cue from theology in its hermeneutical quest rather than from historical Biblical studies. As close as they were even to Bultmann theologically who also *preferred the Fourth Gospel*, they found themselves unable to accept his answer to historical relativity as mere "decision," as they saw it. That is, Tillich argued that Bultmann spoke of God's accosting demand but failed to indicate where the power could be found by which one could meet that demand. Barth's and Tillich's reasons for not rejecting the picture supplied by the *Fourth Gospel* varied, but were certainly centered upon the following convictions: (1) no absolute historical certainty about past events can be attained, no matter which gospel or which data are utilized; (2) since historical relativity cannot be overcome by more data or facts, only faith can grant certainty; (3) faith, as commitment to God rather than certainty of propositions, is accessible to all as a gift of God, whereas historical scrutinizing is limited to very few scholars, and is therefore a subtle form of works-righteousness, manipulation of God, or self-salvation. But this did not allow the whole Christian faith to lapse into relativity because they both found a point of continuity in some form of analogy that connected the past with the present: for Barth, an *analogia fidei*; for Tillich, an *analogia imaginis*, a continuity of *power*. Further, the Logos in the *Fourth Gospel* supplied Tillich not only with the idea of objective reason as a part of the structure of being, but with the necessity of revelation due to the dead-end of reason's quest. It also gave to Tillich a key to seeing a Gestalt for the biblical picture of New Being in Jesus rather than being bogged down in separate and often conflicting details of the various gospels. In Roman Catholic theology, the same Logos furnished Rahner with ground for an "Incarnation" which is real but not a necessity forced upon God, and through which humans could therefore legitimately hear God's address. And back at the turn of the century, although Loisy was aware of the historical problems of the *Fourth Gospel*, and although he for the most part did not use it in reconstructing his picture of Jesus, his understanding was that even in the synoptics one does not get behind the "work" of the church. Thus the "work" of the Christ through the church became the point of continuity which gave validity *even to the Fourth Gospel*, a gospel which Loisy explained as necessary for the church to survive. Present Catholic theology, though not brandishing Loisy's name or work, shows somewhat the same awareness. So in the work of Schillebeeckx and Küng, one finds the point of continuity between past and present Christian experience the power of Christ in one's life, which is defined as one's "suffering for others" or renouncing one's rights to help others. Küng refers to this as the "human face" of God – the key and "vocational" *continuity* supplied as much by the *Fourth Gospel* as by the others.

⁶ "Dogmatic" in the sense that the teaching of the church determined the way the content of any text was to be understood. Schleiermacher had sketched what would be required for a "philosophical theology" or "systematic theology" rather than merely a "dogmatic theology" in his *Kurze Darstellung des Theologesehen Studiums*, ed. Heinrich Scholz, (Leipzig: 1910; Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1961), Eng.

trans. *Brief Outline on The Study of Theology*, tr. T.N. Tice, Richmond: John Knox, 1966), (hereafter referred to as KD, with p. first in German, then Eng.). But he felt that in light of Kant's critique of reason, there was as yet no philosophical theology presently available.

