

## Christology and Anthropology in Friedrich Schleiermacher

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It is no exaggeration to say that Christological doctrine is the heart of Christian theology. It encapsulates an understanding of God and human nature, as well as how the two relate to one another. How one understands the person and work of Christ depends in part on how one understands the human condition, how it needs to be changed, and what it would take to change it. Moreover, insofar as Christ is understood as the Logos, God's self-revelation, Christology also has implications for the doctrine of God, as well a doctrine concerning how it is that God relates to us. Insofar as a doctrine of the work of Christ has implications regarding how his work changes us and our relations to others, Christology contains the germ of Christian ethics. In the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Christology plays no less a central role. As Richard R. Niebuhr has observed, Schleiermacher's theology is Christo-morphic;<sup>1</sup> for him the elements of theology are grounded in the *person-forming* experience of being in relation to Christ and the community founded by him.<sup>2</sup> Both Schleiermacher's dialogue with the orthodox Christological tradition preceding him, as well as his understanding of the work of Christ, are founded on a critical analysis of this fundamental experience and its implications. In this essay I explore Schleiermacher's understanding of both the person and work of Christ. The essay is divided into two main parts. In the first I treat of Schleiermacher's understanding of the person of Christ, and in the second I treat his view of Christ's work.

### AI. The Person of Jesus Christ

Doctrine, for Schleiermacher, is always the result of a reflection on a given *experience* that is presupposed, namely the experience of being redeemed through Jesus

Christ. Hence a true appropriation of Christian doctrine cannot be had by proofs or scientific means, rather it can only be brought about “by each man willing to have the experience for himself... it can only be apprehended by the love that wills to perceive” (*CF* §13.2).<sup>3</sup> Christian doctrines, Schleiermacher tells us, are “accounts of the religious Christian religious affections set forth in speech” (*CF*, §15). They always proceed from a reflection on how the experience of one’s self-consciousness has been changed through being in relation to the Redeemer.<sup>4</sup> The experience of redemption is grounded in Christ’s empowerment of the God-consciousness (the feeling of Absolute dependence) to dominate any moment of self-consciousness in which the self stands in relation to the world. Hence the feeling of absolute dependence itself grounds how the world is understood, valued, and felt.<sup>5</sup> It is through the relation to Christ that the self arrives at complete trust in God, who is the ground of both self and world. Through the empowerment of the God consciousness the self comes to have faith in both God’s goodness and power, and this trust itself affects both how the world is viewed as well as what it is that a person desires.

The starting point of Schleiermacher’s Christology is the certainty of the *experience* of redemption through Christ. He asks, given this experience, what are the conditions of its possibility? This question prompts him to formulate the four “natural heresies” that must be avoided if the concept of redemption is to be properly understood. The heresies are ways in which the fundamentals of Christian doctrine can be contradicted, while “the appearance of Christianity yet remains” (*CF*, 22). These are “the Docetic and the Nazarean, the Manichean and the Pelagian” (*CF*, §22). Avoidance of these heresies sets the parameters for both his Christology and anthropology. The first

two heresies, the Docetic and the Nazarean, specifically concern the person of Christ. It is to a discussion of these that I now turn.

If Jesus is to be the Redeemer, two conditions must be met. First, he must be *like* us, that is, he must have a nature essentially like our own. Second, he must not himself stand in need of redemption, and he must have the requisite power to save those that need redemption. In this regard he must be *unlike* us. The first heresy, which Schleiermacher labels the Docetic, results from thinking of Jesus as so exalted above human nature that he does not partake of it. Schleiermacher notes that “if the difference between Christ and those who stand in need of redemption is made so unlimited that an essential likeness is incompatible with it, then His participation in human nature vanishes into a mere appearance; and consequently our God-consciousness, being something essentially different, cannot be derived from His, and redemption is also only an appearance.” The second heresy results from thinking of Jesus as so similar to other members of the human race that “no room is left for a distinctive superiority” (*CF*, 22). In such a case he himself would stand in need of redemption, and would be powerless to effect the redemption of others. These two heresies are the Scylla and Charybdis of Christology. They reflect fundamental ways that thinking about Jesus can go wrong. In the Symbol of Chalcedon of 451 the church laid down guidelines for correct thinking about Jesus after a protracted Christological controversy. While Schleiermacher does not directly cite the Chalcedonian symbol in §96 where he discusses the issue of the two natures, it stands in the background of his discussion.<sup>6</sup> In fact, any serious Christology must come to grips with the problems faced by Chalcedon. Schleiermacher’s own analysis is concerned to avoid the pitfalls of the one sided Christologies leading up to the council. He preserves

the upshot of the insights of Chalcedon while at the same time rejecting the language in which those insights were framed.

The sentence explicated in §96 reads “In Jesus Christ divine nature and human nature were combined into one person.” The sentence is misleading in that Schleiermacher ultimately rejects the language of two “natures” coexisting in one person. He notes that the word “nature” (φύσις) is used of finite existences having a particular essence, and remarks that even the heathens had realized that it was inapplicable to God insofar as God “is to be thought of as beyond all existence and being” (*CF*, §96).<sup>7</sup> Hence it makes little sense to speak of a divine *nature*. But more problematic is the fact that the requirement that we think of Jesus as having two distinct natures expressing themselves in one person is analogous to “a formula made up by combining indications out of which it is impossible to construct a figure.” Schleiermacher notes that:

Now if “person” indicates a constant unity of life, but “nature” a sum of ways of action or laws, according to which conditions of life vary and are included within a fixed range, how can the unity of life coexist with the duality of natures, unless the one gives way to the other, if the one exhibits a larger and the other a narrower range, or unless they melt into each other, both systems of ways of action really becoming one in the one life?—if indeed we are speaking of a person, *i.e.*, of an Ego which is the same in all the consecutive moments of its existence. (*CF*, §96).

