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ALBRECHT RITSCHL AND THE UNFINISHED REFORMATION

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To Wilhelm Pauck on his 80th Birthday

On 10 November 1883, addressing his Göttingen colleagues and students in academic celebration of the quadricentennial of Luther's birth, Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89) delivered this remarkable verdict: "The genuine ideas of the Reformation were more concealed than disclosed in the theological works of Luther and Melancthon."¹ The Wittenberg reformers themselves, not merely their epigones, had failed to systematize and safeguard those original epoch-making ideas by which they had effected their dramatic reform of religious life within the late medieval church.

¹"Festival Address on the Four-hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Martin Luther," trans. by David W. Lotz (from *Drei akademische Reden* [Bonn, 1887] 5–29) as an Appendix (187–202) to *Ritschl and Luther: A Fresh Perspective on Albrecht Ritschl's Theology in the Light of His Luther Study* (New York/Nashville, 1974) 195. (Hereafter cited, respectively, as "Luther Address" and *Ritschl and Luther*.) Other abbreviations used in this essay include: *Justification* 1 = *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung. Erster Band: Die Geschichte der Lehre* (Bonn, 1870, 1882 = 1889), trans. from the 1st ed. by John S. Black, *A Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (Edinburgh, 1872). *Rechtfertigung* 1 (*Justification* 1) = 2d German edition of *Die Geschichte der Lehre. Justification* 3 = *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung. Dritter Band: Die positive Entwicklung der Lehre* (Bonn, 1874, 1883, 1888 = 1895), trans. from the 3d ed. by H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation: The Positive Development of the Doctrine* (Edinburgh, 1900; reprint ed., Clifton, NJ, 1966). Throughout this essay I have used existing English translations, though only after having checked them against the original texts; occasionally, for stylistic reasons, I have made minor revisions in the translations.

The reformers, for all their attainments, suffered from a defective theological disposition: Luther was a man of profound spirituality but no systematic thinker, while the erudite Melancthon—by succumbing to the intellectualist confusion of Christian faith with specific doctrines of faith—had “allowed the whole of theology to remain in that form which lay at the root of medieval scholasticism.”² In the very hour of its birth, therefore, at least as regards its constructive theological productions, Protestantism was a “stunted growth” (*Verkümmerung*) or “deformation” (*Missbildung*).³ The subsequent history of Protestant theology and spirituality is likewise a painful record of the continuing deformations of the original Reformation principle. “Until now,” concluded Ritschl, “the practical root idea of Luther’s Reformation has not been employed in all clarity and vigor for the regulation [*Normierung*] of Protestantism’s many tasks, i.e., it has still not been directed to the ordering of theology and its demarcation from all useless forms.”⁴

Little wonder, then, that Protestantism has not yet emerged from its time of “teething problems” (*Kinderkrankheiten*). In order to attain maturity, to come of age, Protestantism must at last recover and thoroughly comprehend its formative principle. Its “independent course” (*selbständiger Gang*) will begin only when it self-consciously “reforms theology, fructifies churchly instruction, shores up the moral sense of community, and achieves political resoluteness for the actualization of those spiritual riches which one of her greatest sons once acquired for [the German] nation.”⁵

The Reformation, in sum, remains unfinished. An imperfect creation in its earliest theological forms, it still awaits complete realization within a debilitated Protestantism that even now languishes in childhood dependence on a theological inheritance that

²“Luther Address,” 195.

³*Ibid.* (“This atrophy of Luther’s Reformation, transpiring in the very hour of its birth, has been the chief reason for the limitation of its effects.”) Cf. “Prolegomena” to *The History of Pietism*, trans. Philip Hefner in *Albrecht Ritschl: Three Essays* (Philadelphia, 1972) 134: “The distinctiveness of Protestantism is still sufficiently discernible that almost all who count themselves as its adherents recognize that its original manifestation was stunted [*eine Verkümmerung*] or deformed [*eine Missbildung*].” (Hereafter cited, respectively, as “Prolegomena” and *Three Essays*.)

⁴“Luther Address,” 200–201.

⁵*Ibid.*, 201.

has been progressively deformed by accretions which are utterly alien to the original Reformation principle.

Albrecht Ritschl's own vocational task as a historical and systematic theologian was nothing less than to bring the Reformation to theological completion and, thereby, ecclesiastical Protestantism to maturity. This task occupied him throughout his immensely productive twenty-five years (1864–89) as the luminary of the Göttingen theological faculty—years which witnessed the publication of his magnum opus, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (3 vols., 1870–74), as well as the equally monumental *History of Pietism* (3 vols., 1880–86). In these works, in tandem with his many essays and shorter monographs, Ritschl set out to build a comprehensive theological system—historical, biblical, and dogmatic—in which the authentic religious ideas of the Protestant reformers, especially those of Luther, would at last achieve their finished, coherent, holistic expression; would thus be accorded their due rights; and even so would attain their full historical impact through a re-formation and vindication of contemporary Protestantism.

These preliminary considerations introduce all the leading features of what may be called the “unfinished Reformation” motif in Ritschl's theology. It is my contention that this motif is central to Ritschl's total theological enterprise—that it supplies *the interpretive key to the inner dynamics of his theological system*. To be sure, the idea of the unfinished Reformation, and the evidence for Ritschl's own vocational self-understanding as a “perfecter” of Reformation theology and a “reformer” of Protestantism, are displayed most prominently in his 1880 “Prolegomena” to *The History of Pietism* and in his 1883 festival-address on Luther. I maintain, however, that these relatively late essays only make explicit what was the implicit motive of Ritschl's work ever since the publication of the first edition of *Justification* 1 in 1870. Indeed it is possible, I think, to trace the main lineaments of the unfinished Reformation theme back to 1857, when Ritschl first directed intensive scholarly attention to the Christian doctrine of justification and reconciliation, beginning specifically with research into Luther's teaching.⁶ I

⁶See Otto Ritschl, *Albrecht Ritschls Leben* (2 vols.; Freiburg i. B., 1892, 1896) 1. 294: “While Ritschl was still in the process of publishing the second edition of his *Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche* [1857], he directed his interests to a new field of labor where they were firmly to remain for many years. He began his studies on

should emphasize, however, that Ritschl's interpretation of Reformation religion and theology, and of post-Reformation Protestantism, underwent significant changes over the course of the last three decades of his career. Correspondingly, his idea of the unfinished Reformation was also in flux during these years, first attaining its definitive form in the mid-1870s.

These are sweeping assertions, which I cannot here defend in detail or discuss in depth. The overarching theme of "Ritschl and the Unfinished Reformation" still awaits full-scale treatment (although I have previously indicated the leading points of reference for such an investigation in my book *Ritschl and Luther*).⁷ My primary intent in this essay is to advance and support the claim that the central impulses of the entire Ritschlian system are best comprehended through the interpretive construct of "the unfinished Reformation." One can defend this claim, of course, only by first positing this construct and then by using it to identify, order, and explain the central impulses of Ritschl's system. I will so proceed.

I should add that my overarching purpose is at once to encourage and to facilitate a consideration of the Ritschlian system as

the doctrine of justification, commencing specifically with his researches into Luther." (Hereafter cited as *Leben*.) One may add that Ritschl's *Entstehung* was designed to answer the question: how did the old Catholic church (of the late second century and following) emerge out of apostolic Christianity? From 1857 until his death, Ritschl's research and writing focused on the parallel questions: how did the Lutheran church emerge out of the Lutheran Reformation? and, what are the lines of continuity and discontinuity between Reformation Christianity, on the one hand, and post-Reformation Protestantism, on the other?

⁷See *Ritschl and Luther*, esp. chap. 2 ("Reformation and Continuing Reformation") 57–87. One of my chief concerns in this book was to show that the interpretive theme "Ritschl and Luther" or "Ritschl and the Reformation" possesses more heuristic value for the study of Ritschl's theology than do such well-worn themes as "Ritschl and neo-Kantianism" and "Ritschl and Culture Protestantism." The present essay is intended to serve as a "working brief" for a projected book, of ample proportions, on the topic at hand. The idea of the "unfinished Reformation," incidentally, has a long and complex history, going back to the so-called radical or left-wing reformers of the sixteenth century (for whom Luther and Zwingli were but "half-way men" who "broke the pope's pitcher but kept the pieces in their hands!"). This notion first occurs within Lutheranism itself in the writings of the Pietists (cf. Spener's *Pia Desideria*). The theme comes to full flower in the works of the leading representatives of the German Enlightenment, classicism, idealism, and neo-Protestantism from Lessing to Troeltsch. The history of this important motif has yet to be written; but cf. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther im Spiegel der deutschen Geistesgeschichte: Mit ausgewählten Texten von Lessing bis zur Gegenwart* (2d ed.; Heidelberg, 1970).

an architectonic whole. We possess a wealth of scholarly literature dealing with the several component parts of the system, i.e., discussions of Ritschl as historian *or* biblical scholar *or* dogmatist, depending upon which particular volume of *Justification and Reconciliation*, or which related monograph, is the focus of attention. I know of no sustained effort, however, to investigate Ritschl's total literary output during his Göttingen years, treating it as a coherent whole, and purporting to identify and analyze its internal principle of coherence. To this day one still finds himself asking: what precisely was Ritschl "up to" in the great theological undertaking of his mature years? What follows is a brief, programmatic attempt to answer this question.

