Grace or Morals:
What Ultimately Determines our Destinies?

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A. Introduction

Of the several words grouped together in our question, perhaps the one that most threatens to complicate matters for us at the outset is the 'our.' Specifically, to which group or set of individuals is it intended to refer? Should we understand it to refer only to God's people, those individuals who will dwell in a state of eternal glory with the Lord? Or should we take it to refer more generally to that set containing all humans, including those who will suffer in the post-resurrection state? I take these to be the two main competing options with respect to the question of just whose destinies are to be considered here.

In my judgment, an inquiry that delves into the ultimate determination of the destinies of only a portion of humanity, leaving the destinies of countless others (along with a clear view of the divine principles or actions ultimately accounting for them) out of the frame, risks the setting forth of a lopsided portrait. It also risks the taking of

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an ambivalent stance vis-à-vis the good creation in which Adam, the human race's *pater familias*, found himself, and the Lord's expressed designs for that creation to be faithfully ordered to His own glory by the humans *qua* humans.

Additionally, it will become clear that a serious theological "sorting out" of human destinies with respect to the question "grace or morals?" involves one in a discussion that inevitably grapples with principles and concepts importantly pertaining to both those who are eternally God's people and those who are not eternally God's people. A scripturally informed treatment of divine grace, for example, requires one to think about divine justice as well. Instead of getting what is owed them and, in a sense, to be expected—i.e., judgment— some people receive a gift and move into the light from out of darkness through the mediation of Jesus Christ. Here, just to get things moving, we must distinguish between justice and grace as distinct principles informing divine action, as well as between (at least potentially) two sectors of humanity whose destinies play out under the respective domains of those principles-in-action. While a universal redemption is arguably consistent with God's character, a goat-less Hell is not the reality which will indeed eventuate, to which the Scriptures attest (Matt. 10:28; Acts 17:30-31). And this points to something serious that Christians must appreciate. It is not with mere concepts that we have to do but with the realities of life and death. And these two paths of life and death exhaust the available routes that can be taken by our neighbors in the human community. A theology that solely focuses on those going to the good place, while giving nary a thought to their counterparts headed the other way and to what accounts for the difference between these fails to achieve clarity about grace, not to mention its presumed conceptual correlate, justice. Perhaps more importantly, though, the absence of clarity about the contingent nature of redeeming grace risks producing a subtle attitude of ingratitude (toward God) among Christians. With this in mind, then, I will approach the present question and take 'our' in the broad sense to refer to the destinies of all humans, assuming that the latter will fall into one of two categories—glory or ignominy.

By this point, it is becoming clear, however, that a theology which is biblically informed cannot allow for a straight "grace" or "morals" reply to our question. Especially when one decides on a

numerically universal scope with regard to those whose destinies are being considered and confesses that there are two distinct "destiny camps" into which the human race is (or will be) eternally divided, the grace-or-morals choice begins to look like a false dilemma. Even if we go on to admit (as I shall) that the relative Comedy enjoyed by sheep and Tragedy suffered by goats can, in an important sense, be indexed to their characteristic "works," a faithful Christian accounting of their divergent destinations must make a principal reference to Grace.[3]

B. Challenges to the Christian Tradition from People of the Book

But what about the standpoint of those for whom 'our destiny' denotes the paths and future outcomes of all humans and not merely the members of a blessed sub-division to which traditional Christian thinkers would have us especially tend? Is it not presumptuous so quickly to settle on an efficacious principle of grace, and then, if that was not enough, to divide up the human race into two groups, those God befriends and those He sees fit not to befriend? Furthermore, the suspicious inquirer might object, perhaps even citing an earlier statement of this essay to the effect that the humans in the biblical story were created as a single race living before their God. There was, originally, none of this talk of favoring some over others.

It will strike some as not only implausible but also offensive that ethical monotheists would welcome a seemingly arbitrary "rescue principle" by which the rigors of the moral law might be conveniently eluded. This line of thought, of course, moves rather straightforwardly away from historic Christian beliefs about the reception (or not) of divine grace through the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ uniquely deciding how things will finally stand for Adam's descendants.

Examples of religious traditions that would underwrite these suspicions about the "rescue principle" would include, most obviously, various forms of Judaism and Islam.[4] Both affirm one

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[3] For an insightful use of the literary concepts of comedy and tragedy in the context of a hopeful, Trinitarian eschatology, consult Peter Leithart, *Deep Comedy: Trinity, Tragedy, and Hope in Western Literature* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2006).

[4] I am aware of differences within Judaism, say, between various contemporary approaches and between modern and ancient forms. I am more concerned here, however, to speak to post-A.D. 70 forms that, in contrast to forms prior to that date, tend to be greatly tilted in the direction of moralistic religion. [*Footnote continued on next page …*]

god, whose expressed moral will serves as the standard by which humans are judged. And, to the extent that these traditions have worked out conceptions of divine purpose in the lives of humans who continue to subsist beyond the grave, they fairly steadily agree that our destinies play out along a relatively flat, moralistic plane.[5] Whatever purported priority they may give to a religious or ethno-religious principle of soteriological particularism, say, based on a claimed ancestral connection to Abraham or covenantal solidarity with Moses, neither tradition is ready to embrace what, for them, must seem a disturbingly vertical conception of grace commonly espoused within the Christian tradition. Though differing from each other in many respects that are well-known, Judaism and Islam resemble one another in their mutual affirmation of a picture in which individuals, at best the receivers of a general divine call, work either toward or away from God fundamentally through their own autonomous moral qualities and actions.[6] For this reason, the present study will not especially benefit from an extended look at these traditions. While they are certainly of interest in the worldview arena, they are not particularly appealing specimens for those interested in a theological discourse that takes seriously the claim that gratuitous divine action profoundly shapes what we (at least some of us) will be and how we

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This was an inevitable result of the Temple's destruction and the eclipse of the priestly class. At the same time, one should note that even 2ⁿᵈ Temple Judaism's Jewish converts to Jesus of Nazareth were chastened by Paul at times for their insistence on Jewish ceremonial forms for which circumcision representatively stood. Their insistence would have tended to blunt the sharp break with Mosaic ceremonies (though not with their deeper eschatological significance and fulfillment in Christ) that the New Covenant brought and also to lessen the otherwise startling impact of the Holy Spirit's falling upon non-Jews. These related realities occupied a place of central concern within the landscape of the 1ˢᵗ century "Jesus movement" as the Christian faith spread (Acts 10:44-11:18, 15:1-29). Needless to say, it is my contention that religious paths subordinating belief in the atonement provided by the death of Jesus to the practices tethered to pre-Jesus Judaism cut themselves off from the very substance that would give life to those practices. Thereby, such paths allow the practitioners to rest secured in their relationship with YHWH based either on an ethno-religious identity or commendable ceremonial works they perform or both.

[5] See John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) and N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God (Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol3)* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) on the relative little that is said in the Hebrew Bible concerning post-humous existence, much less full-blown resurrection as it came to expression in the New Testament.