The problem becomes especially intractable if the divine and human natures are thought of as diametrically opposed: the human nature as finite and capable of suffering, and the divine as infinite and impassible. It was this antithesis between the passibility of the

human and the impassibility of the divine that led the Arians to conclude that Jesus, who prayed to the Father, expressed emotions, and suffered on the cross could not truly be God from God, but must be, rather, a semi-divine angel. To think that the Son is of the same essence as the Father, they argued, would be to threaten the divine impassibility.

Leading up to Chalcedon, three ways of trying to come to grips with the doctrine of two natures in one person presented themselves, all of them equally unsatisfactory. Schleiermacher notes that ever since the language of two natures and one person began to be used, the results “have always vacillated between the opposite errors of mixing the two natures to form a third which would be neither of them, neither divine nor human, or of keeping the two natures separate, but either neglecting the unity of the person in order to separate the two natures more distinctly, or, in order to keep firm hold of the unity of the person, disturbing the necessary balance, and making one nature less important than the other and limited by it” (*CF*, §96). The symbol of Chalcedon issued parameters eschewing all three results, as well as reaffirmed the results of Nicaea, which had laid down, against the Arians, that the Son was indeed God from God. Schleiermacher argues that the language of the two natures in one person led, with almost inexorable necessity, to one of the errors eschewed by Chalcedon. The first is that of the Monophysite Alexandrians, who insisted that after the union between the human and the divine in Christ, there was only one nature, namely, the divine. For all practical purposes this Christology did away with the humanity of Jesus. The irresolvable problem of trying to construct such an impossible figure is solved here, as Schleiermacher puts it, by one nature giving “way to the other.” The symbol of Chalcedon attempted to correct this one sided construction through its language that “the distinction of the natures is in no way to

be abolished on account of this union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature is preserved, and concurring into one Person and one subsistence.”<sup>8</sup> It did not, however, explain how this was to be conceived.

Equally problematic was the Antiochene viewpoint, taken to its extreme by the Nestorians, stressing that both natures, the human and the divine, continued to be operative after the union. The problem here was that both natures, each having diametrically opposed attributes, were just about impossible to square with one another insofar as they were to be operative in one person. The result was often a disjointed Christology in which some operations were ascribed to the human nature, others to the divine.<sup>9</sup> This is another possible result of the language of two natures. Schleiermacher notes that the “utter fruitlessness” of such a language is particularly marked “in the treatment of the question whether Christ as one person formed out of two natures had also two wills according to the number of natures, or only one according to the number of the persons.” If Christ has only one will, it must have either a divine or a human nature. The human will “always strives for only separate ends and one for the sake of the other;” the object of the divine will, on the other hand, can be “nothing but the whole world in the totality of its development.” The attributes of both are mutually exclusive. Whichever is chosen, attributes of the other nature are left out. On the other hand, if Christ had two wills, “then the unity of the person is no more than apparent” (*CF*, §96). Equally problematic is the character of Jesus’ intellect: human reason is discursive; it “knows separate things one after the other,” whereas the divine intellect is “omniscient and sees everything at once.” The two kinds of intellects cannot coexist in one and the same person. Antiochene Christology crashed on the shoals of just this problem; while it

stressed Christ's two natures, it had a great deal of trouble explaining the union, since the postulation of both natures demanded that Christ act in accordance with the operations peculiar to each. The Alexandrians, in fact, accused the Antiochenes of having a doctrine of two Sons. Chalcedon declared such a position to lay outside the scope of orthodoxy through its language that "the characteristic property of each nature is preserved, concurring into one Person and one subsistence, not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons, but remains one and the same Son and only-begotten God. Word, Lord, Jesus Christ."<sup>10</sup> Again, how this was to be conceived without contradiction was not explained. Another strategy condemned was that of Eutyches, who seemed to reason that the result of the union was a kind of mixture of the two natures; the Chalcedonian symbol also rejects this position in noting that the "distinction of natures is in no way abolished on account of the union."<sup>11</sup> Schleiermacher mentions this as the error of "mixing the two natures to form a third which would be neither of them."

It is clear from Schleiermacher's discussion that he is in complete agreement with Chalcedon in regard to the positions it *rejects*. The humanity of Jesus after the union cannot be done away with, yet we must affirm a veritable existence of God in him. Nonetheless the operations of the humanity and the divinity cannot be distributed amongst Jesus' actions, but all actions must issue from a single consciousness. And further, we cannot think that Jesus' nature is some kind of third thing resulting from a mixture of the divine and the human. Nevertheless, Schleiermacher rejects the starting point of Chalcedon, namely the adoption of the language of two natures requiring one to attempt to construct an impossible figure, and leading almost inevitably to one of the aforementioned errors.

Whatever the final assessment of Schleiermacher's Christology, his own strategy has the peculiar virtues of consistency and of avoiding all three pitfalls warned against in the Chalcedonian symbol. His crucial move to avoid them lies not so much with his rejection of the language of the two natures, however, as with his understanding of the ideal of human nature become real in Jesus Christ. Two moves are crucial for his resolution of the Christological enigma. First, the essential character of perfect human nature just is to express the divine. Hence there is no real duality between perfect human nature and the divine. Second, human nature only achieves its perfection in Jesus Christ; in fact the creation of human beings is ordered to perfection in and through Jesus Christ. In the following two sub-sections I deal with each of these points.