- ⁷ By the categories Schleiermacher solidified in his *Kurze Darstellung*, his monumental work, *Der Christliche Glaube*, Siebente Auflage, ed. Martin Redeker (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1960), Eng. trans. *The Christian Faith*, tr. H.R. Mackintosh & J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928) (hereafter cited as CG, with p. in German, then Eng.) was "dogmatic" theology in that it was based upon most recent Protestant creeds. Yet because of his prolegomena by which religion, the church, the essence of Christianity, and other things received their definitions through "propositions" "borrowed" from ancillary fields of study, the work is obviously also a "systematic" or "philosophical" theology to the degree these definitions informed the following content.
- ⁸ Among most of the astute critical historians in the church at the time, it was still largely assumed that the Fourth Gospel was written by an immediate disciple of Jesus.
- ⁹ While he accepted Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reason, between phenomena and noumena, and Kant's rejection of knowing the *Ding an sich*, Schleiermacher rejected Kant's answer that "religion" was to be found in morality. Although both men believed in "Christ," another crucial difference between them related to the idea of Christ being the *Urbild* or archetype. Kant utilized the Johannine Logos to reinforce the concept of universal moral duty. But he went further to insist that it is an archetype (*Urbild*) of the moral that is within reason but must not be thought to have been embodied in any single historical individual. Immanuel Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (1793), pp. 61-62, Eng. trans. *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Tr. T.M. Greene & H. Hudson (New York: Harper, 1960), pp. 54-56. Schleiermacher, on the other hand, utilized the Fourth Gospel to reinforce his understanding that the *Urbild* was fully historically realized in Jesus of Nazareth. But it is not an archetype of externals or even morality. Rather, he was the archetype of humanity *only* as regards his God-consciousness or relation to God and the *Nay* that informed his thought and action. To think otherwise, would be to eliminate all traces of humanity from Christ.
- ¹⁰ Karl Barth criticized Schleiermacher for avoiding the truth question by (1) admitting in his "dogmatics" that in his description of God, humanity, and the world, he really was only discussing "states of mind" rather than the *Ding an sich*, and (2) defining "dogmatics" as description of the present belief of the church. Barth, *Protestant Thought: from Rousseau to Ritschl*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969), pp. 306-354, tr. Brian Cozens from eleven chapters of *Die Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Evangelischer Verlag A.G., Zollikon, Zurich, 1952). But this criticism unfairly overlooked the normative objective element of the Spirit or the impress of Christ which Schleiermacher saw as common to all Christians. Rather than not focus on the question of truth, as even Gadamer accused Schleiermacher, Schleiermacher was convinced that the truth is God, encountered objectively by Christians via the Spirit. Admittedly this metaphysical dimension makes his hermeneutic to that degree inapplicable to *other* sciences, but that alone does not prove it incorrect if there be such a thing as God or Spirit.
- ¹¹ Schleiermacher, *Das Leben Jesu* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1864), pp. 37-46, Eng. trans. *The Life of Jesus*, ed. Jack C. Verheyden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 36-44, (hereafter cited LJ with pages first in German, then English).
- ¹² LJ, pp. 37-44 (ET, 36-44).
- ¹³ LJ, p. 40 (ET, 39).
- ¹⁴ LJ, p. 40 (ET, 39).
- ¹⁵ Schleiermacher was familiar with the synoptic parallels of Wilhelm M.L. de Wette and Friedrich Lueke, *Synopsis evangeliorum Matthoei, Marci, et Lucae cum Parallelis Joannis periropis* (Berlin, 1818), see Schleiermacher, LJ, pp. 38-39 (ET, 37-38).
- ¹⁶ That is, this lack of a coherent plan or evident rationale for the document was perceived by its use of pericopes found in the other synoptic gospels, which were in fact utilized differently or interpreted differently by the various writers. One could generalize that according to the evident methodology of Schleiermacher's, John's credibility came primarily from the fact of the radical dissimilarity of any other gospel, for had there been another gospel that incorporated a number of pericopes also found in John, yet utilized or seen differently in any way, it would have had to have been judged as the synoptics, as a mere aggregation of otherwise disconnected narratives.
- ¹⁷ LJ, p. 44 (ET, 43).

¹⁸ LJ, pp. 51-58 (ET, 49-55).

¹⁹ LJ, p. 58 (ET, 56) Schleiermacher, as historian as well as theologian, demanded some evident or at least logical link between the events and their reporting in the gospels. So if the evangelists were not eyewitnesses of Jesus' birth and youth, what is the source of the information? He thought it incredible to suppose that Jesus sat around describing his childhood days and the circumstances of his birth to his disciples. What about Mary, his mother? Schleiermacher conceded that it is possible she could have supplied information to some later disciples. But a single source such as that would not explain the grossly different pictures the gospels present with such an apparently simple matter as the manner and place of birth. So when neither John nor Mark give birth accounts of Jesus, they simply have no essential place in the gospel narratives (*Ge.schichtschreibung*).

²⁰ LJ, p. 69 (ET, 66).

²¹ LJ, p. 71 (ET, 68).

²² LJ, pp. 435-436 (ET, 408).

²³ "I know no rule to set up except this: The Gospel of John is an account by an eyewitness, and the whole Gospel was written by one man. The first three Gospels are compilations of many accounts that earlier stood by themselves. If the individual sections of the different Gospels are examined, we find differences which are genuine contradictions, and they can only be hypothetically reconciled, not wholly." LJ, p. 461 (ET, 433).

