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*THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY: A LOOK AT SCHLEIERMACHER'S DER CHRISTLICHE GLAUBE (1830/31)*

19<sup>th</sup> century was the time of a confessional revival and liturgical renewal, while the importance of 19<sup>th</sup> century theology is enormous. It seems that all the theological trends that went beforehand merged into some of the key theologians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and in turn, what developed afterward in various forms and expressions sprang out of them<sup>1</sup>. At the center of the intellectual landscape of the century were three academic giants, all German: I. Kant (1724–1804), G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), and F. Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Whether agreeing with them or not, theologians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century could not escape from interacting with them. Arguably, the most influential among them in the life of the church was the theology of Schleiermacher. He dominated the theological scene for at least the first third of the century.<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth in his famous «Protestant Theology in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century» maintained that only Schleiermacher may be said to have given birth to an epoch, and the same thing cannot be said of Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89).<sup>3</sup> Werner Elert entitled his major work on the 19<sup>th</sup> century theology, «Der Kampf um das Christentum . . . seit Schleiermacher».<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thielicke H. *Modern Faith and Thought* / Tr. G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, 1990. P. 160.

<sup>2</sup> See: Welch C. *Protestant Thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. Vol. 1: 1799–1870. New Haven, 1972. P. 1–8.

<sup>3</sup> Barth K. *Protestant Theology in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Its Background and History*. Grand Rapids, 2002. P. 640.

<sup>4</sup> Elert W. *Der Kampf um das Christentum: Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen dem evangelischen Christentum in Deutschland und dem allgemeinen Denken seit Schleiermacher und Hegel*. München, 1921.

In this essay I decided to engage mainly Schleiermacher's doctrine of justification. As he is usually called «the father of modern theology», knowledge of this theological giant will help us understand the whole stream of the 19th century in terms of direction and connection. We know that Francis Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics* labeled him as «the worst heretic» of the 19th century and passionately complained that even some of the confessional Lutherans had followed his footsteps.<sup>5</sup> By such remarks, he fostered among us a common reputation that Schleiermacher is a bad influence. But as it is often the case, such labeling is dangerous and unscholarly. Before adopting Pieper's or any other secondary sources' view on Schleiermacher, we should actually read him.<sup>6</sup> According to Terrence N. Tice in «*The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*», the «Schleiermacher renaissance» took place in America as late as in 1964 through Richard R. Niebuhr's book «*Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion*».<sup>7</sup> In the 1980s a significant international dialogue and significant research on Schleiermacher began. Today we witness a growing stream of translations and a huge body of articles and essays on Schleiermacher.<sup>8</sup> Such a continuing growth of Schleiermacher scholarship indicates that people are finding his theology to be helpful and relevant in church and academia. In our essay we will first introduce Schleiermacher and his time, and then we will take a look at his opus magnum «*Der christliche Glaube (The Christian Faith)*» of 1830/31 (the revised edition).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Pieper F. *Christian Dogmatics*. St. Louis, 1950–1957. Vol. 1. P. 114, 120, 128; Vol. 2. P. 117; 364.

<sup>6</sup> Scaer D. *Infant Baptism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran Theology*. St. Louis, 2011. P. 35–51.

<sup>7</sup> Niebuhr R. R. *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction*. New York, 1964.

<sup>8</sup> Tice T. N. *Schleiermacher yesterday, today, and tomorrow // The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher* / Ed. J. Marina. Cambridge, 2005. P. 307–317.

<sup>9</sup> Schleiermacher F. *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche* / 2 Ausgabe. Berlin, 1861. English translation: Schleiermacher F. *The Christian Faith* / Tr. H. R. Mackintosh, J. S. Stewart. Edinburgh, 1989. — About differences between the first and the second

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«Der christliche Glaube» is composed of 172 propositions («die christliche Glaubenssätze») and their explanations. But Schleiermacher's outline looks different from what we are accustomed to in Pieper's «Christian Dogmatics». It does not begin with the Holy Scripture. The Trinity as such is included in the conclusion and as an appendix. All the major portions of his presentation are systematically divided into three divisions of (1) man, (2) God, and (3) the world (§30). The doctrine of justification is found under the category of fellowship with the Redeemer, which indicates that for Schleiermacher justification is not about forgiveness of sins but about fellowship with Christ. Schleiermacher uses the language of «the ministry of the word» and avoids the expression of the office («Predigtamt, Gnadenmittelamt»). And the church is explained as visible and invisible.