[6] I acknowledge that this is a broad generalization that some scholars would want to challenge or at least qualify. Unfortunately, spatial limitations prevent me from giving a defense of it. It should suffice here to say that I continue to affirm and practice the Christian faith based not merely on the fact that I have been raised in that tradition. There are both formal and material considerations that account for why I have not abandoned the Christian faith for a "Jesus-less" Judaism or for the Muslim faith.

become what we will be. Judaism and Islam, I would argue, lack the requisite soteriological tension (or apparent tension) between grace and morals that we are concerned to address here. They can, when contrasted with the Christian tradition, be seen as opting out of this tension by embracing a world picture in which human moral effort stands conspicuously alone in determining our destinies.

Again, Christians do not tend to find such a picture terribly enticing or promising. Indeed, historically, the Christian tradition has stood out among the world's religions in proclaiming a god who takes the initiative to redeem for himself a people, claiming, as it does, the advent of Israel's Messiah in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.[7] This stands in contradistinction to approaches which have, in one fashion or another, rested a comparatively heavy weight upon the shoulders of supposedly autonomous humans and left them to overcome whatever inhibits their happiness, self-actualization, or enlightenment. Seeing, then, that only in the Christian tradition is the grace-morals tension significantly countenanced, it will profit here to ponder the question of our destinies and their ultimate determinant(s) in light of thoughts expressed on the subject (or on matters bearing on the subject) by a theologian within that tradition. In particular, I will work toward a response to our present question by dialoging with a pillar of modern theology who is often reckoned as one of "the Reformed," Friedrich Schleiermacher.

C. Enlightenment Challenges to Orthodoxy; Schleiermacher's Revisions

On first approach, the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher might appear to be a relatively promising place in which to find a message of divine redemption, one that breaks up and duly humbles the pretensions of human activity in the religio-ethical sphere. To be sure, throughout both the earlier and later phases of his work, Schleiermacher was intent on uprooting a common conception of the Christian religion that identified it with, or at least hermeneutically

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[7] While reserving the right to qualify and differ with his portrait and some of its implications at points, I commend the historical study of Jesus of Nazareth and the Messianic concept set forth by N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2* (Minneanpolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

subordinated it to, the conservative moral sense of his day.[8] Representative of this reduction of the religious to the ethical was Immanuel Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, in which the historical and conceptual particularities of the Christian message are read through the grid of his deontological ethics.[9] Schleiermacher rejected this form of Enlightenment moralism as a stale, rationalistic brand of pseudo-piety. In its stead, he sought to articulate a theology, embedded in a more general philosophy of religion, which captured what he believed to be the essence of true Christian piety. The latter, he held, consisted neither in the "doing" of moral actions nor in the "knowing" of metaphysical truths but in that elusive third kind of thing situated between the two as mediator, a "feeling" of the finite individual that he or she is a being in absolute dependence upon an Infinite Other.[10] This conception of the creator-creature or, perhaps better, the Infinite-finite relation, along with a prominent focus placed on the Church and on Jesus as her liberator, found especially in Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*, make the latter deserving of attention.

One can hardly dispute that any Christian theology worthy of the name will place thoughts about human destiny on a conceptual map whose central locations include hamartiology and soteriology. That is, at least some form of the "rescue principle" is crucial for a Christian conception of human eventuation. The deity, to put it far too generically, is intent on moving us (at least some of us) from an undesirable A to a desirable Z. And as much as any other constructed within the Christian tradition, Schleiermacher's theology highlights the importance of relating the route of Redemption to the dead-end town of Sin in which Grace finds humans and liberates them.

As it stands, *The Christian Faith* (hereafter *CF*) generally resembles in its formal structure the sort of systematic theologies produced by various post-Reformation scholars.[11] Its author arranges

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[8] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 28-31.

[9] Kant's approach to ethics was characterized by an exclusive concern with the moral demands of duty, regardless of an action's or policy's supposed consequences.

[10] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: T&T Clark, 1999), 5-12.

[11] Schleiermacher arranges his dogmatics topically in a way typical of post-Reformation theologies, as seen, for instance, in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

his topics, as much as possible, using traditional Reformed terms and categories, leading one at first to expect a rather robust doctrine of redemptive grace that will complement an equally robust doctrine of human fallenness. A quick perusal of *CF*'s division headings, for example, turns up statements such as

> In all men, original sin is always issuing in actual sin.[12]

and

> We have fellowship with God only in a living fellowship with the Redeemer…
> .[13]

But, unless one is content to ignore the context in which they are found, these fairly traditional sounding statements acquire meanings under Schleiermacher's care that depart significantly from the doctrines expounded by his historically Reformed predecessors.

In order to account for this departure and the novelties it introduced, one will initially do well to bear in mind the way in which an inherited religious tradition converged with certain philosophical commitments and aesthetic sensibilities in Schleiermacher's thinking. As they congealed, these elements aided his setting forth of a theological discourse which, in particular, radically altered a traditional Christian (and, more specifically, Reformed) grammar of sin, grace, and destiny. And without a solid understanding of the way in which he altered this grammar by introducing new content into it, we will struggle to evaluate his thoughts on the question of human destinies and those realities upon which they most fundamentally hinge.

First, it must be borne in mind that a major part of Schleiermacher's exposure to the Reformed tradition was to a distinctly mystical branch of that tradition at a Moravian school. Second, despite his marked and commendable opposition to Kant's moralistic reductionism, he took no such umbrage at Kant's phenomena-noumena distinction and the cloud of agnosticism it placed between humans and a supposed divine referent of their

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[12] Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 304.
[13] Ibid., 371.

theological predications.[14]   Rather, this distinction between a cognitively accessible phenomenal "sphere" (to which we are said to be privy by means of the mind's structuring categories) and a cognitively inaccessible noumenal "sphere" (whose residents are said to include God) played the role of a definitive presupposition for how theology, he felt, must henceforth proceed. Third, in tandem with the more mystical religious influence and his respect for Kant's metaphysical agnosticism, Schleiermacher was oriented by the Romanticist spirit which resented as a defilement any effort to approach Someone as sublime and immense as the Infinite in order to draw sharp distinctions, say, between particular attributes or actions. Such an approach to the One would amount to a sort of religious crime, the perpetrator of which threatens to spoil the deity's ineffable unity and uniqueness by submitting the latter to a dissecting analysis only appropriate (if at all) to the world of things finite.[15]

When these components of his mental makeup are taken together, it should not seem incredible that Schleiermacher sought to overhaul the very meaning of what it is to construct a protestant theology, or any sort of Christian theology for that matter. What, then, we might ask, was the nature of his "protestant" theology's *protest*?

What it most certainly was *not* was a stand with the magisterial Reformers against perceived medieval deviations from the ancient evangelical faith, with the latter being believed to have been revealed through the Apostles and passed on by the Church Fathers. For all the religious and theological housecleaning done by the Reformers, theirs was not a wholesale renovation of the very nature of that theological discourse they inherited from the western, Roman church.   Their thinking and writing took place within a well-developed Christian tradition. They trafficked in a conceptual world in which references to a distinctly personal, transcendent, triune deity who is related to the

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14 John W. Cooper, *Panentheism—the Other God of the Philosopher: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 84.

