Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Old Testament*

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In the nineteenth century the unrestricted application of the historical-critical method posed an unprecedented challenge to inherited Christian notions about the Bible. While this challenge was eventually to be felt most acutely in the study of the New Testament (NT) once the distinction between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith" had firmly established itself, traditional viewpoints on the Old Testament (OT) were actually the first to be called into question. As a consequence of historical investigation, it became increasingly difficult for theologians to claim that the gospel is already taught in the OT. Regarding this matter, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) made a bold proposal. He argued against the canonical standing of the OT on the grounds that it expresses Jewish, not Christian, religion. For him this conclusion was the unavoidable result of the advancing critical scholarship that was undermining the christological exegesis used to defend the church's claim to the OT against the synagogue's counter-claim to its sole rightful possession. Opposing such "christianizing" readings, Schleiermacher broke ranks from Christian theologians and championed the side of the Jews in this historic debate. His only predecessors in this regard were Marcion and the Socinians, although his proposal for relegating the OT to noncanonical status was later endorsed by Adolf von Harnack.

Surprisingly, there has been very little scholarship devoted to Schleiermacher's stance toward the OT.[1] In a recent monograph, Klaus Beckmann notes this deficiency and seeks to reignite theological discussion on the Christian relation to the OT in

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[1] Hans-Joachim Kraus insists: "For the basic understanding of the Old Testament in the nineteenth century, Schleiermacher's statements were of no small importance" (Kraus, *Die Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart* [2d ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969] 170).

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light of historical research by exploring in detail Schleiermacher's argument.[2] Since Beckmann believes that Schleiermacher's position is inadequate, he investigates five other German Protestant theologians from the nineteenth century who also sought to come to grips with historical study of the OT to ascertain whether their conclusions are more adequate. While I agree that Schleiermacher's view is inadequate, I disagree with the reasons Beckmann gives for this judgment. Beckmann is convinced that the problems with Schleiermacher's position can be traced to his abandonment of the supposedly "biblical" model of *Heilsgeschichte* (prophecy and fulfillment) that was revived by the real hero of Beckmann's tale, J. C. K. von Hofmann. While Hofmann acknowledged the relative right of historical methods to display the meaning of the OT on its own terms, he insisted that in the final analysis the OT must be interpreted through the lens of the NT's *kerygma*. As Beckmann indicates, Hofmann's position anticipates that of Karl Barth, who proposed to rescue the OT from a purely historical exegesis by reasserting a distinctly theological hermeneutic that regards the OT as a witness to Jesus Christ.[3] Clearly, Beckmann is engaged in an *external* criticism: the only way to avoid Schleiermacher's conclusion is to work from a different set of premises. But the odd thing about Beckmann's recommendation of Hofmann's (and Barth's) proposal is that it is an instance of precisely the sort of christianizing interpretation Schleiermacher opposed. Beckmann has thus not addressed Schleiermacher's argument but simply bypassed it.

Beckmann does not consider the possibility that Schleiermacher's argument might be subject to criticism and, hence, modification along the very methodological lines that Schleiermacher recognized as in keeping with his commitment to a thoroughgoing historical-critical exegesis of the Bible and its revisionary implications for theology. In this respect Beckmann is typical of many theologians who grant a limited role to historical methods while invoking theological categories derived from the NT so as to make the OT serviceable for the purposes of Christian faith. But the enduring question Schleiermacher's argument poses is whether there are compelling reasons to retain the OT in the church's Bible without resorting to christological readings that deprive Judaism of its claim to it. Two important values are at stake here: the OT as a part of the Christian canon, on the one hand, and the intellectual integrity of OT exegesis and Christian theology, on the other. Unless his challenge can be met directly, the Christian claim to the OT cannot be justified theologically apart from a christological exegesis imposed on it from without.

[2] Klaus Beckmann, *Die fremde Wurzel. Altes Testament und Judentum in der evangelischen Theologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002) 31, 33.

[3] Karl Barth exclaimed: "A religio-historical understanding of the Old Testament in abstraction from the revelation of the risen Christ is simply an abandonment of the New Testament and of the sphere of the church in favor of that of the synagogue, and therefore in favor of an Old Testament . . . understood apart from its true object and content" (Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* [vol. 1.2 of *Church Dogmatics*; trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956] 489).

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As an exercise in historical theology this essay undertakes three distinct yet interrelated tasks: first, to analyze Schleiermacher's proposal in its own historical context; second, to offer a criticism of it drawing upon contemporary biblical scholarship; third, to propose an alternative theological construal of Christian faith and of the OT's importance for it. In contrast to Beckmann, however, my argument with Schleiermacher is an *internal* criticism that does not adopt a standpoint extrinsic to his point of departure. Precisely because his theological method requires any interpretation of Christian faith "to be subject to a process of continuous checking against the whole history of Christianity, as presented by contemporary historical research,"[4] his own position on the OT is subject to critique insofar as it assumes a view of Judaism and of early Christianity's relation to it no longer substantiated by historical research. Since, moreover, some of his material doctrinal conclusions are not required by his dogmatic method, other conclusions can be defended as more appropriate without abandoning his model of theology for another.

Schleiermacher's Argument about the Old Testament

Endorsing Semler's call for a "free investigation of the canon" unfettered by doctrinal constraints, Schleiermacher rejected the notion that "the sacred books require a hermeneutical and critical treatment departing from the generally valid rules" of interpretation.[5] For him, this freedom was an inviolable bequest from the Reformers whose aim was to let the Bible speak for itself apart from the yoke of ecclesiastical tradition. "It is thoroughly Protestant," he contended, "to allow everyone the free application of the exegetical art as based on philology."[6] He realized that this would occasion revision, and in some cases rejection, of certain cherished Protestant beliefs about the biblical canon, though he predicted that historical scholarship would prove to be more problematic for the OT than for the NT.[7] Although the documentary hypothesis had yet to receive its classic formulation from Wellhausen, there was already by Schleiermacher's time a well-established tradition of doubting Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Furthermore, critical scholarship was questioning the view that the prophets had predicted the coming of

[4] Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 99.

[5] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt* (ed. Martin Redeker; critical ed. based on the 2d German ed.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1960) § 130.2 (henceforth abbreviated as *Gl.* and cited by section and paragraph); ET, *The Christian Faith* (ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart; English translation of the 2d German ed. of 1830–31; Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976). Translations of Schleiermacher's texts are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[6] *Gl.* § 27.3.

[7] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Schleiermachers Sendschreiben über seine Glaubenslehre an Lücke* (ed. Hermann Mulert; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1908) 41–43; ET, *On the Glaubenslehre: Two Letters to Dr. Lücke* (trans. James Duke and Francis Fiorenza; American Academy of Religion Texts and Translations Series; Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1981) 65–67 (henceforth, page references to the English translation will be placed in parentheses).

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Christ and was beginning to look upon the prophetic oracles as messages addressed to the particular historical circumstances of their own times.[8]

Schleiermacher was convinced that the Christian effort to prove Jesus' messianic status on the basis of OT prophecy was a mistake and that the NT's appeal to it was strictly an intra-Jewish affair of the first century. He conceded that while a Jew of that time might well have become persuaded that the prophecies referred to Jesus, such an opinion necessarily presupposed faith in the inspiration of the Jewish scriptures that a Gentile convert could not have been expected to possess. Indeed, such proof had not really been decisive even for Jewish believers whose conversion was brought about by the powerful impression the personality of Jesus made upon them, not by arguments about prophecy. Hence, far from being troubled by the negative results of historical scholarship, Schleiermacher sought to put them to good theological use. The lesson to be learned is that faith in Jesus can stand on its own apart from appeals to the OT.[9]

Schleiermacher believed the time had come for the church to acknowledge that the OT is a "superfluous authority" for dogmatics. He justified this departure from Christian tradition by arguing that a doctrine taught only in the OT but not in the NT could hardly be said to possess a genuinely Christian character; by contrast, a doctrine taught only in the NT would not be questionable because nothing about it was to be found in the OT.[10] While there are few doctrines which at one time or another have not been justified by appealing to the OT, he was of the opinion that such appeals had done damage to the intellectual integrity of exegesis by foisting an alien meaning upon the text.[11] Moreover, they had unnecessarily muddied the later development of Christian doctrine: "we have to thank the dogmatic attachment to the Old Testament for much that is bad in our theology; and if Marcion had been correctly understood and not denounced as a heretic, our doctrine of God would have remained much purer."[12] Hence, both subdisciplines of theology, exegesis and dogmatics, have a stake in the question of the OT.[13]

Yet Schleiermacher did not actually call for the excision of the OT from the Bible. He recognized that the OT is the indispensable source for understanding the history of the Jewish people from which Jesus and his first disciples descended. For that reason alone, a thorough acquaintance with the OT is essential for grasping the many literary references and linguistic idioms of the NT writings, and Schleiermacher fully

[8] *Gl.* § 14, postscript.

[9] *Sendschreiben*, 42 (*On the Glaubenslehre*, 66).

[10] *Gl.* § 27.3.

[11] *Gl.* § 132.2.

[12] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Aus Schleiermacher's Leben in Briefen* (ed. Ludwig Jonas and Wilhelm Dilthey; 4 vols.; Berlin: Reimer, 1860–1863) 4:394.

[13] In Schleiermacher's model of theology, biblical exegesis is the first part of historical theology. See *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums zum Behuf einleitender Vorlesungen* (ed. Heinrich Scholz; critical ed.; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1961) § 85; ET, *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology* (trans. Terrence N. Tice; Atlanta: John Knox, 1977).

