

Introduction

WHY ADOLF SCHLATTER?

WHO WAS ADOLF SCHLATTER (1852–1938), and why should we care, in particular, about his Christology? The answer that there is no study on Schlatter's Christology yet might be true but not entirely satisfactory. While, for example, a study with the title "The Correlation between Excessive Preaching Habits and Congregational Sleeping Patterns: The Example of Eutychus in Acts 20:9," might be unique and perhaps even remotely interesting, its relevance is certainly arguable. The present work, however, claims to be both unique and relevant for the following reasons. First of all, Adolf Schlatter is an important theologian who has for too long suffered a wrongful neglect. Whilst he contributed crucially to the development of twentieth-century Protestant theology, endeavors with a view to examining his influence more closely are still scarce. This study represents one step towards closing this gap in scholarly research. Secondly, Schlatter's theology is highly promising as it opens avenues of ecumenical understanding. Careful to avoid any confessional bias and always determined to examine Scripture as objectively as possible, Schlatter's "theology of facts" (Werner Neuer) offers an ideal basis for a constructive dialogue not only between Reformed and Lutherans but also, more broadly, between Protestants, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox traditions. It seems, thirdly, that Schlatter's dogmatic trajectory has so far successfully escaped scholarly attention. Although Schlatter is still recognized as an important New Testament theologian, the scientific community would do well to unearth Schlatter's dogmatic legacy, which offers promising insights for our theological discussion today. This project focuses on what we consider to be the most fascinating aspect of Schlatter's dogmatics, namely his relational approach to Christology. Before we turn in more detail to the character and scope of this study, the abovementioned

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incentives for a resurgence in Schlatter scholarship deserve a fuller explanation and we shall look at each of those in the following section.

Schlatter's Influence on Protestant Theology

Adolf Schlatter's influence is generally underrated. Markus Bockmuehl refers to Schlatter as "brilliant but widely ignored,"¹ and Robert Yarbrough names Schlatter "one of Christianity's truly seminal (and neglected) post-Enlightenment thinkers."² Although one observes a growing interest in Schlatter during the past fifteen years or so—in particular after the publication of Werner Neuer's extensive Schlatter biography in 1996—he is still very much a forgotten theologian, both in the German-speaking world and in the Anglo-Saxon context. In John E. Wilson's *Introduction to Modern Theology: Trajectories in the German Tradition* (2007), Adolf Schlatter is merely worth a footnote and he is, strangely enough, mistakenly portrayed as representing an anti-Semitic position.³ In the Blackwell Compendium to *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918* (2005), Schlatter is only mentioned in passing, namely as one of Karl Barth's teachers.⁴ This fact alone, one would think, should have sparked academic interest in the past (particularly in the Barth community), yet Schlatter's influence on Barth is still one of the black spots of theological research. Worse still, the 2003 edition of the *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* omits Schlatter altogether.⁵ Given Schlatter's significant influence in theology, this notorious Schlatter-neglect is certainly a conundrum, calling for a new generation of scholars to rediscover his lasting contribution.⁶

During his career, Schlatter lectured for a hundred consecutive semesters in Bern (1881–88), Greifswald (1888–93), Berlin (1893–98), and Tübingen (1898–1930), influencing several generations of pastors and theologians. A short listing of some of Schlatter's students reads like a who's who of twentieth century German Protestant theology: Alongside the already mentioned Karl Barth, there were Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudolf Bultmann, Erich Seeberg, Paul Althaus, Paul Tillich, Ernst Käsemann, and