The Central Impulses of Ritschl's Theological System

The inner dynamic of Ritschl's system has often been summarized under the rubric "back to the New Testament by way of the Reformation."⁸ This view antedates neoorthodoxy's remorseless assault on Ritschl and the Ritschlians and is certainly to be preferred to the Barthian canard that "Ritschl" and "Reformation" are two irreconcilable magnitudes. It is also a defensible view. In keeping with the reformers' *sola scriptura*, Ritschl did seek to ground his system squarely on the biblical witness and, by his own admission, he interpreted Scripture through categories supplied primarily by Reformation thought (justification and reconciliation!). For all its heuristic value, however, this older approach to Ritschl is one-sided. Its accent falls too heavily on the backward-striving impulses of his endeavor, implying that he was intent upon *repristinating* New Testament Christianity rather than *re-forming* contemporary Protestantism in accord with biblical-Reformation Christianity. Hence another rubric presents itself as more apt: "forward to the reconstruction of modern Protestantism in the name, and on the basis, of that epoch-making Reformation of the

⁸Cf. Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (London, 1937) 139. Mackintosh, cotranslator of *Justification* 3, had recently become a "convert" to the theology of Barth ("... incontestably the greatest figure in Christian theology that has appeared for decades," 263). Although a sympathetic interpreter, Mackintosh now read Ritschl's works through Barthian spectacles and discovered, not surprisingly, that Ritschl was guilty of rationalistic moralism, historical positivism, and anthropocentrism. See *Ritschl and Luther*, 25–27, for notice of older (pre-Barth) interpreters who underscored Ritschl's indebtedness to Luther and the Reformation.

sixteenth century which still awaits completion.”⁹ Adopting this rubric for explanatory purposes, one can identify five main moments or impulses in Ritschl’s total endeavor.

1. *The historical-descriptive impulse: the Reformation principle*

The first, and foundational, impulse involves the historical identification and analysis of those religious ideas which were the agent or “lever” (*Hebel*) of sixteenth-century church reform—what Ritschl calls the Reformation’s “practical root ideas” (*praktische Grundgedanken*). While these ideas are clearly in evidence in the writings of Zwingli, Melancthon, and Calvin, they are most prominently displayed (if not most carefully ordered) in the works of the young Luther (ca. 1515–20). Since these ideas are common to all the mainline reformers, they constitute “the principle of the Reformation” (*das Princip der Reformation*). They are the “principle” (*principium*) in the sense of fundamental source (of reform), primary element (in Reformation thought), and guide and norm (for Protestant theology and spirituality).

Ritschl identified and analyzed the constituent elements of the Reformation principle in the two editions of *Justification* 1—published, respectively, in 1870 and 1882. The pivotal fourth chapter of each edition is entitled “The Reformation Principle of Justification by Faith through Christ.” Thus the Reformation principle is nothing other than the reformers’ distinctive idea of justification, while each component of this principle expresses some aspect or correlate of justification.

In the first edition of *Justification* 1 (1870) Ritschl describes the Reformation principle as follows:

The assurance of justification by faith through Christ, as it is laid hold of by the believer who already has a standing in the church and is striving to do the will of God, is to both [Luther and Zwingli] alike the common lever by means of which they seek to achieve the reformation of the church; for the reformers coupled with that subjective assurance of salvation the fundamental view of the church as being the fellowship of believers who have

⁹This interpretation of the inner dynamic of Ritschl’s system was already arrived at, and stated with admirable conciseness, by Arthur Titius, “Albrecht Ritschl und die Gegenwart: Ein Vortrag,” *TSK* 86 (1913) 67. (See *Ritschl and Luther*, 161, for a translation of the pertinent passage.) I should here like, once more, to acknowledge my continuing indebtedness to two pathbreaking books which have been too often overlooked in the scholarly literature on nineteenth-century liberal Protestantism: Otto Wolff, *Die Haupttypen der neueren Lutherdeutung* (Stuttgart, 1938); and Walther von Loewenich, *Luther und der Neuprotestantismus* (Witten, 1963).

been sanctified by God, and, as a consequence from this view, repudiated the importance for the salvation of the individual traditionally ascribed to the church's legally constituted organs, as well as the authority conceded to them.¹⁰

The Reformation principle is thus comprised of *two* mutually conditioned and inseparable components: one may speak of these as the *religious self-understanding* and the *religious church understanding* springing out of the personal experience of God's free favor for Christ's sake. That is, according to Luther and Zwingli (as also to Melancthon and Calvin), earnest believers who are actively engaged in performing good works within the church, yet who are troubled by their incomplete attainments in sanctification, may be confident that their sins and moral failings pose no barrier to continuing fellowship with God since God freely pardons and accepts them for Christ's sake. Herewith the reformers opposed the debased teaching of the late medieval church that forgiveness or absolution is conditional upon the mechanical completeness of the penitent's contrition and confession. Believers, moreover, knowing that they are justified *solely* by faith in the gospel of reconciliation proclaimed in the church, also know that God's grace cannot be conditional on obedience to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, or on accession to the legal rights and privileges claimed by this hierarchical church as the sole guarantor of salvation.

Thus the Protestant Reformation, understood as a popular religious movement and reform of the institutional church, was nothing other than the multifaceted working out *in concreto* of a profound revolution *in mente* on the part of countless numbers of the faithful—a revolution effected by the reformers' purely religious message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

One must take care to note that the Reformation principle is not as such a *doctrine* of justification, a mere *locus* in a dogmatic system.¹¹ The thought of God's unconditional grace is a "practical" or, as we would now say, an existential or experiential principle which regulates the entire religious consciousness of the regenerate, their total life of faith and praxis. Hence this practical root idea is not to be compared to, nor contrasted with, the medieval church's scholastic doctrines of justification (which address the theoretical problem of how the *injustus* becomes *justus*). The reformers' *sola gratia/sola fides*, rather, must be regarded as

¹⁰ *Justification* 1, 155.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 121.

the counterpoise to the medieval church's heteronomous penitential practice and its equally heteronomous church polity (*Verfassung*).¹² Reformation historians and theologians seriously err, therefore, when they interpret the Reformation as first and foremost a doctrinal dispute and reform. It was preeminently a reform of the Christian religion at its taproots.

The second edition of *Justification* 1 (1882) retains this earlier interpretation of the Reformation principle but goes on to sound a distinctively new note: the reformers not only worked out a new *self-* and *church* understanding among the faithful but also brought about a decisively new understanding of the Christian's relationship to the *world*.¹³ *Justification* 1² contains much new material, amounting to one-fifth of the total book (about 130 pages), and reflects significant developments in Ritschl's historical research and theological reflection since 1870. Ritschl scholars, unfortunately, have usually failed to observe these developments and to underscore their significance.

For present purposes it is important to note that in *Justification* 1² Ritschl expanded his treatment of the Reformation principle by adding a new five-page section devoted primarily to Luther's treatise *On Christian Liberty* as the classic statement of the Christian *Welt- und Lebensanschauung*. According to Ritschl:

Lordship over the world through trust in God, especially over the evils arising out of it, is the practical telic-correlate [*Zweckbeziehung*] of justification, which Luther discovered in the footsteps of Paul and which Melancthon was able to formulate in the classic documents of the Reformation. For whoever is reconciled with God is also [reconciled] with the course of the world, which is conducted by God in one's best interests.¹⁴

This motif of the believer's spiritual world-dominion (*Herrschaft über die Welt*) through reconciliation with God on the basis of justifying faith is one of the dominant leitmotifs of Ritschl's theological system. It is *not* yet present in the first edition of *Justification* 1, although it is to be found in the first edition of

¹²See *Justification* 1, 133–46.

¹³In *Ritschl and Luther*, 66–67, I traced Ritschl's "discovery" of this new theme to the year 1873, as disclosed in his letter to Ludwig Diestel dated 20 March 1873. (See *Leben*, 2. 148.)

¹⁴*Rechtfertigung* 1, 184–85. By the "footsteps of Paul" Ritschl has in mind esp. Rom 5:1–11; 8:18–39. Melancthon's "classic documents" are the Augsburg Confession (art. XVI; XX, 24–25; and esp. XXVII, 49–50) and the Apology (art. II).

Justification 3 (1874), and, thereafter, occupies an increasingly central place in Ritschl's thought.

According to *Justification* 3, "three points are necessary to determine the circle by which a religion is completely represented—God, man, and the world."¹⁵ Hence, "if justification by faith is the basal conception of Evangelical Christianity, it is impossible that it can express the relation of men to God and Christ without at the same time including a distinctive *attitude of the believer to the world* founded upon that relation."¹⁶ Now the reformers themselves, in their seminal teaching on Christian freedom, did articulate precisely such a practical world-correlate of justification; and their original religious assertions, although lacking adequate theological formulation (as we shall see), must be regarded as normative for the whole subsequent enterprise of Evangelical dogmatics.

Ritschl unpacked the content of this unique religious world understanding—whose recovery from earliest Christianity we owe to the Reformation—through the constructs of the Christian ideal of life (*das christliche Lebensideal*) and of Christian perfection (*die christliche Vollkommenheit*).¹⁷ The Christian life ideal is a distinctive combination of religious and moral virtues: faith in divine providence (displayed in humility before God's fatherly guidance of the world; patience in the midst of life's troubles; prayer to God as the immediate proof of reconciliation with God) in conjunction with

¹⁵*Justification* 3, 29. Since "all religions are social" (p. 28), the self-God and self-world relationships must be mediated by the believing community. Hence the *church* is always the mid-point, the presupposed center, of this "circle."

¹⁶*Justification* 3, 168 (italics in original). Here, as in n. 15, I am citing the Eng. trans. of the *third* ed. of *Justification* 3 (1888). However, the *first* ed. of *Justification* 3 (1874), 16–17, 51, makes the same points: that every religion takes account of the individual's relationship to the world (*Weltanschauung*), as well as his dependence on God (*Abhängigkeit von Gott*); and that the Evangelical Christian, through his experience of Christian freedom, attains spiritual autonomy in the world. ("Die christliche Freiheit, welche der Gerechtfertigte in seinem Vorsehungsglauben und in der Ausübung des Gebetes erlebt, ist der Ausdruck für die religiöse Selbständigkeit in der Welt, zu welcher der ächte Protestantismus seine Bekenner anleitet.")