15 Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 348-49.   Although I would argue that Schleiermacher's bent against metaphysical knowledge is misguided, his mystical focus on the One provides something of a corrective to the strong trend in contemporary evangelical theology toward an anthropomorphic deity whose characteristics are univocally modeled on human actions and affections. For an example of this trend, see John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

realm of the historical and finite as its creator were, generally, assumed to be un-problematical. Granted, questions surrounding the predication of divine attributes had been addressed and handled in various ways by men like Thomas Aquinas (analogy) and John Calvin (accommodation).   But "the tradition" was not hampered by an epistemic haziness such that the whole enterprise of a realistic metaphysical theology appeared to be a hopelessly intuitive, non-cognitive venture. Rather, operators within the tradition shared in a "realist" grammar in which God reigns eternally over a creation whose history included a fall into sin, the eventual incarnation of the Trinity's Second Person as Redeemer, and a distinctly supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit to call out a redeemed community from the world of lost sinners.[16]   Many details within that "realistic" tradition came up for debate but the viability of the tradition itself was not fundamentally questioned.[17]

What then was the nature of Schleiermacher's theological protest?   If Schleiermacher represents a swerve away from the tradition's foundational narrative and concepts, how then is it that he has come to be thought of as a "reformer"?   The answers to these questions lie in understanding how his commitments and sensibilities placed him in opposition to some key features of Enlightenment thought. In an illuminating chapter, Alister McGrath describes the Enlightenment's own rebellion against "the tradition":

> The particular hostility demonstrated by the theologians and philosophers of the Enlightenment towards the orthodox dogma of original sin was ultimately a rejection of the implied heteronomous conditioning and moral inadequacy of the individual. In that an orthodox theology of justification – whether Lutheran, Reformed or Catholic – presupposed the essential natural alienation of individuals from God (in other words, that individuals enter the world already alienated from God, rather than that they become alienated from God through their subsequent actions), it will be evident that a serious challenge was posed to

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[16] Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 359.

[17] It should be noted, of course, that there was a less widely embraced Neo-Platonic tradition represented by the likes of Pseudo-Dionysius, John Scotus Eriugena (810-77), Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-1327), and Nicholas of Cusa (1401-64). My only point here is that Schleiermacher, while not without predecessors in his way of thinking, was to a great extent an innovator as a supposed heir of the Reformation.

such theologies by the rise of the moral optimism and rationalism of the Enlightenment.[18]

He then goes on to discuss how various 17th and 18th century European thinkers sought to overthrow and displace the older apparatus of original sin and reconciliation with more naturalistic and anthropocentric soteriological concepts. The idea that humans stand in a unique ethical interface with their creator, whether that interface be marked by peace or tension, was banished as superstition. In its place, sin was severely contracted in its essence and defined primarily in terms of qualities or actions that tend away from individual or societal happiness. To be sure, Kant himself signaled an important shift from the brazenly utilitarian aspects of the Enlightenment's critique of traditional orthodoxy. He, at least, introduced a discourse in which humans are brought face to face with unbending obligations, even while maintaining his anthropocentric credentials in the belief that there is no real obligation where there is no human able to meet it.[19]

Schleiermacher, however, was not satisfied with a theology in which 'God' amounted to little more than a place-marker in a system of ethics, as was the case with Kant. Indeed, no matter how utilitarian or deontological one's morals were, issue was to be taken with an entire project that all but vaporized the unique creator-creature interface, especially as it concerned topics of sin and salvation. Schleiermacher showed his mystical Moravian bent and his Romanticist distaste for the systematizing of Reality in a protest against the Enlightenment's flattened out, humanly focused, moralistic conception of religion. He opposed an intellectual and religious climate in which the divine was, at best, being domesticated. God was, as it were, being cut down to size and run through the ethical filter of Enlightenment man's univocal reasoning. This was perceived as an offense against Reality, against God as its unifier, and against humans as its citizens. He therefore set out to reform the Enlightenment's heirs by bringing a renewed focus upon the creator-creature relationship. He held that man's alienation and subsequent need for restoration on the cosmic scale, the stuff of which true

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[18] McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 360.

[19] Ibid., 373.

religion is about, must not be intellectualized or made to fit neatly into an anthropomorphic doctrine. Rather, he insisted, religion must be grasped at by the imagination and its sphere be understood to stand in a unique, even equivocal, relation to the sphere of morals.[20] These moves, however, exhibited Schleiermacher's loyalties to Neo-Platonism as much as they did his interest in maintaining some semblance of Protestant dogma in the face of Enlightenment anthropocentrism and increasing secularization.[21] So much so was this the case that his reforming efforts constituted as much a protest against the Christian tradition's straightforward metaphysical realism and the conceptions of sin, grace, and, yes, human destiny that came with it as it did a critique of the Enlightenment's reductionistic moralism.

Interpreters have debated over whether Schleiermacher should be read as proposing a version of pantheism, classical panentheism, or some form of theological non-realism, in which alleged references to the deity either amount to expressions of the feeling of Absolute Dependence or could be translated into statements about such a *sui generis* feeling.[22] I tend to think that an open and shut case cannot be made on which reading is best, due to inconsistencies on Schleiermacher's part. He seems to oscillate between the claim that dogmatics is a "science" of the creature's relation to God and the claim that true piety is not at all concerned with metaphysical knowledge but with a consciousness or feeling of Dependence.[23] What is more important for our present purposes, however, is not what is debated but what is not debated. It is *not* debated that Schleiermacher's dogmatics is profoundly focused upon human experience and upon constructing a strictly "bottom up" theology. Nor is it debated that he effected a veritable revolution in

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20 Ibid., 378.

21 Cooper, *Panentheism*, 82.

22 See Cooper, *Panentheism*; also Richard Brandt, "Maturity" in *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher* (New York: Harper and Row, 1941; repr., Westpoert, CT: Greenwood, 1962), 258-98.

23 It strikes me, however, that if the feeling of Absolute Dependence is to carry revelatory weight it must imply or presuppose a true relation between the finite and the Infinite. And if there is a true relation then this implies the existence of both the finite and the Infinite. Despite, then, Schleiermacher's practice of indexing divine predicates to the *human feeling* of being in relation to God, that felt relation would seem to imply at least a rudimentary, realistic metaphysics of God. With Brandt, I have difficulty seeing how God-talk can be at all theologically informative if the entire Infinite-finite relation is reduced in some way to a reference to the religious feeling of individuals.

hermeneutics, one in which the language of earlier dogmas in Scripture and tradition came to be refracted through his own aesthetic and religious lens. An implication of this is that his theology offers severe resistance to any attempt to address the rather "traditional" question of what ultimately determines human destinies (grace or morals?). In fact, to this question, unsurprisingly, Schleiermacher's theology, I will argue on one hand, gives no clear "traditional" reply. All the same, I will contend that, precisely owing to his departure from traditional conceptions of sin and redemption, the aforementioned "rescue principle" is not satisfactorily set forth and maintained in his soteriology. Thus, he, in fact, leaves individuals to fend for themselves and forge their own "destinies" (though not necessarily or primarily with respect to *morals*) along life's dialectical way.