## II. Perfect Human Nature and the Nature of Jesus' Self-Consciousness

A key problem for Schleiermacher is the question of how the divine can co-exist with the human. Schleiermacher notes that since the Christian faith has never assumed that sin is essential to human nature, "it has always been assumed in Christian faith that a union with God is possible in terms of man's essence" (*LJ*, 100). If the essence of human nature is such that it can be united with God, then there is no contradiction in thinking of Jesus as both fully human and as united with God. The idea of Redemption requires that we posit a real existence of God in Christ. Furthermore "to ascribe to Christ an absolutely powerful God-consciousness, and to attribute to Him an existence of God in Him, are exactly the same thing" (*CF*, §94). God is truly present in Jesus insofar as it is the divine that fully expresses itself in his humanity:

"...the existence of God in the Redeemer is posited as the innermost fundamental power within Him, from which every activity proceeds and

which holds every element together; everything human (in Him) forms only the organism for this fundamental power, and is related to it as the system which both receives and represents it, just as in us all other powers are related to the intelligence (*CF*, §96).

It is in virtue of his absolute dependence on God that Jesus can be the organ for the expression of the divine. It is important to note that all elements of what constitutes a natural humanity are involved in this process, so that for Schleiermacher Jesus' intellect and will must be fully human. Schleiermacher's is by no means a *logos/sarx* Christology, in which the Logos provides the direct *energia* to the body of Christ.<sup>12</sup> Rather, all elements of a full and complete humanity are taken up in the process of expressing the divine.<sup>13</sup> As such, Jesus' intellect cannot be an omniscient one, but rather, like ours, proceeds discursively. Likewise his will, like ours, wills one thing for the sake of another; unlike God's it does not will everything at once. As truly human, Jesus is fully enmeshed in all the limitations of embodiment and finite consciousness. Nevertheless, because all the elements of his humanity are fully passive in relation to the divine, his person is able to fully express the divine. According to Schleiermacher's second Christological theorem, "In the uniting of the divine nature with the human, the divine alone was active or self-imparting, and the human alone passive or in process of being assumed; but during the state of union every activity was a common activity of both natures" (*CF*, §97). In other words, in Jesus each moment of the sensuous self-consciousness expresses the divine in virtue of his absolute dependence upon God. Insofar as Jesus expresses the divine, his self-consciousness is fully active in relation to the world,<sup>14</sup> that is, he imparts his God-consciousness to others and thereby quickens the whole race. For

Schleiermacher the Johannine phrase that “the Word become flesh,” is fully appropriate in regard to Jesus, since “‘Word’ is the activity of God expressed in the form of consciousness” (*CF*, §96).

In his *Life of Jesus* Schleiermacher discusses Jesus’ God-consciousness and its developmental character in more depth. The divine in Jesus is not a real, discrete consciousness, but is rather “something that lies at the basis of the total consciousness” (*LJ*, 97). In fact, as soon as one conceives of the divine element in him as such a real discrete consciousness coexisting with the human “we clearly put an end to the unity of the personality” (*LJ*, 96). On the other hand, if the divine in him is thought of as a vital principle lying at the ground of his consciousness, then we can conceive of it as something that makes its appearance gradually, and whose self-expression becomes stronger as Jesus matures. As such Schleiermacher hopes to make sense of the saying in Luke 2:52 that as a child Jesus “increased in wisdom and in favor with God and man” (*LJ*, 98). It is crucial that Jesus’ humanity be essentially like our own, for “if we think of him as an absolute model we must think of his action as wholly human, for otherwise I cannot follow him” (*LJ*, 84). Nevertheless, while Jesus’ humanity is completely like our own in that his consciousness is not an omniscient one, and in that he underwent development just as we do, Schleiermacher stresses that Jesus must be sinless if he is indeed to be the Redeemer. He notes that “not only was his moral development progress without struggle, but also his intellectual development was progress without error”<sup>15</sup> (*LJ*, 107). His development is that from “complete innocence to an ever more perfect consciousness” (*LJ*, 99). Jesus “was always conscious of being in relation to the divine will” (*LJ*, 101) and throughout his development the sensual element never took

preponderance over Jesus' God-consciousness (*LJ*, 98-9) but rather "nothing was ever able to find a place in the sense-nature that did not instantly take its place as an instrument of the spirit" *CF*, §93.4).

Schleiermacher develops a sophisticated analysis of temptation and concludes that Jesus cannot have been genuinely tempted. Everything depends "on determining the point where sin begins." If Jesus' nature was a genuinely human one, he must have been susceptible to the difference between pleasure and pain. However, Schleiermacher does not think that this susceptibility could have involved him in any kind of moral struggle, since "the beginning of sin must lie between the moment at which pleasure and pain exist in this sinless way and that at which struggle begins." Hence, while Jesus felt pleasure and pain, these did not determine his incentives to action (*CF*, §98). Genuine temptation involves the idea that an object of temptation is an object of desire, that is, that it is genuinely attractive. Temptation also involves the idea of struggle in the self: one struggles with the attractive force of the object of desire. But, Schleiermacher reasons, to think that the sensuous self-consciousness in Jesus was able, of itself, to determine something as attractive or repulsive in such a way that he had to struggle with it, is to posit the origins of sin, even if infinitely small, in Jesus. If the sensuous self-consciousness could, of itself, determine a course of action as *genuinely* attractive for him, this would mean that in him there was a moment of consciousness in which the sensuous self-consciousness was not just the organ of the expression of the Spirit, that is, of his God-consciousness. It is these doctrinal considerations that are the guiding thread in Schleiermacher's understanding of the life of the historical Jesus. As such the reports in the gospels that Jesus was "tempted in all points" are a special difficulty for him (*CF*,

§98), and he concludes that the temptation stories do not reflect a genuine temptation of Jesus but are, rather a “parable” of Christ “for his disciples” regarding the “manner in which they should organize their leadership in the office entrusted to them” (*LJ*, 153).

