

# Diverging Theological Paths

*“But . . . I live in the eighteenth century, in  
which miracles no longer happen . . .”*

— G. E. LESSING

## A GROWING OPPOSITION WITHIN PROTESTANT THEOLOGY

Friedrich Schleiermacher developed his theology amidst a period of widespread cultural and intellectual transformation. His adult life, spanning from the closing decades of the eighteenth century through the first third of the nineteenth, coincided with a time of tremendous artistic, literary, and philosophical creativity as well as rapid and unsettling change. The unique trajectory of Schleiermacher’s career brought him into contact with many of these creative and transformative currents in German and European thought.<sup>1</sup> Following his upbringing in the deep piety of the Moravian Brethren, his student writings offer passionate and insightful investigations of Kant’s critical philosophy and Spinoza’s purported pantheism. His studies of Plato and Aristotle with Johann Eberhard at the University of Halle also left him well poised to contribute to the early nineteenth century’s critical retrieval of classical Greek thought. Through his further association with the budding Romantic movement in Berlin at the turn of the century, his subsequent efforts to establish a new and critical system of ethics, and his later academic work at Halle and

1. The biography from Martin Redeker offers the best English-language account of Schleiermacher’s life and thought. See Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, trans. John Wallhauser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1973). The standard biographical treatment is Kurt Nowak’s *Schleiermacher: Leben, Werk, und Wirkung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001). Nowak’s work also offers a select bibliography that highlights recent developments in German scholarship.

Berlin, Schleiermacher found himself in nearly constant dialogue with the work of the prominent thinkers of the age, ranging from the philosophers Jacobi, Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel to the noted polymath Alexander von Humboldt.<sup>2</sup>

It is tempting then, in considering Schleiermacher's theological work, to trace the origin of his characteristic approach and most distinctive ideas to one or another of these remarkable contexts or relationships.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, treatments of his thought often begin by highlighting his involvement in one of these settings in particular: the privileged society of Berlin's Romantic literary salons. At the eighteenth century's close, Schleiermacher enjoyed the extraordinary company of Berlin's social and intellectual elite. He joined the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, the poets Novalis and Ludwig Tieck, and Dorothea Mendelssohn—oldest daughter of the well-respected philosopher Moses Mendelssohn—for regular discussion and lively fellowship under the patronage of Henriette and Marcus Herz.<sup>4</sup> It was the friendly encouragement of this coterie that prompted the then reluctant Schleiermacher to his first publication: his rhapsodic *Speeches* on religion, which drew together the various insights of his early years and spoke of a new era in religious thought and practice. His *Soliloquies*, which have garnered less attention but also provide an important window into his understanding of individuality and human ethical formation, likewise belong to this exciting period.<sup>5</sup> In these respects, this nucleus of avant-

2. See Nowak, *Schleiermacher* (2001), 19–67, 147–62, 187–96. Humboldt, Fichte, and Hegel were among Schleiermacher's colleagues at the University of Berlin. Fichte held a chair in philosophy at the university until 1818, when it was taken over by Hegel. Schleiermacher had little direct contact with Schelling, but his influence is more pervasive in Schleiermacher's thought, especially in his philosophical works. On Schleiermacher's developing ethical thought and philosophical reflections in this time, see Günter Meckenstock, *Deterministische Ethik und Kritische Theologie: Die Auseinandersetzung des Frühen Schleiermacher mit Kant und Spinoza 1789–1794* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988); and Eilert Herms, *Herkunft, Entfaltung und erste Gestalt des Systems der Wissenschaften bei Schleiermacher* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1974).

3. Ulrich Barth offers a clear and helpful survey of these myriad approaches to Schleiermacher interpretation in his *Christentum und Selbstbewußtsein* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 7–27.