For any purportedly Christian theology, the doctrines pertaining to Jesus Christ (i.e., his person and work) will critically indicate the nature of the human transition to be made from an undesirable A to (or toward) a desirable Z. Christology (of whatever sort it is) invariably acts as a sort of bridge from sin (however conceived) to the way of redemption. For this reason, it will profit to take Schleiermacher's Christology as an entryway into his thoughts on human destiny.

So, put simply, what is Jesus Christ all about in Schleiermacher's theological outlook? Who is he and what is he up to in his role as "redeemer"?

I would begin by noting that there does not appear, for Schleiermacher, to be a clear distinction between Christ's *person* and Christ's *work* in the more traditional sense of the divine nature adding to itself a human nature as a prerequisite to the provision of atonement. Indeed, this absence of a clear distinction between who Christ is (as God-man) and what he does as a spiritual liberator points to a tension in Schleiermacher's Christology.

On one end, Christ is presented as the unique way to God, as in dogmatic statements such as this one

> There is no other way of obtaining participation in the Christian communion than through faith in Jesus as Redeemer.[24]

and this one, which asserts Christianity as

> essentially distinguished from other…faiths by the fact that in it everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.[25]

On the other end, however, Schleiermacher wishes to be very clear that an orthodox two-natures Christology is not what he is proclaiming and promoting. He does not refrain from speaking of Christ's "divinity" but neither does he allow room for a supernatural intrusion from on high. To the extent that he can be taken as articulating a realist metaphysics, Schleiermacher leaves little (if any) space for divine action distinct from the flat-line continuities of natural things and events. This fact comes to expression in his notion of Christ as a purely human yet "divine" person, as seen here:

> Even if…the actual implanting of the divine element must be purely a divine and therefore an eternal act, nevertheless the temporal appearance of this act in one particular Person must at the same time be regarded as an action of human nature, grounded in its original constitution and prepared for by all its past history… .[26]

In his view, those who would locate the origin of Christ's Person in the triune council *sans* creation must suppose that God is "arbitrary" for having chosen to appear "precisely in Jesus, and not in some other person."[27] Moreover, he holds that this arbitrariness "belongs to an anthropopathic view of God."[28] Proponents of the latter fail properly to "feel after" the brooding presence of the Infinite and instead project into the heavens an image of their own particularistic devising. Jesus is not to be thought of as one Person consisting of two distinct natures who comes to secure atonement through his own blood. Rather, he comes to us as a man singularly exemplifying piety. Having successfully subverted his activities as one finite individual among a multitude of reciprocally related finite individuals to the "higher virtue" of an utterly passive relation vis-à-

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[24] Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 68.

[25] Ibid., 52.

[26] Ibid., 64.

[27] Ibid., 64.

[28] Ibid., 64.

vis the Infinite, he is rightly reckoned as a divine redeemer.[29] In this sense, Schleiermacher presents a "degrees" Christology. The "incarnation" introduces no fundamental disruption or transcendent encroachment into the historical realm. Instead, Christ appears as one whose ontology is essentially no different than all of the other humans; his soteric nature is realized in his possession of an amplified consciousness of the Infinite in relation to himself and the world.[30]

Here we see that our consideration of Christ's Person has easily drifted into a consideration of Christ's work. For in Schleiermacher's scheme the attitudes and mentality of Christ are of much greater consequence for sinners than is his identity as such. To put it another way, Christ is Redeemer because of a certain principle of activity (or, as it turns out, *passivity*) lived out and exhibited by him; he did not live a redemptive life in virtue of his being the Redeemer or the unique Son of God but is called Redeemer for the unique redemptive life that he is said to have lived.[31]

What are the implications of this, then, for the nature of Christ's redemptive activity? In what sense does his life and work provide a bridge by which sinners might at least begin moving from an undesirable A toward a desirable Z? In what sense does he, after all, figure as *savior*?

Clearly, one will not gain a proper Schleiermacherian sense of Christ's redemptive work without a glimpse of the world into which he came and of its major plight. The Schleiermacherian world is most characterized by a sense of inter-connectedness.[32]   At one level, humans stand in relationship to one another and to the rest of creation as do the various nodes or ties of a spider web. At this level, finite individuals are involved in a multiplicity of relations characterized by give and take, activity and passivity, and an interplay of relative freedom and dependence among themselves.[33]   Schleiermacher's most profound theological insight, however, arguably consists in the

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[29] Ibid., 426.

[30] Ibid., 371.

[31] Ibid., 374.

[32] Jeffrey C. Pugh, *The Matrix of Faith: Reclaiming a Christian Vision* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 127-29.

[33] Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 12-18.

recognition that immanently supervening on this realm of finite relations is a Needless, Infinite, One.[34] Moreover, a true understanding of oneself as one "node" within the web consists in a deeply persistent awareness of and "devotion to" the reality of the web as owing nothing to finite contrivance.[35] The illuminated religious imagination will be deeply informed of its relative place amidst the whole and of its utter reliance on the Presence of an Other for all of life and movement.

The problem is that not all individuals are as maximally filled with a sense of their relationship to the Other (whose presence is necessary for the web of finite relations to be what it is) as they could be. While some intermittent sense of the finite-Infinite relation is implicit in their creatureliness, creatures all too easily pay it little regard. And their own struggles in the region of the finite often all but monopolize their attentions, snatching away what could be a much deeper awareness of God.

It is in view of this prevalent imbalance of human consciousness in a direction away from the Infinite that Jesus Christ features as the spiritual liberator in Schleiermacher's dogmatics. He comes to shift the balance in the other direction. Consistent with the assertion that Christ's ontology in no way differed from that of his fellow humans, Christ is held to have been "God-man" and "Redeemer" due to his perpetual and unbound awareness of God as the One who cares for us. Christ does not lay his life down in order to provide a propitiatory or expiatory bridge by which to deliver his sheep to a safe place. Instead, Schleiermacher much rather would have us picture Christ as a Moses-like deliverer who walks the path from finite consciousness to a consciousness of the Infinite and delivers those who will follow him by their very taking of that path. He is proclaimed as the "exemplar," the "influencer" and the one who communicates the gratuitous divine provision for us through the Impression he makes on us in his own Person.[36]

As such, Schleiermacher's conception of Christ's redemptive work formally parallels John Calvin's. With Calvin, Schleiermacher

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[34] Cooper, *Panentheism*, 86.

[35] Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 12.