²⁴ As, for example, the way he sees the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ.

²⁵ LJ, pp. 441-460 (ET, 411-431). On the issue of the words from the cross he insists "Some claim that such a state of abandonment by God was a necessary part of the plan of redemption. I admit gladly that I do not believe that. It contains an untruth, for if such a one had been abandoned by God he would have to be an untruth. He was an object of divine favor and must always have been that." He explains further that Christ was quoting Ps. 22 not to identify himself with the opening verses of despair, but directing attention to it as a whole, which ends quite triumphantly LJ, p. 451 (ET, 423).

²⁶ Ironically, Wolfhart Pannenberg has faulted Schleiermacher's Christology, even more so than Barth's as being a mere "faith in faith." He argues that Schleiermacher determined the content of his Christology from inferences from soteriology, and did not mind thereby neglecting the actual Jesus. *Jesus – God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 25, 48. But such a caricature overlooks the fact that Schleiermacher believed the gospel accounts that represented Jesus as saving or redeeming people during his lifetime by the actual encounter they had with him. Since for Pannenberg, Jesus became the "Son of God" *retroactively* only from his *resurrection*, Pannenberg's explanation seems less historically verifiable and intelligible than Schleiermacher's. Neither one is a mere "faith in faith," though.

²⁷ CG, II, pp. 82-89 (ET, 417-424). Among other arguments, he insists that the *Fourth Gospel* does not "adduce the visible ascension as a proof of the higher dignity of Christ." CG II, p. 83 (ET, 418). And when he analyzes the belief in Jesus' role in the coming judgment, he notes that the idea of Christ's return to judge is only "an accidental form for the satisfaction of the longing to be united with Christ." Such judgment, he insists, "implies nothing greater in the person of Christ than already we ascribe to Him apart from this; and in any case it does not really belong to the work of redemption itself, [and redemption is the essence of Christianity] since of course *those who believe do not come into judgment.*" CG, II, p. 83, (ET, 419) *emph. added*. The latter statement shows again his dependence upon the *Fourth Gospel*.

²⁸ Schleiermacher qualified this even further, insisting that if one, in order to avoid having to believe in Jesus' literal resurrection, believed that the disciples were *deceived*, taking an inward experience as a literal external resurrection, that would be unacceptable because of what it would imply about the disciples' judgment, as well as Jesus' judgment in selecting them. CG, II, 84-85 (ET, 420). However, he insisted that the "disciples recognized in Him the *Son of God without having the faintest premonition of His resurrection and ascension*, and we too may say the same of ourselves; moreover neither the spiritual presence which He promised nor all that He said about His enduring influence upon those who remained behind is mediated through either of these two facts. This may well depend upon His sitting at the right hand of God – by which, however, since the expression may be strictly an impossible one, we must understand simply the peculiar and incomparable dignity of Christ, raised above all conflict – but not upon a visible resurrection or ascension, since of course Christ could have been raised to glory even without these intermediate steps, and if so, it is impossible to see in what relation both these can stand to the redeeming efficacy of Christ." CG, II, p. 82 (ET, 418) (*emphasis*)

added). Strauss rightly perceived that the church would be incapable of distinguishing what Schleiermacher called the "doctrine of Scripture" (which has finite elements in it) from the "doctrine of Christ," so that Schleiermacher's treatment of Jesus' resurrection would be an offense to the church. In LJ, however, Schleiermacher's acceptance of the resurrection is more obvious; he finds John's account the only credible one, and Jesus' explanation there the extent of our knowledge of his state of mind. He concludes that by so accepting John's picture of the resurrection appearances, etc., the only element that remains incomprehensible is the resurrection itself, to which he responds, "the same thing is true of Christ's whole appearance upon earth. His coming was a miraculous act, but all that followed it was wholly natural." (aber so ist es mit der ganzen Erscheinung Christi auf Erden, das Erste ist ein wunderbarer Akt, aber das folgende ist ein vollkommen Natürliches gewesen) LJ, p. 474 (ET, 445).

²⁹ LJ, p. 62 (ET, 59).