¹⁷See *Justification* 3, 168–77; "Prolegomena," 85–88; and esp. *Die christliche Vollkommenheit: Ein Vortrag* (Bonn, 1874, 1889). See also Ritschl's *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion* (Bonn, 1875, 1881, 1886 = 1890 = 1895), trans. from the 3d ed. by Philip Hefner, *Instruction in the Christian Religion*, in *Three Essays*, 221–91. Paragraphs 46–77, pp. 240–54, treat "The Christian Life." (Hereafter cited as *Instruction*.)

dutiful service and faithfulness in one's secular vocation (displayed in love for the neighbor and thus in cooperation with God in establishing God's kingdom, that "moral society of nations" which is the final goal of the whole creation). Precisely in carrying out this active life (of faith and love) in the world, so that the *Lebensideal* is concretely a *Lebensführung*, the Christian attains a qualitative "perfection" or completeness, the value of a whole, and thus far transcends in value the worth of that "order of things" which exists only to subserve the God-ordained lordship of the "order of persons." To put the matter in contemporary parlance, "Christian perfection" for Ritschl refers to nothing other or less than "authentic existence."¹⁸

Ritschl's identification of the *religious world understanding* as the *third* integral component of the Reformation principle—as the immediate practical goal of justification by faith—marks a turning point in his Reformation scholarship and in the elaboration of his theological system.¹⁹ It enabled him to define and defend the Reformation's epoch-making significance for both the Christian church and the modern world, and to demonstrate the Reformation's uniqueness vis-à-vis medieval Catholicism. These two issues form the centerpiece of Ritschl's important "Prolegomena" to *The*

¹⁸The connection here implied between this Ritschlian motif and Bultmannian existentialism is not fortuitous. On this topic see the insightful remarks of James Richmond, *Ritschl: A Reappraisal* (Glasgow, 1978) 293ff.

¹⁹An examination of several of Ritschl's lesser known essays reveals his developing awareness of the centrality of the Reformation *Lebensideal* for Protestantism. In 1869, writing on "Die Begründung des Kirchenrechtes im evangelischen Begriff von der Kirche," Ritschl focuses on the same two components of the Reformation principle which he later elaborated in the 1st ed. of *Justification* 1: "The thought of the believer's justification through Christ is not, taken in itself, the principle of the Reformation of the church, but only in its inseparable connection with the thought of the church as the community of persons sanctified by God." This essay was originally published in *Zeitschrift für Kirchenrecht* 8 (1869) 220–79, and is reprinted in Ritschl's *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. Otto Ritschl (Freiburg i. B., 1893) 100–146 (hereafter cited as *Aufsätze*); the quotation above is from *Aufsätze*, 104–5. In 1876, however, in his essay "Ueber die beiden Principien des Protestantismus" (wherein he denies that the essence of Protestantism can be rightly comprehended through the familiar notion of its "formal" and "material" principles), Ritschl now underscores the pivotal importance of the recently identified third component of the Reformation principle. This essay concludes: "One should ponder, moreover, whether a formula concerning the essence of Protestantism can be proper or practical which is not oriented to the concept of the church *and to the Christian ideal of life*." The latter essay was originally published in *ZKG* 1 (1876) 397–413, and is reprinted in *Aufsätze*, 234–47; the quotation above is from *Aufsätze*, 247, italics added.

History of Pietism, as the following remarks make plain:

If the Reformation of the sixteenth century had exhibited no ideal for the Christian life, we would be hard pressed indeed to demonstrate with certainty that it possesses epoch-making significance and lasting validity alongside the Catholic form and phase of Christianity. . . . If Protestantism is to prevail against the practical weight which Catholicism carries in its cultivation of monasticism and in the spreading of monastic piety, even among the laity, then it must be able to produce a standard of qualitative perfection. And it has been able to do just this.²⁰

The life ideal of medieval Christendom—indeed of Catholic Christianity ever since the Constantinian settlement—is monastic and ascetic, namely, flight from the world. Whoever wishes to be religiously perfect must either adopt or, within the circumstances of secular life, emulate the monastic virtues of chastity, poverty, and obedience. The reformers, in diametrical opposition to Catholicism's ideal of *Weltflucht*, advanced their distinctive ideal of religious *Weltherrschaft*, thereby locating Christian perfection not in the monastic-ascetic virtues but in that heartfelt trust in God's providential guidance of the world which at once frees believers from the world's oppressive weight, its ills unlimited, and frees them for loving service to humanity.²¹ At *this* juncture, then, Reformation Christianity marks a total break with Catholic Christianity. In this sense the Reformation has inaugurated a new stage in church history, namely, the Protestant era. Furthermore, the Reformation's unique *Lebensideal*, as the foundation of a genuinely secular or "worldly" Christianity, proves itself directly relevant to the conditions of modern life. In so doing it holds out the

²⁰"Prolegomena," 85.

²¹On the differences between the two life ideals, see "Prolegomena," 75–76, 83–89; and *Justification* 3, 177–81. In addition to *Weltflucht*, the Catholic ideal includes the monastic practice of mystical contemplation (*vita contemplativa*), i.e., "the freedom of familiar intercourse with God" accorded to the spiritually perfect (*Justification* 3, 180). In view of Ritschl's strictures on the Christian life ideal as understood by Calvin and Calvinism (a topic yet to be considered), one must say that, strictly speaking, the *Reformation* life ideal is that idea of Christian freedom originally articulated by the *Lutheran* reformers. I should also note that throughout the present essay the term "Reformation," in keeping with Ritschl's usage, refers to the so-called magisterial Reformation. For Ritschl the radical or left-wing reformers represent a "reform" which is *qualitatively* different from that of Luther, Zwingli, and their colleagues. (Cf. "Prolegomena," 70–83.)

promise and, humanly speaking, guarantees that Protestantism will prevail.²²

Ritschl specifically discusses the cultural significance of the Reformation in his 1883 Luther address.²³ While the Reformation was first and foremost a church reform, and while its greatest contributions belong to the history of the Christian religion, it nonetheless was a world-historical event and its unique religious ideas have entered into the fabric of modern culture, indeed have played a formative role in the creation of the modern world. In particular, the new Reformation life ideal has made possible the highest valuation of labor, including the most menial—since, according to Luther, even the humblest service to the commonweal is a priestly act in God's sight. This life ideal has also freed the state from ecclesiastical tutelage and control—since Christians, individually and corporately, exercise only a religious lordship over the world, not a temporal or political sovereignty (as in Roman Catholic papalcaesarism). This noble concept of Christian freedom, moreover, is the implicit presupposition of modern natural science, since the world is now allowed to be truly world, and thus is opened up to unfettered scientific inquiry (whereas the heathenish sacralization of nature in the medieval cosmology had cast a veil of superstitious reverence over the world).

At this point, in light of the foregoing considerations, one might be prepared to concede that Ritschl's historical identification and analysis of the Reformation principle supply the key to his Luther and Reformation scholarship, perhaps also to his apologetics, but might stoutly deny that this historical-descriptive undertaking is central to Ritschl's systematic or constructive labors. After all, historical inquiry is one thing, dogmatic theology quite another. I can only reply that this objection wrongly separates the historical and constructive moments in Ritschl's enterprise, and also fails to take account of the specific content of Ritschl's system.

Ritschl not only wrote historical essays and monographs—from the first edition of *The Emergence of the Old Catholic Church* in 1850 to the completion of *The History of Pietism* in 1886—but

²²See "Luther Address," 200–202.

²³In *Ritschl and Luther*, 163–68, I showed that this address is best understood as an almost point-for-point refutation of the vitriolic attack on Reformation-Protestant Christianity launched by Ritschl's Göttingen colleague, Paul de Lagarde. On the Reformation's cultural significance, see "Luther Address," 189–94.

made historical inquiry the foundation and dynamic of his entire system. *Justification* 3 is inconceivable without *Justification* 1 (and its satellite studies).²⁴ Indeed it is clear, in retrospect, that Ritschl was his century's foremost exemplar of the modern historical mode of doing systematic theology. If Schleiermacher, by grounding all theological assertions on the dictates of the pious God-consciousness, rendered Christian theology consistently "experiential," then Ritschl may be said to have effected the massive "historification" of systematic theology.²⁵

Justification 3, furthermore, is not a *Glaubenslehre* in the strict sense—a comprehensive dogmatic textbook comparable to the tomes of Protestant Orthodoxy, or even to Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*. Rather, as its subtitle indicates, this volume undertakes the "positive development" of the Christian doctrine of justification and reconciliation—setting forth the concept and correlates of justification (chapters 1–3), together with its presuppositions (chapters 4–6), proof (chapters 7–8), and consequences (chapter 9). For Ritschl, however, the Reformation understanding of justification—the Reformation principle, in short—is of regulative import for this undertaking and is thus an indispensable guide for the dogmatician who still claims to be genuinely Protestant. Even so, the historical identification of those practical root ideas which make up the Reformation principle is the foundational impulse, the *sine qua non*, of Ritschl's system.

2. *The historical-critical impulse: the Reformation principle and Reformation theology*

The Reformation principle did not receive consistent, homogeneous expression in the reformers' writings, leading to serious deformations in Protestantism already in its natal hour. Mere repristination of the reformers' theology, therefore, is out of the question. Hence the second major impulse in Ritschl's undertaking is that of historical recovery: the Reformation principle must be

²⁴It is the lasting merit of Philip Hefner's book, *Faith and the Vitalities of History: A Theological Study Based on the Work of Albrecht Ritschl* (New York, 1966), to have uncovered, and underscored, "the system-shaping force of historical factors in Ritschl's theology" (p. 93). Beyond this, however, I have serious reservations about the adequacy, and accuracy, of Mr. Hefner's Ritschl interpretation. See below, n. 60.

²⁵This same point is made by Rolf Schäfer, *Ritschl: Grundlinien eines fast verschollenen dogmatischen Systems* (Tübingen, 1968) 2.

rediscovered and reclaimed by a critical-historical inquiry which painstakingly distinguishes between original intentions and actual results, between formative ideas and their defective theological articulation.