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expected ministerial candidates to know Hebrew and Aramaic as well as Greek.[14] His point, rather, is theological. He distinguished the historical fact of Christianity's origin in the Jewish milieu from the normative question of appealing to the OT in support of Christian doctrine. Since only the NT writings were produced under the influence of Jesus' ministry, they are the first in the series of presentations of Christian faith which alone can serve as the norm for all subsequent presentations of it.[15] Hence, however important its historical value for understanding the context of the NT, the OT should not be taken as canonical: "To include the Jewish codex within the canon means to view Christianity as a continuation of Judaism and is at odds with the idea of the canon."[16]

For Schleiermacher, early Christianity was a completely new religion and stood in the same relation, religiously speaking, to Judaism as to paganism, notwithstanding its historical ties to the former.[17] Whereas conversion to Christianity required that Gentiles abandon their idolatrous worship, it required that Jews relinquish the Mosaic legislation. Accordingly, the step from Judaism to Christianity was as much a transition to another religion as the step from paganism to Christianity. Schleiermacher anticipated the objection that there was a far greater leap "from the side of paganism, insofar as it first had to become monotheistic in order to become Christian."[18] He countered this objection by pointing out that the Gentiles had long been inclined toward monotheism through the influence of their own philosophers who for centuries had criticized Greco-Roman polytheism. Furthermore, Judaism at this time "was no longer based exclusively on Moses and the prophets" as a result of the many foreign influences it had incorporated since the Babylonian exile.[19] Seen in this light, the sharp dichotomy between Judaism and Hellenism breaks down and it is evident that the church was a new formation in the religious sphere: "if Christianity is related in the same way to Judaism as to paganism, then it can no more be a continuation of Judaism than a continuation of paganism."[20]

In opposition to the rationalism of the Enlightenment with its "natural religion," Schleiermacher set out to rehabilitate "positive" (i.e., historically given) religion, each instance of which is a unique entity with its own distinct identity or "essence." In order to identify the essence of any positive religion, it is necessary to specify four features: 1) its stage of religious development, 2) the type of religion it represents, 3) its central idea, and 4) its originating event.[21] Each positive religion has

[14] *Kurze Darstellung*, § 141.

[15] *Gl.* § 132; see also *Gl.* § 129.

[16] *Kurze Darstellung*, 47, n. 2 (*Brief Outline*, 53, n. 2).

[17] *Gl.* § 12.

[18] *Gl.* § 12.2.

[19] *Gl.* § 12.1.

[20] *Gl.* § 12.2.

[21] According to Schleiermacher, the definition of a religion's essence is designated a "critical inquiry" because the constant element in a historical phenomenon cannot be "ascertained in a merely empirical manner." He called this task "philosophical theology" (*Kurze Darstellung*, § 32; see also

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an "outward unity," reflecting a definite origin in history, and an "inward unity," which is a peculiar modification of the elements it shares with other faiths at the same stage and of the same type. Christianity's essence can thus be formulated as follows:

> Christianity is a monotheistic mode of faith, belonging to the teleological type of piety, and essentially distinguishes itself from other such modes of faith in that everything in it is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.[22]

Once the essence is ascertained, the relations of Christianity to other religions can be set forth with precision. Unlike premodern theologians Schleiermacher did not assume that monotheism was the earliest form of religion, although he did consider it to stand at the apex of human religious development. Judaism, too, is monotheistic and belongs to the "teleological" (or moral) type. Greco-Roman polytheism, however, not only reflects a lower stage of development but also belongs to the "aesthetic" type wherein the sense of moral obligation is not constitutive of the religious consciousness. Still, the contrast between Judaism and paganism with respect to stage and type of religion did not lead Schleiermacher to conclude that Christianity is related to Judaism in more than a merely external historical manner. He detected in Judaism an affinity with a less developed stage of religion ("fetishism") since its monotheism is corrupted by nationalism, whereas Christian monotheism is free of this defect.[23] And while the teleological character of Judaism is expressed in the form of obedience to law, in Christianity it assumes the form of exhortations indicating how moral action springs forth from the consciousness of redemption. So even in those respects which the two religions share, there are profound differences between them.[24] Since everything in Christianity is related to the redemptive efficacy of Jesus, "Christian piety, as it emerged right from the start, is not to be understood by means of the Jewish piety of that or of an earlier

Gl. § 21). Ernst Troeltsch correctly understood that the attempt to define the essence was a response to the dissolution of dogma's authority in the light of historical consciousness (Troeltsch,"What Does 'Essence of Christianity' Mean?," in *Ernst Troeltsch: Writings on Theology and Religion* [ed. Robert Morgan and Michael Pye; Atlanta: John Knox, 1977] 158, 177). Sykes comments: "Schleiermacher stumbles on a theological tool, namely that of the critical definition of the essence of Christianity, which meets the future exigencies of the impact of the biblical-critical movement on doctrinal theology" (*The Identity of Christianity*, 99).

[22] *Gl*. § 11.

[23] Schleiermacher wrote, "Christianity is the purest formation of monotheism to have emerged in history" (*Gl*. § 8.4). See Erhard Lucas, "Die Zuordnung von Judentum und Christentum von Schleiermacher bis Lagarde," *EvTh* 23 (1963) 590–607, esp. 590–93; also Ernst Katzer, "Schleiermacher und die alttestamentlich-jüdische Religion," *Neues Sächsisches Kirchenblatt* 26 (1919) 721–28, 737–44.

[24] Schleiermacher characterized "the two chief concepts of the Jewish religion" as "the divine election of the nation and divine retribution" (*Gl*. § 103.3).

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time: thus in no way can Christianity be viewed as a reshaping or a renewal of Judaism."[25]

Since the OT reflects Jewish religion, confusion as to the essential nature of Christianity necessarily arises from the traditional practice of placing both testaments on equal footing as two parts of one canon of scripture. The OT cannot be for Christians what it is for Jews, namely, an indivisible whole.[26] The OT contains elements that are foreign to the church so that "whatever is most definitely Jewish has least value" for Christians and even those passages in it that appear compatible with Christian piety are only "of a more general nature and not distinctively Christian."[27] Aside from the fact that the OT can be claimed as a Christian book only when exegetical violence is done to the plain historical meaning of its literal-grammatical sense, placing the OT on the same level as the NT diminishes the central significance of Jesus in an Ebionite (Jewish-Christian) manner. Moreover, those Christians who are especially fond of the OT evince a legalistic mentality not in keeping with the Christian conception of the moral life.[28]

Although his assessment of the OT is negative in its import for the church, it is necessary to recognize its double-sided character. The clear implication of Schleiermacher's argument is that Christians should acknowledge the integrity of Judaism as a distinct religion which is to be understood on its own terms quite apart from any relation to Christianity. As Joseph Pickle points out, "Schleiermacher's appreciative assessment of Judaism recognizes the uniqueness of Judaism and rejects attempts to treat it or the Old Testament as a *preparatio evangelii*."[29] Hence, Schleiermacher conceded that the OT really belongs to the synagogue, and not to the church, after all. The most important theologian of the nineteenth century thus

[25] *Gl.* § 12.2.

[26] The force of this observation is qualified when Schleiermacher insists upon the need for a critical investigation into the NT canon: "The Protestant Church necessarily claims to be continually occupied in determining the New Testament canon more exactly. The New Testament canon has obtained its present form through the decision of the Church," though "[t]his is not a decision to which we attribute an authority exalted above all inquiry." "It must be permissible, then . . . to have the canon in two forms: that which has been handed down historically and that which has been separated out critically" (*Brief Outline*, § 110, 114).

[27] *Gl.* § 12.3. Schleiermacher sometimes preached on OT texts. For analysis of these sermons, see Joachim Hoppe, "Altes Testament und alttestamentliche Predigt bei Schleiermacher," *Monatschrift für Pastoraltheologie* 54 (1965) 213–20, and Wolfgang Trillhaas, "Schleiermachers Predigten über alttestamentliche Texte," in *Schleiermacher und die wissenschaftliche Kultur des Christentums* (ed. Günther Meckenstock; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1991) 279–89.

[28] *Gl.* § 132.2. Schleiermacher said that "law is not originally a Christian term" (*Gl.* § 66.2). In his understanding of Christian ethics the imperative mood is replaced by a descriptive account of how Christians act in accordance with their religious consciousness. Though his statement implies that Judaism is "legalistic," the primary target of his criticism is the extremely conservative use of the OT by some Christians such as his Berlin colleague Hengstenberg who appealed to the OT to defend the institution of monarchy and to oppose the modern liberal state. See Beckmann, *Die fremde Wurzel*, 239–70.

[29] Joseph W. Pickle, "Schleiermacher on Judaism," *JR* 60 (1980) 115.

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departed from the classical Christian tradition by upholding the Jewish character of the OT. But precisely because the OT is Jewish, it cannot also be Christian.

Critique of Schleiermacher's Portrayal of Judaism and Early Christianity

Schleiermacher's methodological insistence upon the distinctiveness of each positive religion cleared the way for the possibility of an impartial historical treatment of Judaism in its own right. Nevertheless, his interpretation of Judaism betrays certain prejudices that reflect his own Christian starting point. Consequently, his reconstruction of the history of religion invites criticism to the extent that it fails to meet the requirements of a genuinely historical interpretation. Since his proposal regarding the OT is so closely tied to his view of the church's relation to Judaism, of chief concern here is his argument that Christianity is not to be understood as a continuation or development of Judaism.

