

# SCHLEIERMACHER ON THE NECESSITY OF THE CHURCH

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## Abstract

This article examines Friedrich Schleiermacher's arguments for the necessity of the church for the Christian Faith with particular reference to how they cohere with his fundamental starting point, the turn to the subject. The three arguments are: from the communal nature of humanity, from the need for a corporate life of blessedness as opposed to the corporate life of sin, and as a deduction from the doctrine of providence. Through examining each in turn it becomes clear that the necessity of the church is integral to Schleiermacher's theology and that these three arguments are moments in the unfolding of a single coherent argument. I further note the ways in which the explicit Christocentrism in Schleiermacher's later works led to development in his approach to the question. Demonstrating the inherently ecclesial nature of Schleiermacher's thought demands that greater attention be paid to this facet of his theology.

## INTRODUCTION

Two seemingly contradictory strands run through Friedrich Schleiermacher's thought. On the one hand, Schleiermacher represents a turn to interiority, to individual subjectivity, to an eschewal of the outward.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, he unflinchingly asserts the corporate nature of the Christian life and the necessity

<sup>1</sup> See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schleiermacher's Soliloquies: An English Translation of the Monologen with a Critical Introduction and Appendix*, trans. Horace Leland Friess (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), *passim*, but esp. pp. 16–19; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 42–7, 63–79; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), §§2–6; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve: Dialogue on the Incarnation*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990), pp. 37–9.

of the church for redemption.<sup>2</sup> Despite the apparent disparity of these two commitments, they are actually intimately related and both spring from the same first principles (as will become clear in the course of my argument). Schleiermacher's account of the need for the church forms an organic and integral component of his thought. He was, of course, a pastor, and the *Sitz im Leben* of his major works in dogmatics and philosophy of religion includes his weekly homiletical responsibility. That Schleiermacher was a churchman is, at times, forgotten in our consideration of him as a theologian.

This article foregrounds the ecclesial character and context of Schleiermacher's thought by engaging his arguments for the church's necessity in redemption, of which three are primary: from the inherent sociality of humanity; from the need for a corporate life of blessedness working in opposition to the corporate life of sin; and from the nature of divine providence. I explain each, explore their relations to one another, and consider to what extent they are formed by Schleiermacher's own starting point. I note the ways in which these arguments remain consistent, and also where development can be discerned in Schleiermacher's thinking. In the end, all three arguments cohere with one another and the starting point to such a degree that they are best understood as discreet moments in the unfolding of a single argument, which shows how thoroughly the church forms the warp and woof of Schleiermacher's theology.

#### ON FIRST PRINCIPLES

Before turning to the explicit question of the church's necessity, I must first give an account of the first principles from which Schleiermacher derives it. In this section I provide a brief overview of his fundamental axiom regarding Christian dogmatic theology and its relationship to his starting point in interiority.

##### *Interiority, Feelings, Absolute Dependence*

Schleiermacher famously focused the nature of piety to the realm of feeling.<sup>3</sup> This restriction bears an obvious connection to his turn to interiority. He deduces piety as feeling from considering his own interior life vis-à-vis the life of piety.<sup>4</sup> His considerations of the

<sup>2</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, pp. 147–9; and especially Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §§87, 113.

<sup>3</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, pp. 27–36, 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 41–5.

propriety of this restriction turn upon a consideration of the diverse faculties that could be involved in piety, all of which he deems unsatisfactory. Feeling is not itself any given faculty. Rather, as a function of the immediate self-consciousness, it is that which grounds and unifies all of the self's diverse faculties.<sup>5</sup>

It is not just any feeling, though, that so structures the self. For Schleiermacher, piety consists in a feeling of absolute dependence.<sup>6</sup> This feeling is deduced through a consideration of the interior experience. Every human subject experiences his or herself in both receptive and active modes: as acted upon and as actor respectively. There are gradations of these experiences: in some cases the receptive dimension is at the fore, while in others, the agential aspect dominates. However, within the natural order, there is a generally mutually conditioned quality to all things. Nothing in nature is entirely active and not at all acted upon. From this it follows that the natural order as such is entirely dependent. And the whence of this feeling of absolute dependence is the original meaning of the term *God*.<sup>7</sup> This last point is crucial, for it demonstrates the heart of Schleiermacher's approach. Theological concepts, terms, and so forth derive from this interior experience. Robert Adams explains that this does not mean 'that they will render the content of the feeling precisely, but that they will indicate something about what the feeling is like by suggesting ways in which it would be appropriate to think, conceptually, on the basis of regarding the feeling as true'.<sup>8</sup> Everything must ultimately be traceable to the experience of absolute dependence (itself traceable to the subjective turn), which is the first principle for Schleiermacher's conception of the Christian faith.

Christianity, though, demands a more precise specification. The God-consciousness of Christianity is determined by Christ throughout its every aspect.<sup>9</sup> As Schleiermacher himself puts it,

<sup>5</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §3. See also James Duke and Francis Fiorenza, 'Translators' Introduction', in Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, ed. James A. Massey, trans. James Duke and Francis Fiorenza (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1981), pp. 13–14; Robert Merrihew Adams, 'Philosophical Themes in Schleiermacher's Christology', *Philosophia* 39 (2001), p. 454.

<sup>6</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16. See also Richard R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction* (New York: Scribner, 1964), pp. 189–90.

<sup>8</sup> Adams, 'Philosophical Themes', p. 454.