³⁰ LJ, p. 61 (ET, 59). In *The Christian Faith*, the idea of the supernatural conception is made more explicit as the absolute uniqueness in history of the appearance of this completely potent God-consciousness, which Schleiermacher thinks of as a "*trundarbare Erscheinung*!" But this uniqueness is corroborated by the effect that God-consciousness of Jesus has on him or her through the Spirit, whereas a uniqueness of a virgin birth would have appeared for Schleiermacher as setting up a barrier for faith rather than being corroborated from present experience. That is, it is both "inadvisable" as well as "superfluous" to set up a doctrine of the "virgin birth," since (1) it focuses too much on something pertaining to a "purely scientific character"; (2) it feeds into other positions about Mary or about sex that are totally unwarranted; CG, I, pp. 68-69 (ET, 406-407).

³¹ He insisted that one cannot simply assume that John makes up discourses to ascribe to Christ. One would instead have to prove this. LJ, pp. 277-278 (ET, 259-260).

³² LJ, pp. 275-276 (ET, 257-258). Of course, a mere report of Jesus' self-consciousness is not absolute evidence *per se* as to who he really is. But the indirect pointers of Jesus' self-consciousness in the synoptics and the conflicting pictures these gave of his Messianic dignity, could not supply the ground for Christology that was needed. That is, the church's later picture of Christ has to find justification somehow even in *his own self-consciousness*. This was supplied coherently only in the *Gospel of John*.

³³ LJ, p. 280 (ET, 262).

³⁴ LJ, pp. 278-280 (ET, 260-262).

³⁵ LJ, pp. 5-7 (ET, 6-7).

³⁶ Admittedly, of course, the various gospels are not "biographies," not even the *Fourth Gospel*. As Schleiermacher wrote, "John is ruled by a definite point of view throughout but it is not a coherent biography (*zusammenhangervden Lebensbeschreibung*), for many of the moments necessary for a biography (*Biographie*) are entirely lacking in his Gospel," *Hermeneutik und Kritik init Besonderer Beziehung auf das Neue Testament*, ed. F. Lucke (Berlin, G. Reimer, 1838), 223-224. See also LJ, 169 (ET, 159): "For those, however, who undertake the task of viewing the life of Jesus in its continuity, the Evangelist John is just as unsatisfactory as the others." Nevertheless, John's superiority to the other evangelists is that while they do not present his life as a unity, John does. John's "tendency" Schleiermacher describes with the following; "The author wishes to make understandable the disaster in Christ's destiny together with the authentic nature of his activity, while – regarding the matter from John's own standpoint – the two conflicted with one another. Everyone who had, like John, won through to faith, had to expect that Christ would be recognized by all in the same way, and the catastrophe had therefore to be viewed in general as something that appeared unexpectedly. However, he wishes to make it comprehensible, and consequently everything is set forth in order to give a clear picture, in the first place of the actual nature of Christ's activity, and in the second place of the development of his relationship to the people and to the authorities among the people, and to make both comprehensible side by side with one another." LJ, pp. 168-169, (ET, 159).

³⁷ The idea of uncovering the "whole" person corresponds to Schleiermacher's general emphasis that understanding of parts or individual requires including the whole. So, e.g., a typical aphorism of his was "Jedes Verstehen des Einzelnen ist bedingt durch ein Verstehen des Ganzen." *Hermeneutic*, p. 46. This corresponds to his conception of religion being an immediate self-consciousness or consciousness of the Whole or Totality which was so important in the *Heden*.

³⁸ LJ, p. 15 (ET, 16).

³⁹ LJ, pp. 15-16 (ET, 16-17).