The characterization of the OT as "Jewish" is subject to some important qualifications not made by Schleiermacher himself. He apparently assumed that Judaism was the religion of Israel even before the exile.[30] Yet modern study has shown that Judaism first began to take shape during the exilic crisis of Israel's earlier national religion and so is not identical with pre-exilic religion. This insight has ramifications for Schleiermacher's critique of Jewish monotheism as bearing an affinity with a lesser form of religion ("fetishism") on account of its ties to a particular nation. By comparison with Judaism, pre-exilic Israelite religion was not a thoroughgoing monotheism but, rather, a "henotheism" since Israel's national deity was not yet conceived consistently in radical terms as the creator and sovereign of the entire world. Accordingly, a genuine monotheism developed in consort with the emergence of Judaism, not in spite of it! While vestiges of the pre-monotheistic Israelite religion are embedded in older strata of the OT, these traditions were subject to reinterpretation from the monotheistic perspective of the Jewish redactors of the OT. Hence, Schleiermacher's criticism of Jewish monotheism as less than pure results, in part, from his lack of adequate knowledge of the actual historical relations between pre-exilic Israelite religion and post-exilic Jewish religion, including the theological struggle of monotheism with henotheism that is reflected in the literature of the OT. But this is not the entire explanation for his view. Curiously, Schleiermacher's critique of Judaism as particularistic shows the unwitting influence upon him of the Enlightenment's preference for a universal rational religion. The irony here is that he thereby betrayed his own groundbreaking recognition of the irreducibly particular nature of actual religion which he articulated

[30] It appears as though Schleiermacher viewed Moses as the founder of Judaism: "By 'Judaism' is understood primarily the Mosaic institutions, but also, as preparation for these, every earlier usage which abetted the segregation of the people" (*Gl.* § 12.1–2). He also characterized the religion of the pre-Mosaic period as "Abrahamitic Judaism," which is obviously anachronistic.

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in his polemic against "natural religion" as an artificial intellectual construct.[31] Judaism is constituted by the twin poles of universality (reflecting its monotheism) and particularity (rooted in its special vocation to bring all peoples to monotheism). But particularity is not the same as "particularism," just as universality is not identical with "universalism." Christianity is just as particular as and no less prone to particularism than Judaism.[32]

Schleiermacher's portrait does not, moreover, sufficiently differentiate the post-exilic Judaism that put its indelible stamp upon the final form of the OT from the Judaism of the rabbis after the destruction of the second temple. Judaism, as classically defined, is a post-Christian development that cannot be simply identified with the Jewish religion evident in the later formative period of the OT. Prior to the rabbinic period, there was no such thing as a monolithic or "orthodox" Judaism commanding the allegiance of all Jews. In fact, there were varieties of Judaism, each of which claimed to embody the authentic continuation of Israel's religious heritage. The crucial point is that the Bible (Tanakh/OT) does not belong to rabbinic Judaism in any simple sense. Indeed, the results of historical criticism have been no less troubling for traditional Jewish beliefs about the Bible.[33] While the OT is certainly Jewish, it is not to be equated with classical Judaism as though the latter were the inevitable outcome of the former.[34]

[31] Pickle points out that the emancipated Jews whom Schleiermacher knew held to these same views of Judaism on account of their commitment to the Enlightenment's ideal of a purely rational religion: "The uncompromising critic of natural religion sees, and tries to appreciate, Judaism in the guise formulated by passionate devotees of natural religion" (Pickle, "Schleiermacher on Judaism," 137). Pickle concludes that Schleiermacher's view of Judaism was not really negative so much as it was ambivalent.

[32] Schleiermacher's comparison of Jewish and Christian monotheisms results from an unfair juxtaposition of an actual Judaism and an idealized Christianity. Christianity has been particularistic (as distinct from historically particular) in its own way on account of the belief that "outside of the church there is no salvation." Finally, doubt must surely be cast on Schleiermacher's claim that monotheism has found its purest expression in Christianity when it is recalled that Jews and Muslims alike have traditionally looked upon trinitarianism as a relapse into polytheism. That he was sensitive to this criticism is evident from his plea for reconsideration of the Sabellian way of interpreting the trinitarian doctrine. See *Gl.* § 170–72.

[33] Tikva Frymer-Kensky writes: "The Bible is the source of halakic [legal] authority, but it does not function on its own and is not an independent source of authority in traditional Judaism. . . . [T]he Christian church was explicitly 'supersessionist.' It showed honor to and interest in the Hebrew Bible and claimed it as its own heritage, but it considered the New Testament as its foundational Scripture. . . . Judaism was almost equally supersessionist, but it did not make its supersessionism apparent. It behaved ritually as if the Torah was the central facet of Judaism, but it dictated the way that the Torah should be read" (Frymer-Kensky, "The Emergence of Jewish Biblical Theologies," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* [ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky; Atlanta: SBL, 2000] 111).

[34] Matthias Wolfes makes this pointed observation: "The equation of the Old Testament and Jewish religion carried out by Schleiermacher has, however, a fatal consequence for the theological evaluation of Judaism. For it denies to Judaism a capacity for renewal and development beyond the historical religious development attested in the biblical writings" (Matthias Wolfes, *Öffentlichkeit*

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Since the religion we now call "Christianity" began its existence as one variety of Judaism, it is anachronistic to describe it as a new religion in its original phase, as Schleiermacher did; indeed, it is difficult to identify at what stage in its history we can speak of it as a different religion from Judaism. Yet if this is the case, must we not grant that the NT, too, is in a real sense a document of Jewish religion? In his critique of Schleiermacher, Barth correctly understood that, humanly speaking, the entire Bible is

> a product of the Israelitish, or to put it more clearly, the Jewish spirit. This is true. . .of the whole Bible, even of the whole of the New Testament Bible. . . . If we want it otherwise, we will have to strike out not only the Old but all the New Testament as well. . . . The Bible is a Jewish book, the Jewish book.[35]

Although the NT is full of polemics against non-Christian Jews as well as against other Christians (Jewish and non-Jewish), it breathes throughout the spirit of Jewish piety.[36]

The historical picture is further complicated by the insight that all of these varieties of Judaism, including Christianity, were profoundly influenced by Hellenism. Wayne Meeks argues that " 'Judaism' was in some senses a Hellenistic religion. . . . Like the other varieties of Judaism, the earliest Christian groups were simultaneously Jewish and Hellenistic."[37] Yet Schleiermacher did not view Christianity as either Jewish or Hellenistic, and certainly not as simultaneously Jewish *and* Hellenistic, since for him it was a completely new formation equidistant from both Judaism and Hellenism. Although he perceived the influence on Judaism of what would later be called "syncretism," his mode of conceiving each religion as a distinct entity implies a view of the religions as having only external or accidental relations to one another. Even if we should wish to allow for a more dynamic model of their mutual relations, Schleiermacher's thesis that Christianity stood in the same relation of religious discontinuity to Judaism as to paganism is hardly persuasive. It is not clear, moreover, what we are to make of this rather surprising assessment given his classification of paganism as a polytheistic religion of the aesthetic (i.e., non-moral) type. On his own terms, this means that paganism not only represented a lower stage of religious development than Judaism but also

und Bürgergesellschaft. Friedrich Schleiermachers politische Wirksamkeit [New York and Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004] 2:374).

[35] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.2, 510. See also Julie Galambush, *The Reluctant Parting: How the New Testament's Jewish Writers Created a Christian Book* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2005).

[36] Since incipient Christianity was not homogenous, Wayne A. Meeks insists that we formulate better questions: "The questions that have to be asked are more particular: Which parts of the Jewish tradition were being assumed and reinterpreted by this or that group of early Christians? Which institutions were continued, which discarded?" (Meeks, "Judaism, Hellenism, and the Birth of Christianity," in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* [ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; Louisville: John Knox, 2001] 26).

[37] Meeks, "Judaism, Hellenism, and the Birth of Christianity," 24–26.

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differed in kind from it. Indeed, he invoked Greco-Roman paganism as his chief illustration of an aesthetic religion:

> What [in the history of religion] is most apparent to us, as being sharply opposed in this respect to Christianity, is not coordinate with it, but belongs to a lower level, namely, Greek polytheism. In this religion the teleological direction retreats completely; neither in their religious symbols nor in their mysteries is there any discernable trace of the idea of a totality of moral ends and of a relation of all human situations to this. . . . *Christianity, even apart from the fact that it occupies a higher level, is in the sharpest way opposed to this type*.[38]

It is pertinent to recall Schleiermacher's view that the "inward unity" of any positive religion is to be understood as a "peculiar modification" of that which is shared with religions of the same type and at the same stage of development.[39] Yet what else can this mean other than that early Christianity was a peculiar modification of Jewish religion?[40] In his lectures on hermeneutics where he attempted to sort out the differing relations of dependence upon Hebrew and Greek evident in the NT, Schleiermacher concluded:

> It is undeniable that the influence of Hebrew in the really religious terms is particularly great. For in what was originally Hellenic—particularly to the extent that it was known to the N.T. writers—the religious aspect which was to be newly developed (not only) found no point of contact, but even what was similar was rejected via its connection to polytheism.[41]

Here there appears to be an inconsistency in Schleiermacher's argument. From the perspective of hindsight, we know that what began as a Jewish sect developed into a distinct religious community whose self-definition had to be hammered out in polemics against rabbinic Judaism as well as against paganism. But from this fact of history it does not follow that the material substance of Christian religion is as discontinuous with Judaism as with the Hellenistic religions from which the church drew the majority of its converts. Schleiermacher was right to point out the philosophical developments on Greek soil that had prepared for the reception by non-Jews of a monotheistic and ethical religion. Yet his comparison of pagan converts to Jewish converts is misleading since the latter did not understand themselves as rejecting the legacy of Israel for a new religion but, rather, as embracing its fulfillment. This was clearly true of the apostle Paul.[42]

[38] *Gl*. § 9.2, emphasis added.