#### INTRODUCTION

His introductory portion is not without significance. First, as in his earlier book, «On Religion», he maintains that piety («die Fömmigkeit») is neither a Knowing («ein Wissen») nor a Doing («ein Thun») but a Feeling («ein Gefühl») which he also now defines as immediate self-consciousness («ein unmittelbares Selbstbewußtsein») (§3). All three major thinkers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not start with Scripture to present their Christianity, but with a universality of something in man. Kant found it in the categorical imperatives. Hegel runs with a progression of man toward the unity with God. For Schleiermacher it was the consciousness of absolute dependence on God (§4). Second, the reader of Schleiermacher must be aware that while Schleiermacher sticks to the familiar language of the church, he revises the meaning of almost each term. A good example is his use of the term «doctrine». For us doctrine is the Lord's and when it is sound it delivers His gifts. It is a gift from the Lord. Not so in Schleiermacher. For him, doctrine is a description of Christian piety in the heart. It is an account

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editions see: Crouter R. Friedlich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism. Cambridge, 2005. P. 226–247.

of Christian religious feeling (§15). Third, we must not forget that Schleiermacher wrote this book for the United Evangelical Church of Prussia.<sup>10</sup> It appears magnificent that he appeals to the evangelical confessional documents («die evangelischen Bekenntnißschriften») to prove his points (§27). But he cites not only from the Lutheran Confessions but also from the Reformed. And when Lutherans and the Reformed oppose to each other, he accepts «only that part of the confessional documents in which they all agree» (§27.2). This means that he dismisses what is not held in common as non-essential. A good example is his view of the Lord's Supper as we will see later.

#### CREATION AND THE DEVIL

Schleiermacher's understanding of the Creator comes from the absolute dependence on God that all human beings have in common. There has to be an originator of the world (§40). Since Schleiermacher speaks of creation from man's point of view, he expresses nothing about «creatio ex nihilo» or cohesive relation between creation and justification, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.<sup>11</sup> The angels are not particularly helpful or harmful to the consciousness (§42). When it comes to the devil, he denies it, because the belief in the devil robs man of joyful consciousness (§44–45). Schleiermacher knew nothing about «tentatio/Anfechtung».<sup>12</sup>

#### SIN

Schleiermacher's division of pain («Unlust») and pleasure («Lust») in the major portion of his book resembles the distinction between Law and Gospel. But, again, his interest

<sup>10</sup> Crouter R. Friedlich Schleiermacher... P. 231.

<sup>11</sup> Where the point of departure in theology is something in man, one can't move from creation to forgiveness of sins. Luther in his «Lectures on Jonah» observed that natural man knows that a god must exist and he is powerful. But he does not know who that god is and whether or not he is willing to help and save you (Luther M. *Der Prophet Jona ausgelegt* // D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe / Hg. J. K. F. Knaake. Bd. 19. Weimar, 1897. S. 206–207.

<sup>12</sup> Schleiermacher does not take biblical references to the devil literally but symbolically, because Christ and the Apostles were merely borrowing the popular notion of the day when they spoke of the devil.

stays in human experiences. Sin is defined as the consciousness of having turned away from God («die Abwendung von Gott»). Grace, in contrast, is the consciousness of being in fellowship with Him («die Gemeinschaft mit Gott») (§63).<sup>13</sup> This is different from Luther's confession of the chief office of the Law as killing and the chief office of the Gospel as justifying, because Schleiermacher operates with Platonic and Augustinian concepts of distance and unity. As man must move between two kinds of consciousness, redemption means a process in which man's consciousness is drawn ever closer to God. This happens when man receives and appropriates the influence of the absolute perfection of Jesus (§81.2, §70.2).<sup>14</sup>

Schleiermacher's concept of sin has additional features which will be helpful for our understanding of his view of justification. First of all, he takes original sin to be originating sin, so that after the appearance of actual sins, original sin ceases to exist (§71.1). Secondly, Adam and Eve had original sin even before the Fall, so that there was no change in human nature before and after. This does not contradict the original perfection of man for Schleiermacher, because for him sin exists only in so far as there is a consciousness of it (§68.2). Thirdly, since original sin is a common possession of all men, man is a sinner not because he sins but because he is in the corporate community of the sinners (§71.2, §72). Schleiermacher dismisses the idea of the penalties for sin also (§71.4). Fourthly, man does not gain his knowledge of sin from the Law, because the Law is insufficient, but from the absolute

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<sup>13</sup> Everything that hinders the development of God-consciousness in man is considered as sin (§66.1).