- ⁴⁰ LJ p. 17 (ET, 18).
- ⁴¹ LJ p.10 (ET, 11).
- ⁴² LJ, pp. 10-12 (ET, 12-13).
- ⁴³ CG, II, p. 34 (ET, 377).
- ⁴⁴ Schleiermacher finds no credible possible answer to Christology and to the image of "Christ" as the Vorbild and Urbild except that ideality was embodied fully in Jesus of Nazareth, and by his power of redemption, he passed on that redemption through the corporate or church life he established. Anything less would have given a less than ideal image since it would have originated with humans whose God-consciousness is so weak that it is almost non-existent. CG, II, pp. 34-37 (ET, 378-380).
- ⁴⁵ CG, I, pp. 64-71 (ET, 44-52).
- ⁴⁶ LJ, pp. 13-14 (ET, 14-15).
- ⁴⁷ *On Religion, Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, tr. John Oman (New York: Harper & Brothers, Pub., 1958), p. 238. In fact, Schleiermacher was consistent in his position, so the Jewish background was minimized as an explanation of Jesus' potent God-consciousness, and the Old Testament or Jewish Bible he held as superfluous to the Christian faith. CG, I, pp. 83-85, II, pp. 36-37 (ET, 60-62; 379-380).
- ⁴⁸ CG, II, p. 38 (ET, 381).
- ⁴⁹ CC, II, pp. 37-39 (ET, 380-382). See especially his definition of "miracle" as a new beginning spiritually that cannot in anyway be explained by what preceded it. CG, I, pp. 99-101 (ET, 71-73).
- ⁵⁰ CG, I, pp. 86-94 (ET, 62-68). See also on miracles attributed to Jesus, CG, II, pp. 115-118 (ET, 448-450).
- ⁵¹ CG, II, pp. 34-48 (ET, 377-389).
- ⁵² LJ, pp. 24-37 (ET, 24-36); CG, II, pp. 34-48 (ET, 377-389). Ironically, despite Schleiermacher's ruthlessly objective historical method, his dogmatics tend more toward docetism than the Ebionite heresy merely by the positing of potent Godconsciousness in Jesus from birth, something totally unknown among all other humans. This is the "Achilles' heel" that D.F. Strauss attacked, namely, how could one present a credible "scientific" picture by positing one member of a species reaching absolute perfection in total isolation from every other member of that species? David F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, tr. George Eliot (Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 768-773. Schleiermacher, however, had even already anticipated that criticism, but he reminded his readers (1) that by "ideality" (Urbildlichkeit) he meant only *Christ's God-consciousness*, "not some ideal of art or skill postulated from a society; (2) if this ideality is not admitted as actually existing in Christ, then the human species must at least bear or will bear a hope of passing beyond Christ, which means the end of the Christian faith; and (3) to deny this actual ideality in Christ is to relegate the human species to a status lower than animals, for the latter realize their ideal *en toto*, and since humans differ by virtue of their free will, their realization of the ideality must occur in a single person rather than the totality. So to argue that Christ was not it would be to assert that it does not exist. CG, I, pp. 34-37 (ET, 378-379). Strauss, of course, believed that it does exist, but exists not in an individual life but in the whole human species' self-conception and progression toward perfection of its own ideal image, the "Christ."
- ⁵³ Note 42 *supra*.
- ⁵⁴ CG, 11, pp. 248-278 (ET, 560-585).
- ⁵⁵ LJ, p. 17 (ET, 18).
- ⁵⁶ CG, 1, pp. 125-134 (ET, 94-101).
- ⁵⁷ CG, II, pp. 284-309 (ET, 591-611). When Gerhard Spiegler faults Schleiermacher with failing to create a "public theology," insisting that Schleiermacher's position in his *Dialektik* contradicts his position *in* his systematic theology, he seems to overlook three things: (1) Schleiermacher never contended that the specific understanding of the Christian is public; (2) there appears to be no particular reason why the source of the "co-inhering polarity" by which everything in the cosmos is relative could not be the same as the "Woher" of Schleiermacher's theology without this relativizing God; and (3) the experience one has with God is immediate and therefore always prior to and transcendent to any subsequent conceptualization of it. See Spiegler, "Theological Tensions in Schleiermacher's Dialectic," *Schleiermacher as Contemporary*, ed. Robert W. Funk, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), pp. 13-26.
- ⁵⁸ CG, II, pp. 298-299 (ET, 603). This is true based upon the idea of sanctification (via the Spirit) of the individuals within the church.

⁵⁹ CG, 11 pp. 297-299 (ET, 602-603).

⁶⁰ This is not, of course, to suggest that for Schleiermacher the absolute is ever attained as historical-conceptual knowledge. Here the polarities of his *Dialektik* reinforce the difference between the certainty one reaches by understanding and the certainty Schleiermacher equates with *Gefühl*. But the relationship of the Christian to God is not relative. In Schleiermacher's words, "Our union with Him [Christ], accordingly, although it never attains more than relative manifestation, is yet recognized by God as absolute and eternal, and is affirmed as such in our faith." CG, I, p. 124 (ET, 455).

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