[39] Ibid.

[40] For an early critique of Schleiermacher's thought along these lines, see J. C. F. Steudel, "Über Schleiermacher's und Marheineke's Ansicht über das Alte Testament," in idem, *Vorlesungen über die Theologie des Alten Testaments* (ed. G. F. Oehler; Berlin: Reimer, 1840) 540–42. Studel represented the supernaturalist orthodox theology.

[41] *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Essays* (ed. Andrew Bowie; Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 42.

[42] Krister Stendahl cautions against speaking of "conversion" with respect to the apostle Paul

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The conclusion is unavoidable that the historical foundation of Schleiermacher's argument about the OT is inadequate inasmuch as it presupposes an undifferentiated view of pre-rabbinic Judaism as well as an interpretation of early Christianity as only accidentally related to the religious heritage of Judaism. For this reason, Pickle has rendered the following ironic verdict: "The advocate of historical-critical understanding accepts a view of Judaism that is utterly ahistorical."[43] While Schleiermacher cannot be held responsible for not having had the benefit of recent biblical scholarship at his disposal, it is nonetheless the case that his commitment to the historical-critical method invites these criticisms of his own historical reconstruction. In this connection, we are brought back to the idea that Christianity, like every other positive religion, has a distinguishing "essence" that identifies it as a unique entity in the religious realm. This idea was much debated in the nineteenth century. In the wake of the widespread acknowledgment of the demise of the orthodox doctrine of scripture, it answered the need for a conceptual tool to bridge the empirical study of history and the normative task of theology. On the other hand, the notion of a distinguishing "essence" presented its own problems. The ambiguity inherent in this notion is whether the essence of a religion is an abstraction from history intended merely to characterize a set of related phenomena or whether it is also meant to serve a critical purpose in relation to them.[44] In practice, it appears to do double duty in this regard, although this is not objectionable provided that the proper conceptual distinctions are made between these two functions.[45]

Schleiermacher reasoned that the essence of Christianity can be determined in a scholarly manner only by comparing Christianity to the other positive religions. In this he was surely correct. Two questions must be asked, however. The first is whether such a concept is not too static to do justice to the dynamic character of a movement in history. Given that religious traditions undergo real change

since it implies that he joined another religion. Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 7–23.

[43] Pickle, "Schleiermacher on Judaism," 137. Pickle goes on to say: "One can only wish that Schleiermacher's theological dispositions had been matched with an equally comprehensive awareness of Jewish piety, tradition, and insight. . . . Since theology is never a closed book, however, it falls to his admirers to improve—in his own spirit—upon his view of Judaism."

[44] The ambiguity involved in the idea of an "essence" is that it is not merely descriptive in intent but prescriptive as well. Its purpose, according to Troeltsch, is not only to indicate what distinguishes Christianity from other religions but also "to make possible an evaluation of what is essential [within Christianity], on the basis of which the inessential can be ignored and that which is contrary to the essence can be condemned" (Troeltsch, "What Does 'Essence of Christianity' Mean?" 144). The central problem in its deployment, as Troeltsch indicated, lies in "this unavoidable transition from an abstracted concept to an ideal concept" (158). Troeltsch thus called for a more careful distinction between "the properly historical" and "the philosophically historical, normative element."

[45] A helpful analogy may be found in thinking about the reasons why the United States was founded, such as democracy, freedom of religion, human rights, etc. This descriptive-historical judgment obviously entails normative implications for judging America as a nation in relation to these ideals.

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and development over time, does not the assumption of an essence hamper our appreciation of their dynamic character? This objection is valid whenever an abstract conception of a phenomenon is mistaken for the concrete phenomenon itself. But this confusion is not inevitable. Indeed, we cannot even speak of movements in history (say, the Renaissance or the Reformation) apart from the application of abstract concepts to the interpretation of the historian's empirical data. And all historians who are more than mere chroniclers necessarily hazard some general characterizations of broad movements in history and culture. This commonplace has to be stressed in response to those scholars who reject the very notion of an essence on the grounds that such an idea is foreign to temporal phenomena. No doubt, a large part of the problem stems from the connotations the word "essence" has acquired in our postmodern intellectual situation where "essentialisms" of one kind or another are rightly suspected of falsifying the complexity of reality. Yet it is erroneous to think that Schleiermacher intended to reify an abstraction. Although it may be desirable to come up with new terminology to designate such a conceptual operation, this does not obviate the need to specify wherein the enduring identity of a religious tradition consists if we wish to avoid a complete nominalism in historical interpretation.[46]

This recognition of the legitimacy, even indispensability, of inquiring into the essence leads to our second question, namely, whether the quest to define what makes Christianity distinctive must depend upon a comparison with the other religions that implies their inferiority. As I see it, there is no reason, for instance, why the identity of Christianity has to be purchased at the cost of a sharp contrast or opposition between it and Judaism given their inextricably close historical relations and substantial material overlaps. While Schleiermacher's concept of an essence can be defended in principle, his use of it in fact is vulnerable to this criticism.[47] Hence, an updated attempt to implement this task must renounce any apologetic motive when attempting to define the essence of Christianity in relation to Judaism. But in itself there is nothing wrong with his formal definition of Christianity's essence: like Judaism, it is an ethical monotheism; but unlike Judaism, its central figure is Jesus and its central idea is redemption from sin.[48]

[46] The German word *Wesen* can be translated either as "essence" or "nature." For my own constructive purposes in the next section, I employ the term "nature" to distinguish the material content of Schleiermacher's understanding of Christian faith from his formal statement of its "essence."

[47] John B. Cobb, Jr. criticizes the tradition of Schleiermacher: "[T]he question of the distinctive essence of Christianity was subordinated to that of its superiority to other religions in such a way that the former question was inadequately treated" (Cobb, *The Structure of Christian Existence* [New York: Seabury, 1967] 14).

[48] For an example of this sort of inquiry on the part of a liberal Jewish thinker, see Leo Baeck, *The Essence of Judaism* (trans. Victor Grubenwieser and Leonard Pearl; New York: Schocken, 1976).

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The Jewish Jesus and the Nature of Christian Faith

Schleiermacher posed the question: "Was Christianity something new or not?" In light of the foregoing discussion, the question should not be formulated so starkly as "new or not," since on historical grounds alone we have to say that Christianity was relatively new even if not absolutely so. Yet Schleiermacher disagreed. To his mind, Christianity represents an absolutely new beginning in the religious realm which cannot be explained by what preceded it historically. Here, however, we are dealing with more than a strictly historical judgment on his part since a particular theological construal of Christian faith co-determines his argument. He said as much in his lectures on hermeneutics: "The question cannot be decided in an immediately hermeneutic manner and therefore shows itself as a matter of conviction."[49] To be sure, in the final analysis how we think about Christianity's relation to Judaism (and, hence, to the OT) is a theological question, the answer to which is indicative of a theologian's entire construal of the nature of Christian faith. While one cannot move directly from history to theology in positivistic fashion, there is nonetheless a critical interrelation between the two, especially for a theologian who affirms without qualification the results of historical-critical study. Yet in moving from the empirical questions of the historian of religion to the normative questions of the theologian, a shift is being made from a standpoint "external" to Christianity to one that is "internal" to it.[50] Whereas the essence must be determined through comparative study, theology (in the sense of dogmatics or systematic theology) requires that the theologian stand within the church, sharing its distinctive religious experience, and seeking to give as accurate a description of it as possible.[51]

Though Schleiermacher is most often remembered for his famous redefinition of religion as "the feeling of absolute dependence," of greater importance perhaps was his proposal of a historicized model of dogmatics (*Glaubenslehre*) designed to transcend the dichotomy beyond supernaturalism and rationalism occasioned by the Enlightenment's challenge to the Reformation heritage. The components of this model are the following: first of all, faith is not an assent to doctrinal propositions, but a matter of the heart or, to use his terminology, the religious affections. Indeed, one may share Schleiermacher's affective view of faith without endorsing his theory of religion in every detail. Second, doctrines are understood as intellectual attempts to explicate the understanding of human existence in the world before God implicit in the Christian religious affections.[52] Third, historical study teaches

[49] *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 43, 41.

[50] *Gl.* § 11.5, 28.2.

[51] Faith in Christ, according to Schleiermacher, is "a purely factual certainty, but a certainty of a fact which is entirely inward" (*Gl.* § 14.1). Elsewhere he states: "This exposition is based entirely on the inner experience of the believer; its only purpose is to describe and elucidate that experience" (*Gl.* § 100.3).

[52] Schleiermacher exposited each doctrine in a threefold manner as a statement about the self, the world, and God (*Gl.* § 30).

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that the church's doctrines have changed over the course of time. Fourth, the task of dogmatics is to discern the logical or systematic connection between the various doctrinal *loci* as representing in their totality the historically particular experience of redemption through Christ that constitutes the church as a distinctive religious community.[53] Fifth, since dogmatics concerns the state of Christian doctrine in the present moment, it must be open to further doctrinal revision for the sake of the best contemporary understanding of the Christian religious affections wherein faith consists. Formal agreement with Schleiermacher's model and method of dogmatics does not, however, entail endorsing all of his material conclusions. This distinction between the formal and material elements in Schleiermacher's dogmatics is crucial if there is to be an internal criticism of his positions that does not—as in the case of an external criticism such as Beckmann's—presuppose a completely different conception of the theological enterprise.[54] In my judgment, there are three interrelated doctrines to be interrogated for the sake of proposing a revision of Schleiermacher's construal of the nature of Christian faith. These are: christology, soteriology, and the multiple meanings of revelation.