One last point is crucial in understanding the nature of Jesus’ God-consciousness and the expression of the divine in him. In Jesus each moment of the sensuous self-consciousness is referred back to his absolute dependence upon the Father; as such each moment of the sensuous self-consciousness is the organ of the expression of this relation, in which his humanity is receptive to the divine power. This power is understood, first and foremost, as love. Hence Schleiermacher notes that

But our canon also compels us to think of the human nature of Christ in such feelings, not as moved for and through itself, but only as taken up into association with an activity of the divine in Christ. *Now this “divine” is the divine love in Christ which, once and for all or in every moment—whichever expression be chosen—gave direction to His feelings for the spiritual conditions of men.* In virtue of these feelings, and in consequence of them, there then arose the impulse to particularly helpful acts. So that in this interrelation every original activity belongs solely to the divine, and everything passive to the human. (*CF*, §97.3, italics mine).

This view of Jesus’ self-consciousness, and of the mode of the union between the human and the divine in him is crucial to an understanding of the work of Jesus, which I discuss below.

### III. Jesus as Ideal and the Original Divine Decree

Many of Schleiermacher's critics have concluded that the *Christian Faith* presents an anthropological transcendental philosophy of religion with an amazingly high Christology stuck in the middle. F. C. Baur complained to his brother that if the principle characteristics of Jesus "were derived from religious self-consciousness...I could think of the Redeemer only as a certain form and potency of self-consciousness...and the outward appearance of Jesus is not the original fact [from which Christian consciousness is derived]."<sup>16</sup> Such too, was the verdict of Karl Barth, who accused Schleiermacher of an anthropological starting point logically committing him to understanding Jesus as a mere exemplar of human nature. He charges that for Schleiermacher "statements about sin and grace relate to those of the God-consciousness as *predicates* to a *subject*..."<sup>17</sup> that is, sin and grace are viewed as mere modifications of a human nature understood in its own right, from the perspectives of philosophy, psychology and anthropology. As such the revelation given in Jesus Christ cannot function as a supernatural event, that is, as the Word of God against which the natural man must be judged and through which he is redeemed. Rather, Jesus is viewed as functioning inside the parameters of a God-consciousness that is an element of an already given human nature; as such, Barth notes, the advent of Jesus is just about as novel as "the formation of a new nebula."<sup>18</sup> If such is the case, it is hard to understand Jesus as the archetype of the relation between God and persons such that all human relationship to God is rooted in him.<sup>19</sup>

Such judgments cannot be farther from the truth, and can only be the result of a lack of acquaintance with Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* as a whole. In his lectures, for instance, Barth urged that his students need only read the first twelve sections of the

*Christian Faith* in order to come to the conclusion that the rest of the book was not worth the effort.<sup>20</sup> A complete reading of *The Christian Faith*, however, shows that Schleiermacher can quite consistently claim that Jesus' must function inside the parameters of what is completely human while still functioning as the archetype in which all human relation to God must be rooted.

According to Schleiermacher, every given state of the God-consciousness in human corporate life is "no more than a mere approximation to that which exists in the Redeemer Himself; and just this is what we understand by His ideal dignity" (*CF*, §93). In fact, human nature first achieves its perfection in Jesus Christ, whose perfect God-consciousness was destined from the beginning of all time to quicken that of the entire race. Hence, for Schleiermacher "Christ is....the completion of the creation of man" (*CF*, §89). From the first moment of its creation the human race was ordered to its completion in Jesus Christ: "For although at the first creation of the human race only the imperfect state of human nature was manifested, yet eternally the appearance of the Redeemer was already involved in that" (*CF*, §89.3). The impartation of the Spirit to both the first Adam, in which this Spirit remains sunk in sensuousness, and to the second Adam, in which its impartation reaches its perfection, "go back to one undivided eternal divine decree" (*CF*, 95). Through this decree it was ordained that the first Adam should reach completion in the second. There is, therefore, according to Schleiermacher, no creation of human nature independent of Jesus Christ, but both go back to a *single establishing action* on God's part. God does not first create the world and then act again to redeem it. That would be to ascribe anthropomorphic characteristics to God's action, since we would then have to posit in God "an alteration of activity and rest in relation to the

world.” If God first creates something, and must then act again in order to alter what has already been established in creation, then “the world would remain entirely dependent upon God but irregularly, and on divine activities which mutually exclude one another” (CF, 38.2)<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, if God’s causality is absolute, it cannot belong to the sphere of interaction in which something *independently* existing is acted upon. Rather, God’s creative activity itself brings about the existence of what is acted upon. The divine causality is “opposite in kind” to finite causality since it does not belong to the sphere of interaction (CF, §51). What God acts upon has no reactive power that is not itself kept in existence through God’s activity. As such, God’s creative act fully determines the existence of what is brought into being *for the good*. Moreover, given the above considerations the creative and sustaining activity must be thought of together, so they are really one. God does not first create and then sustain, but rather all action of God upon the world is his enduring sustenance of it, encompassed in the original divine decree through which he orders it to the good.