1. Bockmuehl, *This Jesus*, 218n1.

2. Yarbrough, "Translator's Preface," 9.

3. Wilson, *Introduction to Modern Theology*, 21n72. We shall return to this issue in the next chapter.

4. Hardy, "Karl Barth," 22.

5. Larsen, *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*.

6. Andreas J. Köstenberger offers some explanations for this neglect, in "Preface," 13–22.

Otto Michel, to name but a few. While one cannot speak of a characteristic Schlatter-school, he certainly left a distinct mark on his students. In many ways the exact nature of this influence is still theological *terra incognita*, awaiting its discovery today. Adolf Schlatter lived in turbulent times, both historically and theologically. His particular historical position at the interface of two centuries and the context of the then increasing diversification of the theological landscape make Schlatter research fascinating and promising for today, at the outset of a new century. Growing up in rural Switzerland, Schlatter was immersed in Wilhelmine Prussia during his time in Greifswald and Berlin; he lived through the First World War where he lost a son; he then became a citizen in the Weimar Republic, and subsequently witnessed in Tübingen the rise of National Socialism, until he passed away on the verge of the Second World War. Theologically, he was raised and rooted in Protestant Reformed orthodoxy; he was influenced by German philosophical idealism, had to answer liberal claims around the fin de siècle, and was finally in dialogue with 1920s dialectical theology. At times of paradigmatic theological change, Adolf Schlatter challenged his contemporaries by formulating a fresh, yet conservative theological design. Advocating an observative, empirical approach to theology, Schlatter roots the historical and systematic disciplines in the perceived reality of God's revelation in creation, in Scripture, and, supremely, in Jesus Christ. With this angle, he aimed to provide an alternative to the liberal critique of Scripture and theology, while at the same time avoiding the uncritical adoption of a conservative, biblicist theology.⁷ Occupying this unique position, Schlatter's contribution promises to be stimulating for our theological conversation today and one cannot but agree with Wuppertal dogmatician Johannes von Lüpke, who notes that "[i]t is time to return to Schlatter's theology in order to make progress in today's discussions."⁸ This applies not only to the present debate on Christology as we shall see later, but also to our ecumenical exchange.

Schlatter's Ecumenical Perspective

In a time of increasing segmentation and specialization, and some would add, confessional isolation, Adolf Schlatter stands out as a fascinating polymath

7. Schlatter was clearly not a biblicist (more on this in chapter 2). Still, the stereotype seems alive and well, even in his former domain Tübingen. Clemens Hägele observes that readers interested in Schlatter's dogmatic opus will have to look for his books in the Tübingen *Theologicumbibliothek* under the shelfmark biblicists. Hägele, *Schrift als Gnadenmittel*, 33n102.

8. Lüpke, "Vorwort," 9.

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with a holistic theological and confessional agenda. Covering virtually all the disciplines of theological scholarship, he brings together a remarkable grasp of original languages, exegetical skills, as well as philosophical and experiential power. Paired with his intrinsic confessional openness, which could be attributed to the special circumstances of his upbringing (his mother was a lifelong member in the Swiss Reformed Church, whereas his father was one of the founding members of a Free Evangelical Church), it makes Schlatter an ideal conversation partner in today's attempts to overcome confessional barriers.⁹ Originally ordained in the Swiss Reformed Church, Schlatter showed no reservation working closely alongside Prussian Lutheran theologian Hermann Cremer (1834–1903) in Greifswald, or later, in Berlin, with the liberal Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), all the while retaining strong connections with the conservative pietist movement.¹⁰ In one of his autobiographical reflections, Schlatter insists that while he was “in Switzerland a part of the Reformed [Church], in Prussia [a member] of the united [Church] and in Tübingen part of the Lutheran Church, it did not have any influence on my inner position.”¹¹ Schlatter also enjoyed the works of Catholic theologian Franz von Baader (1765–1841) who exerted an important influence on him. Long before the initiation of the ecumenical dialogue, Schlatter makes clear that he intended to work towards “overcoming the severe abyss that separates the Protestant and Catholic Churches.”¹² In this sense, it is not surprising that his contribution is in fact appreciated not only among Protestant readers but also within the Catholic context. In his *Geleitwort* to the 1985 reprint of Schlatter's commentary on the Epistle of James, Catholic New Testament theologian Franz Mussner remarks that Schlatter's exegetical works are highly significant for the ecumenical dialogue, as they exhibit a paradigm of obedience to the text which could

9. On Schlatter's ecumenical perspective see Neuer, “Die ökumenische Bedeutung,” 71–92.

10. See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 428–40. The term “pietism” is notoriously difficult to define. See Wallmann, *Der Pietismus*, 7–8. In general, scholars agree in defining pietism broadly as a religious movement of renewal of the seventeenth century, which had its prime of life in the eighteenth century. Together with Anglo-Saxon Puritanism, it is considered to be the most important religious movement within Protestantism since the Reformation. The main concern of early pietism was a reform of the Protestant churches in Germany under Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705) in Frankfurt (1670s), picked up by August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) in Halle (1690s). Other noteworthy representatives of pietism are Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752) and Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–82).