Ritschl carried out this act of critical recovery—this simultaneous criticism and conservation of the Reformation heritage—in the two editions of *Justification* 1, in the “Prolegomena” to *The History of Pietism*, and especially in his seminal essay, “The Emergence of the Lutheran Church” (1876). He recapitulated his findings in his 1883 Luther address, as well as in the numerous historical excursions in (the three editions of) *Justification* 3.

The reformers inaugurated a comprehensive reinterpretation of Christian life in the world on the basis of the experience of justification by faith within the church. At least they did so in principle. They successfully worked a change in the contemporary religious self-, church and world understanding through the dissemination and widespread public reception of their practical root ideas. Yet they did not provide a coherent, internally consistent theological systematization of their seminal religious insights. Considered as a *religious event*, therefore, as a decisive turning point in the history of the Christian religion and church, the Reformation is complete. As a *theological phenomenon*, however, it is still incomplete. It reformed religion, not theology. Owing to this theological atrophy in its birth-hour, the Reformation’s epoch-making significance has been obscured, even denied, prompting hostile critics to announce the “end of Protestantism.”

Ritschl’s interpretation of theological deformation in the Reformation era is multifaceted, richly textured, and subtly nuanced. It is impossible to do it justice in a few summary paragraphs. In general, Ritschl advances three major criticisms of Reformation theology: (1) it exhibits a defective systematic ability, a lack of constructive power; (2) it succumbed to scholasticism or intellectualism through its theoretical encapsulation of the gospel; and (3) it failed to give normative expression to the new Reformation ideal of the Christian life. Each criticism calls for comment.

Luther—first among the reformers in importance as well as time—never succeeded in systematizing his original religious insights.²⁶ The fact is that he lacked the talents of a constructive theologian. He was chiefly a preacher and biblical expositor, not a

²⁶For what follows, see *Justification* 1, 133–39, 167–84; “Prolegomena,” 122–28.

dogmatician. His theological labors, moreover, were almost entirely determined by polemics, by the pressing need to respond to the piecemeal, atomistic attacks of his Catholic antagonists and his left-wing Protestant critics. By thus allowing himself to be forced into controversy over individual points of doctrine, Luther permitted his own theological work to become fragmented. He also allowed the *Fragestellung* of his opponents to shape his theological reply. For example, in the years following the Diet of Worms, he structured his formal doctrine of justification to conform to the traditional scholastic model of his Roman opponents. Rather than holding to his original view of the years 1515–20 that justification (*qua* the forgiveness of sins) is the answer to the inchoate righteousness of the regenerate, he now began to take up the theoretical idea of justification as a real “making righteous,” leaving the impression that justifying grace is the efficient cause of good works. In so doing he gave place to the typical Catholic preoccupation with the moral transformation of the sinner, to the scholastic equation of justification with sanctification (*justum in re facere*). Thereby he obscured the distinctive Evangelical understanding of justification as the religious regulator of the regenerate conscience, as the solution to the problem of personal assurance of divine grace in the midst of continuing sin (*Heilsgewissheit*).

In this connection Luther (along with Melanchthon) came to represent justification as a conversion process: the transformation of *homo peccator* into *homo justus* under the twofold proclamation of law and gospel.²⁷ This ill-advised law-gospel distinction, however, worked a profound dislocation in Luther’s original idea of the church. For on this scheme the church is no longer understood as the assembly of believers (*congregatio fidelium*), but as a “miscellaneous number of sinners who require first to be converted” (*corpus mixtum*).²⁸ Conversion presupposes repentance and the latter, in turn, is predicated on scrupulous self-examination in the mirror of the divine law and, hence, on dread of divine judgment. Herewith, in patent contradiction to his original Reformation insight, Luther reintroduced a legalistic regulation of the

²⁷On the law-gospel distinction, see *Justification* 1, 167–84; *Justification* 3, 159–67. (See also *Ritschl and Luther*, 106–12.) This distinction, geared to the sensibilities of “theologically and religiously uneducated persons,” first received extended practical application in Melanchthon’s 1528 *Visitation Articles*.

²⁸*Justification* 1, 135.

religious self-understanding and so opened the way to that penitential struggle of the anxious conscience (*Busskampf*) which is the leading characteristic of Pietism.²⁹

The most serious consequences of Luther's deficient constructive ability appear in his reversion to viewpoints of scholastic provenance—positions which he had earlier overcome in arriving at his original Reformation principle. Among these striking "Catholic remainders" (*katholischen Reste*) in Luther's mature theology—besides the formal parallel between the medieval and Lutheran doctrines of justification—Ritschl identified two of the greatest moment: a nominalist concept of God and an Anselmic interpretation of the atonement. The early, the "authentic" Luther rejected every speculative approach to God. God cannot be fathomed in his hidden majesty; he can be known only where he has willed to make himself known, in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Yet in his 1525 reply to Erasmus, *On the Bondage of the Will*, Luther posited a hidden God outside Christ, a God of wrath and implacable justice who appears wholly other than the merciful Father revealed in Christ. Luther thus subverted his christocentric idea of revelation by appealing, in nominalist fashion, to the absolute power and secret will of the *Deus absconditus*.³⁰ Likewise, when he came to formulate his atonement doctrine, Luther seriously compromised the core of his evangelical thought. His theological first principle is "the abiding revelation of love as the essence of God in Christ"; yet, in keeping with the law-gospel distinction, he introduced the idea of the divine wrath which requires satisfaction for sin alongside that of the divine love which reconciles the sinner.³¹ In the event Luther had reverted to Anselm's notion of the sinless Christ's vicarious satisfaction rendered to God's offended honor on behalf of sinful humanity. Luther's entire doctrine of God, in sum, displays severe internal contradictions and so lacks unity.

Among the reformers Melanchthon bears primary responsibility for the theological deformation of the Lutheran Reformation. Melanchthon was Lutheranism's chief theological spokesman, the reputed systematizer of early Reformation thought. To this end, however, he "was only able to use the loose scheme of the *Loci*

²⁹ *Justification* 1, 183, 330; *Rechtfertigung* 1, 180–81; *Justification* 3, 159ff.

³⁰ *Justification* 1, 199–200; *Rechtfertigung* 1, 218–24.

³¹ *Justification* 1, 159, 198–203; *Rechtfertigung* 1, 224; *Justification* 3, 263–64.

theologici, which actually produces the opposite of a theological system.”³² In the later editions of the *Loci* (1535ff.) he reintroduced a scholastic (Aristotelian) methodology and launched Lutheranism on its perilous path of natural theology—in open contradiction to Luther’s original faith-principle and to his own insistent christocentrism in the first edition of the *Loci* (1521) and in the Augsburg Confession and its Apology (1530).³³

Calvin, by contrast, was “the one systematic theologian of the later Reformation period.”³⁴ His *Institutes* provided an elegant model of theological construction for his successors, with the result that Reformed Orthodoxy displays a much greater “systematic impulse” than does Lutheran Orthodoxy in Melancthon’s train.³⁵ Calvin also proved himself to be “the most circumspect of Luther’s interpreters in regard to the structuring of the order of salvation.”³⁶ That is, in keeping with the standpoint of the early Luther, Calvin consistently identified the church as the immediate object of Christ’s redemptive work and as the sole locus for appropriating the *beneficia Christi*. In all these respects, Calvin deserves the palm as *the* theologian of the Reformation era. Yet the Genevan reformer also fell prey to doctrinalism and to a repristinating biblicism. And while his greatest single contribution to Evangelical dogmatics is his ecclesiocentrism, the last, definitive edition of the *Institutes* (1559) does not emphasize this church connection so forcefully and clearly as do the earlier editions.³⁷ This circumstance abetted the ensuing attenuation of the church-consciousness in Reformed circles, and thereby opened the door to the early appearance of sectarian Pietism on Calvinist-Reformed soil.

The most egregious defect of Reformation theology, however, is not its lack of systematic rigor, serious as that failing is, but its

³²“Prolegomena,” 127.

³³ *Justification* 3, 6–7, and esp. *Theologie und Metaphysik: Zur Verständigung und Abwehr* (Bonn, 1881, 1887), trans. Philip Hefner, *Theology and Metaphysics*, in *Three Essays*, 151–217 (see 204–8). (Hereafter cited as *Theology*.) Melancthon’s legacy at this point made it already possible for Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) to identify faith in divine providence as a truth of natural reason and to locate it within the sphere of natural theology (cf. *Justification* 3, 181).

³⁴ *Justification* 1, 281.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶“Prolegomena,” 130; *Justification* 3, 112.

³⁷ *Justification* 1, 186–88.

capitulation to *Schulmässigkeit*, to scholasticism and a school-mentality. By the time of Melanchthon's death in 1560 and Calvin's in 1564, certainly with the appearance of the Formula of Concord in 1577 and the entire *Book of Concord* in 1580, Reformation religion had hardened into Reformation doctrine, regarded as immutable and permanently binding for faith and life. Ritschl's summary judgment on the Protestant Reformation, therefore, is that while it began as the reform of religion, it had within two generations given way to intellectualism and doctrinalism, resulting in a "reason-centered Christianity" (*Verstandeschristenthum*).³⁸ This "scholastic narrowing" (*scholastische Verengung*) of the Reformation did not first take shape in the works of the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Orthodox theologians; it must be charged directly to the account of the reformers themselves.³⁹

This fateful development must be attributed, above all, to far-reaching alterations which the concept of the church underwent in early Lutheranism.⁴⁰ During the Reformation's formative years Luther and Melanchthon consistently maintained that the church is grounded solely on the *evangelium Dei*, namely, God's own work of redemption accomplished through Jesus Christ and attested in the gospel. The distinguishing mark of the true church, therefore, is its faithful proclamation of this dynamic gospel (*verbum efficax*) which creates and preserves the church. On the whole, Luther held to this position throughout his career; it is reaffirmed in such a late work as *On the Councils and the Church* (1539). Melanchthon also expressed this viewpoint with all clarity in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession and still held to it in his 1535 *Loci*.