4. See Nowak, *Schleiermacher* (2001), 79–83.

5. See F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); see also Terrence N. Tice, *Schleiermacher* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 9–10. On the occasion of his twenty-ninth birthday in 1797, this literary circle of friends, led by Friedrich Schlegel, elicited a promise from Schleiermacher to put his thoughts on religion to paper within a year. The book appeared a little more than a year later, in 1799. Schleiermacher describes his insight into individuality given in his *Soliloquies* as his “highest intuition” (*höchste Anschauung*). See F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Soliloquies*, trans. H. L. Friess (Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1979), 31–41; Terrence N. Tice, “Schleiermacher's ‘Highest Intuition’ in Landsberg,” *Schleiermacher in Context*:

garde Romantic thinkers might seem a fitting starting point for the whole of Schleiermacher's theology, with his innovative presentation of the Christian faith occupying a kind of middle point between traditional piety and the daring freedom of modern thought—partly an apologetics against and partly an accommodation to the new “cultured despisers of religion.”

Yet when viewed alongside his broader work, this vivid episode proves only a single example of a larger, lifelong involvement with a pervasive difficulty Schleiermacher recognized as the signature challenge facing Protestant Christianity in his time: the growing opposition between distinctively Christian faith and the progress of scientific scholarship, or *Wissenschaft*. By the dawn of the nineteenth century, Protestant theology found itself in the difficult position that a far-reaching gulf had developed between religious belief and the natural and historical sciences.<sup>6</sup> The new situation held consequences for virtually every area of German society, but in the field of theology its effects were particularly acute. The growing independence of the natural sciences and the emerging historical criticism threatened both cherished dogmas and basic conceptions of biblical authority. The natural sciences seemed to inch ever closer to a comprehensive knowledge of the physical world, increasingly calling into question the extraordinary claims of traditional Christianity, in its teachings on creation, the supernatural inspiration of the Bible, and the existence of miracles. And the emerging historical-critical mindset, which would quickly become a hallmark of the nineteenth-century study of religion, shook the bedrock of Christian belief as it seemed to undermine both the authority of Scripture and the permanence of Christian doctrine.

The urgent need to overcome this separation formed the overarching concern of German Protestant theology in the early nineteenth century. Yet in its basic lines, this opposition had long been developing in the German theological scene. This growing crisis, as it began to take hold at the turn of the nineteenth century, received impetus in particular from two earlier theological trends: neology and Pietism. These two wide-ranging movements represented the alternative paths through which eighteenth-century German theologians had endeavored to understand their position in the modern world. Common

*Papers from the 1988 International Symposium on Schleiermacher at Herrnhut, the German Democratic Republic*, ed. Ruth Drucilla Richardson (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1991), 19–20; and Günter Meckenstock, “Die Wandlungen der ‘Monologen’ Schleiermachers,” in *Schleiermacher und die wissenschaftliche Kultur des Christentums* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 403–18.

6. See F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, trans. James Duke and Francis Fiorenza (Atlanta: Scholars, 1981), 60–65.

to both approaches was the desire to leave behind the arid and inflexible scholasticism or school theology that had long dominated Protestant dogmatics and to express the central truths of Christian faith in a fresh and revitalized manner more in keeping with the needs of the time. However, they represented substantially conflicting views of the right relationship between human reason and divine revelation.

#### *NEOLOGY AND GERMAN PIETISM*

The rise of “neology” (*Neologie*), or the “new teaching,” resulted from the latter eighteenth-century reception of Enlightenment thought within Protestant theology.<sup>7</sup> The term, taken over from the field of literary criticism, designated a new orientation in theological discussion through the concern to find points of connection between Protestant belief and emerging modern thought. Often regarded as a German offshoot of English Deism, this line of thinking placed an increased emphasis on natural religion, as the essential core of revealed religion that is accessible not only through sacred texts but also through the rightly ordered workings of the rational mind.<sup>8</sup> Spurred on by the educational reforms of the Prussian monarch Frederick the Great, these theologians sought to expound the underlying continuity between the positive teachings of Christian tradition and the necessary and simple truths of enlightened reason.<sup>9</sup>

The full scope and content of this movement are difficult to determine precisely, yet the development is noteworthy for pioneering many of the positions and tendencies that would characterize later modern liberal theology.<sup>10</sup> The neologians held a marked distaste for metaphysical and

7. See G. Hornig, “Neologie,” *Historisches Woerterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 6, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer (Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co., 1984), 719; also Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 34–39, 51; and Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 98–102.