Schleiermacher’s doctrine of the original divine decree, containing the complete destiny of humanity, implies the collapse of the distinction between nature and supernatural. There is a single nature system established by God in the original divine decree, and included in this decree is way that God relates to the world. Hence everything established through this divine action belongs to nature and is completely natural; God does not first establish nature to exist and relate to him in one way and then establish a second way of relating through miracles and other “supernatural” events. To think of God that way would involve us in the difficulties mentioned above. Hence the impartation of the Spirit to the first Adam (which remained “sunk in sensuousness”) and the perfection

of the impartation of this Spirit in Christ both form “even in a higher sense, one and the same natural system, though one unattainable by us” (*CF*, §94.3). Given that the way that God relates to the world is established through the original divine decree, the creation of humanity is teleologically ordered from its very inception to its perfection in Christ. God relates to humans through the God-consciousness, a “vital impulse” (*CF*, §65) within them that continually undergoes development, but one that remains locked in a state of captivity or constraint aside from the power of Christ. This God-consciousness was destined from the beginning to find completion and perfection in Christ, who alone holds the keys to unlock its power. Schleiermacher notes that

...the uniting divine activity [in the Origin of the Person of Christ] is also an eternal activity, but that, as in God there is no distinction between resolve and activity, this eternal activity means for us simply a divine decree, identical as such with the decree to create man and included therein...(CF, §97.4).

In other words, God’s activity of uniting with humanity in the perfect God-consciousness of Jesus Christ is established in the original divine decree; the activity of the God-consciousness in human nature that has not yet been quickened by Jesus is but a prefiguration, in the form of potentiality, of its actualization in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the appearance of the Redeemer is already involved in the receptivity implanted in human nature from the beginning (*CF*, §89.3).

It is true that the God-consciousness can undergo development even if it as yet has no knowledge of the historical Jesus, and as such does not remain at the level of sheer potentiality aside from such historical contact with him. However, when such

development occurs, it does so in fits and spurts, so that just as there is a little progress, there is just as much regression to superstition and idolatry. Moreover, whatever progress there is refers back to the original divine decree, in which the teleological perfection of the world is already implanted in the seeds of the world's first beginnings. At this original moment it was already ordained that humanity should be completed in Christ. Hence "the origin of finite existence" is the "source of the whole temporal development," and this is the object of the "divine approval of the world" (*CF*, §57.2). Moreover, precisely because the coming of Christ is already prefigured in the origin of finite existence, it is appropriate to link "the first consciousness of sin, due to the accession of the God-consciousness, with the first presentiment of redemption" (*CF*, §71.3). Consciousness of sin can be understood as the pangs of creation as it longs for its completion in Jesus Christ.

Important to Schleiermacher's view of Christ as archetype is the difference between the existence of God in Christ and in the rest of the human race. The existence of God in human nature is originally "found nowhere but in Him, and He is the only 'other' in which there is an existence of God in the proper sense." On the other hand, the existence of God in us is only derivative: "it is only through Him that the human God-consciousness becomes an existence of God in human nature" (*CF*, §94.2). Jesus' relation to God is different from that of all other persons. Only in Jesus is the God relation original and unmediated; the rest of humanity's relation to God must be mediated through him. All these points show that if Schleiermacher's theology is taken as a whole, the charges of Baur, Brunner and Barth have no basis.

## BI. The Work of Christ

A clear understanding of how Jesus redeems first presupposes a grasp of what it is that humans need redemption from, namely, sin. Schleiermacher understands sin as the result of inattention to the influence of the higher (transcendental) God consciousness upon moments of the sensible self-consciousness. The God-consciousness is always present and in relation to the sensible self-consciousness, which is the self's consciousness of itself as related to, and interacting with, the world. Insofar as the God-consciousness is allowed to be effective, it conditions every moment of the sensible self-consciousness. As transcendental, the God consciousness is like a light that casts its rays on how the world is understood, valued, and felt. As Frank has shown in an earlier essay in this volume, insofar as the God-consciousness involves an element of *self*-consciousness, it is the consciousness that one is not the author of one's own existence. However, this "gap" in self-consciousness (through which one comes to the consciousness of one's dependence on the absolute) is also the place at which the power of God can shine through, so to speak, into the finite. If this gap remains completely open, so that the power of the divine can pass through it, the body and all the higher functions of the human psyche (such as intelligence, will, and the emotions insofar as they are informed by the former two), become the organs of the spirit. In Christ this is complete, and this is what Schleiermacher means when he notes that in Christ the divine is completely active and the human is completely receptive; in him the human has been taken up completely and become the organ of spirit.

While this gap in the self's consciousness of itself is always present, it can become obscured through the self's thinking of itself as independent. Schleiermacher

notes that sin is “an arrestment of the power of spirit due to the independence of the sensuous functions” (*CF*, §66.2). The “evil condition” from which humans need redemption is an “obstruction or arrest of the vitality of the higher-consciousness, so that there comes to be little or no union of it with the various determinations of the sensible self-consciousness...” (*CF*, §11.2). In the state of sin the self shuts itself off from the power of God by thinking of itself as independent, as the source of its own existence. Hence sin is first and foremost “a turning away from the creator” (*CF*, §66.2).<sup>22</sup> Schleiermacher’s understanding of the relation of God to human beings, and the results of the sundering of this relation is, at its core, Platonic and Augustinian. There are, of course, important differences. But the similarities are fundamental. The right relation of the soul to God is one in which the soul allows itself to be infused with the power of the divine (the divine love); for Schleiermacher this happens through the feeling of absolute dependence. If the self mistakes itself as independent, it cuts itself off from the source of its true life. All sin is a result of this fundamental mistake, the authority problem in relation to God.