11. Schlatter, *Rückblick*, 19–20.

12. *Ibid.*, 236.

work as a common denominator for both traditions.¹³ Protestant theologian Hans-Martin Rieger's dissertation on "Adolf Schlatter's Doctrine of Justification and the Possibilities of Ecumenical Understanding," recently received an award from the Catholic faculty at the University of Regensburg.¹⁴ Moreover, Pope emeritus Benedict XVI considers Schlatter a noteworthy conversation partner,¹⁵ and it is surely not coincidence that Schlatter scholar Werner Neuer is the only Protestant enjoying the honor of being a permanent member of the Ratzinger *Schülerkreis*.¹⁶ As we shall see throughout this work, Schlatter's contribution indeed possesses significant potential to build bridges in our current attempts at interdenominational dialogue.

Schlatter's christological Contribution

It is mainly Schlatter the New Testament theologian who has been in the spotlight of scholarly interest so far. While there occasionally appeared studies on Schlatter's dogmatic outline in the first decades after his death,¹⁷ scholarship in general focused mainly on Schlatter's New Testament legacy.¹⁸ His New Testament theology was not only critically acclaimed in Germany,¹⁹ but was also well received in the English-speaking world, through translation work by Robert Morgan,²⁰ and more recently, Andreas J. Köstenberger,

13. Mussner, "Geleitwort," xii.

14. In 2000, the Catholic theological faculty awarded Rieger the first prize of the Dr Kurt Hellmich Trust which promotes research in ecumenical theology.

15. Commenting on Schlatter's dispute with Adolf von Harnack, Ratzinger notes that Schlatter was right in his assessment that what separated their theologies was not merely the question of miracles, as Harnack argued, but in fact the question of Christology. See Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 132n17.

16. Vieweger, "Der protestantische Papst-Schüler."

17. The studies mainly focused on basic prolegomena to Schlatter's systematic approach. See for example Fraas, "Die Bedeutung der Gotteslehre für die Dogmatik bei Adolf Schlatter und Reinhold Seeberg"; Dymale, "The Theology of Adolf Schlatter with Special Reference to His Understanding of History"; Bailer, *Das systematische Prinzip*; Egg, *Adolf Schlatters kritische Position: Gezeigt an seiner Matthäusinterpretation*; Meyer-Wieck, "Das Wirklichkeitsverständnis Adolf Schlatters"; Kindt, *Der Gedanke der Einheit: Adolf Schlatters Theologie und ihre historischen Voraussetzungen*.

18. For an overview see Yarbrough, "Modern Reception," 417–23.

19. Schlatter students Wilhelm Lütgert, Otto Michel and Ernst Käsemann were significantly influenced by Schlatter as Neuer observes (*Adolf Schlatter*, 790). Leonhard Goppelt (1911–73) saw Schlatter as a forerunner of his own New Testament theology and Peter Stuhlmacher (1932–) followed closely in Schlatter's footsteps. See Stuhlmacher's own comments in his essay, "Adolf Schlatter's Interpretation of Scripture," 433–46.

20. Schlatter, "Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics," 117–66.

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who translated Schlatter's two-volume New Testament Theology, *The History of the Christ* (1997), and *The Theology of the Apostles* (1999). Among Anglo-Saxon New Testament scholars who are currently rediscovering Adolf Schlatter's exegetical legacy are—in addition to Schlatter translators Andreas Köstenberger and Robert Yarbrough—Donald Guthrie, Brevard Childs, Hendrikus Boers,²¹ N.T. Wright,²² Markus Bockmuehl,²³ and Thomas R. Schreiner.²⁴ While these developments suggest a slight Schlatter renaissance, Schlatter the dogmatician is still largely unknown to the wider audience. Perhaps this could be attributed to the rise of dialectical theology which somewhat overshadowed Schlatter's dogmatic heritage.²⁵ About half a century after Schlatter's demise, Werner Neuer lamented that his systematic approach had until that point not been adequately processed.²⁶ In 1996, Neuer presented his comprehensive Schlatter biography, "Adolf Schlatter: A Life for Theology and the Church" (*Adolf Schlatter: Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche*). This milestone publication fuelled a fresh interest in the Swiss scholar, together with the publication of two reprint collections of some of his most influential theological writings a few years later.²⁷ Recent sources on Schlatter's dogmatic opus explore his take on the doctrine of Scripture,²⁸ his understanding of the sacraments,²⁹ and his view of justification.³⁰ Major English-language systematic treatments however are still scarce, which could be attributed to the lack of translations of Schlatter's dogmatic works (such as his *Dogma* and *Ethik*)—noteworthy exceptions are Stephen Dintaman's monograph,³¹ and Andreas Loos' doctoral thesis.³²