<sup>9</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §10. See also Jacqueline Mariña, 'Christology and Anthropology in Friedrich Schleiermacher', in Jacqueline Mariña (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*

‘Christianity is a monotheistic faith, belonging to the teleological type of religion, and is essentially distinguished from other such faiths by the fact that in it everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth’.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, two related exigencies emerge for Schleiermacher to be self-consistent. All of his theologoumena must arise from the feeling of absolute dependence and this feeling of absolute dependence must itself be traceable to the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ.

### *Thematization of the Transcendent*

That all must be traceable to Jesus Christ illustrates another important feature of Schleiermacher’s thought: the need for the concrete and definite. While immediate experience is itself unconditioned and ineffable, it must still be thematized in order to be expressed.<sup>11</sup> As Denis Thouard notes, while the unconditioned is ‘rigorously unobjectifiable’, still some categorial thematization must occur.<sup>12</sup> In this connection, language plays an important role in both phenomenalization and individuation, while also making possible the formation of a community.<sup>13</sup> Only a sufficiently definite thematization of the original unconditioned experience will suffice for the production and sustenance of the feeling of absolute dependence which constitutes the heart of piety. This drives Schleiermacher’s critiques of natural religion. Despite all the problems that come with the positive religions, it is their very positive character that suits them for the cultivation of piety.<sup>14</sup> For this reason recourse to Jesus Christ, and not a simple statement regarding absolute dependence, is needed for Christian dogmatic theology.

Moreover, the inescapably linguistic character of this demands some sort of culture wherein the experience thematized by language may be expressed and shared. From the interior turn comes a further exterior turn, as it is only through a shared cultural framework that the inner feelings of piety to which all must return can be cultivated and sustained.

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 152; Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, pp. 210–14.

<sup>10</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §11.

<sup>11</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, pp. 94–7.

<sup>12</sup> Denis Thouard, *Schleiermacher: Communauté, individualité, communication* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2007), pp. 122–31, at 122. My translation.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189–90.

<sup>14</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, pp. 214–34.

Communal emphases, then, are by no means interlopers in an otherwise individualized outlook. Instead, they are entirely consistent with Schleiermacher's commitments to interiority and subjectivity.

### *History's Mediations*

It is in the realm of the concrete and historical that the transcendental is encountered, thematized, and mediated by and for humanity. Ruth Jackson notes that for Schleiermacher 'redemption literally happens in and through time'.<sup>15</sup> As Schleiermacher writes, 'what owes its origin to divine agency can nevertheless be received only as it appears in history, and also can continue to function only as a historical entity'.<sup>16</sup> The importance of history will be borne out more explicitly later. For now, though, let us note a few more indirect and incidental indications of its importance. First is Schleiermacher's move to locate dogmatic theology within the broader category of historical theology.<sup>17</sup> It is that mode of discourse wherein one gives expression to the current beliefs of the church.<sup>18</sup> It is accountable (though not absolutely bound) to and continuous with the beliefs of the church in other historical eras, because the church is a historically continuous entity.<sup>19</sup> Therefore any account of the Christian faith will necessarily involve engagement with the mediation of Christ's redemption in history to and by the church.

Richard Niebuhr points to further support of this position in a consideration of Schleiermacher's *On the Incarnation: Dialogue on Christmas Eve*. He notes that the picture of encounter with Christ in that work is only

as he is reflected and refracted in the innumerable facets of socially mediated experience... He deliberately seeks out the redeemer and founder of the church in the midst of contemporary religious institutions and customs, for he is not in quest of a Christ who, as the absolute paradox of finite and infinite, negates the continuity of human nature and history. He takes his departure from a humanity

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Jackson, 'Creation, Temporality and the Lord's Supper in Friedrich Schleiermacher's Dogmatic Theology', *Theology* 116 (2013), p. 335. See also Mariña, 'Christology in Schleiermacher', p. 166.

<sup>16</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §87.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1977), pp. 71–82.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71–2; Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §§2, 15–19.

<sup>19</sup> Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline*, pp. 73–4; Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §19.

that is already celebrating Christmas and participating in 'the better world'.<sup>20</sup>

This is by no means an explicit treatment of historical mediation. Nor does it bear directly upon the question of the church's necessity. However, it does show how thoroughly assimilated the importance of historically mediated thematizations of immediate transcendent experience is for Schleiermacher. From the form of presentation in the *Christmas Eve Dialogue* to the typology of theological disciplines in the *Brief Outline*, this notion forms part of the deep structure of Schleiermacher's thought.

The foregoing suffices to demonstrate the importance of historically concrete mediation for Schleiermacher's account of piety and its relation to his starting point of the turn to the subject. It demonstrates how closely allied with that starting point is the insistence that in Christianity everything be traceable to the feeling of absolute dependence as thematized in the experience of redemption by Jesus Christ. It shows that a communal emphasis is not foreign to the interior emphasis. It does not, however, suffice to demonstrate the church's necessity. All it demands is that the original experience of absolute dependence be mediated historically, and have some connection to Jesus Christ. One must push further in order to claim that the Christian church is that historical mediation. By delineating these thematic starting points in Schleiermacher's thought, though, the groundwork is laid for considering his more explicit arguments regarding the necessity of the church.

#### SCHLEIERMACHER'S ARGUMENTS FOR THE NECESSITY OF THE CHURCH

From his earliest writings, Schleiermacher argues that his account of piety demands something along the lines of a church. His arguments for the church both remain consistent and evolve over the course of his life. In this section I provide an overview for the three primary arguments Schleiermacher offers for the necessity of the church. I note, in particular, their bearing upon his starting point in subjectivity.