8. Cf. here A. C. McGiffert, *Protestant Thought Before Kant* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 247–51. While neology displays a clear resemblance to and dependence upon English Deism, its development took a different course. The neologians showed a continued commitment to the Protestant church and directed their energies especially to careful biblical criticism. On the differences between treatments of natural religion by the English Deists and German *Neologen*, see Ulrich Barth, “Mündige Religion—Selbstdenkendes Christentum: Deismus und Neologie in wissensoziologischer Perspektive,” *Aufgeklärter Protestantismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 201–24.

9. See Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (2006), 98–100; also Emanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie im Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegungen des europäischen Denkens*, vol. 5 (Darmstadt: C. Bertelsmann, 1964), 3.

speculative modes of ecclesiastical teaching. Instead, they directed their efforts with remarkable fervor toward the critical investigation of the Old and New Testament records and emphasized basic moral and ethical teachings as the essential elements of the Christian faith.<sup>11</sup> Hermann Samuel Reimarus and J. S. Semler, two of the most prominent neologians, introduced the thoroughgoing application of historical-critical approaches to biblical scholarship, seeking to uncover the true authors and contexts underlying various scriptural texts and to separate verifiable historical facts from the inaccuracies of the biblical reports.<sup>12</sup> The result of these labors was a simple moral presentation of Christian faith trimmed to the sensibilities and limitations of natural human reason.

By contrast, the widespread emergence of Pietism throughout Germany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represented a distinctly different set of concerns. This movement of religious renewal encompassed a diverse catalogue of practices, social structures, and beliefs that emphasized the individual intensification of sanctification and discipleship in the Christian life. One of the most significant European religious developments since the Protestant Reformation, Pietism was a historically complex collection of various theological orientations and social relations identifiable more by tendency than by specific doctrinal positions or beliefs.<sup>13</sup> It took root especially in Lutheran

10. See Hornig, "Neologie" (1984), 719.

11. See Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie* (1964), 4–5.

12. The work of Hermann Samuel Reimarus is especially important here. In addition to his own works on rational and natural religion, he came to exert a tremendous though indirect influence through G. E. Lessing, who in the years 1774–78 published excerpts from Reimarus's biblical studies as fragments from an "unknown" author purportedly found in the Wolfenbüttel archive. These Wolfenbüttel Fragments, which present a historical account of the life of Jesus showing him not as the divine Son of God but merely as an inspired teacher, incited a significant controversy in late eighteenth-century biblical scholarship. Reimarus was first identified as their author in 1813. See Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 52ff. For a fuller discussion of Reimarus's own theological convictions, as well as the reasons motivating Lessing's decision to gradually publish Reimarus's Fragments, see Henry Chadwick's introduction in G. E. Lessing, *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans. Henry Chadwick (1957), 9–29. Another important figure associated with this movement is the theologian and philologist Johann August Ernesti (1707–1781). See Bernhard Pünjer, *History of the Christian Philosophy of Religion from the Reformation to Kant*, trans. W. Hastie (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1887), 550–62.

13. See Carter Lindberg, *The Third Reformation? Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983); see also Martin Brecht and Carter Lindberg, "Pietism," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. 4, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 218–20. Like neology, the variation of expressions of Pietism makes it difficult to define within clear boundaries. German Pietism developed in conjunction with a number of related, "cousin" movements such as Jansenism and Methodism. See Sheehan, *German History 1770–1866* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989),

communities, but came to exert a significant influence upon Reformed communities as well. The name of “Pietist” was first applied, derisively, to the followers of Phillip Jakob Spener, who together with August H. Francke and the later Graf Nicholas Zinzendorf served as inspirational leaders of this renewal. Yet it appropriately conveys the concentration on the practices of piety common to the numerous communities influenced by this movement. At the outset, Pietist communities were characterized simply by their newly regained focus on individual and communal spiritual practice.<sup>14</sup> Through this recovered practice believers sought to reclaim the original heritage of the Reformation, long since obscured by Protestant scholasticism, and to reorient their personal and social lives to once more reflect the life of vital faith and earnest discipleship. By the mid-eighteenth century, the movement had developed to the expression of more explicit emphases on the need to internalize and appropriate Christian teachings, through constant care for and attention to the interior life, and this gave rise to an increasing focus on personal conversion and spiritual regeneration.<sup>15</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this Pietist orientation engendered a respect for biblical revelation that contrasted sharply with the attitude of the neologians. In place of historical-critical methods of biblical exegesis, Pietist communities would emphasize regular study of the Bible for the sake of personal insight and individual spiritual growth. In such a practice readers were not to cast suspicion on the Scriptures, by callously subjecting the texts to extrinsic rational criteria. Instead, they were encouraged to surrender themselves to Scripture’s revealed teaching.<sup>16</sup> The divinely inspired message of the biblical writings could not, as it were, be wrested away by force through amassing historical and archaeological materials. Rather, to the hearts of those who would receive it in humility, the Scriptures issue a personal call to salvation. In place of careful inquiry into underlying historical conditions, then, Pietist communities practiced independent spiritual reading to train one’s imagination and desires to conform to the biblical witness.<sup>17</sup>