21. On Guthrie, Childs, and Boers, see Yarbrough, "Modern Reception," 423–26.

22. Wright, *New Testament*, 121, 194, 344, 373.

23. Bockmuehl refers to Schlatter in his *Seeing the Word*, and commends Schlatter's theology and method (74, 88).

24. Note extensive references to Schlatter in the index of Schreiner's *New Testament Theology*, 947.

25. As Stuhlmacher suggested, in "Adolf Schlatter," 219. Other scholars come to the same conclusion; see Neuer, *Zusammenhang von Dogmatik und Ethik*, 22; Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 12; Gasque, "Promise of Schlatter," 20; Morgan, "Introduction," 29.

26. Neuer, *Zusammenhang von Dogmatik und Ethik*, 25.

27. Neuer, *Die Bibel verstehen*, and von Lüpke, *Adolf Schlatter*.

28. Hägele, *Schrift als Gnadenmittel*.

29. Rüeegg, *Der sich schenkende Christus*.

30. Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*.

31. Dintaman, *Creative Grace*.

32. Loos, "Divine Action, Christ."

Considering the status quo, it is most surprising that Schlatter's significant christological angle has until this day not attracted adequate attention. This is a serious neglect insofar as Schlatter's theology is, as Paul Althaus put it, "through and through christocentric."³³ So far, there are only a few studies available which examine certain facets of Schlatter's Christology. While Johannes H. Schmid carefully analyses Schlatter's picture of the historical Christ,³⁴ he, however, misunderstands basic prolegomena to Schlatter's dogmatic thinking, which limits his study to a certain extent.³⁵ Werner Neuer touches upon certain aspects of Schlatter's Christology when discussing Schlatter's atonement theology.³⁶ In his examination of Schlatter's doctrine of justification, Hans-Martin Rieger refers to some important christological foundations in Schlatter's dogmatic thinking, and he rightly points to the characteristic relational feature in Schlatter's Christology.³⁷ Finally, Andreas Loos provides significant insight into the Trinitarian structure of Schlatter's Christology, while his special focus on "Divine action" in general prevents him from offering a more elaborate christological discussion in particular.³⁸

While those recent scholarly endeavors might be promising, one still looks in vain for rigorous attempts dedicated to chisel out the distinct shape of Schlatter's Christology. Some years ago, Jürgen Moltmann pointed out that "[i]n face of today's theological questions, A. Schlatter's 'Jesus' Divinity and the Cross' [*Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*] deserves to be snatched away from oblivion."³⁹ The findings presented in this study suggest that Moltmann is right. Of course, the goal cannot be to offer an exhaustive account of Schlatter's Christology. Rather, this work aims to expose the foundational building blocks of Schlatter's Christology. More precisely, it will be argued that the central and most significant feature of Schlatter's Christology is its relational orientation. That is, on the one hand Schlatter is critical of the traditional way of approaching Christology merely speculatively "from above"; yet on the other hand, he also rejects the path "from below" as the only valid way towards a Christology proper. Instead, Schlatter suggests a relational approach to Christology, which, as this study shows, is a robust and creative approach that can adequately describe and integrate the person and work

33. Althaus, "Adolf Schlatters Wort," 103.

34. See Schmid, *Erkenntnis des Geschichtlichen Christus*.

35. We agree with Walldorf's observations, which suggest that Schmid in particular neglects Schlatter's philosophical-theological realism, while also denying an underlying ontological concept in Schlatter. See Walldorf, *Realistische Philosophie*, 18–19.