[36] Ibid., 427.

maintains that Christ's redemptive activity does little good so long as its supposed beneficiaries fail to take hold of and appropriate Christ's benefits for themselves.[37] Sensibly then, Schleiermacher's dogmatics sets out, from the start, within the matrix of and for the benefit of *the Church*. It is crucial, however, to recognize that for Schleiermacher the Church is not "set apart" from "the World" by a particular, electing grace.[38] For him, moreover, the Church-World contrast is not characterized by a sharp *antithesis* between graciously reconciled "covenant keepers" and unregenerate "covenant breakers." It is, rather, characterized by a *continuity* in such a way that the Church can be said to occupy the central core of the worldwide web of relationality and focused "Dependence," with "sinful worldliness" increasing the further out from the core one goes.[39] The important point here is that Schleiermacher's ecclesiology mirrors his "Romantic" Christology.[40]

In addition to his Christology and ecclesiology, another way in which Schleiermacher gives the appearance of favoring the "grace side" of the grace-morals dichotomy (one which I mentioned earlier) is in his opposition to a reductionistic moralism that was passing for piety in his day. But it must be understood that it is not merely his opposition to moralism that creates that appearance. It is *the fact that he frames the entire human interface with God in non-moral terms* that accounts for why he cannot be indicted for construing salvation as an outgrowth of human moral effort.

In particular, Schleiermacher does not think of human fallenness from within the framework of an original, historic, covenantal relationship established by God with man. And so, consistently, his conception of human fallenness or original sin does not incorporate beliefs about the ethical rebellion of an original Adam. Absent

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[37] For an exposition of Calvin's view, see, for instance, Joel R. Beeke, "Appropriating Salvation: The Spirit, Faith and Assurance, and Repentance," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2008), 270-300.

[38] Unfortunately, spatial restraints prevent a treatment here of the much discussed distinction between the "visible" and "invisible" Church within Reformed Orthodoxy. For an initiation into this distinction as it is set forth by Reformed writers, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), IV, 1, 7.

[39] Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 525-28.

[40] Ibid., 641.

entirely from his outlook, in fact, are doctrines about (1) the covenantal guilt incurred by Adam's fall into sin for the entire human family and (2) the fundamentally defective moral condition that was mysteriously passed on to the members of that family as a result of the original transgression. I will argue that Schleiermacher's decision to replace these doctrines with sub-biblical substitutes keeps him from addressing our traditional question about human destiny and its ultimate determination in a straightforward manner and, by implication, prevents him from soundly articulating the "rescue principle" so essential to a Christian understanding of human eventuation.

But if the traditional grace-morals discourse is, as it were, thrown out of gear by Schleiermacher's unwillingness to frame human fallenness in terms of moral rebellion and guilt, then what are the terms in which he does frame human fallenness?

I maintain that his conception of human fallenness is framed in what can be called a "virtue aesthetics," in which sin (in its opposition to virtue) is evaluated in metaphysical and epistemological terms, rather than in terms of one's disposition(s) or judicial status. One gets the sense that sin has a sort of "metaphysical" texture when one considers that in both the supposed ideal (the Person of Christ) and in those supposed to be needful of Him as their Exemplar (the rest of us) a primitive (and therefore good) God-consciousness lurks.[41] That human sinfulness is characterized in terms of the "more-or-less" dialectics of God-consciousness and not under a forensic category of guilt and condemnation comes across in Schleiermacher's rather hopeful estimates of our human capacity to embody "aesthetic virtue." He speaks of

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[41] Ibid., 26-34. The notion of a universal consciousness or knowledge of God in itself is, of course, unobjectionable. The reason why the particular doctrine espoused by Schleiermacher is unacceptable is because it effectively collapses a traditional (and biblically warranted, I would argue) Reformed distinction between the innate knowledge all humans have of God and the knowledge of God in Christ with which Christians are endowed through the work of the Holy Spirit. The knowledge of God, for Schleiermacher, is characterized by the degree to which it obtains within what might be deemed a "salvific continuum" of the general human community, radiating out from "the Church" rather than by two sharply distinguished categories of, say, "general" and "redemptive" knowledge of God according to the presence or absence of the Holy Spirit's illuminating power in a person.

the power of development which resides in our human nature—a power which expresses itself…according to laws… .[42]

Likewise, Schleiermacher supplants a divine judgment laid upon disobedient creatures with an approach that describes evil using psychological or epistemological categories:

> [T]he evil condition can only consist in an obstruction or arrest of the vitality of the higher consciousness, and thus little or no religious life. …We may give to this condition, in its most extreme form, the name of *Godlessness*, or better, *God-forgetfulness*.[43]

Humans are thus not depicted as defiant or culpably indifferent cosmic criminals. They are not perceived as offenders of divine holiness for whom severe sanctions are warranted. Rather, the real problem is that humans do not consistently recognize themselves to be members of a finite whole whose unity and diversity rests on the unilateral care and support of an Infinite Soul.

This last observation exposes a feature of Schleiermacher's theology that cannot but hinder him from realistically attributing to divine grace an ultimacy in determining human destinies. Corresponding to his re-framed conception of sin along non-moral lines and the consequent absence of anything like judicial guilt, Schleiermacher appears to affirm an undifferentiated divine disposition toward humans. Specifically, he seems to predicate no distinct "background" of divine justice which would spell pending doom and actual, eschatological retribution for sinners in case the Infinite should not exercise redemptive kindness by way of a gratuitous rescue. A difficulty, however, is posed here in that the thoughts expressed in the rather brief sections of *CF* dealing with divine holiness and justice are incredibly prolix, making for interpretative headaches. Nevertheless, Schleiermacher appears to want to withhold from the Infinite a legitimate default to justice such that a gracious call would issue consistently but contingently from the divine kindness. Whereas classical theists within the Reformed tradition have historically taken divine attributes or dispositions such as holiness, justice, and wrath as forming a backdrop against which divine acts of redemptive love (toward sinners, naturally) stand out in

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[42] Ibid., 63.
[43] Ibid., 54.

bold relief, Schleiermacher seems determined to weave these former predicates exhaustively and inextricably into the immanent consciousness of those being "redeemed":

> [A]s regards God's holiness…from the fact that it forms so far a general characteristic of God's consciousness of His works and so of His omnipresence and omniscience, holiness is an essential element in our consciousness of God, for we can be cognizant of the absolute power of the God-consciousness only as we are cognizant of the state of sin as removed by redemption.[44]

Insofar, then, as even "baseline" divine attributes such as holiness and justice find themselves absorbed into Schleiermacher's phenomenology of human "piety," the assertion that humans are uniquely and desperately beholden to Jesus Christ to deliver them from sin's deadly grip amounts to a rather tenuous thesis. While it may well denote some sort of defect in our consciousness, 'sin' hardly figures as a definite bondage from which we would hopelessly seek to escape in our own strength. Indeed, Schleiermacher, at points, strikes one as holding that although all are equal in their need of redemption some are less equal than others:

> If, however, there are within the communion considerable differences in the free development of the God-consciousness, then some people, in whom it is most cramped, are more in need of redemption, and others, in whom it works more freely, are more capable of redemption… .[45]

But with this rather positive assessment of sinful humanity the Holy Scriptures do not concur.