174–77; also Martin Brecht, “Pietismus,” *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 26, ed. Gerhard Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 606–7.

14. In the words of a 1689 poem by the Leipzig professor Joachim Feller, “What is a Pietist? One who studies the Word of God / And also leads a holy life according to it.” See Brecht and Lindberg, “Pietism” (1999), 218–19.

15. Brecht, “Pietismus” (1996), 606–7.

16. See Wilhelm Dilthey, “Schleiermacher’s Hermeneutical System in Relation to Earlier Protestant Hermeneutics,” in *Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, vol. 4, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 57–58.

These two poles of neology and Pietism framed German theological discussion in the late eighteenth century, and Schleiermacher's own studies, first among the Moravians and later in the rationalistic atmosphere of the University of Halle, gave him significant interaction with both movements.<sup>18</sup> Yet by the time Schleiermacher began his own academic career in theology in 1804, a subtle but significant shift had occurred. The contrasting tension of neology and pietism had been supplanted by a more hardened and intractable opposition. Theologians of the time had divided themselves into two sharply conflicting schools of thought. The first took its point of departure from independent human reason and considered all religious truth as proceeding from—and having its ultimate justification within—ordinary human rationality. The other proceeded from the immediacy and otherness of divine revelation and insisted that the content of Christian revelation contained an inescapably supernatural and indeed “super-rational” quality and so remained beyond the grasp of unaided human reason. The contrast of these two approaches solidified into the early nineteenth-century theological controversy between Rationalism and Supranaturalism, a dispute that would set the terms of German theological discussion well through the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>19</sup>

17. See Brecht and Lindberg, “Pietism” (1999), 221–22. This was especially true in the Pietistic theological school that developed under Friedrich Wilhelm I at the University of Halle.

18. Schleiermacher was reared in the Moravian form of Pietism influenced by Zinzendorf and spent his early student years in the Moravian school at Niesky and at the seminary at Barby. For an account of these early years and their influence on Schleiermacher's mature thought, see James Brandt, *All Things New: Reform of Church and Society in Schleiermacher's Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 41–46. After a difficult period of discernment, he left this closely knit community in 1787 and entered the University of Halle, which had become strongly influenced by the rationalistic work of the philosopher Christian Wolff and the neologian Semler and which allowed Schleiermacher to begin his own independent investigations into the vexing philosophical and theological questions of the time. On this time in Halle and its influence upon Schleiermacher's thought, see Ulrich Barth, “Die Religionstheorie der ‘Reden’: Schleiermachers theologisches Modernisierungsprogramm,” in *Aufgeklärter Protestantismus* (2004): 259–70; also Nowak, *Schleiermacher* (2001), 32–42.

19. On the history and relationship the theological schools of Supranaturalism and Rationalism, as well as a helpful summary of the theological positions proffered over the course of this controversy, see Emanuel Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie* (1964), 1–144. A brief overview of the controversy as seen in its own time can be found in “Supernaturalismus,” *Bilder-Conversations-Lexikon*, vol. 4 (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1841), 336–37. The term “Supranaturalism” is employed in place of “Supernaturalism” here and below in keeping with the most common usage and to distinguish this specific movement from broader conceptions of “supernaturalism.” Cf. Hirsch, *Geschichte der neuern evangelischen Theologie* (1964), 6; and Joachim Weinhardt, “Supranaturalismus,” *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 32, ed. Gerhard Müller (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 467–68.