36. Neuer, *Zusammenhang von Dogmatik und Ethik*, 198–227.

37. Rieger, *Schlatters Rechtfertigungslehre*, 306–26.

38. See Loos, "Divine Action, Christ."

39. Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, 187.

of Jesus Christ. Before we proceed to present a more detailed outline of this project, we must not forget to point to the overall character of this work and certain challenges associated with Schlatter research.

CHALLENGES AND CHARACTER OF THIS STUDY

When investigating Schlatter's theology, one is faced with several challenges. We shall briefly look at three major difficulties which deserve to be mentioned at the outset, namely first, the problem of our overall theological terminology to be used in this study, secondly, Schlatter's lacking interaction with secondary sources, and finally, the sheer size of Schlatter's works and his often difficult language.

Terminology

There is, first of all, the problem of terminology, and this applies not only to Schlatter, but to every study concerning nineteenth- and twentieth-century theology. Evidently, Adolf Schlatter's lifespan overlaps with a fascinating diversification of the theological landscape at that time. Usually linked with the branch of *positive theology*, Schlatter witnessed the hegemony and the collapse of so-called *liberal theology*, while he also observed the irenic attempts of the *mediating theologians*, who sought to break middle ground between these two poles. In the second half of his career, Schlatter was also in close dialogue with the *dialectical movement* of post-World War I Germany. One obviously needs to take into account this intriguing kaleidoscope of theological movements and schools as they explicitly and also implicitly contributed to the characteristic shape of Schlatter's christological outlook. The complexity of the different theological streams of that time renders our task both stimulating and challenging. Joachim Weinhardt, for example, laments that "a standard description of the 19th century [theological] schools is not available," while adding that it will be impossible to reach any agreement in the future.⁴⁰ This certainly does not sound auspicious. Theologians usually resort to the abovementioned fourfold division of liberal theology, mediating theology, positive (or confessional/conservative) theology, and dialectical theology, in order to systematize the different theological approaches and ideas. These terms, however, are fuzzy and unpropitious for several reasons.⁴¹ It is difficult, for example, to find a consensus on what

40. Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung*, 7.

41. See *ibid.*, 5–15.

liberal theology is.⁴² One would ideally need to add a qualification, that is, one would have to define in which ways a theology is liberal in relation to another theology. On the whole, scholars disagree in their labelling of different theologians as liberal,⁴³ mediating,⁴⁴ positive/confessional,⁴⁵ or dialectical.⁴⁶ It seems almost impossible to categorize clearly the complex

42. The term “liberal” in itself seems to be highly problematic, as Weinhardt suggests. According to Weinhardt, the term was first used to describe a certain stance on church politics (for example in relation to the *Apostolikumsstreit*, see chapter 2). Later, the term made its way into the theological vocabulary when it was used by confessional theologians, conservative Ritschlians, and dialectical theologians to designate the left-wing Ritschlians Harnack and Herrmann. See Weinhardt, *Wilhelm Herrmanns Stellung*, 13–15, 18; cf. Axt-Piscalar’s definition, in “Liberal Theology in Germany,” 468–69.

43. According to Axt-Piscalar, liberal theology stands (narrowly defined) for the theology from around 1870 to 1918 and includes Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89) and his successors, such as Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), Julius Kaftan (1848–1926), Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922), Martin Rade (1857–1940) and Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923). It also includes representatives of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (history of religion school), such as Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920), Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), Johannes Weiss (1863–1914), Alfred Rahlfs (1865–1935), Heinrich Hackmann (1864–1935), William Wrede (1859–1906), Albert Eichhorn (1856–1926), and Richard Reitzenstein (1861–1931). In the wider sense, she claims, liberal theology refers to those “ways of thinking which constructively take up Enlightenment principles and try to render them theologically” (Axt-Piscalar, “Liberal Theology in Germany,” 469). This includes then Johann S. Semler (1725–91), as well as the approaches by Schleiermacher, Strauss, Baur and the Tübingen school. On the history of religion school see Chapman, “History of Religion School,” 434–54.