The belief that the self is independent has several important consequences. The first of these is the identification of the self with the body, that is, with the sensuous functions. As Schleiermacher notes, if the self thinks of itself as a body, then it will think that it can be harmed. If what conditions an experience is identification with the “flesh,” then “every impression made by the world upon us and invoking an obstruction of our bodily and temporal life must be reckoned as an evil.” As such, identification with the body brings fear. Second, as a result of its identification with the body, the self contracts in upon itself; it is ever vigilant lest it be harmed, and it stands in constant competition

with others for what it believes are finite resources necessary for the sustenance of the body. If the supremacy of the God-consciousness is done away with, “what is a furtherance to one will often for that very reason become a hindrance to the other.” On the other hand, were the God-consciousness determinative of human existence, whatever opposition the world offers to the bodily life of human beings “could never have been construed by the corporate consciousness as an obstruction to life, since it could not in any sense act as an inhibition of the God-consciousness, but at most would give a different form to its effects” (*CF*, §75.1).

Key to Schleiermacher’s understanding of redemption is that the belief system associated with sin is a corporate one having corporate effects. As noted above, this belief system contains three important interrelated elements: first, belief that the self is independent of God, second, identification of the self with the body, and third, belief that the since the self is a mere body, it is inherently independent of others and in competition with them for finite resources. All three ideas are inherently linked. They are not only beliefs of the individual self about the self, but are in general corporate. They are beliefs ensconced and reinforced in communities about what it means to be a self. Moreover, sin is itself always a corporate action. Schleiermacher notes that sin is “in either case common to all.” Sin is

...not something that pertains severally to each individual and exists in relation to him by himself, but in each the work of all, and in all the work of each; and only in its corporate character can it be properly and fully understood. This solidarity means an interdependence of all places and all times in the respect we have in view. The distinctive form of original sin

in the individual, as regards its quality, is only a constituent part of the form it takes in the circle to which he immediately belongs, so that, though inexplicable when taken by itself, it points to the other parts as complementary to it. And this relationship runs through all gradations of community—families, clans, tribes, peoples, and races—so that the form of sinfulness in each of these points to that present in the other parts as complementary to it...and whatever of that power appears in the single unit, whether personal or composite, is not to be attributed to, or explained by, that unit alone.... (CF, §71.2).

Sin is never an individual affair, but rather implicates ever-widening circles of community. What the self believes about itself (and hence the actions flowing from such a self-understanding), is never independent, but rather depends, to a great degree, on how the community constructs itself as a group as well as the individuals within it. Hence the sin of one individual is never fully understandable in isolation, but always points past itself. Understanding the corporate character of sin is key to an understanding of the work of Christ; Schleiermacher importantly notes that “the denial of the corporate character of original sin and a lower estimate of the redemption wrought by Christ usually go hand in hand (CF, §71.3). It is because human beings are so interdependent with one another that the sin of one person implicates the whole race. More importantly, the converse is also true: it just this interdependence of human beings on one another that makes it possible for the salvation of the whole race to be accomplished in the historical life of one person.

Schleiermacher’s understanding of the work of Christ can be broken down into two key moments. First, Jesus strengthens each individual’s God-consciousness,

enabling it to dominate each moment of the sensuous self-consciousness. In other words, Jesus awakens the God-consciousness and establishes the dominance of spirit over the flesh. Second, Jesus establishes the Kingdom of God. Both moments are interdependent, so that the awakening of the God consciousness occurs through the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of God is established through the awakening of the God-consciousness. One is the vertical pole—the relation to God through Christ, the other the horizontal pole, the establishment of a Christian community. Schleiermacher notes that “...to believe that Jesus was the Christ, and to believe that the Kingdom of God (that is, the new corporate life that was to be created by God) had come, [are] the same thing...” (*CF*, §87.3). There is no teaching about the Kingdom that is not at the same time a teaching about Jesus himself.<sup>23</sup> “The original activity of the Redeemer,” Schleiermacher writes, is “that by means of which He assumes us into this fellowship of His activity and His life” (*CF*, §100). This activity is the result of the divine love in Christ, which is communicated to all those who enter into fellowship with him. As a result of the communication of this divine love, “the redemptive activity of Christ brings about for all believers a corporate activity corresponding to the being of God in Christ.” The love of Christ is communicated to the believer, and the believer in turn expresses Christ’s love to the members of the community of Christ, both those already within the community and those yet to be incorporated into it. Insofar as the believer shares in the blessedness of the being of God in Christ, the “former personality dies, so far as is meant a self-enclosed life of feeling within a sensuous vital unity, to which all sympathetic feeling for others and for the whole was subordinated” (*CF*, §101.2). The love of Christ is a gift to each individual; once received the person is empowered to love others through

the love of Christ. As such, the love of Christ for humanity founds the community of the Kingdom of God. The “will for the Kingdom of God” is “at once love to men and love to Christ and love to God,” which is at the same time “Christ’s love working in and through us” (*CF*, §112.3). It is this founding of the Kingdom that is principle work of Christ and the manner in which he redeems humanity.