D. Some Scriptural Objections to Schleiermacher's Revisions

It is critical, first, to recognize that the Scriptures frame human fallenness in terms of moral guilt, corruption, and disobedience and not essentially in metaphysical or epistemological terms as does Schleiermacher. This, of course, does not mean that the offenders of God are not subject to metaphysical and epistemological repercussions for their sin. Christians believe, for instance, that the Final Judgment will render an appropriate and definitive "fit" between the judicial standing and existential state of all humankind's members, even God's enemies (Matt. 25:41-46; I. Cor. 15:42-49).

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[44] Ibid., 352.
[45] Ibid., 57.

And this will certainly shape in profound ways the character and content of their knowledge (I Cor. 13:12). It is also true that there is, here on earth, an integral epistemic component correlative to one's relationship (whether it be felicitous or infelicitous) with the Lord. Those, in particular, who go about living idolatrous, unregenerate lives are said to suffer (willfully) from a mental futility and darkened understanding native to their unredeemed condition (Eph. 4:17, 18). But the metaphysical repercussions that obtain in a robust resurrection eschatology are just that, repercussions. As such, they are at best secondary matters with respect to the nature of sin. Moreover, the epistemic aspect of a person's relationship with the triune god, whether that person lives "in the light" or "in the dark," is more appropriately described in terms of his moral or "spiritual" orientation and not in terms of the relative presence or absence of some intrinsic ontological or psychological capacity. Primarily and essentially, Scripture depicts and evaluates sin from within a moral frame of reference. Sin is a moral and judicial breach of divine holiness (I John 3:4).

In contrast to Schleiermacher's re-framed doctrine of sin, Scripture portrays human waywardness within the framework of an original, historic, covenantal relationship established by God with man (Gen. 2:15-17; Hos. 6:7). Adam, as the representative head of the human family (Rom. 5:14, 17, 19), fell from his originally upright and innocent state and thereby brought cosmic guilt both on himself and on the family when he transgressed God's command (Rom. 5:18). Furthermore, this contrast of an original and ideal moral righteousness with the tragic guiltiness of fallen humanity is consistently correlated with a real (and not merely projected) diversity of divine dispositions toward "the righteous" and "the wicked" in Scripture (Gen. 1:31, 6:5-8; Rom. 1:18; I Cor. 10:5). As John the baptizer prophetically confessed, there are actual, historical individuals upon whom divine wrath abides, unless a pivotal, spiritual and forensic change should occur in their lives (John 3:36).

Along with this characterization of sin in fundamentally judicial terms—i.e., as a defection from the creator by the breaking of His covenant—Scripture speaks of Adam's progeny as each being in a particularly dire existential situation *sans* redemption. As comfortable as it might be to picture all humans generically as

"sinners, more or less," the biblical writers do not do this. The apostle Paul, for example, described for his hearers in the Ephesian church how they had formerly shared in a dastardly and corrupt "nature." According to him, the human race does not, spiritually speaking, consist of a singular conglomeration of individuals, with 'the righteous' only loosely designating those who are separated by a few degrees from others in their awareness of the Infinite. The designation 'wicked,' after all, is hardly warranted in the case of those who have merely "forgotten" or been distracted from the creator's Presence in, with, and around us. While this claim would meet with resistance from those like Schleiermacher who tend to equate fallenness with finitude, it comports well with (along with the rest of Scripture) the apostle's clear ontological and temporal distinction of the fall from the originally "very good" creation (Gen. 1:31, 3:6-7; I Tim. 2:14). Far from the delicacies of Schleiermacher's "virtue aesthetics," Paul locates the sinner on life's path, informs her that she is terribly lost, and traces her quandary back to a personal estrangement from and moral opposition to the creator. He evaluates those in the state of unbelief with regard to their "vital signs," the "path" they are on, their "guide" on that path, the "spirit" that works in them, the type of behavior in which they engage, and the divine disposition appropriately corresponding to their sinful selves. In sum, they are "dead in trespasses and sin," drifting along "the course of this world," trailing the "prince of the power of the air," fitting the description "sons of disobedience," and living as slaves to their fleshly passions, being "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:1-3).[46] While the Bible writers do sometimes record warnings against "forgetting" the Lord, they do so in a highly charged moral sense, reminding members of the covenant community of the definite, historical acts of their covenant god who has delivered them, is delivering them, and will deliver them, if they truly and eternally belong to Him (Deut. 6:12; Philippians 3:12-14).

The significance of Schleiermacher's revisions of the doctrines of sin and redemption is profound. In addition to his replacing of judicial guilt and its concomitant "background" of divine holiness-justice-and-wrath with his own non-moral framework, he presents a

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[46] All quotations from Scripture are taken from the ESV.

rather isomorphic conception of divine love vis-à-vis the creation, with the latter coming to expression in an all-too-human portrait of Jesus Christ. Moreover, his exchange of a tragic conception of "the transgressors" (as seen in Paul's writings) for individuals caught in the dialectical tension of finite- versus Infinite- mindedness (more reminiscent of Neo-Platonism) fails to appreciate the intrusive "divine intervention" of which earth's travelers stand in need.

Scripture certainly does not hesitate to set forth Christ as the chief exemplar to be followed (in some measure anyway). In a remarkable call to faith that came prior to his own crucifixion and doubtless rang in the post-resurrection ears of his disciples, Jesus Himself said:

> 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his Cross daily and follow me.[47]

These and the words following them render the conclusion inescapable that a love for and commitment to Christ entail a radical dedication of our time and energy to Him. It is clear also that one's attitudes and actions with respect to Christ play a critical role in the destiny one fulfills and that something on the order of a moral appraisal will mark that destiny. This is evident in that Jesus followed the hypothetical imperative quoted above ('If anyone would come after me…') with some future indicatives to the effect that divine approbation or disapprobation of our works will be variously expressed by the giving and taking of "life." This will also go along with an authoritative evaluation of the accrued "reputation" we will have in virtue of our loyalty (or lack thereof) to Christ in our earthly lives:

> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.[48]

This obviously runs much deeper than a bare forensic adjudication of the legal records of humans. But this fact, important

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[47] Luke 9:23.
[48] Luke 9:26.

as it is (and I will address it further below), does nothing to dissolve the genuine human need for judicial reconciliation with God. Nor does it dissolve the distinction between Christ's Person as the God-man and the Work of reconciliation He came to accomplish.

Perhaps the most gripping, mysterious and, indeed, essential feature of the gospel message is that the Triune God lovingly undertakes to rescue guilty covenant breakers. Notice that Paul speaks in the past tense in reference to the former identity of Christians when he says: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "Sinners" is what they *were*. But in the death of Jesus, Yahweh surprises His beneficiaries, saving them from a condemned existence (Rom. 5:9) and officially removing the government of sin from its dominion over them (Rom. 6:6). It is not deemed a surprise because God's redemptive act in Christ's cross is somehow "out of character" for God. Just the reverse, it is fully consistent with His character. But the gospel is appropriately deemed a surprise all the same, in the sense that the cross was not owed to anyone. Going further, against Schleiermacher's purely immanent Christ, we must affirm that He who, *sans* redemption in time, is fully and sufficiently *theos asarkos* was *theos ensarkos* in Jesus of Nazareth and remains such as the resurrected Christ. God took on a human nature in order to ransom the elect through an atoning sacrifice in time.[49] Schleiermacher's failure to recognize Christ as the actual sin-bearer is a failure to see that a central obstruction blocking our way from a sinful A toward a redeemed Z is not our essential finitude but our acquired guilt.