While the specific terms of this debate have received little attention in Anglophone scholarship, the conflict between these two theological schools provided the backdrop to all of Schleiermacher's mature dogmatic works, from the time of his appointment as a professor in 1804 to his death in 1834.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, he recognized this opposition as the urgent theological controversy of his time and one that would not be easily overcome.<sup>21</sup> Yet Schleiermacher also grasped the nature of this crisis in a manner that differed significantly from his contemporaries. He recognized the underlying divide between faith and scientific scholarship as one that would be resolved neither through a merely apologetic strategy of defending Christianity against the claims of reason, nor by a purely mediating approach that would seek to chart a middle path between Rationalist and Supranaturalist concerns by means of a skillful compromise. Instead, he regarded this upheaval as highlighting a more urgent need to rethink the foundations of Christian thought and to ground the study of theology in a surer and more properly historical basis. Most fundamentally, he recognized this dilemma as a unique opportunity for arriving at a more adequate understanding of a central problem in modern Christian thought: coordinating the new and transformative influence of Christ with the contingency of human historical living.

### THE STRATEGY OF THE SUPERNATURAL-BECOMING-NATURAL

Schleiermacher fashioned his own theological approach as a distinct alternative to the impasse between Rationalism and Supranaturalism in his time. Setting aside abstract discussions of natural reason and supernatural revelation, he outlined an innovative historically minded theological method and centered his own dogmatic efforts on the attempt to better grasp this foundational relationship of Christ to human history.

The present work explores Schleiermacher's treatment of this basic relationship in his dogmatic thought. At the heart of this study is the complex interconnection between two central yet ambiguous concepts in his mature

20. By the mid-nineteenth century, this opposition between human reason and divine revelation had given way to a preoccupation with the historical study of theology. Though Schleiermacher himself was influential in effecting this change, Carl Schwarz identifies the 1835 publication of D. F. Strauss's *Leben Jesu* (*Life of Jesus*), appearing one year after Schleiermacher's death, as the turning point in this development. See Schwarz, *Zur Geschichte der neuesten Theologie*, 4th ed. (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1869), 4. Schleiermacher's own role in this "historicization" of theology will be taken up below in chapter three.

21. Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lucke* (1981), 68, 88.



theological writings: the “supernatural” and the “historical.” These two terms serve as foci for the ongoing challenge and promise of Schleiermacher’s contribution to modern theology. Yet within his work both also take on a unique meaning. Schleiermacher never established a general theory of transcendence, and he offers no speculative explanation of the relationship between “nature” and the “supernatural” purely in themselves. Indeed, his candid remarks on the subject make clear that he had no interest in such a project.<sup>22</sup> His considerations of the supernatural are relatively few, and when they do occur, they presuppose a decidedly Christian conviction that belongs to the context of his own German Protestant (*Evangelisch*) community. Nonetheless, Schleiermacher’s dogmatic writings consistently affirm that the redemptive activity of Christ in history has a character that should, at least in some measure, be regarded as supernatural. His entire conception of Christian faith is emphatically Christocentric. Time and again, he insists that the entire structure of his system is founded on the grounding fact of redemption through Jesus of Nazareth, who inaugurates the Reign of God in human history.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Schleiermacher’s considerations of the place of history in theology allow no simple categorization. The awareness of the historical contingency of the Christian faith is an ever-present feature of his theological deliberations, yet his own understanding of this historical development differed both from his contemporaries and his successors. Schleiermacher’s “historicism” fits none of the dominant molds of historical understanding so emphatically rejected by early twentieth-century theologians.<sup>24</sup> His was neither the speculative philosophical history favored among Hegel’s students, nor the radical empiricism of Leopold von Ranke’s drive to present the past just as it actually was, nor the relativizing historical method of his later admirer Ernst Troeltsch.<sup>25</sup> More so than many thinkers of his age, Schleiermacher emphasized

22. *Ibid.*, 88\_90.

23. See F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt, Zweite Auflage (1830/31)*, in *Kritische-Gesamtausgabe (KGA)* I.13.1–2, ed. Rolf Schäfer (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), §§10, 13, 89, 93, 100. Edwin Christian van Driel clearly and succinctly outlines this Christocentric focus on redemption. See his *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17–25.