#### *The Sociality of Human Life*

Schleiermacher's earliest and most repeated argument for the church's necessity turns upon the inherent sociality of humanity. In the fourth of his five *Speeches on Religion*, 'Association in

<sup>20</sup> Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, p. 45.

Religion', Schleiermacher contends that his emphasis on subjectivity and feeling does not abolish the notion of a church. Indeed, 'If there is religion at all, it must be social, for that is the nature of man, and it is quite peculiarly the nature of religion'.<sup>21</sup> This is not a mere assertion, but rather arises a posteriori from the turn to the subject. The phenomenology of subjectivity is such that the interiorly focused subject is 'a compendium of humanity. In a certain sense [his or her] single nature embraces all human nature.'<sup>22</sup> And the stronger the impression made on one by religious experience the stronger the impulse to sociality.<sup>23</sup> Through observation of the self, Schleiermacher discerns that the self is inextricably social. This, then, demands a mingling of like-minded pious souls.

In the *Speeches on Religion*, this pious collocation is a more or less amorphous reality, which Schleiermacher terms the 'true church' in contrast to the visible church.<sup>24</sup> The visible church's relation to the true church is ambiguous. On the one hand, Schleiermacher expresses disgust at aspects of it, and goes so far as to suggest that the more pious one becomes, the less need one will have for the visible church.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the visible church should not be done away with for two reasons. First, it can function as an antechamber of sorts for the true church. Indeed, were the visible church's clergy drawn from the truly pious members of the true church rather than appointed in the interests of the state, the visible church could be a wonderful ancillary society to the true church.<sup>26</sup> Second, returning to the theme of thematizing the transcendent, it is only within the definitive contours of a positive religion that true piety can be inculcated.<sup>27</sup> Amorphous as the true church may be, the distinctions available to the visible church are of great importance. This distinction between the true church and the visible church will prove to be the site of a development in Schleiermacher's thought, but I must postpone its discussion to a later section after the third argument has been introduced.

Writing over two decades later in *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher offers more or less the same argument for ecclesial necessity. Because the religious self-consciousness is an

<sup>21</sup> Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 148.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 156–60.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214–25.

essential aspect of humanity—a conclusion reached by attentive-ness to subjectivity—it follows that it must be social because ‘every essential element of human nature becomes the basis of a fellowship or communion’.<sup>28</sup> Human beings invariably express their inner states, even if only ‘without any definite aim or pertinence, by means of facial expression, gesture, tones’ and so forth, and this invariably leads to mutual recognition of the other’s inner state.<sup>29</sup> This naturally leads to association. Such association finds its first beginnings in the life of a family. When the sphere of association goes beyond just one family and includes other families and develops to the point that there is a ‘definite understanding as to which individuals belong to it and which do not—this we designate a *Church*’.<sup>30</sup>

So from Schleiermacher’s earliest writings to his most mature, the need for a church was argued on the basis of the inherently social character of human life. This sociality was itself discerned by recourse to the fundamental starting point of a notion of piety grounded in the interior life of the subject. This argument never falls away from Schleiermacher’s writings; nor does it remain alone. Others developed to complement it.

### *Contrasting Corporate Lives*

One such argument turns upon Schleiermacher’s account of human sinfulness, which is developed in *The Christian Faith*. Sin, Schleiermacher insists, cannot be understood simply as a discreet category of its own. Instead, it is intelligible only against the backdrop of redemption.<sup>31</sup> Consciousness of sin is a consequence of grace, and its content is ‘simply that which would not be unless redemption was to be; or on the other hand as that which, as it is to disappear, can disappear only through redemption’.<sup>32</sup> In other words, sin is an extrapolated category. The starting point, as Schleiermacher uniformly insists, is a feeling of absolute dependence expressed as the need for redemption by Jesus Christ. Sin is simply posited as this redemption’s contrary. Therefore sin takes on for Schleiermacher the distinct shape of a lack and impedence of the God-consciousness.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Emphasis original.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., §63.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., §65.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., §67.

This lack and impede likewise demands some account of an 'original perfection' of humanity. Just as consciousness of sin arises only from the experience of redemption, it can make sense as *sin* only if there were an original capacity for God-consciousness. Otherwise, how could it possibly be blameworthy? Therefore, Schleiermacher does not posit an adversarial relationship between consciousness of sin and original perfection. Indeed "bad conscience" which we may have within us is there, for one thing, only because of our seeing the possibility of what is better... and for another, because of the mere fact of our *having* a conscience, *i.e.* an inward demand for harmony with the God-consciousness'.<sup>34</sup> This original perfection involves an intertwining of self-consciousness with consciousness of common humanity: God-consciousness is be communicated to and received from others.<sup>35</sup>

It is, then, at least in part, this intertwining of self- and human-consciousness that is deranged under the conditions of sin. There is an inherently corporate cast to sinful humanity. This becomes especially clear in Schleiermacher's account of original sin. The subjectivity of sin is complex. It includes at once a consciousness of sin's origin in one's own self and a consciousness of its origin exterior to the self. It comes at once from within and from without.<sup>36</sup> Because the individual shares in the whole of humanity, the impede of God-consciousness known as sin comes to him or her by way of his or her formation by and participation in social relations. In one's receptivity, and particularly before one's spontaneous activity fully develops, one is on the receiving end of the non-God-conscious spontaneous activity of one's forebears (originated original sin). And in one's spontaneous activity, one communicates one's own godlessness to others in their receptivity (originating original sin).<sup>37</sup> Therefore human sinfulness is a corporate act and a corporate life.