<sup>14</sup> It is true that Schleiermacher does not consider sin at the levels of knowing or doing. But since for him doctrine is descriptive of human experiences, even though he talks about the pain of consciousness, he is not able to confess the bottomlessness of our sinful nature as Luther expounds on it in the Smalcald Article (SA III, II, 4). According to Luther, we are never able to know how sinful we really are before God in our lifetime, and our level of understanding of ourselves goes only in proportion to the revelation of the Scripture that is believed (SA III, I, 3), it is impossible to ask for Schleiermacher that much when his point of departure is not God's word but human heart.

sinlessness and perfection of Jesus (§68.3). And fifthly, God is the author of sin, because unless man attains the consciousness of sin he will not realize the need for redemption (§71.1).<sup>15</sup>

### CHRIST

What controls Schleiermacher's Christology is the work of Jesus («*seine Wirksamkeit*») in redemption and reconciliation (§91, §92.3). But again, the readers of Schleiermacher must not be deceived by the common language he uses. By redemption Schleiermacher means that Jesus takes believers into the power of His God-consciousness (§100). And by reconciliation he means that the believers gain the corporate feeling of blessedness in their hearts (§101, §86, §88.4). These works of Jesus are explained by a generic term, «*influence*» (§87, §88). Jesus influences people only in the community which He founded (§87, §88, §92). In His work of redemption He first enters into the corporate life of sin in order to begin influencing people with His God-consciousness. In His work of reconciliation Jesus lives at the center of the believers' life in order to effect a feeling of disappearance of the old Adam as well as a feeling of union with Christ. Both redemption and reconciliation take place only gradually in a movement of growing likeness to the Redeemer (§100). It is a process of formation. For this reason, Schleiermacher criticizes the notion of vicarious atonement and the forgiveness talk because there the work of Christ comes from outside.

How does Jesus influence people? Is it through word and sacrament? Does the Office of the Holy Ministry have a place in Schleiermacher's discussion? We will find that out in the next section. But for now, Schleiermacher supplies two things: his revision of the doctrine of the person of Christ («*seine Würde*») and another revision of the doctrine of the threefold office of Christ. The major point of his understanding of Christ's person is that Jesus possesses the absolute sinlessness

<sup>15</sup> Strangely Schleiermacher appeals to AC XIX to justify his understanding where an expression «as soon as God withdraws His hand» appears in German edition (§81.3). Schleiermacher does not pay attention to the fact that the main point of this article was to dismiss the very idea that God is a cause of sin.

and perfect blessedness in His consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Thus Schleiermacher sees this as a requirement for being able to influence His God-consciousness in the believers (§92, §96). Otherwise, He cannot draw people away from the corporate life of sin (§92).

Schleiermacher relates preaching about Jesus' perfect God-consciousness and absolute sinlessness to His prophetic office, while His inward way of controlling the church to His royal office (§103, §105). But the most unique one, perhaps, is His presentation of the High-priestly office of Jesus. Just as the high priest serves in the divine service of the Temple and never departs from it, so Jesus remains constantly with God and does the will of God. This is Schleiermacher's notion of the active obedience of Christ (§104.2–3). The passive obedience is not about His atoning sacrifice but His self-denying love (§101.3, §104.4). In both cases, Schleiermacher dismisses the notion of vicariousness. Rather than putting believers in a passive mode, Schleiermacher wants them to be partners in His obedience.

#### JUSTIFICATION

Schleiermacher's exposition of the manner in which the believers experience the fellowship with Christ in their consciousness is divided into two headings of regeneration and sanctification (§109.2). Regeneration in turn is described as

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<sup>16</sup> Schleiermacher dismisses the virgin birth, Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and second coming as unimportant details. These questions belong to the doctrine of the Scripture as they have nothing to do with the doctrine of Christ for him (§97.2, §99.2). Schleiermacher rationalizes that the supernatural conception of Jesus can be believed without having to talk about non-Joseph influence in the Scripture or even non-Mary influence in the later Medieval development. Likewise, he thinks that Jesus' spiritual presence does not have to be mediated by the intermediate steps as His resurrection and ascension (§97.2, §99.1). In these topics, Schleiermacher attempted to find a mediating position between the orthodox dogma and the Enlightenment religion. Theologically, he has moved away from Lutheran Confessions because, for example, the ascension of our Lord is the key for His ongoing ministry on earth to distribute His forgiveness by using the apostolic ministry. Schleiermacher does not see this. In terms of Jesus two natures, he again revises it (§96).

conversion and justification. Furthermore, conversion consists of repentance and faith while justification is made up of forgiveness of sins and being a child of God.