Between 1537 and Luther's death in 1546, however, Melanchthon's concept of the church underwent a subtle yet profound transformation—one which Luther tacitly accepted and did nothing actively to correct. During these years (and thereafter) the acknowledged systematician of the Lutheran Reformation proceeded to locate the church's catholicity and truth in its doctrinal rectitude (*pura doctrina*), its faithful confession of all the individual teachings of the gospel (*doctrina evangelii*), its public adherence to

³⁸"Prolegomena," 134, 137.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 124.

⁴⁰This development is the subject of Ritschl's masterly essay, "Die Entstehung der lutherischen Kirche," *ZKG* 1 (1876) 51–110; reprinted in *Aufsätze*, 170–217.

the ecumenical creeds of Christendom and the dogmas of the ancient undivided church (*fides catholica*). From this intellectualistic perspective, the church is no longer seen in a purely religious light as the community of the faithful gathered around word and sacraments, but is construed in a theoretical fashion as an assembly of right doctrine, while the ground of the church is no longer located in the gospel as such, but in the pure doctrines of the gospel. The church, in brief, has become a "school."

The later Lutheran theologians, dutifully appropriating Melancthon's legacy (even when, like the Gnesio-Lutherans, they repudiated his "heresies"), increasingly stressed the noetic element in faith (*fides* = *notitia et assensus*), thereby obscuring the centrality of trust and confidence (*fides* = *fiducia cordis*). Trust is merely "added on," as it were, to a prior knowledge of, and assent to, the articles of faith. At this point, however, Calvin made a signal contribution to safeguarding the original Reformation idea of faith. For Calvin, as for Luther, "faith consists in the moving, and therefore personal, conviction which is mediated through the feeling of the grace of God that is apprehended in Christ."⁴¹ Trust in God, accordingly, is the *specific form* of faith understood as the personal experience of God's saving grace in Christ; such trust is not merely an *inference from* faith understood as the saving knowledge of revealed truth.

Calvin's advance, however, was soon surrendered by his successors. "The entire Calvinist school," including its greatest representative, Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), regressed into scholasticism.⁴² The Reformed divines neglected to include *fiducia* in the concept of *fides*, identifying it, rather, as an act which follows from faith, that is, as a mere "postscript" or "appendix" to a clear knowledge of revealed truths. In Ritschl's judgment, therefore, "all this adds up to the fact that the scholastic aridity of all religious knowledge is even stronger in the Calvinist-Reformed church than in the Lutheran."⁴³ Paradoxically, Calvin himself supplied the decisive impetus to this Reformed neo-scholasticism. For despite his profound insight into the nature of faith as *fiducia*, Calvin objected so vehemently to the Catholic tolerance of an

⁴¹"Prolegomena," 130.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*, 131.

“ignorant” *fides implicita* that he also came to identify authentic faith with the mastery of a body of revealed doctrine. For Calvin, in short, faith had to be “scholastically precise.”⁴⁴

The most pernicious consequence of the Lutheran reformers’ defective theological capacity, and of their concomitant lapse into scholasticism, is the grievous damage done to their original understanding of Christian freedom from and for the world as the immediate practical goal of justification. This Reformation *Lebensideal*, as we observed, is the distinctive mark of Protestantism; the direct antithesis to Roman Catholic monastic-ascetic *Weltflucht*; the basis for the Reformation’s claim to epoch-making, world-historical significance. Yet at this crucial juncture the reformers failed most lamentably to wed praxis with theory by neglecting to give this world-correlate of justification, this “secular” moment of the Christian religion, adequate theological articulation. Undoubtedly the most pained utterance to be found in Ritschl’s published works is this from the “Prolegomena”:

Frankly, it is shocking that there is no mention of the practical aim of justification by faith in the fourth article [“On Justification”] of the Augsburg Confession. And if we explicate this aim in any terms other than those of blessedness, within present experience, and if we do not take the believer’s attitude toward the world into consideration, how is it to be understood as distinctively Protestant? But these considerations are never asserted as being theologically normative.⁴⁵

The Lutheran reformers’ occasional remarks about the believer’s new “graced” relationship to the world do not amount to a sustained, systematic treatment, nor do they afford a norm and standard for the entire enterprise of Protestant theology. Furthermore, the original practical or existential impulses of Reformation religion were everywhere submerged beneath the increasingly dogmatic structure of Reformation theology. These sins of omission and commission in the writings of the Wittenberg reformers rendered Ritschl’s 1883 verdict inescapable: “The genuine ideas of the Reformation were more concealed than disclosed in the theological works of Luther and Melancthon.” The Lutheran Reformation, theologically considered, is unfinished.

One might expect that this theological atrophy among the Lutherans would have been made good by Calvin and the Calvinist divines, in view of their greater constructive talent and

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., 128.

systematic precision. As we have noted, however, Calvinism actually surpasses Lutheranism in its doctrinaire narrowing of Reformation religion. Within Calvinism, indeed, "foreign elements are bound together to a greater extent than in the so-called half-Catholic Lutheranism."⁴⁶ With this striking assertion Ritschl completely reversed the standard judgment—perpetuated, among others, by Ernst Troeltsch—that Lutheranism is more "medieval" than Calvinism, that Calvinism is thus more "modern" than Lutheranism, hence that "reform" is far more imperative in the Lutheran than in the Calvinist-Reformed church.

It is true, of course, that Calvin and Calvinism eliminated the cultic and institutional forms of the medieval church, while Luther and Lutheranism were much more conservative in this regard. Yet Calvinism, avers Ritschl, proved itself far more medieval than Lutheranism owing to the specific way in which Calvin "linked the thrust of the world-renouncing, holy church to Luther's principles."⁴⁷ That is, in the all-important realm of the Christian *Lebensideal*, Calvinism stands in the medieval-monastic tradition, an ideational line which runs from Spiritual Franciscanism through Anabaptism to Calvinism and thence to Pietism in Reformed circles. What all these phenomena have in common is an ideal of ascetic sanctity and a world-renouncing ethos. In this respect Calvinism actually reverted to "the medieval ideal of reform within the scope of Luther's Reformation."⁴⁸ This circumstance explains why the Calvinist-Reformed church (in Holland and the German Rhineland) showed itself even more disposed to embrace Pietism's acosmic distortion of Christianity than did German Lutheranism.

3. *The historical-evaluative impulse: the Reformation principle and the Christian tradition*

The historical identification of the Reformation principle and its critical disengagement from a deformed Reformation theology are inseparably bound up with a third central impulse of Ritschl's system: the critical interpretation and evaluation of the entire Christian heritage in the light of the Reformation's original practical root ideas. Thus Ritschl came to employ the Reformation principle as his leading hermeneutical and axiological category.

⁴⁶Ibid., 137.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid. On the Calvinistic life ideal, see "Prolegomena," 113–22.

In the first place, this category enabled Ritschl to trace the continuities and discontinuities between Reformation Christianity and its Catholic (patristic-medieval) antecedents.⁴⁹ The religious self-understanding in the light of grace alone—although opposed to the medieval church's heteronomous sacrament of penance—actually stands in indisputable continuity with the loftiest piety of the Latin church. This *sola gratia* piety can be traced throughout the entire Middle Ages, from Augustine through Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi down to Luther's own religious superior and spiritual father, Johann von Staupitz. For this reason Ritschl ventured to affirm that "neither Zwingli nor Luther either discovered the thought which was the leading one with them as reformers, or rediscovered it merely by study of the Bible, but that they imbibed it from a tradition current within the church."⁵⁰ Likewise the reformers' religious church understanding, their idea of the church as the *communio sanctorum* or *congregatio fidelium*, although opposed to the medieval church's hierarchical and hierocratic polity, is continuous with the teaching of the Apostles' Creed and thus also with the credal profession of the Roman church.⁵¹ Indeed the entire church consciousness of the reformers was incontrovertibly Catholic, for they held to the dogmatic and quasi-legal ground of the medieval *corpus christianum*, namely, the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas of the ancient church as summarized in the ecumenical creeds.⁵²

The reformers' religious world understanding, however, is unique to Protestantism. It marks the restoration of the original

⁴⁹See *Justification* 1, 90–133; *Rechtfertigung* 1², 105–53; and Ritschl's important but neglected address, "Festrede über Reformation in der lateinischen Kirche des Mittelalters (8 Juni 1887)," in *Drei akademische Reden* (Bonn, 1887) 30–46.

⁵⁰*Justification* 1, 166. Ritschl always insisted that the Reformation was licensed by the Western church's own tradition of theology and spirituality. Cf. "Luther Address," 189: "Luther's right to reform the church is legitimated even before his Roman opponents by the fact that his interpretation of Christianity represents the logical development of Latin Catholicism's basic formula [*Grundformel*], which had been covered over and deprived of its saving efficacy by all the accretions of a ritualistic and political ecclesiasticism."

⁵¹*Justification* 1, 155–56.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 126–33. This adherence to the ancient dogmas abetted the fragmentation of Reformation theology since these dogmas were not fully congruent with the reformers' religious interests. The reformers could appropriate the old dogmas, indeed were required to do so in order to demonstrate their catholicity, but could not successfully assimilate them into their theology. (See "Prolegomena," 127–28.)

New Testament (specifically Pauline) understanding of the Christian's religious lordship over the world on the grounds of justification by God and reconciliation with God. It marks the point of maximum discontinuity with the Middle Ages, indeed with the entire "Catholic form and phase of Christianity" (beginning in the second century). It also marks the point of maximum continuity with the culture of modernity.