44. Scholars generally agree that proponents of mediating theology sought to mediate between the two poles of liberal and positive theology, that is, they clearly intended to remain faithful to the Scriptures (without being rigid biblicists), while also taking into account the findings of modern science. Mediating theology began to prosper with the foundation of the journal *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* in 1828. Lists of mediating theologians usually include Isaak A. Dorner (1809–84), whom Eckhard Lessing, however, counts among the free theologians (see his *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen*, 1:141–44), Carl Ullmann (1796–1865), Friedrich W. C. Umbreit (1795–1860), Johann K. L. Gieseler (1792–1854) and Carl I. Nitzsch (1787–1868). See Matthias Gockel’s essay on “Mediating Theology in Germany,” 301–7. Apparently, depending on how broadly or narrowly one defines liberal, or positive, theology, one ends up with different lists of mediating theologians.

45. Lessing defines positive theology as a conservative theological stream which is closely tied to the church. Influential positive theologians are the Beck students Martin Kähler (1835–1912), Hermann Cremer (1834–1903) and Adolf Schlatter, who were the main heads of the positive Greifswald school (more on this in chapter 2). To this school belonged also Schlatter’s student Wilhelm Lütgert (1867–1938), Erich Schaeder (1861–1936), Ernst Cremer (1864–1922), Karl Bornhäuser (1868–1947), Friedrich Bosse (1864–1931), and Julius Kögel (1871–1928). Closely affiliated with the Greifswald school are Samuel Oettli (1846–1911), Christoph Riggenbach (1818–90) and Otto Zöckler (1833–1906). See Lessing, *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen evangelischen Theologie*, 1:116–32. With regard to this term, one also observes the lack of a scholarly consensus.

46. Karl Barth’s theology, for example, has one often been labelled dialectical, which,

theological programs of the (equally complex) theological individuals. One easily runs the risk of doing an injustice to the scholars' own theological idiosyncrasies.

Thus, when referring in this study to these classical terms liberal, mediating, positive/confessional theology, and dialectical theology, one needs to bear in mind their inherent shortcomings. While we make, for the sake of simplicity, use of these terms in the following first chapter, they will be employed only tentatively in the remainder of this study and crucially in instances where Schlatter himself uses these terms. In light of these conceptual vulnerabilities, the most elegant solution then, it seems, is to focus on Schlatter's own theological characteristics and of the different individuals he encounters in the context of his life and work. For, only when one takes the theological personality seriously, against the backdrop of his or her historical context, will one be able to probe the theological matter more deeply.

Schlatter's Lacking Interaction with other Scholars

Second, Schlatter's hesitation to interact with other scholars in his works presents a particular obstacle to the reader. Only on rare occasions does one find clear references to other theologians and movements, and this might be another reason for the Schlatter-neglect mentioned earlier. "I neither had the time nor the inclination," writes Schlatter, "to refute my colleagues' views."⁴⁷ While this might sound quite harsh and even slightly condescending, one needs to put this statement into perspective in order to understand Schlatter's basic intention. In one of his autobiographical works, Schlatter himself wonders whether he should not have listened more carefully to fellow New Testament theologian Bernhard Weiss (1827–1918), who once encouraged him to pursue to a greater extent "conversation with colleagues."⁴⁸ However, Schlatter makes clear that his reluctance in this respect was not a reflection of his ignorance. Rather, it was an essential part of his empirical realist method of focusing exclusively on the theological facts (*Tatsachen*) as he perceived them in his reading of the New Testament. Schlatter writes:

It was not the desire for originality which prompted me to be more reserved in my references to [secondary] literature; it was rather a sign of a diffident anxiety. . . . [F]or I needed protection for my own thinking, so that the thoughts of the others

however, does not reflect all of the different stages of Barth's theological development.

47. Schlatter, "Entstehung der Beiträge," 54; cf. 71.

48. Schlatter, *Rückblick*, 116.

would not confuse me; [I needed] protection for my own eye, so that it would remain capable [*sehfähig*] to discern the facts [*Tatbestände*].⁴⁹

Schlatter's main intention then was to focus the reader's attention on the content of the New Testament as the foundation for dogmatics. To interact with secondary literature would only have distracted him (as well as the reader) from this goal. Whether or not this approach is helpful in terms of encouraging academic debate remains to be seen. However, a careful reading of Schlatter reveals that he indeed closely interacts with contemporary ideas, movements and even colleagues, although he is generally hesitant to name names—which might be due to his difficult frontline position between positive and liberal theology, as we shall see in due course. At any rate, one is required to read Schlatter very carefully, thus between the lines, as it were, in order to identify his hidden, but surely existent, critique of ideas and movements.