Conversion marks the beginning of the new life in fellowship with Christ. As mentioned, it does not take place by the preaching of the Law and the preaching of the Gospel in Schleiermacher's church, but by the vision of Christ's perfection, which causes both repentance and faith. It is a gradual movement toward a living fellowship with Christ. But how can believers know whether they are in or still out? Schleiermacher answers: by the steady progress in sanctification, and by active participation in the extension of Christ's kingdom (§108.2). If one is not «missional» and «pious», that person is not even converted for Schleiermacher!<sup>17</sup>

What is justification for Schleiermacher? It is a changed relation to God (§107), which comes only through the union with Christ (§107.1). God justifies the one who is converted

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<sup>17</sup> In Schleiermacher's theology, conversion is known by repentance and faith. Repentance means a combination of regret and change of heart. This is a description of man's conscience when he is in the fellowship of sin. The law is not sufficient to produce the consciousness of regret because it is external and because it evokes regret on only particular things (§108.2, §112.5). Only the vision of the perfection of Christ brings about a consciousness of true conversion-regret. But since the same vision of Christ is at the same time His self-impartation of perfection, it is also recognized as the dawn of faith, which Schleiermacher defines as the appropriation of the perfection and blessedness of Christ. As we did not clearly hear from Schleiermacher how Christ communicates His perfection which results in both regret and faith in the previous section of Christology, in this section on regeneration the reader of Schleiermacher stays uninformed. Schleiermacher repeats the language of «influence» of the Redeemer (§106.1, §109.3, etc.). He does not speak of the preaching and the sacraments as the means through which Christ works. He is also opposed to an idea of having to designate a particular time and place of man's conversion (§108.3). Then, how can a believer know whether he is received into a living fellowship with Christ? As conversion and justification take place only gradually because it has to do with the union with Christ, the only way to recognize one's progression is by seeing the fruits of conversion; a steady progress in sanctification, and active participation in the extension of Christ's kingdom (§108.2). Schleiermacher thinks it impossible that a man who is received into unity of life with Christ can go on in his living without actively providing himself as an instrument of Christ's redeeming activity.



(§109).<sup>18</sup> As Christ influences the believer, his consciousness of sin becomes the consciousness of forgiveness of sin. When forgiveness of sin is felt, there emerges also a consciousness of being adopted as a child of God (§109.2).

Once a man is converted and justified, the fellowship with Christ in his heart must steadily grow. This is the state of sanctification (§110.1), where fellowship with Christ always means fellowship with His mission to the world (§111.4). The believer still sins but carries with him the forgiveness of sin so that he will not lose his redemption. Once in the state of sanctification no new sin can develop (§111.1). In Schleiermacher's view on justification, amazingly he has no use of Christ's atoning death on the cross. He ignores the means of grace all together and the means of grace office. Certainty of being justified is known only empirically in a quantitative way and by looking at one's own heart and work.

#### CHURCH

Schleiermacher's proposition §115 summarizes his understanding of the church. He wrote: «The Christian church is formed when the reborn individuals come together for the purpose of working on each other and for working with each other in an orderly manner». Such a definition of the church sounds strange to Lutheran ears because there is no mention of the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. But in Schleiermacher's system this statement only makes sense, because Schleiermacher is not confessing the church from the word of God but is giving his assertion on the life of the church from below. Believers are those who have been received into the living fellowship with Christ by His influence.

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<sup>18</sup> Since conversion consists of repentance and faith, justification comes after the beginning of faith (§109.4). Faith comes by receiving an influence from Christ. But such influence must be accepted by man, as the ability of receiving Christ's influence was never lost by original sin for Schleiermacher. Repentance (in conversion) corresponds to forgiveness of sin (in justification), just as faith (in conversion) is related to being a child of God (in justification). Repentance and forgiveness have to do with end of the old state as faith and being a child of God express the character of the new (§109.2).

By participating in Christ's mission to extend His kingdom, they will know that they are indeed brought into fellowship with Christ.

The reason for stating that in the church believers work «on each other» and work «with each other» comes from his conviction that Jesus does not have any direct influence on the church any more (§116.3). Christ is no longer present because Schleiermacher does not hold the biblical teaching on the ascension, the means of grace, and the office that serves them as instituted by Christ. But Schleiermacher does not take the fact of Christ's absence negatively. In fact, he even rejoices about it, because he observes in the New Testament that so long as Christ was there with His disciples they depended on Him. Only when Jesus departed did they start to influence each other actively and spontaneously rather than staying merely as receivers (§122.2–3). Here Schleiermacher speaks of the Holy Spirit as the common spirit of the community. In the absence of Christ, Schleiermacher still wants to keep «something divine» in the church (§116.3). That is the Holy Spirit as the common spirit who keeps the believers in unity (§121.2).