From this follows the necessity of a different and opposed corporate life. As Schleiermacher writes: 'We are conscious of all approximations to the state of blessedness which occur in the Christian life as being grounded in a new divinely-effected corporate life, which works in opposition to the corporate life of

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., §68. Emphasis original.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., §60. Also Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, pp. 73–9; Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, pp. 16–18.

<sup>36</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §§69–70. See also the analysis in Abraham Varghese Kunnuthara, *Schleiermacher on Christian Consciousness of God's Work in History* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008), p. 113.

<sup>37</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §§70–2.

sin and the misery which develops in it.’<sup>38</sup> Such a life must be corporate not just because the life of sin to which it is opposed is corporate, but also because it is only through a corporate life that adequate certainty can arise for attributing something to divine causality. Isolated individual consciences are too mutable for this.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, because of the corporate nature of sin, redemption must also have a corporate nature. ‘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 is 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’ and that person’s ‘establishment of a Christian community’.<sup>40</sup> So runs Schleiermacher’s second argument for the church’s necessity.

It is worth noting that while the groundwork for this argument is present in the *Speeches on Religion*, which affirms the sociality of humanity, the argument itself can only develop within the more explicitly Christian ambit of Schleiermacher’s other works. This is because it depends on the further observation of the reality of sin, which can only arise a posteriori from an awareness of having been redeemed. The Christocentrism of *The Christian Faith* introduces new parameters to Schleiermacher’s thought that allow this second argument to arise.

### *Deduction from Providence*

The third argument for the church is far more involved than the other two. In order to give an adequate account of it I must explore the relationship between creation/providence and the feeling of absolute dependence, the relation of Christology to these, and the relation of ecclesiology to all of the foregoing.

#### 1. Creation/Providence and Absolute Dependence

For Schleiermacher the feeling of absolute dependence is paramount; all theologoumena must be related back to it. Further, anything that undercuts this feeling of absolute dependence is ruled out of court. Moreover, this feeling arises through the relative interaction of the receptive and spontaneous faculties in one’s experience of the world. The nature of one’s consciousness of the world is such that, by definition, it cannot sustain the

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., §87.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., §83.

<sup>40</sup> Mariña, ‘Christology in Schleiermacher’, p. 165.

feeling of absolute dependence, because the world itself is absolutely dependent upon God.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, though, this feeling increases in direct proportion to one's awareness of oneself as part of the larger system of the world. The interdependence of all things funds the feeling of absolute dependence.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the constitution of the world has a tremendously important role to play in the experience of piety.<sup>43</sup>

A consideration of the world's constitution falls under the doctrines of creation and providence, which Schleiermacher does not believe ought to be sharply distinguished. Rather, the point of both doctrines is simply 'the proposition that the totality of finite being exists only in dependence upon the Infinite'.<sup>44</sup> Considered as creation, this doctrine has in view 'a single divine act...including the whole system of nature', and considered as providence it involves 'a continuous divine activity exerted on the whole course of the world, covering the first beginning no less than each subsequent state'.<sup>45</sup> So the basic point is this: the world, in its origin and its continuation, is absolutely dependent upon God, who relates to the world by a single and continuous act that both establishes and maintains the natural order.

The interdependence of the natural order and the conviction of that order's dependence on God coincide to produce the feeling of absolute dependence.<sup>46</sup> For this reason, then, Schleiermacher insists on interpreting the events of history 'with reference to the interdependence of nature and without detriment to that principle'.<sup>47</sup> To do otherwise undermines the feeling of absolute dependence and is, therefore, unacceptable. This leads to Schleiermacher's rejection of the miraculous. A pure miracle would utterly overthrow the interconnection of nature (and therefore piety), as this event is severed from the

<sup>41</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §32.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, §34. See also Holger Werries, *Alles Handeln ein Handeln der Kirche: Schleiermachers Ekklesiologie als Christologie* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012), p. 154; Dawn DeVries and B. A. Gerrish, 'Providence and Grace: Schleiermacher on Justification and Election', in Mariña (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, p. 193; Jackson, 'Creation and the Lord's Supper', p. 333; Kunnuthara, *Schleiermacher on God's Work in History*, pp. 128–31.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, pp. 67–74.

<sup>44</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §36.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, §38.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, §46.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, §47.

web of finite causality of all events leading up to it and following from it.<sup>48</sup>

While divine causality transcends the natural order, it can be experienced only within the natural order's finitude.<sup>49</sup> Spatial and temporal accounts of the divine causality are ruled out, for they put the unconditioned and independent God on the same plane as the conditioned and dependent world. That is the point of such attributes as eternity and omnipresence.<sup>50</sup> So then

the divine omnipotence can never in any way enter as a supplement (so to speak) to the natural causes in their sphere; for then it must like them work temporally and spatially; and at one time working so, and then again not so, it would not be self-identical and so would be neither eternal nor omnipresent. Rather everything is and becomes altogether by means of the natural order, so that each takes place through all and all wholly through the divine omnipotence, so that all indivisibly exists through One.<sup>51</sup>

To summarize, creation and providence name that relation whereby God, in a single, undivided, and continuous act constitutes the world in its dependence upon him. God works through the web of finite causality in a non-competitive, and non-intervening manner. God does not need to intervene in the created order, as he grounds it and all events are traceable to his omnipotent causality. It is Schleiermacher's contention that any departure from this conception of creation/preservation will lead to a disruption of the feeling of absolute dependence.