As it has been put in a recent Richard Gaffin essay, however, the saving benefits of Christ's cross-work "are received only as he, himself, by faith (*fide*), is 'grasped and possessed.'"[50] Earlier I noted a formal parallel between the theologies of Schleiermacher and Calvin at this point. Both of them realize that an intimate connection must

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[49] I trust it is clear from my use of "in time" here that I affirm the timeless eternality, as opposed to the temporal everlastingness, of God. I have become convinced fairly recently that this classical view set forth in the writings of Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Calvin both comports with Scripture and is philosophically defensible. For a strong defense of this view, see Paul Helm, *Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time* (Oxford: University Press, 1997).

[50] Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Justification and Union with Christ," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2008), 252.

obtain between Christ and His people if redemption is to be brought home to the redeemed. But the parallel is *merely* a formal one, with Calvin cleaving more faithfully to the biblical revelation. Scripturally speaking, if the definite removal of the shameful guilt of God's elect was accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, the removal of their immanent, totalizing corruption takes place through the giving of the Holy Spirit and through His progressive work of sanctification in them. Even as Christ rolls away the boulder of God's displeasure from between His elect and their eternal hope and life, so His Holy Spirit places their feet on that path and sets them walking in a new way.

Going back to Paul's address to the Ephesians, the apostle follows his chapter two review of their former worldly lives with a declaration of the mercy and love of God that finds sinners and arrests their blind gallop toward death. In this passage there appears no attempt to isolate Christ in His capacity as deliverer from the concretely manifested effects of His work in the lives of Paul's hearers. It is also noteworthy that Paul follows Jesus in tying a tight knot between one's relation to the person of Christ and one's deeds. Here he strikingly juxtaposes the "works" of which salvation is not the product with the "works" to which the saved are destined:

> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.[51]

Paul does not attribute this transformation to anything like a breakthrough in one's sense of Absolute Dependence. And based on his abysmal estimation of the unregenerate consciousness discussed earlier, it is difficult to think that Paul is envisioning a scenario in which sinners make a positive moral contribution toward their move from the realm of the dead to that of the living. He attributes the move, rather, to a personal illumination *brought* by the Holy Spirit and to the progressive renovation *wrought* by Him in the members of Christ's body (Eph. 2:18, 22).

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51 Ephesians 2:8-10.

E. Some Philosophico-Theological Objections to Schleiermacher's Revisions

In assessing the theology of Schleiermacher, I find that he: (1) mischaracterizes the creator-creature relation, (2) improperly identifies the nature of human fallenness along radically non-moral lines, (3) fails to recognize the profound rescue proclaimed in the Christian gospel, (4) does not sufficiently distinguish the various facets of that rescue from each other, (5) misses the distinctly personal way in which our (humanity's) destinies are determined, and, finally, (6) does not see how our relationship to the Savior both comes to expression and comes to be evaluated eschatologically in terms of our works.

It is puzzling to think that a theology such as Schleiermacher's, which has often been taken to be pantheistic, in a real sense gets its start by making a kind of appeal to the creator-creature distinction. It is true that, even more than those of his later theology, the early thoughts expressed in *Religion* tended to be of a nebulous, pantheistic sort. But the mature program set forth in *CF* clearly seeks to woo readers away from the Enlightenment's immanent moralism toward a renewed sense of human agency with reference to the finite-Infinite interface.[52] Unfortunately, its author goes about this the wrong way, replacing an anthropocentric ethics (which kept theology as little more than an afterthought) with an immanentistic and exclusively relational theology couched in Christian terms.

While Schleiermacher is correct to reject immanent moralism and to reorient us to the creator-creature interface, I believe that he is incorrect to remove, as he does, a significant moral component from that interface. To his credit, he wishes to recognize a significant difference between the divine reality and human reality.[53] The Scriptures are saturated with the creator-creature difference (see, e.g., Job 38-41). But Schleiermacher profoundly misses the significance

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[52] In *Panentheism*, John Cooper argues that the space made in Schleiermacher's thought for a genuine human agency and freedom justifies classifying his theology as *panen*theistic, rather than *pan*theistic.

[53] For instance, Schleiermacher's stress on the absolute dependence of humans in relation to the Creator and on the uni-directionality of something at least remotely analogous to causal influence going from the Creator to the creatures makes him a "classical" panentheist according to Cooper. This differentiates him from "modern" panentheists (e.g., Hegel, Process theologians) who posit a bi-directional influence in which the Creator is also affected by the creatures.

of man as the image of God (*imago dei*) and what this reveals about not only the God-world relationship but also the nature of sin and redemption. Namely, a significant aspect of man as God's image, in addition to his being a dominion-taking creature, is the way in which man's relationship to God and the attending human dispositions and actions correlative to that relationship either reflect God's righteous character or constitute a creaturely perversion away from that character.[54]

Schleiermacher, in effect, disposes of the *imago dei* and what is revealed on a broader biblical level in connection with it by refashioning the Infinite-finite relation. His religiously refashioned Infinite-finite relation, moreover, results in what I will call an "impoverished transcendence" of four different types: creational, judicial, spiritual, and eschatological.

Schleiermacher's theology suffers from an impoverished creational transcendence in its effective replacement of *man* as the quintessential creaturely (i.e., ontologically distinct) expression of God with a God-world relation modeled on the soul-body relation. God, on this scheme, does not relate as an "other" tri-personal agent to the world but rather as the soul would with the body on a non-dualist conception. As such, it is impossible to imagine God functioning independently of the world. God can be said to be everywhere present, but He is present to the world as the parts of the body are to the space they occupy.[55] A critical consequence of this is the absence of a transcendence of Lordship and the implication of God in the "sinfulness" inherent in the finite parts of His "body," the latter constituting a necessary extension of His being.[56] There exists, therefore, no absolute contrast for Schleiermacher between the creator's righteous character and the creature's transgression against that character.

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[54] This is especially seen in the fact that God structures His relationship with man in terms of historic, judicial covenants.

[55] See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1997), 20. As Hodge points out, Schleiermacher indicates that man is "the existence form" of God on earth, but this amounts to affirming a continuity between God and world such that man figures as a metaphorical "spearhead" of creation in its Neo-Platonic return to the One from which it necessarily emanates. See also, again, Cooper, *Panentheism*, 85-87.

[56] For more on Lordship theology, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2002), especially Part One.