We cannot fail to notice what many scholars have labeled as Schleiermacher's "christocentrism." Of course, all Christian theology is christocentric in some sense inasmuch as the person of Jesus is the central revelation of God that constitutes the church as a distinct religious community. But Schleiermacher's theology is christocentric in a much stronger sense on account of his conviction that redemption from sin is mediated through Jesus alone. Schleiermacher affirmed that Jesus, by virtue of his incomparable relation to God, quite simply *is* the new element that cannot be explained by any historical antecedents. He conceived of Jesus as a person whose consciousness of God was unbroken by sin; indeed, the religious ideal for human existence became an actual fact in this one individual.[55] Here we meet the sole miracle in Schleiermacher's theology.[56] For him, denial of this claim would spell the end of Christian faith.[57] Still, he was certain that his view of Jesus was a necessary inference about who he really must have been given his actual redemptive influence upon the present religious experience of Christian believers. In spite of his assurance in this regard, however, there are grave problems with such an idea. For one thing, it is exceedingly difficult to imagine what it would mean to say of a real human being that he or she was entirely without sin.[58] It is easy to suspect a

[53] "Dogmatic propositions arise only from logically ordered reflection upon the immediate utterances of the religious self-consciousness" (*Gl.* § 16, postscript).

[54] Richard R. Niebuhr makes exactly the same point. See Richard Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction* (New York: Scribner, 1964) 16–17.

[55] *Gl.* § 93. Schleiermacher added that this perfect God-consciousness was "a veritable existence of God in him" (*Gl.* § 94). He thereby wished to indicate his continuity with the Alexandrian tradition.

[56] *Gl.* § 93.1–3.

[57] *Gl.* § 93.2.

[58] Leander E. Keck adds that there is no need to "presuppose 'sinless perfection' (to speak with

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"docetic" strain at work here, notwithstanding Schleiermacher's explicit rejection of this ancient heresy.[59] Moreover, the admittedly imperfect consciousness of God on the part of Christians does not require a perfect consciousness of God as its sufficient source, but merely a more powerful and vivid one.[60] Also, this conception has negative implications for the question of Jesus' relation to Judaism. In Susannah Heschel's analysis, Schleiermacher

> lifted Jesus from the realm of the human to a superhuman, if not supernatural, pedestal, by virtue of his extraordinary inner life. . . . As a result, Jesus' life as a Jew became fundamentally irrelevant to the crux of his exceptional role.[61]

Schleiermacher feared that if Jesus had not perfectly embodied the religious ideal, then he was "only a more or less original and revolutionary reformer of the Jewish law."[62]

It is pertinent to recall Schleiermacher's calm predication that historical-critical scholarship would be more damaging for the traditional Christian assessment of the OT than for that of the NT. Yet in no wise has the historical basis of Schleiermacher's theology been more badly shaken than by the subsequent course of research into the gospels as sources for our knowledge of who Jesus was. Schleiermacher was confident that John's gospel provides us with a reliable report of Jesus' teaching from which we can form a picture of his inner life.[63] Accordingly, the message proclaimed by Jesus was about his own unique relation to God. This assumption that the christological teaching of John's gospel accurately depicts what Jesus taught about himself in turn accounts for the antithetical relationship between Jesus and Judaism in Schleiermacher's interpretation.[64] But this view founders on

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Schleiermacher) in the event of Jesus" (Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981] 217).

[59] For Schleiermacher the two opposing christological heresies are the Ebionite (or "Nazarean") and the docetic; the former denies that Jesus is absolutely superior to all other persons by virtue of his God-consciousness and the latter denies that there is an essential likeness between him and all other persons (*Gl.* § 22.2). Docetism originally referred to the denial that Jesus had a real body and later to the denial that he had a rational human soul. Schleiermacher, of course, did not deny either of these; but his assertion of Jesus' absolutely perfect God-consciousness makes him categorically unlike everyone else.

[60] Schleiermacher acknowledged this point as a possible criticism of his doctrine but rejected it (*Gl.* § 93.1).

[61] Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 145.

[62] *Gl.* § 93.2.

[63] Schleiermacher defended the historical veracity of John's gospel in a note added to the third edition of the *Speeches* in 1821. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (trans. John Oman; New York: Harper and Row, 1958; repr., Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994) 262–63. In another place, Schleiermacher speculated on John's relation to Jesus: "In John's Gospel the interest is historical: was the author a contemporary witness?" (Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, 212).

[64] Horst Dietrich Preuss writes: "The opposition of Moses and Christ Schleiermacher takes from the Gospel of John which is also in other respects for him the most highly prized [of the

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the later insight of critical study that the synoptic gospels, not John, contain the most authentic reminiscences of Jesus' teachings. In his survey of the nineteenth century's quest for the historical Jesus, Albert Schweitzer concluded:

> Schleiermacher is not in search of the historical Jesus, but of the Jesus Christ of his own system of theology; that is to say, of the historic figure which seems to him appropriate to the self-consciousness of the redeemer as he presents it. . . . What is chiefly fatal to a sound historical view is his one-sided preference for the Fourth Gospel. It is, according to him, only in this Gospel that the consciousness of Jesus is truly reflected.[65]

If Schleiermacher had been constrained to base his view of Jesus' preaching on the evidence of the synoptic evangelists instead of relying on John, he would have been forced to confront head-on what became the major problem of NT scholarship in the nineteenth century: the relation between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

The only figure to the left of Schleiermacher analyzed in Beckmann's study is David Friedrich Strauss.[66] It was in the work of Strauss that this distinction became crucial for the scholarly study of the NT. Strauss, too, faulted Schleiermacher for teaching "not an historical, but an ideal Christ."[67] In sharp contrast to Schleiermacher, Strauss clearly saw that in his religion Jesus was a Jew and that the church's christology as reflected, for example, in John's gospel attests to what Christians later taught about Jesus after his death.[68] Yet Strauss understood that even in its christological faith the church was still primarily a Jewish phenomenon. The NT's witness to Jesus as the messiah was born of a lively continuation of religious motifs found in the OT.[69] Hence, for Strauss, the OT and its interpretation in second-temple Judaism were the formative influences upon the presentation of Jesus in

gospels], and perhaps this even played a role in determining his attitude to 'the Jews'" (Preuss, "Vom Verlust des Alten Testaments und seinen Folgen dargestellt anhand der Theologie und Predigt F. D. Schleiermachers," in *Lebendiger Umgang mit Schrift und Bekenntnis* [ed. Joachim Track; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1980] 144).

[65] Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (trans. W. Montgomery; New York: Macmillan, 1968) 62, 66.

[66] Beckmann, *Die fremde Wurzel*, 197–239.

[67] David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (ed. with an introduction by Peter C. Hodgson; trans. George Eliot; Lives of Jesus series; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 773.

[68] Beckmann, *Die fremde Wurzel*, 206.

[69] Ibid. Beckmann is troubled by the application of "myth" to the exegesis of the Bible as well as by the Hegelian interpretation of it given by Strauss, yet he correctly formulates the import of this hermeneutic for Strauss: "In his 'mythical' criticism of the gospels Strauss expressed in radical fashion the literary unity of the Old and New Testaments. In his view, the evangelical narratives arose from the living Jewish tradition. Since the New Testament writers intended to prove the messianic character of Jesus, the Jewish Bible was seen [by Strauss] as the decisive formative influence upon the evangelical texts. The Jewish-Old Testament myth about the messiah determined for Strauss not only the 'how' but already the 'that' of the narratives about Jesus as the Christ" (Ibid., 208). If Beckmann had been willing to follow Strauss down this path, he could have claimed that Strauss, not Hofmann, provided the best alternative to Schleiermacher's position. One need not endorse

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the gospels. Two consequences follow from this distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. First, Jesus did not teach the gospel that Christians later taught about him, as Schleiermacher mistakenly assumed.[70] Second, the actual content of Jesus' message can only be understood in relation to his Jewish context. This means that Jesus was a Jew, not a Christian.[71]

These considerations would require Schleiermacher to rethink the historical basis of his christological doctrine. More importantly, they would most certainly entail revision of his historical reconstruction of Jesus' teaching in the direction of what he pejoratively called "Ebionitism," i.e., a view that qualifies the absolute uniqueness of Jesus by stressing his continuity rather than discontinuity with Judaism. Schleiermacher well understood what this would mean for his theological position:

> If Christ was so constrained by the limitations of what was given at the time of his appearance, then even he and not least his entire work have to be capable of explanation from what was historically given to him; hence, Christianity as a whole could be understood to have emerged from Judaism at the particular stage of its development that it had attained at that time, the stage at which a person like Jesus could have come forth from its womb.[72]

This alternative view which was rejected by Schleiermacher is, however, completely in keeping with the results of contemporary scholarship on Jesus. Hence, if we are in earnest about the historical Jesus, as Schleiermacher was in principle, we have to surrender unhistorical claims that insulate Jesus' religiosity from his Jewish milieu.[73] We may properly seek to delineate Jesus' distinctiveness in relation to his milieu, but this is not to deny that the religion he taught was a form of Judaism. Though Schleiermacher insisted upon the Jewish character of the OT, he did not view the OT as a document of equal religious value to the NT.[74] This assessment reflects his conviction that Christianity is not only a different religion from Judaism but also superior to it. He further assumed that this view was consonant with what Jesus taught. This claim is now undermined by the insight that Jesus was wholly rooted in the Jewish tradition.

Strauss clearly saw that it is no longer possible to assume an identity between the church's proclamation *about* Jesus and the proclamation *of* Jesus. But if the church's

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the Hegelianism of Strauss as a condition for recognizing the importance of myth as a category of biblical interpretation.

[70] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1951, 1955) 1:3.