## 2. Creation/Providence and Christology

It is only fitting that tracing this argument for the necessity of the church involves recourse to Christology, given Schleiermacher's insistence that everything in Christianity 'is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth'.<sup>52</sup> Any treatment of any doctrinal consideration that did not have explicit recourse to Christology would be suspect at least, and probably simply fail the major criteriological test of Christocentrism. Schleiermacher's understanding of Christ's person and work follows naturally from

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., §51. See also DeVries and Gerrish, 'Justification and Election', p. 194.

<sup>50</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §§52–3. Indeed, all the divine attributes are related back to absolute dependence. See e.g. Adams, 'Philosophical Themes', p. 456.

<sup>51</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §54.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., §11.

his consideration of creation/preservation. Christ as the second Adam brings creation to its perfection. Indeed, he goes so far as to state that 'we regard the beginning of the life of Jesus as the completed creation of human nature'.<sup>53</sup>

In what, though, does this completed creation consist? As is well known, Schleiermacher's conception of the presence of divinity in Jesus is one of a perfect God-consciousness.<sup>54</sup> In Christ there is a perfect and unclouded blessedness insofar as the God-consciousness is developed in him to its fullest capacity. This is beyond the capacity of humanity to realize, and therefore Schleiermacher posits a supernatural origin for it.<sup>55</sup> However, and consistent with the commitments sketched in the doctrine of creation/preservation, this act of incarnation becomes itself a 'natural fact'.<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere Schleiermacher clarifies: 'Whenever I speak of the supernatural, I do so with reference to whatever comes first, but afterwards it becomes secondly something natural. Thus creation is supernatural, but it afterwards becomes the natural order. Likewise, in his origin Christ is supernatural, but he also becomes natural, as a genuine human being.'<sup>57</sup> Catherine Kelsey explains how this works: 'Christ himself incorporates into the natural world by living that God-consciousness which was not yet part of the natural order. Having lived it, he has made it part of the natural order of human life, so no further intervention of the supernatural is necessary for redemption.'<sup>58</sup>

Because the act of union of humanity and divinity in Christ is divine, it must also be eternal. And since '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'.<sup>59</sup> So the incarnation of Christ, while it does introduce something new into the human race, is not a *de novo* intrusion of the divine into human history. Instead, it is the temporal realization of the one eternal and

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, §§89, 94.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, §94.

<sup>55</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §97. See also Kevin W. Hector, 'Actualism and Incarnation: The High Christology of Friedrich Schleiermacher', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006), p. 310.

<sup>56</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §13.

<sup>57</sup> Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, p. 89. See also Werries, *Alles Handeln ein Handeln der Kirche*, p. 163.

<sup>58</sup> Catherine L. Kelsey, *Thinking About Christ with Schleiermacher* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), p. 62.

<sup>59</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §97.

divine decree to create humanity. It is the completion of this creation.<sup>60</sup>

Redemption consists in the communication of Christ's perfect God-consciousness to his people.<sup>61</sup> Christ enters into the corporate life of humanity in order to communicate his blessedness.<sup>62</sup> Because Christ's activity comes from the divine presence in him, and because 'we know no divine activity except that of creation', it follows that Christ's activity must be of this type. In other words, it is of a piece with creation/preservation.<sup>63</sup> Further, there is a certain isomorphism between the act of union of humanity and divinity in Christ and the realization of the God-consciousness in the redeemed.<sup>64</sup> Just as Christ's God-consciousness realized itself by every aspect of his being—all of his spontaneous activity being the instrument of the being of God in him<sup>65</sup>—so, in us, redemption involves having our spontaneous activity become subservient to the influence of God-consciousness. 'Conversion', then, 'may be said to be just the evocation of the spontaneous activity in union with Christ.'<sup>66</sup>

Closely related to the notion of conversion is that of justification, where one becomes aware of one's new, redeemed standing with God because of Christ. The two doctrines mutually condition each another.<sup>67</sup> And it is in considering justification that the conception of the relationship between creation/providence and Christology reaches its fullest expression. Schleiermacher departs significantly from the classical Protestant understanding of justification by denying that it is a discrete declaration or act of God directed towards an individual.<sup>68</sup> After all, as has been established, 'All that can be individual or temporal is the effect of

<sup>60</sup> Edwin Chr. van Driel, 'Schleiermacher's Supralapsarian Christology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007), p. 261; Kunnuthara, *Schleiermacher on God's Work in History*, p. 80; Mariña, 'Christology in Schleiermacher', p. 161.

<sup>61</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §100.

<sup>62</sup> See Paul T. Nimmo, 'The Mediation of Redemption in Schleiermacher's Glaubenslehre', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2003), p. 190.

<sup>63</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §100.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, §106.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, §94. See also Hector, 'Actualism and Incarnation', pp. 311–12.

<sup>66</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §108.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, §109.