24. On the intellectual crisis resulting in the 1920s rejection of the primacy of history in German academic theology, see F. W. Graf’s excellent essay, “Die ‘antihistorische Revolution’ in der protestantischen Theologie der zwanziger Jahre,” in *Vernunft des Glaubens: Wissenschaftliche Theologie und kirchliche Lehre*, ed. Jan Rohls and Gunther Wenz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 377–405, esp. 377–88.

25. For a discussion of the range of meanings falling under the term “historicism” in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thought, see Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism* (New

responsible historical investigation as a prerequisite to all intelligent scholarly inquiry bearing on human thought and action, yet he also insisted that the specific form of this research must be carefully tailored to the character of each individual discipline.<sup>26</sup>

This study contends that the distinctive manner in which Schleiermacher grapples with the tension of these two concepts indicates a decisive and often overlooked aspect of his dogmatic theology. Throughout, his theological writings sound the constant refrain that responsible dogmatic reflection upon Christian faith allows no clean separation between what belongs to revelation and the purely supernatural and what belongs to the realm of nature and the historical. Instead, the new and higher life originating in Christ designates a reality that can in certain respects be described as both supernatural and historical. The Christian life can rightly be called supernatural in respect to its extraordinary origin and surpassing character. The introduction of the higher spiritual life in Christ marks the advent of a new beginning in human living, irreducible to its preceding historical factors or circumstances. After this remarkable origin, however, Christ's singular influence is entirely mediated by and contingent upon ordinary and unremarkable means and is everywhere conditioned by natural and historical development. Indeed, for Schleiermacher it is precisely in the coordination of these two moments that the truly distinctive character of Christianity is revealed: the natural and historical world realizes its fulfillment and perfection only through the redemptive activity of Christ.

York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 12–17; on L. von Ranke, see George Iggers and George Powell, eds., *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 5.

26. Although Schleiermacher never developed an independent philosophy of history as such, his reflections on historical understanding are present throughout his early and late writings in both philosophy and theology. For the understanding of history in his early thought, see Kurt Nowak, "Theorie der Geschichte. Schleiermachers Abhandlung 'Über den Geschichtsunterricht' von 1793," in *Schleiermacher und die wissenschaftliche Kultur des Christentums*, ed. Günter Meckenstock (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 419–39, esp. 436–39. For a systematic account of Schleiermacher's mature reflections on historical understanding and its relationship to Schleiermacher's theological method, see Wilhelm Gräß, *Humanität und Christentums-geschichte. Eine Untersuchung zum Geschichtsbegriff im Spätwerk Schleiermachers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980). Schleiermacher's lectures on *Philosophical Ethics* are also of particular importance for understanding the role of historical investigation in scholarly inquiry. See the introduction to F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Lectures on Philosophical Ethics*, ed. Robert B. Loudon, trans. Louise Adey Huish (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xxiii–xxx; and Andrew Dole, *Schleiermacher on Religion and the Natural Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35–70.

Schleiermacher indicates this aspect of his thought through the curious descriptive strategy of the “supernatural-becoming-natural” (*Naturwerden des Übernatürlichen*).<sup>27</sup> Jesus Christ has introduced a new principle, power, and influence into human history. Through Christ God has become active in a new way in human consciousness, thought, and action. Yet this new and “supernatural” influence is not one that can be communicated or received directly or without mediation; rather, it expresses itself only indirectly and mediately as it takes shape in and through existing natural and historical forms. Schleiermacher thus envisions Christ’s influence in human history as a gradual transformation from within. His dogmatic theology describes the emergence of the Reign of God, a development that does not oppose or interrupt natural and historical development but works in and through it to bring the created world to its completion.

This unique treatment of the supernatural and the historical highlights a consistent dynamic of Schleiermacher’s dogmatic thought. The redemptive activity of Christ and the unfolding course of history are closely bound together, but this bond has a specific character. The point of departure is fixed in the originative influence of Christ, yet the consequent development plays itself out through the ordinary forms and structures of history. His theology describes, in other words, the historically conditioned unfolding of redemption in human living—that is, the historically conditioned unfolding of grace.