[71] Hans Dieter Betz, "Wellhausen's Dictum 'Jesus was not a Christian, but a Jew' in Light of Present Scholarship," *StTh* 45 (1991) 83–110.

[72] *Gl.* § 93.2.

[73] Schleiermacher was the first to offer a course of lectures on the life of Jesus in 1819, thereby helping to launch the nineteenth century's quest for the historical Jesus. *The Life of Jesus* (ed. Jack C. Verheyden; trans. S. MacLean Gilmour; Lives of Jesus series; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

[74] Beckmann, *Die Fremde Wurzel*, 133 n. 530.

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kerygma represents a development beyond what the historical Jesus taught, the question arises as to how we are to understand the material relation between them.[75] Although the christological faith of the church is not based directly on the teachings of Jesus, it nonetheless first arose in response to his distinctive embodiment of Jewish faith.[76] His central message concerned the coming of God's sovereign reign ("the kingdom of God") and he called upon his fellow Jews to be prepared to receive it. As such, his preaching was about God, not about himself.[77] Without rejecting the Torah in principle, he differentiated between greater and lesser commandments in it. He continued aspects of the prophetic tradition in his concern for the poor and the oppressed. He pointed to evidence of God's providential care in the ordering of nature as had Israel's wisdom teachers before him. In all these respects, Jesus' teaching and ministry were firmly rooted in the OT/Jewish tradition. H. Richard Niebuhr spoke of the faith that came to expression in Jesus' words and deeds as a paradigmatic illustration of Israel's "radical" or thoroughgoing monotheism. The historic significance of early Christianity, as Niebuhr noted, is that it made this faith available to non-Jews without requiring of them conversion to Judaism.[78] This crucial step obviously required a critical sifting of the Jewish scriptures for the purpose of discerning what was still valid for the new community under altered circumstances. But this development did not negate the material connection between Jesus' faith in God and the faith of Israel to which he was heir. Rudolf Bultmann emphasized that no matter how critical Jesus may have been in relation to the other Jewish teachers of his day, the content of his preaching was

> nothing else than true Old Testament-Jewish faith in God radicalized in the direction of the great prophets' preaching. . . . [T]he concepts of God, world, and man, of Law and grace, of repentance and forgiveness in the teaching of Jesus are not new in comparison with those of the Old Testament and Judaism, however radically they may be understood. And his critical interpretation

[75] When I employ the phrase "historical Jesus," I simply mean the earliest layers of the synoptic tradition that have the greatest claim to reflect the authentic words of Jesus, though these can never be completely reconstructed with absolute assurance. Such historical judgments are always matters of probability. Schubert M. Ogden helpfully points out that the earliest, non-christological stratum of the synoptic tradition has a *kerygmatic* intent inasmuch as it seeks to confront the hearer/reader with the same decision for God called for by Jesus' words (*The Point of Christology* [San Francisco: Harper, 1982]112–15).

[76] This way of posing the question of the material continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith was the signal contribution of the post-Bultmannian "New Quest" initiated by Ernst Käsemann. See Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," *Essays on New Testament Themes* (trans. W. J. Montague; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 15–47.

[77] Adolf von Harnack correctly understood that Jesus "desired no other belief in his person and no other attachment to it than is contained in the keeping of his commandments" (*What is Christianity?* [trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders; Fortress Texts in Modern Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986] 125).

[78] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper, 1970) 39–40.

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> of the Law, in spite of its radicality, likewise stands within the scribal discussion about it.[79]

Even the love-command that has been so important in Christian ethics is derived from Jesus' summary of the Torah. Correctly understood, then, the faith of Christians is not opposed to the Jewish faith of Jesus; rather, it is trust in and loyalty to God *through* Jesus.[80] "Christian faith is not belief in a miracle," not even the miracle of Jesus' sinless perfection, but "the confidence that Jesus' witness [to God] is a true one."[81] Hence, Christian faith cannot be construed as standing in a completely antithetical relationship to Judaism without pitting itself against Jesus' own faith as a devout Jew.

Claude Welch is correct in characterizing Schleiermacher's position as representing only a "halfway" solution to the modern problem of christology. Unlike the classical problem of trying to affirm Jesus' humanity given the prior assumption of his self-evident divinity, the modern problem was to ask in what sense Jesus could be divine given his genuine humanity.[82] But it is possible to go further than Welch does by arguing that even this new formulation of the christological problem is flawed insofar as it asks "about the being of Jesus in himself, as distinct from asking about the meaning of Jesus for us."[83] Instead of asking about Jesus' own relation to God (about which we could know next to nothing in any case), we should be asking another question: what does Jesus mean for those persons who have experienced redemption as a result of their encounter with him? Christological reflection thus properly begins, not with a question about the being of Jesus in relation to either divinity or humanity, but with the given fact of his salvific impact upon those who call themselves "Christians." The question "What does Jesus actually do for Christians?" is, as Brian Gerrish rightly notes, "the crucial one to ask in any Christian community, if the christological project is to be duly launched."[84] It is this aspect of Schleiermacher's approach—namely, his insistence that christology arises from reflection upon Jesus' redemptive influence— that remains worthy of development

[79] Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:34–35. Bultmann says that this continuity between Jesus and his Jewish heritage explains why "modern liberal Judaism can very well esteem Jesus as teacher."

[80] Troeltsch wrote: "In the absence of historical-critical thinking, Jesus was naturally identified with God in order that he might be the immediate object of faith; with critical thinking, the God of Jesus becomes the object of faith, and Jesus is transformed into the historical mediator and revealer" ("The Dogmatics of the History-of Religions School," in *Religion in History* [trans. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991] 98).

[81] Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 274.

[82] Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (2 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972–1985) 1:83–84.

[83] Ogden, *The Point of Christology*, 16.

[84] B. A. Gerrish, *Saving and Secular Faith: An Invitation to Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 98. Gerrish likens this logic of christological reflection to that found in Athanasius and Luther.

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since, if pursued consistently, it would allow us to state the meaning of Jesus for contemporary Christian experience while leaving behind untenable claims about the historical Jesus and his supposedly sinless relation to God.

If we ask how Jesus is efficacious in a redemptive manner today, we have to address the role of preaching in the church. Although Schleiermacher affirmed that the faith of Christians in every age is none other than that experienced by Jesus' original disciples, he did acknowledge a difference in the medium through which this faith has been evoked and sustained:

> To us is given, instead of [Jesus'] personal efficacy, only that of his community insofar as even the picture (*Bild*) of him found in the Bible likewise only came into being and persists because of it.[85]

After Jesus' death, it is the NT's portrait of him that serves as the occasion for an experience of redemption. This biblical picture of Christ thus takes the place that Jesus once had in relation to those who came into personal contact with him. In this respect, the church's proclamation can be understood as a continuation of Jesus' ministry. Such a focus on the NT's depiction of Jesus and its actualization in the church's preaching does not require assertions about Jesus that exempt him from the contingencies of his own historical circumstance as well as from our common humanity.

This modification of Schleiermacher's proposed avenue to christological reflection need not entail the problematic conclusion that redemption from sin can be achieved only through an encounter with Jesus, an assumption he shared with the classical tradition that he in other ways sought to revise. Not only is redemption for Schleiermacher the central idea in the Christian religion, but Jesus is its only mediator.[86] He spoke of "the conviction, which we assume every Christian to possess, of the exclusive superiority of Christianity" without, however, giving a satisfactory explanation as to why we should be convinced of this.[87] A paradox in Schleiermacher's thought is precisely how this "absolutist" conception of christology and soteriology is to be related to his celebration of diversity in religion.[88] Whereas the premodern tradition had seen in religious diversity a symptom of sin, Schleiermacher viewed it as reflecting the varying historical circumstances in which religions originate and develop. It appears, however, as though he wanted to have it both ways: while an appreciation of diversity is ingredient in a genuinely historical understanding of religion, all Christians are nonetheless agreed that redemption can come only through Jesus. But this latter assertion reflects an absolutizing of what is historically relative and thus is contrary to a truly historical viewpoint. We must

[85] *Gl*. § 88.2.

[86] *Gl*. § 11.3.

[87] *Gl*. § 7.3.

[88] Wesley J. Wildman defines the "Absolutist Principle" as "the proposition that Jesus Christ is absolutely, universally, uniquely, unsurpassably significant for revelation and soteriology" ("Basic Christological Distinctions," *TD* 64 [2007] 299).

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find some distinction that will allow us to extricate ourselves from this contradiction while still acknowledging the legitimate motive that misled Schleiermacher to fall victim to it. A descriptive account of the Christian religious experience rightly emphasizes what Schleiermacher understood, namely, that Christians are those who are certain that their own experience of redemption is constituted by a relation to Jesus. The Christian religious affections thus have a necessary connection to the figure of Jesus as mediated by the church's gospel. Yet it does not follow that a redemptive experience of God must always be constituted by a relation to Jesus. Such a claim exceeds the bounds of Schleiermacher's method of dogmatics, which cannot render judgments about non-Christian religious experience.

Wesley Wildman, tracing what he calls "the Absolutist Principle" back to the church's earliest stages of christological reflection, explains the basic confusion here:

> The origins of the Absolutist Principle are understandable, as Christians sought to account for their powerful experiences of salvation in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, there were never any compelling reasons for absolutizing the interpretation of those transforming experiences. The significance of Jesus Christ could be adequately and accurately expressed without the aid of the Absolutist Principle.[89]

This brand of christocentrism and its corollary that salvation is a human possibility solely in connection with Jesus are, in Wildman's view, the major doctrinal factors that have also created the problem of the church's relation to Judaism. The church's traditional polemic against the synagogue is a consequence of universalizing its historically particular religious experience so that those who stand in other streams of religious history are viewed as simply bereft of anything like the redemptive benefits that accrue to Christians as a result of their relation to Jesus. In place of absolutism, Wildman proposes a "modest" christological conception that does not make such exaggerated claims.