In entering into the historical life of the human race, and founding a community within it, Jesus communicates the God-consciousness and the activity of divine love. The agency of Christ can only be received as “it appears in history, and can continue to function only as a historical entity.” Hence one cannot “share in the redemption and be made blessed through Christ outside the corporate life that he instituted.” One cannot “be with Christ, as it were, alone,” that is, to be with Christ is to be in the Christian community, and to live out the new way of being towards others that he instituted (*CF*, §87.3). Our interdependence with other human beings is worked out in history. It is because of this interdependence that the sin of one implicates the whole human community; likewise it is through this interdependence that the perfect divine love of Christ can be mediated historically and redeem humanity.

Important in this regard is that Schleiermacher rejects any understanding of redemption that is not mediated through the community as “magical.” Such, in particular, is the Anselmian theory of satisfaction, in which “the forgiveness of sins is made to depend upon the punishment which Christ suffered, and the blessedness of men itself is presented as a reward which God offers to Christ for the suffering of that punishment.” According to this theory, the effective element in the forgiveness of sins is that Jesus bore the punishment for the sins of humanity although he was himself innocent; salvation can

be principally construed as an individual affair in which the person accepts the sacrifice of Christ on his or her behalf. Schleiermacher notes several problems with this account, in particular the magical character of redemption, in which “something so absolutely inward as blessedness is supposed to have been brought about externally, without any inner basis.” Moreover, punishment “is merely the sensuous element in the forgiveness of sins. The properly ethical element, the consciousness of deserving punishment would remain. And this therefore would have to disappear as if conjured away, without any reason” (*CF*, §101.3). In other words, the Anselmian theory hardly explains the *ethical* transformation of the individual on whose behalf Christ has worked; it merely represents an exchange of punishments having to do only with the sensuous self-consciousness. Contrasted with this is Schleiermacher’s own understanding: the individual becomes blessed through participating in the life of Christ, and this is the life of love that he imparts to the historical community he founds as he inaugurates the Kingdom. This Kingdom is a new way of being in the world, one that is grasped as one enters the new community and participates in it. The blessedness that Christ imparts through the historical community is one that is *person-forming*, “for now all his activities are differently determined through the workings of Christ in him, and even all impressions are differently received—which means that the personal self-consciousness too becomes altogether different” (*CF*, §100.2).

For Schleiermacher the passion of Christ, featured so prominently in the gospels is not a “primitive element” in redemption and reconciliation. The primitive element is the foundation of the Kingdom and the corporate blessedness attending it. The suffering, however, does acquire secondary importance insofar as it exemplifies Christ’s perfect

obedience and his steadfastness in his proclamation of the Kingdom even in the face of social evil and sin, that is, the political opposition that would cost him his life. On Schleiermacher's view portrayals of the life of Christ (a good contemporary example would be Mel Gibson's *Passion*), focusing mostly on the suffering are "magical caricature[s]" since they "isolate this climax, leave out the foundation of the corporate life, and regard this as giving up of Himself to suffering for suffering's sake as the real sum total of Christ's redemptive activity" (*CF*, §101.3). Rather, Christ's suffering is a result of his having entered into the fallen human community that had opposed with such vehemence his introduction of a new mode of being in the world. Only in this sense can it be said that "His sufferings in this fellowship, if occasioned by sin...was suffered for those with whom He stood in fellowship, that is, for the whole human race..." (*CF*, §104.4). It is, however, a mistake to think of his sufferings as the bearing of punishment due to the rest of the race.<sup>24</sup>

Jesus steadfastness in inaugurating the Kingdom (even unto death), the establishment of which was the only way in which the human race could arrive at blessedness, is the perfect manifestation of Christ's love. It is therefore in "His suffering unto death, occasioned by His steadfastness" that his "absolutely self-denying love" is manifest. When the passion is understood in the context of his establishment of the Kingdom, "... there is represented to us with perfect vividness the way in which God was in Him to reconcile the world to Himself." Through this portrayal of his steadfastness "we see God in Christ, and envisage Christ as the most immediate partaker in the eternal love which sent Him forth and fitted Him for His task" (*CF*, §104.4). To sum up, Christ's saving work is his inauguration of the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is first

and foremost one of divine love. Jesus is perfectly receptive to this divine love in virtue of his absolute dependence on the Father; he expresses this love in his historical presence among human beings. In his communication of the divine love he brings others into fellowship with him, who in turn are enabled to love others as he has loved them. Jesus establishes the Kingdom by setting others aflame with the power of divine love.

## BII. Conclusion

Many contemporary criticisms leveled at Schleiermacher's Christology are the result of too shallow a reading of him. For instance, the charge by Colin Gunton that Schleiermacher's Christology is docetic, having Apollinarian and monophysite overtones is unfounded, the result of his having ignored large parts of Schleiermacher's work.<sup>25</sup> The charge is partly a misunderstanding of Schleiermacher's Christology as one "from below" that ignores "those aspects of the tradition which conceive him [Christ] in relation also to past and future eternity."<sup>26</sup> In fact, if taken in context of the original divine decree, Schleiermacher's Christology is one from above: it is in Christ that the completion of human nature has been ordained, and in this fundamental sense Christ is related to the past and future of humanity. In Christ the fullness of human nature is perfected.