<sup>68</sup> Recently Paul T. Nimmo has undertaken to defend Schleiermacher from this charge ('Schleiermacher on Justification: A Departure From the Reformation?', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 66 [2013], pp. 50–73). While Nimmo demonstrates continuity between Schleiermacher and the magisterial reformers (particularly Calvin), the fact remains that the decretive aspect of justification is understood differently by Schleiermacher than by his reformational predecessors. Nimmo's vindication of Schleiermacher against Barth's

a divine act or decree, not the act or decree itself'.<sup>69</sup> This leads to the conclusion:

There is only one eternal and universal decree justifying men for Christ's sake. This decree, moreover, is the same as that which sent Christ on his mission, for otherwise that mission would have been conceived and determined by God without its consequences. And once more, the decree that sent Christ forth is one with the decree creating the human race, for in Christ first human nature is brought to perfection.<sup>70</sup>

From all this it is clear that Schleiermacher's Christology and its correlate, the doctrine of redemption—which he points to as the centre from which all must proceed and to which all must refer—is of a piece with his doctrine of creation/preservation, and the moves he made there to safeguard the feeling of absolute dependence. As Niebuhr writes:

Creation-faith is and is not the presupposition of the doctrine of redemption. It is the presupposition of redemption, because it is the feeling of being absolutely dependent, of having our being-in-such-and-such-a-way, that the redeemer reforms and informs. It is not the presupposition of redemption because it is much more than that; genuine creation-faith is dependent upon the redemption wrought by Christ, because the feeling of absolute dependence is fully formed only in and through the agency of Christ, the Spirit, and the church.<sup>71</sup>

This is further borne out by Schleiermacher's contention that the two parts of *The Christian Faith* were reversible—an arrangement with which he himself toyed.<sup>72</sup> That one could just as logically start from redemption and move back to creation as one could go the other way round—with the primary downside as an aesthetic antipathy towards anticlimax—demonstrates that creation and redemption are intrinsically related in this way. From here, just one more piece needs to be added to see how this becomes an argument for the necessity of the church.

### 3. Creation/Providence/Christology and Ecclesiology

The coming of Christ and the communication of his perfect God-consciousness represents the completion of God's creative act with regard to humanity. Moreover, creation is not concerned

critiques ought to be attended to and accepted. My point in this essay, though, is narrower, having to do with the unity of God's decrees.

<sup>69</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, § 109.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. See also DeVries and Gerrish, 'Justification and Election', p. 202.

<sup>71</sup> Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, pp. 246–67.

<sup>72</sup> Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, pp. 55–60.

with atomistic events and individuals, but rather with the whole, which means that redemption must likewise concern itself with the whole, that is, with the community.<sup>73</sup> As Abraham Kunnuthara notes: 'Parts are always related both to other parts and to the whole, and the whole to parts, thus in an interdependent causality; and this is the only causality possible within the confines of creation.'<sup>74</sup> Beyond this, Schleiermacher insists that it is 'magical' to bypass the community for the communication of redemption.<sup>75</sup> The reason for this is simple enough. In Christianity everything is attributed to Jesus Christ; therefore redemption must be an effect of Christ. The magical conception sees 'an influence not mediated by anything natural, yet attributed to a person. This is completely at variance with the maxim everywhere underlying our presentation, that the beginning of the Kingdom of God is a supernatural thing, which, however becomes natural as soon as it emerges into manifestation.'<sup>76</sup> Such a 'magical' redemption would be in violation of natural system of finite causality that the treatment of creation/preservation established as vital to the feeling of absolute dependence.

So, then, Schleiermacher's ecclesiology allows him to do two things. First, it allows redemption to be conceived of as a personal effect of Christ, a *sine qua non* of Christian theology. Second, it allows him to have a 'natural' mechanism for this 'supernatural' communication.<sup>77</sup> An insistence on natural causality pervades Schleiermacher's account of the church.<sup>78</sup> Its life, mission, and expansion are all located within the sphere of 'the divine government of the world', that interconnected web of finite causes explored in his articulation of creation/preservation.<sup>79</sup>

What, then, is this naturalistic account of the church's effect and expansion? To begin with, Schleiermacher notes that one feature of finite causality within the natural order is 'that what proceeds from a single point spreads only gradually over the whole area'.<sup>80</sup> The single point at which the Christian church

<sup>73</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §100.

<sup>74</sup> Kunnuthara, *Schleiermacher on God's Work in History*, p. 97. So also DeVries and Gerrish, 'Justification and Election', p. 190.

<sup>75</sup> So Mariña, 'Christology in Schleiermacher', p. 166.

<sup>76</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §100.

<sup>77</sup> So Kelsey, *Thinking about Christ*, p. 61.

<sup>78</sup> So Nimmo, 'Mediation of Redemption', p. 190.

<sup>79</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §114.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, §117. See also DeVries and Gerrish, 'Justification and Election', p. 204.

begins is Jesus Christ. As the church spreads, there must be a natural explanation for this spread. Schleiermacher's solution for this is a two-tiered ecclesiology of sorts. There is both an inner community and an outer community.<sup>81</sup> From within the outer community, one is affected by the inner community in one's receptivity until finally Christ's own God-consciousness is reproduced in one's own spontaneous activity, whereupon one has acceded to the inner community.<sup>82</sup>

There is an obvious formal similarity between this conception and the notion of the visible church and the true church in the *Speeches*. I am not persuaded, however, that precisely the same understanding is in view here. For this I have two reasons. First, the account of the visible church in the *Speeches* is predominantly (though not exclusively) negative, and its relation to the true church is a great deal more tangential. The treatment in the *Christian Faith* is far more positive and the connection a good deal more intimate, using the imagery of concentric circles. Second, the *Speeches on Religion* deal more generally with the philosophy of religion. The true church is not Christian-specific. In *The Christian Faith*, though, the inner and outer communities are both expressive of a Christ-formed piety. I would suggest, then, that this represents a development in Schleiermacher's thought, though one that manifests a genuine continuity with what has come before. Once more, then, we see that the introduction of explicit reference to Christian redemption, which brings along a Christocentrism, allows Schleiermacher's thought to shift and develop.

