

Foreword

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A COUPLE YEARS AGO, I came upon a new publication by Adolf Schlatter, *Einführung in die Theologie*, published by Calwer in 2013.² Not only was I greatly interested in what Schlatter has to say about the study of theology, I was intrigued by the fact that Schlatter, who went to be with the Lord in 1938, managed to publish yet another book—with the help of prolific Schlatter scholar Werner Neuer and the publisher, of course! The fact that Schlatter material continues to be published over seventy-five years after his death constitutes a fitting tribute to his remarkable caliber as a scholar.

While some, in his day as well as in ours, write him off variously as a conservative, as non-scholarly, or as inelegant in his prose, Schlatter's work as the whole has truly stood the test of time and continues to be relevant for theological and biblical research. For this reason, I am delighted at the publication of Michael Bräutigam's important new study, *Union with Christ: Adolf Schlatter's Relational Christology*. Bräutigam's work is part of a Schlatter renaissance that is discovering, or rediscovering, his contribution for a new generation of scholarship.³

1. Andreas Köstenberger is the translator of Adolf Schlatter's *New Testament Theology* and the co-translator (together with Robert Yarbrough) of Schlatter's final work, *Kennen wir Jesus? (Do We Know Jesus?)*. See *The History of the Christ: The Foundation of New Testament Theology; The Theology of the Apostles: The Development of New Testament Theology; Do We Know Jesus? Daily Insights for the Mind and Soul*. Köstenberger is Senior Research Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, USA, and the founder of Biblical Foundations™.

2. Schlatter, *Einführung in die Theologie*. This volume includes Schlatter's previously unpublished lecture, "Einführung in die Theologie" (1924), and it also contains his 1931 farewell message to his students after fifty years of teaching activity, "Erfolg und Misserfolg im theologischen Studium."

3. See Dintaman, *Creative Grace*; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*; Rieger, *Adolf*

ESSENTIAL CONTENT

In his study of Schlatter's Christology, Bräutigam shows that Schlatter's work in this area reveals a distinct relational trajectory which offers new perspectives for today's Christological discussions. The work is divided into two major parts. Part 1 examines Schlatter's Christological agenda against the backdrop of his biography and the central theological developments of his time, exploring his critique of Kantian Christology and his engagement with the revival movement, the Ritschlian school, and dialectical theologians, most importantly his compatriot Karl Barth.

This sets the scene for the more systematic-theological discussions in Part 2. Instead of pursuing exclusively the classic two-nature treatment, Schlatter is shown to develop a relational account of Jesus Christ that is embedded in a trinitarian framework in which Father, Son, and Spirit share a communion of will and of love that creates, shapes, and upholds the life and story of Jesus the Christ.⁴ Within this framework, Schlatter regards Jesus' action on the cross as the pre-eminent relational movement, first and foremost toward the Father and also toward human beings.

At the cross, Jesus reveals his divinity as he maintains fellowship with God in the Spirit despite his God-forsakenness. He reveals his humanity by maintaining close communion with sinners, transforming and gathering the redeemed into the new community of faith. Schlatter's relational perspective thus offers a sustainable Christology that provides not only a balanced view of Jesus' divinity and humanity but also offers a creative way of investigating Jesus' essential and relational being.

ANCILLARY CONTRIBUTIONS

This first rigorous attempt dedicated to chiselling out the distinct shape of Schlatter's Christology offers much food for thought for today's theological discussions. In particular, the work will prove to be of interest to *Barth and Bonhoeffer scholarship* as Schlatter at one point taught both of them and both witness to Schlatter's strong formative influence on them. By delineating Schlatter's characteristic and unique theological program, this work contributes not only to our understanding of Schlatter's thought but to that of Barth's and Bonhoeffer's theological development as well.

Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre; Rüegg, *Der sich schenkende Christus*.

4. This strongly resonates with my own work in this area, particularly with regard to Johannine studies: see volume co-authored with Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*.

Not only does this study contribute to Christological discussions and Barth and Bonhoeffer scholarship, it also amplifies one of my favorite Schlatter contributions, that to *hermeneutics*. Specifically, Schlatter conceives of the core concept of *Anschluß an Christus* (union with Christ) through three distinct yet related theological and hermeneutical movements: the *Sehakt* (act of seeing); the *Denkakt* (act of thinking); and the *Lebensakt* (act of living).⁵ In this way, the present work contributes also a case study of Schlatter's hermeneutic as applied to Christology.