The Reformation, accordingly, was by no means a complete break with medieval Catholicism, except at the single point of its dramatically new life ideal (which thus serves as the *differentia specifica* of Protestantism). Ritschl, in fact, so strongly emphasized the Reformation's continuity with medieval Christianity that he rejected as inaccurate, and totally unserviceable, the much favored, widely employed formula of the "two principles of Protestantism."⁵³ The so-called formal principle of the Reformation, the *sola scriptura*, is not unique to Protestantism, since it can be found already in Scotus and Occam; while the so-called material principle, the *sola gratia/sola fides*, designates that very piety which shaped the life and thought of the most conspicuous characters of the Middle Ages and which, for that matter, "constitutes a constant and characteristic feature of the Roman Catholic church itself."⁵⁴ These considerations explain why Ritschl, up to and including the first edition of *Justification* 1, still spoke of the Reformation as a "specific stage" in the history of the church, one which entailed a "rupture" with the preceding stage only because the intransigent Roman hierarchy rejected the reformers' evangelical message.⁵⁵ It was not until 1873–74, when he first identified the reformers' religious world understanding as the third component of the Reformation principle, that Ritschl began to speak of the Reformation as a "new stage" in church history, and so also began to underscore the Reformation's qualitative uniqueness vis-à-vis the Middle Ages and its epoch-making, world-historical significance vis-à-vis modern culture.⁵⁶

⁵³See *Justification* 1, 157–59, in addition to "Ueber die beiden Principien des Protestantismus" (see n. 18). Cf. "Prolegomena," 83–85.

⁵⁴*Justification* 1, 115, 133.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 165–66.

⁵⁶In *Rechtfertigung* 1 Ritschl simply drops his earlier remarks (in *Justification* 1) about the Reformation as a "specific stage" in church history. The Reformation marks a new stage in Christian history in the particular (and limited) sense that "it set in motion a new phase of the Christian *Lebensführung*" ("Prolegomena," 84).

In the second place, Ritschl employed the Reformation principle to trace the continuities and discontinuities between Reformation Christianity and post-Reformation Protestantism.⁵⁷ In particular, he underscored the repeated failure of later Protestantism—from the Reformation era itself down to his own day—to reappropriate and revalidate its original animating ideas. Ritschl devoted over 400 of the 650 pages of each edition of *Justification* 1 to a critical analysis and appraisal of post-Reformation Protestantism, while his great *History of Pietism* runs to some 1700 pages as he goes about the melancholy task of charting Pietism's *de facto* abandonment of the Reformation heritage.

Pietism, of course, was Ritschl's *bête noire*, prompting some scholars to puzzle why he should have devoted over ten years of his career to researching and writing the history of a phenomenon he so cordially detested. One explanation, favored by his most hostile critics, is that having so little personal religion of his own, he could not tolerate it in others, especially on so immense a scale! There should be little occasion for puzzlement, however, or for such reductionistic, blatantly *ad hominem* explanations. The first sentence of the third paragraph of *The History of Pietism* gives his reason plain: "Wherever it exists, Pietism claims to have reformation significance for the Evangelical churches."⁵⁸ This challenge had to be answered, and answered at length, not least because Ritschl's own theological system claimed precisely such significance! In any event, the pretensions of "reforming" Pietism had to be unmasked by showing that it too must be counted among

set in motion a new phase of the Christian *Lebensführung*" ("Prolegomena," 84).

⁵⁷See *Ritschl and Luther*, 81–84.

⁵⁸"Prolegomena," 56. In the introduction to his translation of the "Prolegomena," Philip Hefner observes: "The great and intriguing question is why a man would devote ten years of his life to the study of a movement to which he was opposed." He suggests that "the answer may lie in the fact that Pietism was so concerned with the Christian life, which was also Ritschl's major concern in his academic thought" (*Three Essays*, 52). Surprisingly, Mr. Hefner does not take note of Ritschl's express statement about Pietism's "reforming pretensions." No doubt this is because Mr. Hefner makes the *Lebensideal* the key to Ritschl's entire system, whereas I regard the Reformation principle as the key, with the reformers' life ideal figuring as but one (albeit pivotal) component of this larger construct. Mr. Hefner, in fact, takes over the *Lebensideal* construct from the 1880 "Prolegomena" and then reads Ritschl's entire literary corpus, beginning already with the first ed. (1850) of *Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche*, in its light. My research has shown that the *Lebensideal/Lebensführung* construct first appears in Ritschl's system in 1873–74 (with the first ed. of *Justification* 3), and is then assimilated into *das Princip der Reformation* as its third component.

the *deformations* of Protestantism, that down to the present day, Pietism's vaunted claim notwithstanding, churchly Protestantism *still* awaits the completion of the Reformation.⁵⁹ That Ritschl's greatest historical monograph can be thus "accounted for" by reference to the unfinished Reformation motif is, I think, proof positive that this motif is basic to Ritschl's entire undertaking.

Here it is not possible, or necessary, to survey Ritschl's insightful, acerbic, often surprising interpretation and evaluation of the development of Protestant thought and spirituality from seventeenth-century Lutheran and Reformed Orthodoxy to the repristinating confessionalism and neo-Pietistic Orthodoxy of the nineteenth century. On the whole, the record is one of continuing deformation. To be sure, there are several notable exceptions: one can discern the promise of new theological beginnings—of a return to and revalidation of Reformation religion—in Paul Gerhardt's classic, utterly christocentric hymnody; in Enlightenment theology's neo-Abelardianism, Kant's ethical rigorism, and Schleiermacher's ecclesiocentric dogmatics. Yet Protestantism has invariably frittered away these gains and perpetuated the theological atrophy of the Reformation era.

Orthodox and Rationalist intellectualism; Pietist sectarianism and otherworldliness; Enlightenment eudaemonism and ethical relativism; half-Catholic mystical and ascetic modes of piety; Hegelian speculation; neo-Lutheran sacramentalism, confessionalism, and restorationism: these long-standing and current deformations of original Reformation Christianity have consigned churchly Protestantism to a state of perpetual immaturity; have made it an object

⁵⁹ In spite of Ritschl's massive historical-theological assault on Pietism, it is not true that he "cordially detested" Pietism. Philipp Jakob Spener must be reckoned among the company of true teachers for Ritschl, since Spener rightly advanced an "ethical proof for the truth of Christianity" (*Justification* 3, 8) and firmly maintained Luther's principle that the individual's religious experiences (including conversion) "all point back to his baptism, and are to be explained as the consequences, or the renewal, of baptismal grace" (*Justification* 3, 156). Thus Spener preserved the indissoluble connection between justification-regeneration and the churchly fellowship, and hereby proved his fidelity to the Reformation heritage. Moreover, it was August Hermann Francke (and the Gotha Pietists), not Spener, who introduced the *Busskampf* on Lutheran soil (*Justification* 3, 162–64). Ritschl also carefully distinguishes between the old Halle Pietism and the modern species of Pietism, the latter newly allied with a repristinating Orthodoxy (e.g., in the person of E. W. Hengstenberg), and owing more to Zinzendorf and the Moravian Brotherhood than to Spener and Francke (*Justification* 1, 513ff.).

of scorn before its traditional and now newly resurgent (Ultramontane) Roman Catholic foes; and have all but obliterated the Reformation's epochal significance as its cultured despisers unwittingly confuse the withered shell of present-day Protestantism with the core of Reformation religion.

Lest Ritschl be condemned as a "critical reductionist," however, as a theologian who made "God's redemptive grace accessible within only *one* configuration of the human psyche" (namely, that of "a Paul or a Luther or a Ritschl" or, at its widest extent, that of "the nineteenth-century bourgeois"), one must take care to add that Ritschl was a historical theologian of genuinely catholic sensibilities.⁶⁰ Even while tracing out severe *theological discontinuities* in church history, he everywhere discerned pervasive *continuities in piety*. The very notion of a historical "fall," a total or near-total break in the web of history, was anathema to him on

⁶⁰These grave charges have been levelled against Ritschl by Philip Hefner, *Faith and the Vitalities of History*, 96ff. Mr. Hefner contends that Ritschl, for all his sensitivity to history's formative role in theology, "ultimately violates the integrity of the very historical reality that he knows himself beholden to, because he places this history at the mercy of a constructive category which distorts it," namely, the narrow, reductionistic category of the Christian *Lebensideal* or *Lebensführung* (p. 97). I consider this harsh judgment to be totally unwarranted by the evidence. Mr. Hefner's basic error, I find, is that he simply *equates* the *Lebensideal* with *Frömmigkeit* or piety as such (cf. p. 100): thus he reduces Ritschl's multifaceted idea of religion to but a *single* component and then proceeds to accuse Ritschl of reductionism. As we have seen, religion or piety for Ritschl includes not only the believer's relationship to the *world*, but also and always to *God* and to the *church*. In Ritschl's works, therefore, the concept of the *Lebensideal* does not fill the total horizon of religion but refers strictly to the Christian *Welt- und Lebensanschauung* on the grounds of reconciliation with God. It is thus but one facet or component of piety, though an all-important facet for Ritschl (since only at this point do the uniqueness and epochal significance of Reformation Christianity first come to light). As I have shown in the present essay, moreover, Ritschl's historical method is sufficiently nuanced to allow for pervasive continuities in one dimension of piety (e.g., the religious regulation of the believer's self-understanding by the thought of grace alone) even while finding profound discontinuity in another dimension (e.g., the religious world understanding). Thus the reformers' *sola gratia* piety stands in direct continuity with the loftiest piety of the Middle Ages, although the new Reformation life ideal marks a complete break with medieval monastic-ascetic *Weltflucht*. The notion of the Christian life ideal—in its biblical-Reformation guise—is actually Ritschl's *category of historical discontinuity* par excellence. Little wonder that Mr. Hefner, by straightway identifying "piety" with "life ideal," concludes that Ritschl could not do justice to the pluralities and relativities of Christian history. I conclude, however, that Mr. Hefner has not done justice to Ritschl's complex, and subtly nuanced, axiology of history based on his equally complex idea of *Frömmigkeit*.

empirical grounds: critical historiography knows of no such “catastrophes,” certainly not in the history of Christianity. New Testament religion was not a “fall” from Old Testament (Israelite) religion; nor early Catholicism from apostolic Christianity; nor the Lutheran church from Luther’s religion; nor post-Reformation Protestantism, for all its deformations, from Reformation Christianity. Christianity is a common spiritual movement: its root ideas of God’s unmerited favor and forgiveness for Christ’s sake, appropriated by faith alone, and of the church as the elect people called into being by the Lord Jesus, sustained by his evangel, and sanctified by God’s Spirit, have continually animated this religion throughout its history. Nor have these ideas and their attendant life forms been limited to a select few, a sectarian company of the religiously like-minded.