> Modest christologies have tremendous advantages over their absolutist counterparts because they are not required to adopt the view that cosmic history and religious insight reach their culmination in the figure of Jesus and in his reception as the Christ.[90]

Niebuhr, who was conscious of his formal continuity with Schleiermacher's method, made virtually the same point: "A critical historical theology cannot . . . prescribe what form religious life must take in all places and all times beyond the limits of its own historical system."[91] By declaring that apart from Jesus the consciousness of God is tainted and impure, Schleiermacher violated the strictures of his own

[89] Wildman, "Basic Christological Distinctions," 302.

[90] Ibid., 303.

[91] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941) 13. Niebuhr's work is an example of how a theologian employing a "confessional" theological method quite similar to that of Schleiermacher can nonetheless put different material content into it.

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theological method, which only allows for a descriptive account of the *Christian* religious experience.[92]

Schleiermacher did not derive all knowledge of God exclusively from Christ in Barthian fashion. The revelation in Christ has a "point of contact" (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) in the innate awareness of God given with human self-consciousness simply as such.[93] Moreover, in Schleiermacher's usage, "revelation" is not a theological principle that stands in an oppositional relation to the mode of understanding to be derived from the historical interpretation of religion, as is the case with Barth (and presumably also Beckmann). Revelation, for Schleiermacher, refers either to the original revelation of God to human self-consciousness or to the historical revelation in Christ that is the basis of the church's proclamation. Still, it may be asked whether there is not also a third sense in which we can and should speak of revelation in reference to that religious development wherein the original revelation, which in itself may be quite inchoate, did in fact become a clear monotheistic consciousness of God. Paul Tillich, a theologian who was quite explicit about his indebtedness to Schleiermacher, made precisely this point when he differentiated between three senses of revelation as "universal," "preparatory," and "final."[94] Since the meanings of "universal" and "final" are sufficiently similar to the two senses of revelation found in Schleiermacher's thought, we ought to inquire into what Tillich meant by a "preparatory" revelation. Speaking as a Christian for whom Jesus as the Christ is the final revelatory event in history, Tillich nevertheless attributed an unparalleled significance to the history of Israel:

> The revelation through the prophets is the direct concrete preparation of the final revelation, and it cannot be separated from it. The universal revelation as such is not the immediate preparation for the final revelation; only the universal revelation criticized and transformed by the prophetism of the Old Testament is such preparation.[95]

Tillich thus claimed that "the Old Testament is an inseparable part of the revelation of Jesus as the Christ."[96] What is apparent in Tillich, though missing from Schleiermacher, is a deep appreciation of the religious significance of Israel's history as having provided the indispensable presupposition of the church's faith in Jesus.[97]

[92] *Gl.* § 94.2.

[93] Schleiermacher called this "an original revelation of God to the human being" (*Gl.* § 4.4).

[94] Hans W. Frei called Tillich "Schleiermacher redivivus." Frei, *Types of Modern Theology* (ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 3, 68.

[95] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, 1957, 1963) 1:142.

[96] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:133.

[97] Tillich responded to the charge that Judaism is inherently nationalistic: "The Old Testament certainly is full of Jewish nationalism, but it appears over and over as that against which the Old Testament fights" (*Systematic Theology*, 1:142). Such a nuanced approach is absent from Schleiermacher's portrayal.

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Schleiermacher was right to locate what is new about Christianity in the religious significance Jesus has for Christians. But to say that Jesus is of central importance to Christians is not to say that everything important in Christianity began with him. Nonetheless, there is one respect in which Schleiermacher credited the history of Israel, namely, when he said that a universal redeemer could only have come from a monotheistic people.[98] He also acknowledged that the Christian notion of redemption, presupposing as it does the reality of freedom and consequently of guilt on account of sin, is intelligible solely on the basis of the teleological type of religion which first emerged in Israel. Are these not admissions that, apart from the prior religious development in Israel, the church could never have arisen in the first place? On his own terms, would it not be possible for Schleiermacher to grant the truth in what Tillich said since he well understood that ethical monotheism is an ingredient in the Christian religious experience?[99]

Cumulatively, these various considerations more than suffice to justify the conclusion that Schleiermacher's formal method of theology allows for a revision of his material positions in the doctrinal *loci* of christology, soteriology, and the multiple meanings of revelation. While Schleiermacher was correct to identify the essence of Christian faith as monotheistic and ethical and focused on the figure of Jesus for the purpose of redemption from sin, he was wrong to draw such a sharp antithesis between Israel's faith and that of the church. Indeed, there is every reason to affirm a strong material connection between the Jewish message of Jesus and the church's proclamation of his ongoing significance. Christians need not deny the indispensable role played by the Israelite-Jewish tradition in establishing precisely those presuppositions without which neither Jesus nor the church would have been possible and on the sole basis of which their fundamental import is intelligible. Of course, to say that these alternatives to Schleiermacher's own views are allowed by his method is not to imply that he personally would have agreed with them. The point is simply that another theologian, working from the same model for theological inquiry initially proposed by Schleiermacher, can arrive at a different construal of the nature of Christian faith that likewise claims to be a faithful rendering of the religious affections evoked and sustained by the church's preaching. It is not necessary to demonstrate more than this in order to make a convincing case that Schleiermacher's material interpretation of doctrine can be criticized according to the methodological criteria he set forth as adequate to the unprecedented responsibilities of modern theology. All the same, this alternative proposal has the advantage that it coheres with the best historical scholarship in a way no longer true of Schleiermacher's theology.[100]

[98] *Gl.* § 12.1.

[99] In a handwritten marginal comment, Schleiermacher did attribute the emergence of monotheism to "revelation" (*Gl.* § 2:502, 504, notes to § 10 and 15 from the first German edition of 1821–1822).

[100] Not only could Schleiermacher's method have allowed him to paint a more positive portrait of Judaism, but Jewish theologians could easily avail themselves, *mutatis mutandis*, of his formal

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Historical Criticism and the Canon of Scripture

The question of the OT's right to a place in the Christian Bible did not first arise with historical criticism. Quite early in the church's history, the OT became problematic because it was also the Bible of the synagogue (Tanakh). Since Marcion believed that Jesus taught an altogether new religion antithetical to Judaism, he was completely consistent in arguing that the church should dispense with the Jewish Bible in favor of a canon of distinctively Christian writings. Yet he was alone in his categorical rejection of all spiritualizing modes of exegesis. When the proto-orthodox church repudiated Marcion's proposal by retaining the OT as the first part of its canon, it simultaneously rejected his insistence upon the literal sense of the text.[101] The church thereby secured its christological exegesis of the OT, which backed up its claim that Israel's scriptures belong to the Christians, not to the Jews. For this reason, the anti-Marcionite church never refuted Marcion on his own terms, but rather implicitly accepted his formulation of the crucial issue: if the OT is not Christian, it cannot be canonical.

Although Schleiermacher shared Marcion's view of the absolute novelty of Christianity in relation to Judaism, he did not defend it on the mythological grounds that Jews and Christians worship two distinct deities. On the basis of historical scholarship, he recognized the real differences between the OT and the NT that had been smoothed over by premodern forms of exegesis; as a result, he was right in criticizing previous theologians for trying to make the OT say something about Jesus that it does not say. His argument underscored the legitimate rationale for historical criticism, namely, that it alone makes possible an understanding of the biblical texts free from the distortions of anachronism.[102] Indeed, it is to his credit that he frankly acknowledged the Jewish character of the OT and pleaded for an end to the church's historic polemic against the synagogue over its rightful possession. He

model of theology.

[101] Jaroslav Pelikan notes: "The Old Testament achieved and maintained its status as Christian Scripture with the aid of spiritual exegesis. There was no early Christian who simultaneously acknowledged the doctrinal authority of the Old Testament and interpreted it literally" (*The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition 100–600* [vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition*; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971] 81).

[102] Today, historical-critical readings of scripture have to be defended against attacks from both ends of the theological spectrum. From the right, Christopher R. Seitz, seeking to rehabilitate a traditional view of biblical authority, denies that historical-critical study has any constitutive significance for theology (*Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004] 97). John J. Collins provides a cogent rejoinder to this type of conservative argument ("Biblical Theology and the History of Israelite Religion," *Encounters with Biblical Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005] 33). On the left, Dale B. Martin, working from a "postmodern" position, argues against "the notion that Christians should insist on the *necessity* of historical criticism" (*Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* [Louisville: John Knox, 2006] 9). For a critique of this type of argument, see Collins, "Historical Criticism and Its Postmodern Critics," *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 9–25.

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was, moreover, prescient in his prediction that critical scholarship would occasion difficult problems for the church's inherited theology.