#### *CHRIST, HISTORY, AND THE REIGN OF GOD*

The following six chapters unfold as a close examination of this relationship between the “supernatural” influence of Christ and the contingency of historical human living in Schleiermacher’s dogmatic thought. The treatment here aims to highlight the foundational importance and unique character of this theme in Schleiermacher’s mature theology, through investigating the historical background of his writings and the development in his primary dogmatic works. Rather than beginning with a general question regarding the relationship of transcendence and immanence, or the character of the “supernatural” in modern theology as such, it takes its initial bearings from the questions and concerns surrounding theological study in Schleiermacher’s own

27. Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, §88.4, KGA I.13.2: 26. See also §89.4 That it is here a “descriptive strategy” indicates that it serves not to offer any firm principle about the relationship of nature and the supernatural, but rather to point heuristically to the more fundamental issue behind these imprecise concepts: correctly conceiving the relationship of Christ and human history (see chapter four, below).

context. Moreover, as Schleiermacher located his own systematic skill especially in a talent for organization and drawing rich interconnections between different areas of thought,<sup>28</sup> much of the following discussion proceeds through carefully attending to the structure and arrangement of Schleiermacher's two principal dogmatic works: his well-known *Glaubenslehre*, or *Christian Faith*, and unfinished his work on *Christliche Sittenlehre*, or *Christian Ethics*.<sup>29</sup>

The endeavor to clarify Schleiermacher's unique understanding of Christ's influence in human history, and its implications for the understanding of grace, constitutes the principal aim of this study. Yet, it also has the secondary aim of offering a systematic consideration of Schleiermacher's lectures on *Christian Ethics* as a source of dogmatic or systematic theology. Alongside the treatment of Christian piety as it becomes manifest in thought in *Christian Faith*, *Christian Ethics* offers a careful and nuanced reflection on Christian faith as it emerges in action. According to Schleiermacher's organization of the various tasks of theology in his *Brief Outline*, dogmatic theology has its full compass only as both disciplines are taken together.<sup>30</sup> While Schleiermacher's unfinished work in *Christian Ethics*, which survives in the form of his own outlines and the manuscripts of student lecture notes, has been a significant resource for recent German scholarship on Schleiermacher's dogmatic thought, the field has received only scant treatment in Anglophone scholarship, and with greater emphasis upon its moral implications than its dogmatic structure and significance.<sup>31</sup> However, as this area of Schleiermacher's dogmatic thought

28. Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke* (1981), 70.

29. The most adequate critical edition of Schleiermacher's materials on *Christian Ethics* is F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Christliche Sittenlehre (Vorlesung im Wintersemester 1826/27). Nach größtenteils unveröffentlichten Hörernachschriften und nach teilweise unveröffentlichten Manuskripten Schleiermachers*, ed. Hermann Peiter (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010).

30. F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study: Translation of the 1811 and 1830 Editions*, trans. Terrence N. Tice, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), §§223–31.

31. See Hans-Joachim Birkner, *Schleiermachers Christliche Sittenlehre in Zusammenhang seines Philosophisch-Theologischen Systems* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964); *Schleiermachers Christliche Sittenlehre* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964); the newly published volume of Hermann Peiter's essays in *Christliche Ethik bei Schleiermacher—Christian Ethics according to Schleiermacher: Gesammelte Aufsätze und Besprechungen—Collected Essays and Reviews*, ed. Terrence N. Tice (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010); and Eilert Herms, *Herkunft, Entfaltung und erste Gestalt des Systems der Wissenschaften bei Schleiermacher* (1974). To date the best English-language treatment of Schleiermacher's Christian ethics is James Brandt's *All Things New* (2001). Quite understandably, Brandt focuses on the promise of Schleiermacher's Christian ethics for contemporary discussions of theological ethics. A further recent treatment of Schleiermacher's theological ethics is John Sungmin Park's *Theological Ethics of Friedrich Schleiermacher*, *Schleiermacher Studies and Translations*, vol. 20 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2001), which highlights

offers a detailed analysis of the expression of Christian faith in historical action, it is of significant importance for the investigation here and is treated at length below.