The truth is that the piety or religious practice of the church catholic has invariably been far more sound, more faithful to its biblical roots, than the serious deformations in the church’s formal theology would suggest. Thus the medieval church’s *sola gratia* piety—which ever characterized that church in her posture of prayer and praise—formed the counterpoise to the official scholastic doctrines of justification (with their fateful coordination of divine grace and human merit). The sixteenth-century reformers, in turn, reappropriated this piety and turned it to reforming effect. So also the christocentric *Vorsehungsglaube* of post-Reformation religion (as displayed in the hymnody of Paul Gerhardt and the devotional writings of Johann Arndt and Christian Scriver) served as a practical counterbalance and corrective to Orthodoxy’s rationalistic treatment of God’s providence as a truth of natural religion.⁶¹ Ritschl was ever mindful, in brief, that the Christian church does not live by theology alone.

4. *The biblical-systematic impulse: the Reformation principle and the reconstruction of Protestant dogmatics*

The three correlative moments of Ritschl’s historical scholarship press on directly to, and culminate in, the systematic-theological moment, namely, Ritschl’s endeavor to reconstruct Evangelical dogmatics on the ground of the Reformation principle (and *its* biblical base). As noted at the outset, Ritschl’s paramount goal,

⁶¹ *Justification* 3, 181ff.

the preoccupation of his Göttingen years, was to articulate a homogeneous theological system informed by the Reformation's practical root ideas. In particular, the system was to be organized around Luther's own first principles which, to date, had not achieved a unified exposition.

Ritschl scholars, past and present, have devoted countless pages to analyzing, and criticizing, the first twenty-five pages—the four introductory sections—of *Justification* 3. The famous Ritschlian image of Christianity as an ellipse with two foci (religious redemption through Jesus Christ and moral activity in the kingdom of God); Ritschl's phenomenology of religion; his theological epistemology, with its anti-metaphysical bias; his notion of independent and concomitant value judgments: these and other key ingredients of his dogmatic prolegomena have generated endless comment and controversy. Yet, until recently at least, relatively few of Ritschl's latterday commentators and critics have paused to note, much less to take seriously, his own oft-repeated declaration that his intent was nothing less than to bring to systematic expression, and completion, the formative ideas of the Protestant Reformation. Instead, the dynamics of Ritschl's system have been variously located in his reputed neo-Kantianism, or in his indebtedness to the philosophical and theological representatives of German idealism (Kant, Schleiermacher, Baur, Rothe, Lotze), or in his regression to the feeble theological lucubrations of the German *Aufklärung*. I believe that the considerations which I have advanced in this essay—buttressed by the much more detailed arguments presented in my *Ritschl and Luther*—suffice to call into question any interpretation of Ritschl's constructive theology which neglects, or minimizes, his profound indebtedness to the Reformation heritage.

Ritschl's adherence to the Reformation tradition is immediately evident from his position on biblical authority. "It stands as the fundamental principle of the Evangelical church that Christian doctrine is to be obtained from the Bible *alone*": so Ritschl in the "Introduction" to his *Instruction in the Christian Religion*.⁶² In support of this assertion Ritschl cites Luther's Smalcald Articles, II.15: "The word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one

⁶²*Instruction* (paragraph 3), 22. See also *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*. Zweiter Band: *Der biblische Stoff der Lehre* (Bonn, 1874 , 1882 , 1889 = 1900) section 3 ("Die Auctorität der heiligen Schrift für die Theologie").

else, not even an angel." That Ritschl took the Reformation *sola scriptura* seriously is clear from the very format of *Justification and Reconciliation*. Originally Ritschl planned only two volumes, a historical survey together with a biblical-systematic exposition. Owing to the bulk of the material to be treated, he was obliged to separate the biblical from the systematic section, but he continued to maintain the centrality of the biblical material. Otto Ritschl, in his biography of his father, states that Ritschl's "theological system rested completely on his biblical theology."⁶³ Indeed the biblical section was for Ritschl of constitutive significance for dogmatics, while the historical section was of regulative value.

The Bible's centrality for Ritschl, however, must not be misconstrued. His biblical study does not amount to an *independent* theological impulse outside the scope of his overarching endeavor to recover Reformation religion and to "perfect" the theologically-deformed Reformation. Ritschl does not doubt that Reformation Christianity is entirely congruent with biblical religion. The reformers' practical root ideas are themselves warranted by Scripture and, for this reason, have constitutive significance for Protestant theology. (Were this not so, we would be hard pressed to explain why Ritschl took the Reformation theme of justification and reconciliation as the subject matter of his entire system.) Reformation theology is quite another matter. Ritschl's critical-historical study demonstrated that the reformers' theology is not consistent with their original religious insights, lacks internal coherence, gives way to neo-scholasticism, and so amounts to a "stunted growth." His biblical study, in turn, showed that Reformation theology, contrary to its insistent claim, is not entirely congruent with Scripture. In keeping with the reformers' own *sola scriptura*, therefore, their theology must be forthwith *corrected* by Scripture.

It is demonstrably the case, concludes Ritschl, that the reformers—above all the Lutheran reformers—failed to do justice to the biblical concept of the kingdom of God. It is clear from Scripture that this idea formed the core of Jesus' own proclamation and of the primitive Christian kerygma. The *basileia tou theou* designates nothing less than God's spiritual lordship over the entire creation: it is thus God's own self-end, the final end of the elect community, and the goal of human history.⁶⁴ In the theological works of the Wittenberg reformers, however, God's kingdom

⁶³ *Leben*, 2. 165.

⁶⁴ *Justification* 3, 10.

is treated in a purely individualistic and acosmic way—as the reign of God in the pious heart, or as the inward union of Christ with the Christian.⁶⁵ Accordingly, the systematic theologian who takes the biblical-Reformation idea of justification as his transcendent theme must not fail to relate the idea of divine forgiveness to the issue of the world's ultimate destiny, as well as to the concrete circumstances of faithful existence in God's present yet ever coming kingdom. Failing this, the theologian would prove unfaithful to *both* Scripture and Reformation religion, and could not justly claim to be bringing the theologically unfinished Reformation to completion.

The pivotal importance of Reformation Christianity for Ritschl the systematician is also clear from a consideration of his leading methodological canons in *Justification* 3—especially if one takes at face value his explicit statements about the provenance of these canons. In line with Luther's "new principle" for theological construction—his rejection of any and all "disinterested" knowledge of God—Ritschl insists that a proper theological system must be so structured that "every part of theological knowledge is construed from the standpoint of the Christian community, since only so can the worth of Christ as revealer be employed throughout as the basis of knowledge in solving all the problems of theology."⁶⁶ God can be known only in Christ, and thus only through the mediation of the believing community founded by Christ. Yet Reformation and post-Reformation theology, in Melancthon's train, abandoned this standpoint, reverting to a scholastic, Aristotelian natural theology. This fateful deformation must be opposed and overcome. "That task I essay," declares Ritschl, "in the full consciousness that my action is justified and rendered imperative by the standard writings of the Reformation."⁶⁷

In the same vein, in his *Theology and Metaphysics* (1881), Ritschl declares: "The epistemological method which I follow in theology corresponds to the authentic intention of Luther, in particular his resolve to break with scholastic theology."⁶⁸ Ritschl's well-known rejection of natural theology owes more to Luther's polemic against a scholastic *theologia gloriae* than it does to Kant's *Critique*

⁶⁵Ibid. 11, 181.

⁶⁶Ibid., 6.

⁶⁷Ibid., 7.

⁶⁸*Theology*, 209.

of *Pure Reason*. It is actually the Kant of the Second Critique whom Ritschl hails, in effect, as the philosopher of Protestantism—yet only because Kant’s moral philosophy restored “the moral view of the universe due to the Reformation.”⁶⁹ Likewise, Ritschl’s fundamental distinction between religion (faith) and dogma, between practical and theoretical cognition, between value judgments and disinterested knowledge, is rooted specifically in the reformers’ distinction between *fiducia* and *fides historica*, not simply in a general concept of religion or in a neo-Kantian or Lotzean epistemology.⁷⁰

I maintain, in sum, that Ritschl’s chief methodological principles—his christocentrism or revelational positivism (bordering on fideism), his ecclesiocentrism, his idea of value judgments, his soteriological concept of religion (based on Luther’s celebrated explanation to the First Commandment)—are all the direct expression of his endeavor to reconstruct Evangelical dogmatics by reappropriating the reformers’ original religious standpoints.⁷¹

Reformation religious thought also supplies the leading themes of *Justification* 3, thus entering into the determination of the content as well as the form or structure of Ritschl’s dogmatics. As with the reformers before him, so also for Ritschl the doctrine of justification by faith is “the central doctrine of Christianity,” its *articulus primus et principalis*, precisely because God’s unmerited forgiveness of sins is “the foundation-stone of the Christian religion” and “the key to the whole domain of Christian life.”⁷² One recalls that Ritschl’s contemporary, the great Basel historian Jakob Burckhardt, could claim that “the doctrine of justification through faith, in Luther’s version, now has been abandoned by all prominent Protestant theologians”—a completely untenable claim in view of Ritschl’s lifelong labors, yet one which serves to dramatize the contemporary relevance and lasting value of Ritschl’s life’s work.⁷³

It is clear that *Justification* 3 is structured around, and purports to unfold in an organic fashion, the component parts of the Reformation principle: *justification*, God’s free forgiveness, understood as

⁶⁹ *Justification* 1, 390.

⁷⁰ See esp. *Theology*, 203–9.

⁷¹ See *Ritschl and Luther*, 31–51.

⁷² *Justification* 3, vii, 113, 141.