But wasn't Schleiermacher saying that Christ was the One who redeems and reconciles men? Was it not by His work that men are taken into the living fellowship with Himself? How are we to understand that it is the common spirit who influences believers in the church? The answer lies in his conviction that there is no Gnadennittelamt in the church (§122.3). When the mandated office by Jesus is denied, believers are left with no certainty as to how the crucified and risen Lord still comes to His people to forgive and to enliven. So, Schleiermacher establishes a wonderful system of every believer reciprocally influencing one another (§121.1, 3) in the absence of the office through which Christ bestows His gifts.

#### «THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH»

Lastly, we should briefly mention Schleiermacher's version of the "marks of the church" because of their relation to his concept of justification. He identifies six marks: (1) Holy Scripture, (2) the ministry of the Word, (3) baptism, (4) the Lord's Supper, (5)

the office of the keys, and (6) prayer in the name of Christ. The first two are for the witness to Christ (the prophetic activity of Christ), the third and fourth are for the formation and maintenance of living fellowship with Christ (the high-priestly activity of Christ), and the last two are for the reciprocal influence among the believers (the royal activity of Christ). Schleiermacher also considers the first three (Holy Scripture, the ministry of the Word, baptism) to be Christ's redemptive activity, and the last three (the Lord's Supper, the office of the keys, prayer in the name of Jesus) to be Christ's reconciling activity. His desire to systematize doctrine is manifest here again.

In this part of *Der christliche Glaube*, Schleiermacher repeatedly mentions that our Christianity should be the same as that of the Apostles (§127.2), and that the grounds of faith must be the same for us as they were for the first Christians (§128.2). What it means for Schleiermacher's concept of justification is that just as Jesus was making His disciples in his earthly ministry by dwelling among them in fellowship, so in our day, Jesus still makes His disciples through the common spirit working within the community of believers. In Schleiermacher's system there is no place for proclamation, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

What about these "marks of the church"? For Schleiermacher, the New Testament is a record of Christian piety among the first members (§129.1). The ministry of the Word is possessed by every Christian. Schleiermacher still recognizes the pastoral work as public ministry. But the authority of the pastor is a derived authority from the church by way of transfer (§134. 1–2). When a pastor absolves a congregation, he does so by the authority of the church (§145.2). One of the rationales behind this assertion is his interpretation that when Christ commissioned His Apostles to make disciples, the commission was chiefly directed to those outside the church. Within the church, believers are to teach and care for each other.

When it comes to baptism, Schleiermacher reveals again his neo-Platonic tendency to divide what is external and what is internal. Baptism is still viewed as the channel of God's justifying action (§137.3). But since baptism itself gives nothing because it is external, he speaks of the effect of baptism which had already

been effected internally. The most important point of baptism is the intention of the church to baptize (§137.1). Once welcomed into the fellowship, the church starts to influence the newly baptized so that he or she may receive forgiveness of sins.

Concerning the Lord's Supper, he temporarily settles himself with the Zwinglian view to be most compatible to his view on baptism. For Schleiermacher, the Lord's Supper consists of bodily participation (bread and wine) and the spiritual effect (strengthening of the spiritual life) (§140). Again, the Lord's Supper gives nothing because it is external. But just as confirmation exists as the consummation of baptism, so the Lord's Supper exists as the assurance of the forgiveness of sins announced earlier in the communion service. On the other hand, Schleiermacher does not downplay the Lord's Supper completely. It is actually important for him and considers it to be the highest point of worship (§139.2), because in this particular "action", believers receive the confirmation of both their fellowship with Christ and their union with each other at the same time in their consciousness (§141.1).

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Schleiermacher presented a very different view not only on justification but also on all parts of his theology, both in methodology and content. He spoke a foreign language, and attracted many to adopt his new views over the course of many generations. He emphasized our heart, consciousness, and experience, but he was really a theologian of reason, having Zwingli before him and Ritschl after him. As far as we are concerned, we pray that we would ever confess only what the Lord has given us to confess, because any correction or addition that we might wish to make would only weaken the doctrine. The faithfulness does not mean that we should isolate ourselves from those who speak foreign languages. We should listen carefully and engage with them fruitfully. But it does not mean that we should stop confessing. Justification is all about Jesus who bears our sin. It is a joyous proclamation that our sins are

now located on our Savior Jesus. Justification is essentially all about our sins having been answered for by Jesus who continues with His Spirit to deliver the forgiveness of our sins through baptism, absolution, and the Lord's Supper. When you've visited a foreign country, you appreciate your homeland anew.

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