As the reigning dispute between Rationalism and Supernaturalism set the terms of theological discussion in Schleiermacher's time, the analysis here begins by considering the central issues of this contentious debate, especially as presented in the works of the popular Rationalist preacher Johann Friedrich Röhr and the spirited Supernaturalist theologian Claus Harms (see chapter two). While many theologians of his day either operated within these positions or sought to find an intermediate compromise between them, Schleiermacher regarded the entire conflict as resting on a fundamental misunderstanding, and he developed his work in conscious distinction from the terms of this debate.

Schleiermacher's reorganization of the study of theology and his articulation of theological method outlines the foundational basis for this alternative approach. As discussed in chapter three, Schleiermacher played a key role in restructuring the discipline of theology at the newly established University of Berlin in 1810, and he recognized the importance of recovering a properly "scientific," or *wissenschaftlich*, form for theological inquiry. He depicts the study of theology as a thoroughly critical and historical undertaking, yet he also insists that it is a positive discipline set apart through the distinctiveness of the new life realized in the Christian church. His *Brief Outline* delineates this theological method and forms the basis for his subsequent dogmatic treatments of Christian thought and action in his *Christian Faith* and *Christian Ethics*.<sup>32</sup>

Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith* fleshes out this novel conception of the dogmatic task. The complex formal arrangement of the work, treated below in chapter four, centers on a critical analysis of distinctively Christian thought as a reflection upon the appearance of the Redeemer in human history. Deliberately distinguishing his position from Rationalist and Supernaturalist perspectives, Schleiermacher describes Christ's influence in history according to the theme of the supernatural-becoming-natural. With this strategy, he hints at a unique understanding of the redemptive activity of Christ in the natural and historical world. The appearance of Christ signals the emergence of a new power and motive principle in human history in the developing Reign of God, through which the created world is brought to completion.

the structural interconnection of Schleiermacher's *Christian Ethics* with his *Christian Faith*, though without treating the content of the *Christian Ethics* in great detail.

32. Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline* (2011), §§31–33, 223–23.

The material development of Schleiermacher's teaching in *Christian Faith*, the subject of chapter five, proceeds from this focus and offers an insightful and original treatment of grace in human historical living. Beginning with the doctrines of regeneration and sanctification, it considers the growth of this new divinely given form of life as it originates in Christ, endures in the Holy Spirit, and is rooted in the eternal divine decree. The redemptive influence proceeding from Christ is not only person-forming but world-forming, producing the church as a community of grace set apart from the reign of sin and destined to guide human history to its consummation under the governance of the triune God.

Schleiermacher's lectures on *Christian Ethics* offer a parallel set of dogmatic reflections through a detailed critical analysis of distinctively Christian action. The form and foundation of this system, considered in chapter six, again unfolds according to the theme of the supernatural-becoming-natural. Christian action finds its basis in the new life introduced in Christ and continues in the community of faith through the Spirit. This action manifests itself in threefold form: first, as representational action (*darstellendes Handeln*) that reflects the enduring blessedness of fellowship with Christ; then, in the two modes of efficacious action (*wirksames Handeln*), as purifying (*reinigendes*) and propagative (*verbreitendes*).

The historical development of the three forms of Christian action in Schleiermacher's *Christian Ethics*, the focus of the seventh and final chapter, expands the teachings of his *Christian Faith* and significantly develops his unique understanding of grace in history. Schleiermacher describes the unfolding expressions of historical Christian action as an increasing permeation and elevation of the natural world through the redemptive influence of Christ. Impelled by this higher influence, Christian action appropriates and modifies existing social and cultural conditions, gradually bringing them into ever-greater harmony with the Spirit. In similar fashion to his *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher's *Christian Ethics* depicts the new life inaugurated in Christ as the fulfillment of human action: the emerging reality of the Reign of God.

The theme of the supernatural-becoming-natural, then, offers a fresh and illuminating perspective on the defining characteristics and inner consistency of Schleiermacher's dogmatic theology. It provides a focal lens that both clarifies the central relationship of Christ and history in his mature thought and foregrounds his own compelling vision of the transformative work of grace in human living. Within the faith of the Christian church lies the conviction that with the coming of Christ the world is changed. A new and higher life has developed in the Christian community, and its true dignity consists not

in operating magically in the world—as if breaking in from beyond—but in elevating and transforming the powers and phenomena of historical human living from within.