⁷³ On Burckhardt’s Luther-Reformation interpretation, and for the quotation here cited, see *Ritschl and Luther*, 162ff.

the purely religious regulator of the believer's self-understanding; the *church*, the assembly of the faithful and elect community, understood as the sole locus for the experience of God's unmerited grace and as the sphere of religious worship (faith), together with the *kingdom of God*, God's own self-end and the world's destiny, understood as "the moral society of nations" realized through the moral action of believers in their secular vocations (love); and *reconciliation*, the practical result of justification, understood as the believer's positive entrance into fellowship with God (trust, patience, humility, prayer) and thus into a new relationship to the world based on the certainty that God orders all things in the best interests of his spiritual creation (religious lordship over the world).

So also the "presuppositions" of this systematic elaboration of the Reformation principle—the doctrines of God, sin, and Christ's person and work—are themselves worked out on the basis of the reformers' practical root ideas: for example, God understood as *eitel Liebe*; sin as lack of trust in God, separation from God, and active opposition to his will; Christ as royal prophet and priest, whose "person" (divine nature) is to be approached historically, not metaphysically, in keeping with the reformers' Christology *von unten nach oben*.

At each major juncture of his systematic theology, therefore, Ritschl not only appeals to the reformers for support, but aims to make their original religious viewpoints—as distinct from their later theological formulations—the groundwork of his "positive exposition."⁷⁴

5. *The apologetic impulse: the Reformation principle and the vindication of Protestantism*

The historical identification, critical recovery, and systematic unfolding of the Reformation principle not only serve the needs of a debilitated, theologically "immature" Protestantism, but preeminently answer the pressing challenge to engineer a contemporary

⁷⁴In *Justification* 3 Ritschl pointedly asserts that "the doctrine of justification set forth [in the first three chapters dealing with the concept and general relations of justification] stands in the line of direct continuity with the intention of the reformers and the standards of the Lutheran church" (p. 191). Comparable claims occur throughout *Justification* 3 (e.g., 211–12; 333–34; 391–99; 498–99; 548–49; 660).

vindication of Protestantism. Ritschl was not an apologetic theologian in the strict sense, yet his mature works contain a reasoned defense of the heart of Reformation faith against its Roman Catholic foes and its cultured despisers. Ritschl took pains to show that the Reformation's practical root ideas—above all its distinctive ideal for the Christian life—possess immediate relevance for solving the most insistent problems within both church and society. Ritschl, in brief, entered the lists as a defender of the Reformation's epoch-making significance for both Christianity and culture.

I have already noted Ritschl's views on the cultural significance of the Reformation, the import of its idea of Christian liberty for modern life and thought. Elsewhere (i.e., the concluding chapter of *Ritschl and Luther*) I have considered at length Ritschl's vindication of Protestantism in the face of an aggressive, increasingly monolithic Catholicism (symbolized by the pontificate of Pius IX), and his defense of the reformers and their Reformation against such implacable foes as Paul de Lagarde and Jakob Burckhardt. Here I wish to focus on Ritschl's response to perhaps the most exigent religious and cultural problem of his day. We have seen that the concept of the Christian *Lebensideal*—the religious world understanding of the reformers, their teaching on Christian freedom or religious lordship over the world—became a dominant motif in Ritschl's theology during the mid-1870s. One does not go wrong, I think, in labelling this concept Ritschl's apologetic category par excellence. For Ritschl this unique Protestant ideal of life—recovered by Luther in the footsteps of Paul—is the Christian answer to the nineteenth-century “world problem”: the ever-widening split between finite human spirit and impersonal nature, between the order of persons and the order of things.⁷⁵

“The world is too much with us; . . . Little we see in Nature that is ours”: Wordsworth's lament (in Sonnet XIV, 1807) is echoed throughout the belletristic and philosophical literature of the century. The painful contradiction between feeling self and unfeeling

⁷⁵This split is central to Ritschl's phenomenology of religion: it poses the dominant *Heilsfrage* to which every religion addresses itself. It is clear, of course, that this was *not* the primary soteriological issue for the sixteenth-century reformers. Here Ritschl's “critical reappropriation” of Reformation religion—his “innovation” vis-à-vis the Reformation tradition—shows itself in all clarity. Yet Ritschl was striving to respond to the pressing issues of his own day by assuming responsibility for his Reformation heritage. I take this significant hermeneutical endeavor to be a sign of his theological acuity and greatness, not a proof of his servile capitulation to the *Zeitgeist*.

world—between the deepest longings of the human heart and an indifferent, if not malevolent, natural order—expresses itself in an ever-growing sense of world alienation. Tennyson, writing nine years before the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, is haunted by the vision of "Nature, red in tooth and claw"—"So careful of the type . . . , So careless of the single life" (*In Memoriam*, 1850); while Matthew Arnold (Ritschl's exact contemporary but by one year) finds himself "as on a darkling plain" in a bleak world which "Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor peace, nor help for pain" ("Dover Beach," 1867). Such melancholic brooding on the human predicament is not unique to Victorian England. European literature everywhere displays this same autumnal note, elegiac strain, and twilight mood. Sensitive souls experience and express a sense of cosmic lostness, a kind of metaphysical homelessness, evoked by their corrosive doubt of the value of individual life in a world so oblivious to personal being and well-being.⁷⁶

In Germany, Schopenhauer's metaphysical pessimism—his vision of the world as "a hell which surpasses that of Dante"—attained wide currency in the decades following the failed revolution of 1848. (Schopenhauer's major work, *The World as Will and Idea*, appeared already in 1819, with augmented editions in 1844 and 1859.) This outlook culminated in the desperate idea of "cosmic suicide" advanced by Eduard von Hartmann (*The Philosophy of the Unconscious*, 1869): humanity must perforce will its own destruction upon reaching the highest consciousness of its hopeless condition. Germany in mid-century also witnessed the rise and temporary hegemony of philosophical positivism and materialism: the concerted endeavor to drive every trace of vitalism and teleology from the field by a strictly mechanical explanation of nature, often leading to the metaphysical postulate that matter is the sole existent. (Such materialism was preached and popularized in the widely read books of Jakob Moleschott, Ludwig Büchner, Karl Vogt, Heinrich Cölbe, and Ernst Haeckel.)⁷⁷ In 1872, at the

⁷⁶See Basil Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies* (London, 1949) and idem, *More Nineteenth Century Studies* (New York, 1956); Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought* (Penguin Books, 1961); and esp. Lionel Trilling's brilliant last book, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA, 1972).

⁷⁷Mid-century developments in philosophy and the natural sciences (including the rise of "scientism") are discussed in such informative books as John Theodore

close of his tumultuous career, David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) published *The Old Faith and the New*—his final reckoning with theological orthodoxy and traditional theism. Having latterly discovered new light in the writings of Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, Darwin, and Haeckel, Strauss found a solution to the world problem in a monistic evolutionary naturalism, concluding that though the monstrous world-machine crush us, we may be persuaded of its necessity and rationality, and thus of its peculiar beneficence, since nature herself dictates that without death there can be no life.⁷⁸

For his part, Albrecht Ritschl—in his role as a theologian of culture—responded to the pervasive world weariness of his age by endeavoring to recover, and revalidate, the original Christian and distinctively Protestant idea of religious lordship over the world through personal trust and confidence in the *Deus justificans*. During the last fifteen years of his career, from the publication of the first edition of *Justification* 3 in 1874 until his death in 1889, Ritschl increasingly bent every effort to vindicate Protestantism's unique life ideal as the solution to the great nineteenth-century controversy over *Weltanschauungen*. His rejoinder to the cosmic pessimism of Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, to the reductionistic anthropology of metaphysical materialism, to the bleak monistic worldview so elaborately mapped by mechanistic natural science, was no insipid spiritualism, some theosophical version of German idealism, but nothing less than the cardinal Christian doctrine of justification and reconciliation in its specifically Reformation guise.

One must not forget—what so many of Ritschl's critics have either forgotten or left unsaid—that this reputed leader of theological modernism devoted virtually his entire career to investigating, articulating, and defending a doctrine which the *moderni* contemptuously dismissed as but a rationalization for ethical quietism, a subversion of individual autonomy, a compensatory projection of the anxious psyche, or an outmoded mythological construct. For Ritschl, by contrast, this much maligned, long deformed, and perennially misunderstood doctrine of justification,

Merz, *A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. 3 (London, 1912; reprint ed., New York, 1965); Ernst Cassirer, *The Problem of Knowledge: Philosophy, Science, and History Since Hegel* (New Haven, 1950); and Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man & Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Baltimore/London, 1971).

⁷⁸For Ritschl's reply to Strauss, and to contemporary pessimism, materialism, etc., see *Justification* 3, 206ff., 229ff., 614ff.

together with its practical correlate of Christian freedom from and for the world, alone promised to satisfy, in a truly human and humanizing way, the heartfelt yearnings of his contemporaries for personal wholeness in a heartless world. Responding to this universal cultural quest for authenticity and integrity, Ritschl advanced what he took to be the reformers' original idea of Christian "completeness" (*Vollkommenheit*): their grand teaching that one achieves the value of a whole, a qualitative superiority to the entire natural realm and world order, only through trust in God's fatherly care of his material and spiritual creation; through patience, humility, and prayer; and no less through loving service to one's neighbor by the conscientious pursuit of one's worldly *Beruf*.

To be sure, given the egregious failure of Reformation and post-Reformation theology to codify and transmit the unique world understanding which we owe to Reformation religion, the heritage of the Reformation has come down to the present in a deformed, atrophied condition. Here again then, as in every matter touching on the Christian doctrine of justification and reconciliation, the exigent task of the Evangelical theologian is to recover the reformers' original religious standpoint, critically disengage it from a deformed theological tradition, reconstruct it in a homogeneous theological system, and thereby vindicate the abiding significance of essential Protestantism for life in the modern world.

These several considerations, taken together in their cumulative weight, warrant the conclusion that the key to Albrecht Ritschl's comprehensive undertaking is his endeavor to bring to theological completion the unfinished Reformation of the sixteenth century.