This moves us, then, to consider the dearth of judicial transcendence in Schleiermacher's dogmatics. In their very nature as finite creatures, humans are bound to attend to things finite and not be eminently conscious of their elusive but intimate connection to the Infinite. *Ipso facto*, then, they are reckoned sinful. This, in addition to his not having a God-concept in which the divine stands as an authority figure, helps to explain why Schleiermacher does not characterize fallenness using the categories of guilt and condemnation. Sin is seen as a defect whereby human awareness is not properly oriented to the relation of Absolute Dependence. Consequently, Christ's redemptive work is not to rectify human alienation in the heavenly court but to inspire sinners to reorient their consciousness by His own exemplary modeling of Infinite-awareness.[57]

In a similar fashion, the particular regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is effectively replaced by the more general, inclusivist spirit of Schleiermacher's gospel. An impoverished spiritual transcendence is seen in the "truncated transcendence" of humans ascending to a heightened sense of passivity vis-à-vis the creator. Sinners are not subject to a "triune interruption" of their being and doing along life's way. Nor do they benefit from a keen sense of the hopelessness and tragedy from which Christ's cross-work would deliver them. In this way, the dismissal of the Holy Spirit as a personal rescue agent connects up with the lack of a distinct eschatological transcendence in Schleiermacher's theology. Because a severe judicial and spiritual tension is not introduced between heaven and earth, no resolving or overcoming of that (non-existent) tension is to be found. Just as the doctrine of creation is flattened out along a line of ontological necessity, the resurrected new creation holds forth little hope for raising redeemed sinners above that line.

F. *Personal* Redemption: Justification and Sanctification, United but Distinct

But if Schleiermacher's theology fails to provide a "lift" in these various ways (and it does), at the same time his intensely immanentistic doctrine (sub-biblical as it is) functions thematically to

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[57] In fact, Christ the Redeemer appears to be bound up in a necessary relation of some sort with the necessity of creation as God's "body"; see Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 504.

point us to a Scriptural truth. Schleiermacher's understanding of salvation is fairly characterized as a spiritual Romanticism marked by universalistic overtones and a dialectical striving on the part of humans to raise their sense of dependent finitude. Furthermore, it is my belief that he illicitly conflates justification and sanctification, not rightly distinguishing salvation's forensic and transformational aspects.[58] That being said, he would likely contend that this is not so, perhaps pointing to his statement that

> [I]t cannot be advisable virtually to abolish the difference between the divine work *on* man and the divine work *in* man.[59]

Yet it would seem that justification, for Schleiermacher, denotes a relational "turning point" on a continuum. Similarly, "forgiveness" has more to do with recognizing the unavoidability of "sin" when the latter is understood as an imperfectly realized God-consciousness in finite beings.[60] This would line up too with the idea that (universally?) man's union with Christ appears to be a permanent feature of creation, due to "the continuance of the creative act from which came the Redeemer."[61]

Nevertheless, while there seem to be good reasons to think that Schleiermacher fails properly to *distinguish* justification and sanctification, he is certainly right (again, at least formally) not to *separate* them. Richard Gaffin is emphatic on this point in his recent exposition of John Calvin's views on justification and sanctification as they are expressed in the *Institutes*. Though Christ's imputed righteousness forms the basis of one's being reckoned among "the righteous," justification should not, as Gaffin puts it, be thought of as a "skyhook."[62] It does not amount to a distant switching of legal records detached from the productive energy of the Spirit, who, having put people in touch with Christ by faith, works to renew them in His image. Rather, as I would put it, justification is God's definitive and declarative judicial restoration of a person and occupies

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[58] This would obviously be true, of course, if I am right that he lacks altogether the forensic aspect.

[59] Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 497; I have added the italics.

[60] Ibid., 478-80; 502, 3.

[61] Ibid., 503, 4.

[62] Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Justification and Union with Christ," in *Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2008), 257.

a principal place at the head of sanctification, signifying the onset of God's existential healing of that person. Judicial restoration and existential healing are not separated from each other but they *are* distinct realities; they are the dual products of a Spirit-wrought union with Christ. So, it is one's relationship to Christ—more specifically, one's union or disunion with Him—that is most ultimate in determining one's destiny. And one is not brought into union with Christ on the basis of a moral deed, disposition, or a vague "susceptibility" (to use Schleiermacher's language). One is brought into union with Christ only by the Holy Spirit's granting of faith, a faith that works. The Spirit, like the wind, blows where He wishes (John 3:8), in accordance with the Father's ordination (Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28-30), and brings fruit in His wake (Gal. 5:22).

G. Re-Addressing the Destiny Question in Light of the Previous Considerations

I wish to expand the discussion here, however, to address directly the grace-morals dichotomy presented in our question. At the broadest level, there is a sense in which the dichotomy must be flatly denied. It must be denied if we have in view God's dealings with all of humanity. We would do well to understand God's dealings at this level as being structured by two "umbrella" principles. One principle is that of grace, under which people are elected, justified, and sanctified. These actions of God produce in those people good works, leading to glory. Another principle is that of justice, under which people (being reprobated *sans* creation by God's good pleasure) are left guilty and go on living in their unspiritual state. This divine action (with respect to reprobation) and divine inaction (with respect to the guilt and corruption to which the reprobate are abandoned) leaves people to their "dead works," leading to ignominy. Thus, both grace and morals determine our destinies, if morals be taken to refer to the works of one in disunion with Christ. Yet it would be misleading to say that our destinies are "ultimately" determined by either grace or morals if these are thought of as impersonal principles. It is, therefore, better to speak of the "who" that ultimately determines our destinies than the "what." Ultimately, it is the Triune God who determines destinies and He does this in two fundamental ways, under the umbrella principles of grace and justice.

Finally, a theme in Schleiermacher's theology that proves instructive is the idea that the concept of "destiny" need not be restricted narrowly to a consideration of the bodily resurrected end-states we will eventually reach. As I have hinted at along the way, the grace-morals dichotomy in our question can also be viewed in a more contracted fashion and refer only to those whom God elects, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies. When taken in this way, "grace or morals" would be better expressed as "faith or works." A major reason for this is that the grace-morals dilemma suggests that if one's destiny is ultimately determined by God's grace then that person's works cannot play a significant role in how they are and will be evaluated by Jesus Christ. I do not believe that this is true. To repeat, what is really crucial is the way in which one is connected (or not) to the person of Jesus Christ and our relation to Him manifests itself concretely in our lives, of which He is and will be the Judge:

> Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.[63]

> 'Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. …The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.'[64]

We will, indeed, be judged by our words and, more generally, by our works (Rom. 2:6-10). Thus, there are and will be rankings of greater and lesser within the two domains of glory and ignominy. Part of our "destiny," if we are united to Christ, is to bear "kingdom worthy" fruits (Mt. 21:43), the kind of fruits appropriate to good trees. It is, therefore, legitimate to locate a certain determinative ultimacy in the works of Christian faith, in the sense that they will so expressly stand as a witness to our union with and devotion to Christ that they will be preeminently focused upon by Him in the Judgment. All the

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[63] Matthew 7:21-23.
[64] Matthew 12:33, 35-37.

same, it will not do for the good trees to boast in themselves for the esteem Christ will show them for their fruit. More appropriately, they will convert His esteem into their own gratitude to *Him* for the soil *He* planted them in and for the growth and productivity provided by *His* Spirit.[65]