Schlatter's Output and Language

There is, thirdly, the sheer volume and the difficult language of Schlatter's works. As the number of his publications exceeds the four hundred mark,⁵⁰ the key to a successful study is to select the most significant material in the Schlatter corpus. For our purposes, a focus on Schlatter's major New Testament theology (*Glaube im Neuen Testament*, *The History of the Christ*, and *The Theology of the Apostles*), and his dogmatic opus (*Das christliche Dogma* and *Die christliche Ethik*) is advisable, insofar as Schlatter unfolds in these fundamental works both the characteristics of his New Testament picture of Christ and the foundations of his overall Christology. One will also need to consult crucial monographs, relevant journal articles and speeches, as this additional material provides a substantial insight into the distinctive features of Schlatter's christological approach.⁵¹ Schlatter's *Do We Know Jesus?*, though originally composed as a devotional, contains significant christological information, and, last but not least, Schlatter's unpublished documents demand careful attention, in particular his 1884 Bern lecture, "Christologie und Soteriologie." Schlatter's unpublished works are handwritten in an outdated German writing-style, the *Sütterlinschrift*, which

49. Ibid.

50. For an overview, see Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 832–41.

51. Such as *Jesu Gottheit und das Kreuz*, "Das Bekenntnis zur Gottheit Jesu," in *Gesunde Lehre*, by Adolf Schlatter, 32–48; "Der Zweifel an der Messianität Jesu," 7–75; and *Das Gott wohlgefällige Opfer*.

renders a transcription at times challenging, and only very little material has as yet been transcribed.⁵²

Finally, one must mention the particular challenge presented by his sometimes convoluted and labyrinthine language. “Schlatter’s theology is difficult to comprehend,” William Baird laments, “written in a convoluted style that defies comprehension even by native German intellectuals.”⁵³ Similarly, Schlatter student Otto Michel notes that Schlatter is an “opinionated, in no way easily accessible theological thinker.”⁵⁴ Peter Stuhlmacher complains about Schlatter’s “monstrous phrases,”⁵⁵ and remarks that it is “virtually impossible” to translate Schlatter’s prose into English.⁵⁶ While these comments are certainly not encouraging, they are surely somewhat exaggerated. As it is often difficult to provide a literal translation of Schlatterian key terms without losing important connotations, the meaning of the German term will be explained and used alongside when appropriate. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own. Having briefly discussed both the promise and the challenge of Schlatter research, we conclude our introductory remarks by offering the overall roadmap of this work.

THE ROADMAP: CHAPTER CONTENTS

This book consists of two major parts. The first half of this work is dedicated more to Schlatter’s biographical-historical background, which sets the stage for the major dogmatic-christological analysis in the second half. The first part on “The Genesis and Context of Schlatter’s Christology,” is to a great extent an exercise in narrative theology, paving the way for the second, systematic-theological part, which focuses on “The Dogmatic Shape of Schlatter’s Christology.” The following section offers a brief summary of the chapter contents.

Part one: The Genesis and Context of Schlatter’s Christology

Chapter 1 deals with the basic question: Who was Adolf Schlatter? As Adolf Schlatter is no household name among scholars, this introductory chapter

52. Unpublished documents and manuscripts by Adolf Schlatter are accessible in the Adolf Schlatter archive in Stuttgart, Germany [Bestand D 40].

53. Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:374.

54. Michel, “Schlatter als Ausleger der Schrift,” 227; cf. Bailer’s summary of challenges with a view to Schlatter research in *Das systematische Prinzip*, 11–20.