Schleiermacher's understanding of the work of Christ has enormous implications for Christian ethics. It provides a sound basis for liberation theology in its understanding of the principle work of Christ as the founding of the Kingdom. Through his inauguration of a new mode of being in the world, Jesus implicitly and explicitly criticizes all forms of domination, exploitation and control.<sup>27</sup> Of course, in Schleiermacher this view is not fleshed out; Schleiermacher does not focus on characterizing the exact nature of social

sin. But the basic outlines are there. A close engagement with Schleiermacher's Christology demonstrates both the orthodox tenor of his Christology as well as his relevance for theology today.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> On this point see Richard R. Niebuhr's excellent study, especially chapter 5, in which he characterizes Schleiermacher's theology as "Christo-morphic." Niebuhr 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Another excellent study of Schleiermacher's Christology is that of Catherine Kelsey. A major emphasis of her study is Schleiermacher's theological starting point: it is the *experience* of redemption as being in relation to God through Christ. See for example, Kelsey 2003, 46ff.

<sup>3</sup> All citations are from the Mackintosh and Stewart translation of *The Christian Faith*.

<sup>4</sup> In this regard it is important to note that the analysis of the God-consciousness that Schleiermacher provides in the introduction of *The Christian Faith* is not an anthropological analysis of self-consciousness that can be understood independently from the context of redemption. As Schleiermacher notes, "There is no general God-consciousness which has not bound up with it a relation to Christ, and no relationship with the Redeemer which has no bearing on the general God-consciousness....For the former propositions are in no sense the reflection of a meager and purely monotheistic God-consciousness, but are abstracted from one which has issued in fellowship with the Redeemer" (*CF*, §62). Schleiermacher makes the same point in his second letter to Dr. Lücke. This is key to a proper understanding of Schleiermacher, whose actual views have been obscured by critics such as Karl Barth, who accuse him of basing his Christology on an anthropological starting point.

<sup>5</sup> On the transcendental character of the feeling of absolute dependence and how it affects the way that the individual relates to the world, see Mariña, forthcoming.

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<sup>6</sup>As any student of patristics knows, those controversies are enormously complex, and there can be no doubt that there is a simplifying tendency in Schleiermacher. However, Schleiermacher clearly grasps what are the major pitfalls. On the controversies leading up to Chalcedon, see Grillmeier's excellent study, Grillmeier, 1975.

<sup>7</sup> Schleiermacher may have Plato in mind, who in the *Republic* at 509b notes that the form of the good (which by many Christian thinkers was taken to be equivalent to God) is beyond even being both in dignity and power.

<sup>8</sup> Denzinger (ed.) 1948, 70-1.

<sup>9</sup> In a letter written to Nestorius around 430 Cyril of Alexandria condemns just such a position; he notes: "If anyone distributes between two characters or persons the expressions used about Christ in the gospels, and apostolic writings...applying some to the human being, conceived of separately apart from the Word,...and others exclusively to the Word, let them be condemned." From Cyril of Alexandria, Letter XVII, 12 (Third letter to Nestorius) in Wickham (ed.), 28.17-32.16.

<sup>10</sup> Denzinger (ed.) (1948), 70-71.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>For an excellent discussion of this *logos/sarx* Christology (Apollinarianism) see Grillmeier 1975, 335-339.

<sup>13</sup> Moltmann correctly identifies the similarities between Schleiermacher's and Rahner's Christology, see Moltmann 1990, 61.

<sup>14</sup> On this point see Mariña 1996, 195-8.

<sup>15</sup> That is, while his views concerning the nature of the physical world may have been similar to those of his contemporaries, he never asserted his certainty regarding them

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since a concern with them was not his task. For Schleiermacher error “emerges only when the desire for knowing is terminated before the truth is reached” (*LJ*, 110).

<sup>16</sup> Strauss 1977, lii.

<sup>17</sup> Barth 1982, 205.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Emil Brunner also made similar charges; see Brunner 1924.

<sup>20</sup> Barth, 1982, 243.

<sup>21</sup> While Schleiermacher’s discussion here refers principally to the relation between the creative and sustaining activity of God, the idea applies equally to the notion of redemption, which can be thought of as moment in God’s preservation of the creation. Schleiermacher’s point is that if God’s causality is absolute, divine activities cannot be thought of as limiting one another. For a fuller discussion of this problem see Mariña 1996, 177-200.

<sup>22</sup> I provide a more in-depth discussion of the nature of sin in Mariña 2004 and in Mariña, forthcoming.

<sup>23</sup> The point is made by Jack Verheyden in his introduction to *The Life of Jesus*, xxxiv-v.

<sup>24</sup> Schleiermacher rejects both this “magical” view of Christ’s efficacy as well as what he calls the “empirical view.” According to the latter view the redemptive activity of Christ occurs principally through teaching and example. The problem here, according to Schleiermacher, is that on this view the work of Christ cannot be understood as something special; Christ is merely another teacher or another good example.

<sup>25</sup> Gunton 1997, 98.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 154.

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<sup>27</sup> An example of a theology that brings the idea of the Kingdom to the forefront is that of Jürgen Moltmann. Moltmann, however, does not acknowledge a debt to Schleiermacher and in fact is quite critical of him for his alleged “anthropocentrism.” He critiques Schleiermacher and others for their focus on “the experience of subjectivity.” As such, he charges that such theologies are no longer willing “to call into question the social conditions and political limitations of this experience of subjectivity” (Moltmann 1990, 63). My own reading of Schleiermacher shows that such a charge is unfounded, although of course Schleiermacher does not *explicitly* use the idea of the Kingdom to judge social and political realities; in him the idea remains only implicit.