The present work also informs *historical Jesus research* in the vein of both New Testament studies and Christological systematic exploration. As can be seen clearly in his two-volume *New Testament Theology*, according to Schlatter there is no rift between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.⁶ Rather, there is the one person of Jesus Christ who accomplishes his salvific cross-work in concrete space and time. This is surely a remarkable proposition, given that it was originally set forth in a day when the German theological air was rife with the likes of Martin Kähler and Rudolf Bultmann.⁷

PRIMARY CONTRIBUTION

But the primary contribution of this work is its scrutiny of Schlatter's *Christological thought*. While Schlatter subscribes to classic formulations such as *homousios* or the hypostatic union, he believes that these devote insufficient attention to the relational dimension of New Testament Christology. As a being in action and communion, Jesus sustains a twofold relationship with God and humanity: in relation to God, he is the Son of God who acts in perfect volitional union with God (*Denkakt* #1); in relation to humanity, he is the Christ who possesses the will to save humanity (*Denkakt* #2).

Based on his creative, relational reconstruction, Schlatter offers an alternative interpretation of the classic notions of Jesus' divinity and humanity. According to Schlatter, Jesus demonstrates his divinity as he obeys the Father perfectly and remains in unbroken communion of will with him

5. My indebtedness to Schlatter's hermeneutic is evident in Köstenberger and Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*; idem, *For the Love of God's Word*.

6. This is evident already in the title of volume 1: *Die Geschichte des Christus* (*The History of the Christ*). I have translated Schlatter's *Geschichte des Christus* into English, *The History of the Christ: The Foundation of New Testament Theology*; See also my translation of Schlatter's *Theologie der Apostel*, published in English as *The Theology of the Apostles: The Development of New Testament Theology*.

7. See Kähler, *Christ of Faith*. Note in particular Bultmann's contention that the "message of Jesus is a presupposition for the theology of the New Testament rather than a part of that theology itself." Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament I*, 3.

even on the cross while also sharing in our human nature and thus fulfilling his role as the Christ, with the ultimate goal of establishing the new community of God of which he is the head. Thus the Jesus of history is also the Christ of faith who reconciles humanity with God through his work on the cross.

Yet Schlatter, and Bräutigam, are not done yet. In characteristic fashion, Schlatter weds biblical study and dogmatics with ethics: orthopraxis must accompany orthodoxy.⁸ A study of Schlatter's Christology is thus incomplete without a discussion of how Christology impacts the individual believer and the community. In this regard, Schlatter stresses faith in the person and work of Christ as the means through which humans are brought into relation with God and with each other in the new community of faith. Individuals enter into volitional union with Jesus (*Anschluß an Jesus*), a union that is mediated by the Holy Spirit and leads to a communion of will with God that in turn triggers ethical action.⁹

FINAL COMMENDATION

Along with established Schlatter scholars such as Werner Neuer and Robert Yarbrough, this work places its author, Michael Bräutigam, on the vanguard of Schlatter scholarship in the twenty-first century.¹⁰ With astute treatments such as these, it is entirely possible, if not likely, that Schlatter may emerge as more influential in the twenty-first century than he was in the twentieth century. While at times overshadowed by theological giants such as Bultmann or Harnack, Schlatter's refusal to follow scholarly trends in his day may yet reap rich dividends from which we all can benefit.¹¹

It has been a joy and privilege to summarize the contents and potential contribution of this remarkable volume. I cannot emphasize strongly enough the generative potential of the present work for New Testament

8. Note the fact that Schlatter followed his 2-volume *New Testament Theology* with volumes on dogmatics and ethics. See Schlatter, *Das christliche Dogma*, and, *Die christliche Ethik*.

9. Toward the end of Schlatter's lifetime, the term *Anschluß* took on ominous overtones owing to its use in the Third Reich as designating the forceful annexation of my native country of origin, Austria, in 1938 by Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler.

10. See in particular Werner Neuer's monumental Schlatter biography, *Adolf Schlatter: Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche*. Neuer's more popular biography (*Adolf Schlatter*, 1988) has been translated into English by Robert W. Yarbrough, *Adolf Schlatter: A Biography of Germany's Premier Biblical Theologian*. See also by Yarbrough, "Adolf Schlatter," in *Dictionary of Historical Theology*, 505–7.

11. For a comparative study, see Köstenberger, "T. Zahn, A. von Harnack, and A. Schlatter," in *Pillars in the History of New Testament Interpretation: Old and New*.

research and Systematic theology. I recommend it very highly as a suggestive and fruitful exploration of a heretofore neglected aspect of Schlatter's multifaceted scholarly output, namely his relational Christology, which is yet to be taken up and incorporated in today's discussions of the person and work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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