55. Stuhlmacher, “Zum Neudruck,” xi.

56. Stuhlmacher, “Foreword,” x.

provides a brief sketch of Schlatter's life and theology. Retracing Schlatter's individual history also raises one's awareness of the underlying reasons for his characteristic theological development, and, in particular, of his unique christological outlook. In chapter 2, we focus on the question: Where was Adolf Schlatter? In this threefold section we examine in more detail the complex theological-historical landscape of Schlatter's time, determining how it contributed to the *Sitz im Leben* of his theology. In a first step, we trace several noteworthy stimuli for Schlatter's theological development, such as his encounters with the revival movement (*Erweckungsbewegung*) at home and with pietism through his teacher Johann T. Beck, which stood in stark contrast to idealist positions the young Schlatter was faced with in school and at the university. We analyze, secondly, Schlatter's critical position towards certain Christologies he came across during his career in Bern, Greifswald, and Berlin, in particular focusing on his critique of Albrecht Ritschl and his pupils Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack. Moving chronologically to Schlatter's time in Tübingen, we shall thirdly, discuss Schlatter's critique of his former student Karl Barth more closely. In outlining Schlatter's theological exchange with major figures of his time, we are able to identify both significant aspects of his christological critique and his alternative suggestions. These important considerations set the stage for the ensuing dogmatic discussion in part 2.

Part two: The Dogmatic Shape of Schlatter's Christology

Chapters 3 to 6 form the dogmatic heart of this study, based on Schlatter's threefold distinction of seeing-act (*Sehakt*), thinking-act (*Denkakt*), and life-act (*Lebensakt*). The goal is to investigate first the methodological foundation of Schlatter's Christology (chapter 3), moving then to an analysis of the dogmatic core of his relational Christology (chapters 4 and 5), while the final part looks at the existential-ethical ramifications of his christological account (chapter 6). The following paragraphs offer a more detailed outline. Chapter 3 deals with the seeing-act, in which we seek to demonstrate how Schlatter arrives with his empirical realist method at a unified account of Jesus Christ. According to Schlatter's New Testament observation, there is no rift between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. Rather, there is only one unified Jesus Christ who performed the salvific deed on the cross in concrete space and time. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the dogmatic implications of the christological picture described in the seeing-act, what Schlatter calls the thinking-act. While Schlatter subscribes to classic christological formulae, such as *homoousios* or the hypostatic union, he feels that these

ignore the significant relational aspect he observes in the New Testament documents. In Schlatter's view, a relational understanding of Jesus Christ is more in touch with the New Testament witness as it shows Jesus Christ as a being in action and in communion. Schlatter sees Jesus in a twofold relationship, a double communion as he calls it, namely with God and with humanity. In relation to God (*Denkakt I*), Jesus is the Son of God who acts in perfect union of will with God. And in relation to humanity (*Denkakt II*), Jesus is the Christ, the Son of Man, who possesses the will to salvation for humanity. Based on his creative, relational framework, 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 even on the cross, while he also shares in our human nature and thus fulfils his role as the Christ with the ultimate goal of establishing the new community of God of which he is the head. Chapter 6 discusses the implications of Schlatter's relational Christology for the Christian life. For Schlatter, dogmatics has to go hand in hand with ethics: orthodoxy remains incomplete without orthopraxy. It is thus essential for a correct reading of Schlatter to examine how Christology impacts the individual believer and the community. We will thus consider how Schlatter emphasizes faith in the person and work of Christ as the means through which human beings are brought into an existential relation with God and with each other in the new community of faith. The individual completes her⁵⁷ volitional "union with Jesus" (*Anschluß an Jesus*),⁵⁸ mediated by the Holy Spirit, which leads to a communion of will with God that in turn triggers ethical action. In this respect, it will also be assessed whether Schlatter accomplished his goal of a completion of the Reformation (*Vollendung der Reformation*). The study concludes by offering a summary of our findings while also pointing to the lasting value of Schlatter's relational Christology for today's discussions.

57. The University of Tübingen had opened its doors for female students in 1904. In contrast to some of his colleagues, Schlatter welcomed and supported female theology students, and he showed no reservations about leading bible studies at the Tübingen "Deutsche Christliche Vereinigung studierender Frauen" (DCVSF). See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter*, 556–59. Kierkegaard biographer and Schlatter student Anna Paulsen, together with other Schlatter students, later expressed their gratitude to Schlatter in an open letter in the *Festschrift* for his seventy-fifth birthday, in Bender et al., *Vom Dienst an Theologie und Kirche*, 5–6. Our use of gender-inclusive language in this work clearly reflects Schlatter's openness in this respect.

58. *Anschluß* (or *Anschluss*) *an Jesus* is a key concept in Schlatter's work; it refers to one's union, connection, and allegiance with Jesus Christ.