In any case, Schleiermacher insists that the contemporary production of Christian piety follow the pattern of the original disciples, which means that it comes about through Christ. However, as Christ is no longer directly accessible to the faithful, his influence must be mediated. This is the role of the inner community, as well as of the Holy Spirit, which Schleiermacher posits as the common spirit of the community.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §§113, 116–17. See also Werries, *Alles Handeln ein Handeln der Kirche*, p. 163; Kunnuthara, *Schleiermacher on God's Work in History*, pp. 119–23; Kevin W. Hector, 'The Mediation of Christ's Normative Spirit: A Constructive Reading of Schleiermacher's Pneumatology', *Modern Theology* 24 (2008), pp. 1–22.

<sup>82</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §122.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, §127. Note the treatments of Schleiermacher's pneumatology in Ralph Del Colle, 'Schleiermacher and Spirit Christology: Unexplored Horizons of the Christian Faith', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1 (1999), pp. 286–307; Hector, 'The Mediation of Christ's Normative Spirit'.

During the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, the inner community consisted in him alone, while his disciples constituted the outer community.<sup>84</sup> Kevin Hector gives a cogent account of this relationship in terms of a performative apprenticeship:

Through their susceptibility to Christ's instruction, the disciples internalize Christ's influence and are recognized by Christ as competent to judge whether others are 'going on in the same way'. Once the disciples have made the transition to spontaneity, others (who have no direct contact with Christ) can be susceptible to the disciples' judgments about whether a belief or action counts as following Jesus; these others may eventually be recognized as themselves competent to judge such matters, so that still others can be susceptible to their judgments, and so on. We thus have a picture of how Christ's activity is mediated to us in the present: we accept the judgments of those who know how to 'go on in the same way' as Jesus in order to learn what it means to follow him; once we are recognized as competent in making such judgments our judgments provide the basis for others to learn the practice, and so on.<sup>85</sup>

This is a highly 'natural' account of the church. No such supernatural intrusions as would overthrow the system of nature, and thereby render Christian piety impossible, are involved. This explains why Schleiermacher sees the community as necessary if one is to avoid a magical conception of Christ's relation to the faithful. At the same time, though, this account must not be mistaken as reductionistic. Schleiermacher himself distinguishes his position not only from magical accounts of efficacy, but also from 'empirical' distortions that would see the transmission of God-consciousness as simply the result of teaching and example.<sup>86</sup> Instead, as Hector notes, 'All of Schleiermacher's claims about "social mediation" and "recognition" are... simply his way of explaining how the Spirit works'.<sup>87</sup> Schleiermacher invokes the Holy Spirit here explicitly to ground the church's mediation in a divine activity.<sup>88</sup> But consistent with his views of divine activity, this activity must have a natural mechanism. Schleiermacher does not rule out the supernatural as such, but rather conceptions of the supernatural that undermine

<sup>84</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §§114, 116. For a more detailed treatment of Jesus' formation, instruction, and apprenticeship of a community see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus*, ed. Jack C. Verheyden, trans. S. Maclean Gilmour (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp. 338–62.

<sup>85</sup> Hector, 'The Mediation of Christ's Normative Spirit', pp. 8–9.

<sup>86</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §100.

<sup>87</sup> Hector, 'The Mediation of Christ's Normative Spirit', p. 9.

<sup>88</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §116.

Christian piety. Indeed, one could say that he recovers the genuine transcendence of the supernatural. The entire system of nature is grounded in the divine activity. As we have seen, he goes so far as to suggest that 'supernatural' should be used to denote the beginnings, while 'natural' refers to its ongoing continuation.<sup>89</sup> This is why he insists that 'the supernatural in Christ is to become natural and the Church to take shape as a natural historical phenomenon'.<sup>90</sup>

To sum up the matter: 'Since after the departure of Christ the enlarged range of connexion with Him can only proceed from the fellowship of believers, these three facts—being drawn by that union into the fellowship of believers, having a share in the Holy Spirit, and being drawn into a living fellowship with Christ—must simply mean one and the same thing.'<sup>91</sup> Christ is the actor, even through the church. It is his God-consciousness and activity that is mediated through the church and its practices. Indeed, Schleiermacher highlights this by positing an isomorphism between the church's practices of prayer in the name of Jesus, the ministry of the word, and the sacraments, and Christ's threefold office of prophet, priest, and king.<sup>92</sup> It is through the church, as part of the web of finite causes, that the influence of Christ is able to continue as a genuine divine activity without positing 'division or opposition' within that divine activity or by 'regard[ing] the government of the world as other than a unity, directed towards a single goal'.<sup>93</sup> The church is, therefore, included in the original divine decree to create humanity, to bring that creation to perfection in Christ, to justify humanity for Christ's sake, and so on.<sup>94</sup> This keeps Schleiermacher's account of the need for the church in close connection with his fundamental starting point: the need to relate all things to the feeling of absolute dependence as expressed by a consciousness of redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ.