For the sake of arriving at a different conclusion than Schleiermacher's about the OT's place in the Christian canon, must we abandon the strictly historical perspective in favor of a special theological or "sacred" hermeneutic that treats the Bible as a unique case to which the general rules of interpretation do not apply? Should these turn out to be in fact our only options, then modern Protestant theology has certainly been brought to an impasse by historical criticism. But there is another option beyond this impasse that has not been sufficiently considered. Beckmann's inadequacy is that he never thinks of arguing against Schleiermacher's thesis on the basis of the latter's own hermeneutical presuppositions. This failing mirrors that of nascent orthodoxy, which was unable to reply to Marcion except by evading his direct challenge. Like Hofmann and Barth, Beckmann tips his hat to the legitimacy of historical-critical readings of the Bible in principle but only to shift the grounds of discussion by appealing to dogmatic categories of interpretation derived from the NT in order to argue for the canonical status of the OT. The irony here is that Beckmann has tacitly accepted Schleiermacher's neo-Marcionite formulation of the basic issue: either the OT is not strictly speaking a Christian book, in which case the church should hand it back to the synagogue, or the true meaning of the OT consists in its prophetic witness to Jesus as Israel's messiah, in which case the Jews' claim to it is invalidated by their lack of faith in its christological referent. After his otherwise admirable recounting of the story of historical-critical research into the OT, Beckmann concludes with this pronouncement: "For the sake of the faith affirmed in the New Testament, Christian theologians must insist against the Jewish 'no' that Jesus of Nazareth is the messiah promised in the Old Testament."[103] But it can be asked of Beckmann why Christian theologians must continue to press this claim. Not only has historical research into the OT undermined the traditional "proofs" of Jesus' messianic status, but even the very idea of a "messiah" appears to be a mythological or symbolic one, as Strauss clearly understood.[104] Moreover, the early Christians, by ascribing this title to Jesus, radically redefined its content in light of his non-messianic fate. Drawing a very different conclusion from historical study, Rabbi Michael Hilton calls upon Jews and Christians to revise their theological traditions on the basis of a "more accurate understanding . . . of the relationship between the two faiths":

> We cannot afford the two faiths an equal and distinct right to exist while we continue to regard Judaism as the unchanged word of the Bible from which

[103] Beckmann, *Die fremde Wurzel*, 349.

[104] Many modern Jews also acknowledge the mythological or symbolic character of the messianic idea. See the Prayer Book of Conservative Judaism, *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly of America and the United Synagogue of America, 1973) ix.

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> Christianity deviated, or Christianity the true fulfillment of the prophets which the Jews rejected.[105]

Hilton's proposal thus points the way beyond that untenable impasse of either an OT historically interpreted as a document of Jewish religion and, hence, antithetical to Christianity (Marcion, Schleiermacher, Harnack) or an OT spiritually interpreted as a witness to Christian faith and, hence, denied to Judaism (Hofmann, Barth, Beckmann).

The modern impasse in Protestant theology with respect to the OT results from the dual legacy of the Reformation. The Reformers insisted that the Bible be allowed to speak in its own voice and that the Bible should be the sole norm of Christian doctrine. Their rejection of the allegorical method and correlative insistence upon a literal exegesis undergirded their use of the Bible as the critical principle for testing the medieval tradition. Prior to modernity, these two commitments could be affirmed simultaneously because it was axiomatic that the Bible as a whole provided an unambiguous foundation for doctrine. But in the modern period, these two aspects of the Reformation heritage came into conflict. Historical scholarship not only separated OT and NT into distinct fields of study but also identified within each testament diverse theological traditions that could not easily be harmonized. Perceiving the problem, Schleiermacher fought against an uncritical use of the Bible as a proof text for doctrine. For him, this entailed three departures from the inherited approach to the scriptures: first, the "true" or normative NT canon has to be critically distinguished from its received historical form; second, the NT should not be used to support Protestant doctrine against Catholicism; and, third, the OT cannot be invoked to defend Christianity against Judaism. The first two points are relatively non-controversial in theology today. Still, his handling of the OT continues to be denounced. Yet the usual alternative to it, illustrated by Beckmann, is even more problematic. Schubert Ogden locates the problem here in the assumption that the OT is to be judged by the same critical norm as is the NT.

> The usual view on this point in recent Protestant theology is, in effect, this: just as the New Testament is to be used by theology only under the control of the New Testament message, so the Old Testament's authority for theological reflection and argument is subject to that of the New. But . . . this familiar view of the use of the Old Testament is now scarcely less untenable than the views of the Reformers and of the orthodox dogmaticians of which it is a revision. . . . That the New Testament is to be used in theology only under the authority of the Jesus-kerygma poses no particular difficulty, since the New Testament's writings . . . expressly have to do with the subject-term of this kerygma, that is, with Jesus. . . . However, we now recognize that it is historically false as well as theologically misleading to claim that the Old Testament writings, too, are expressly about Jesus. . . .

[105] Michael Hilton, *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (London: SCM, 1994) 2.

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> [R]ecognizing that the Old Testament does not bear witness to Christ prophetically in the sense in which the early church understood it to do and, therefore, at the crucial point is *not* like the New, forces the question whether the Old Testament may be properly used as a theological authority at all.[106]

Here Ogden formulates the theological question of the OT in the only way it can be taken seriously on the basis of Schleiermacher's premises. This question can be rephrased by asking whether Schleiermacher's perfectly sound argument against an illicit use of the OT in Christian theology precludes altogether the possibility of an admissible use therein.

Since Schleiermacher acknowledged the necessity of a theological criticism (*Sachkritik*) of the NT scriptures, there is no reason in principle not to insist upon a similar approach to the OT. Only in this case the theological criterion should not be the *kerygma* as in the NT, but rather the indispensable monotheistic-ethical presuppositions on the sole basis of which the NT's christological and soteriological affirmations are intelligible and apart from which they are easily distorted in a dualistic and polytheistic manner. Accordingly, the OT's enduring import for the church is to insure that its faith is never interpreted in such a manner that explicitly contradicts or even implicitly denies these presuppositions which are contained in all authentic proclamation of the gospel.[107] That the ethical monotheism to which the OT bears definitive witness has as a matter of fact actually functioned in this sense as a necessary—though not sufficient—norm by which to test the adequacy of the various interpretations of the gospel found in the NT and the post-biblical tradition is ample warrant for deeming the OT to be of indispensable *religious* and *theological* value to Christian faith.[108] This rationale for attributing a definite sort of canonical status to the OT—different from that of the NT but no less important—does not sidestep the challenge of historical criticism to traditional theology. It also validates the legitimate motive at work in the ancient church's retention of the OT without endorsing the inadequate argumentation on which it based this decision.[109]

[106] Schubert M. Ogden, "The Authority of Scripture for Theology," *On Theology* (San Francisco: Harper, 1986) 65–66.

[107] Schleiermacher said of the less distinctively Christian doctrines elaborated in the first part of his dogmatics that they are "both presupposed by and contained in every Christian religious affection" (*Gl.* § 32).

[108] Rolf P. Knierim asks "whether the understanding of Christ as expressed in diverse theological interpretations triggered by the New Testament is at times so controversial among Christians, today as throughout history, that they reflect a polytheistic more than a monotheistic Christology or Christianity" (*The Task of Old Testament Theology: Method and Cases* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995] 7, n. 5).

[109] Neither Marcion and nor the Gnostics were monotheists. Hence, the decision to retain the OT was simultaneously a reassertion of monotheism as the indispensable presupposition of Christian faith. For an example of how the OT's witness to monotheism functioned as a constraint upon the development of trinitarian doctrine, see Gregory of Nyssa, "Concerning We Should Think of Saying that There are Not Three Gods to Ablabius," *The Trinitarian Controversy* (trans. William G. Rusch; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 151.

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Not the least advantage of this alternative systematic proposal for formulating both the question and its answer is that it is not constrained to secure its positive valuation of the OT by diminishing the import of historical criticism, thus pitting a special theological hermeneutic against a so-called "general" hermeneutic.[110] Moreover, it does not entail a denial of the synagogue's equally valid claim to possession of Israel's scripture.[111]

Ernst Troeltsch, who pursued the theological implications of a consistently historical approach to religion more fully than anyone either before or after him, noted that "the strictly historical interpretation of Christianity has made tremendous strides and has furnished a historical-critical picture very different from that which lay before . . . Schleiermacher."[112] Regarding the OT, he affirmed: "To acknowledge Christianity . . . is also to recognize the religion of Israel as its prior stage and presupposition, for without it, Christianity is incomprehensible."[113] Nonetheless, he gave this positive assessment of Schleiermacher's new departure for modern theology: "His program simply needs to be carried out consistently. Hardly any change is necessary."[114] While Schleiermacher's execution of his self-appointed task is justifiably subject to criticism, we must look upon his program for theology as "*an unfulfilled possibility* and not as an accomplishment forever witnessing to the errors following from his methodological starting point."[115]

Perhaps the true service of historical theology consists not only in providing new angles of vision that illuminate the ambiguities of our religious past, but also in reminding us of unfinished business that has to be on any agenda for future constructive work.

[110] James Barr identifies the usual false dichotomy at work here: "It is sometimes said that the historical relation between the Old and New Testaments is not in question, but that the problem lies in stating a theological relation. The theological relation, however, cannot be the formation of connections *other than* the historical; it must rather be the seeing of theological values *in* the historical connections" (*Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testaments* [London: SCM, 1966] 31).

[111] Ogden submits that "the key" to answering the question of the OT lies in "the insight that the writings of the Old Testament contain the most fundamental presuppositions . . . of the Jesus-kerygma. . . . But if this is correct, there is no doubt that the Old Testament, in its way, is also a theological authority, nor does using it as such pose any particular difficulty" (Ogden, "The Authority of Scripture for Theology," 66–67).

[112] "The Dogmatics of the History-of-Religions School," 93.

[113] Ernst Troeltsch, *The Christian Faith* (trans. Garrett E. Paul; Fortress Texts in Modern Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 85. Though Troeltschs's dogmatics follows Schleiermacher's model, it includes a discussion of "The Religious Significance of the History of Israel" (85–86).

[114] "The Dogmatics of the History-of-Religions School," 108, n. 5.

[115] Van A. Harvey, "A Word in Defense of Schleiermacher's Theological Method," *JR* 42 (1962) 153.

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