<sup>89</sup> Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre*, pp. 88–9; see above, n. 57.

<sup>90</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §117.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, §124.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, §127. This is noted in Werries, *Alles Handeln ein Handeln der Kirche*, pp. 157–8; Jeffrey VanderWilt, "'Why Worship?': Schleiermacher Speaks to the Question', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56 (2003), p. 297.

<sup>93</sup> Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §164.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* See also Mariña, 'Christology in Schleiermacher', p. 166; Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*, p. 214.

## THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ARGUMENTS

How, then, do these three arguments—from the social nature of humanity; from the contrast between the corporate lives of sin and of blessedness; and from the doctrine of creation/providence—relate to each another? To begin, the first two arguments are interrelated. It follows from the fact of sociality that if human beings are in view, then both sin and redemption will take on a corporate cast. However, the arguments are distinct in one regard. The argument from sociality envisions individuals expressing their interior states to one another and thereby banding together. It is an argument from below, as it were. The argument from corporate lives, on the other hand, envisions the individuals in question *in media res*,<sup>95</sup> already socially implicated in both sin and redemption.

Similarly, the arguments from corporate lives and from providence are closely related. It is precisely the sort of corporate life (whether of sin or blessedness) envisioned by the former argument that allows the latter argument to work. Only because humanity is bound together in these corporate solidarities can the supernatural influence of Christ be passed along naturally, in accord with the orderly government of the universe, and therefore in such a way as not to overthrow Christian piety. At the same time, the argument from providence is distinct in that, in each moment of its unfolding, the explicit concern to maintain the feeling of absolute dependence by upholding a certain vision of the constitution of the world remains in place. The argument from sociality, on the other hand, ‘works’ without express regard to either sin or redemption: neither of which is explicitly in view when it is first developed in the *Speeches on Religion*. Indeed, it works without explicit reference to Christ, which ought to suggest that it is incomplete, given Schleiermacher’s stated concern elsewhere to related all theologoumena to Christ. I propose, therefore, that this argument needs the third, with its christological specificity, as its completion if it is to stand within Schleiermacher’s system.

With regard to Schleiermacher’s starting point in the turn to subjectivity, the first argument arises most directly therefrom. It arises a posteriori and empirically from considerations of interiority. Turning the gaze to the subject results in the conclusion that the sort of subject one is, is a socially natured one. That this argument in this form perdures throughout Schleiermacher’s career shows its centrality and importance to him. The argument

<sup>95</sup> See Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, §61.

from providence bears the most logical connection to the interior turn. From this starting point and the conclusion of what piety consists in, the deduction follows naturally to the necessity of the church. So while perhaps less immediately connected to Schleiermacher's fundamental starting point, it retains the strongest connection to it, particularly once that starting point takes the pious turn and begins to concern itself particularly with Christian thematization of the feeling of absolute dependence. While the first argument can be articulated without explicit reference to Christ, this third one depends entirely upon Jesus of Nazareth.

The second argument seems more like a middle term than either of the other two. It depends upon the sociality of human nature as its premiss, and the deduction from providence for its telos and its mechanism. However, it is intimately related to both of the other arguments, and helps to show their connection to one another. In a sense, these three arguments might better be understood as the unfolding of a single argument. The turn to the subject reveals that this subject is socially ordered. This social ordering is expressed in both the corporate life of sinfulness and the corporate life of blessedness. The corporately constituted humanity is that into which Christ enters to complete its creation, which is accomplished by natural mechanisms. The need for these natural mechanisms is likewise established from the turn to the subject, as the feeling of absolute dependence deduced from this turn depends upon the orderly system of nature. By means of these natural mechanisms, then, Christ's blessedness is communicated to these socially constituted subjects through the corporate life inaugurated by Christ.

This is a rather complex argument. However, each step along the way is logically interconnected with the others, and if not directly dependent upon the data of interiority, then closely related to a deduction therefrom. Envisaging these three arguments as moments in the unfolding of a single argument seems particularly apt as it coheres with Schleiermacher's own account of how the single divine decree successively realizes itself temporally through creation's first beginning, its completion in Christ, the formation of the community, and the conversion and justification of individuals within that community. The original decree and the action are simple, but its temporal unfolding is at times complex. Similarly, the pith of Schleiermacher's argument is simple: the interior turn shows that Christ has redeemed humanity by way of the community he has founded, but the unfolding of that argument is intricate.

## CONCLUSION

Friedrich Schleiermacher's thought is rigorously systematic. Like few others, he remains thoroughly consistent with his own first principles and attends to the internal consistency of his formulations. His thought must be evaluated as a whole for all its parts are so intertwined as to not be fully comprehensible in abstraction. They attain their full coherence only in the context of the whole. At the same time, I have demonstrated that within the overall coherence and consistency of Schleiermacher's thought, there were true developments, namely with regard to the relation between the visible church and the true church and the argument from the corporate life of blessedness. The former was simply not available apart from the more explicitly Christian focus of *The Christian Faith*, while the latter allows for a genuine refinement of his thought as expressed in the *Speeches on Religion*. The difference that Christ makes truly made a difference in Schleiermacher's theology.

As I have also shown, though, his thought is also inextricably ecclesial. The necessity of the church, though variously expressed, is no ancillary concern, but forms an inextricable component of the structure of his theology. Therefore, evaluations of Schleiermacher's thought must take his ecclesial location and context with the utmost seriousness, for to ignore it is to ignore a load-bearing feature of the overall structure.