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Theodor Zahn, Adolf Harnack, and Adolf Schlatter

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THEODOR RITTER VON ZAHN, Karl Gustav Adolf von Harnack, and Adolf Schlatter lived in the engulfing shadows of the Enlightenment. This movement, with its quest for scientific objectivity and its confidence in human reason, affected every scholarly discipline, including biblical studies. One of the products of the Enlightenment was the historical-critical method pioneered by Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91) and Johann David Michaelis (1717–91). This approach reached a peak in Harnack,¹ with Zahn and Schlatter representing a conservative counterpoint to the prevailing scholarly climate.

These three scholars not only lived in the heyday of historical criticism, they also did their work at the onset of a new movement, the return to a theological interpretation of the Bible. Stephen Neill and Tom Wright call this the “Re-entry of Theology,”² with the best-known representative of this movement being Karl Barth (1886–1968). Harnack, Zahn, and Schlatter, then, lived at a time when historical criticism was a formidable dam concealing increasing cracks that were gradually to give way to the “new” theological methods.

THEODOR RITTER VON ZAHN (1838–1933)

Biographical Information

Theodor Zahn was the ninth child born to Franz L. Zahn (1798–1890) and Anna Schlatter (1800–53; note the family relation to Adolf Schlatter, see below) in Mörs, Rhenish Prussia (now Germany) on October 10, 1838. Although his great-grandfather, Johann Michael Zahn, was a Christian and initially taught philosophy and later studied theology and served as a pastor in Wassertallebel (1711), his grandfather, Gottlieb

1. Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:122.

2. Neill and Wright, *Interpretation of the New Testament*, 205.

Zahn (1762–1845), was a rationalistic non-Christian who begrudged the conversion of his children and grandchildren. Ironically, Gottlieb reared two pastors and one missionary. Franz, Gottlieb's third son and Theodor's father, was one of these two pastors. Although raised beneath his father's rationalistic umbrella, Franz became a Christian at the University of Jena where he was studying jurisprudence (1817) before switching to theological studies (1822). After practicing law and training elementary teachers, Franz became pastor of a church in Mörs, his hometown.

With such a father, Theodor Zahn was no stranger to academics, theology, or rationalism, as he was exposed to each from an early age. His erudition and academic promise were evident already in his translation of the eight books of Caesar's *Gallic Wars* from Latin into German at the age of ten (1847–48). Zahn was educated at the Universities of Basel, Erlangen, and Berlin. Encouraged by his father to attend the University of Basel, Zahn studied theology and was influenced by the church historian Karl Rudolf Hagenbach. While studying at Erlangen for three semesters (1856–57), Zahn was greatly impacted by his professor and mentor, Johann Christian K. von Hofmann (central figure of the so-called "Erlangen school"). Zahn completed his studies in Berlin, seeking to fill gaps in his knowledge, which he thought to be dogmatics, history of theology, and the study of Martin Luther and Friedrich Schleiermacher. These formative years shaped Zahn into an orthodox Lutheran as well as a New Testament and patristics scholar practicing a conservative form of historical criticism.

Zahn described the three years subsequent to his graduation (1858–61) as full of trials. During this time, while teaching at his father's school, he suffered from a major eye disease that hindered his reading and writing for an entire year. Once recovered, Zahn taught religion, world history, and German literature at the Gymnasium (middle and high school) of Neustrelitz (1861–65) before becoming a student lecturer at the University of Göttingen (1865–68). While at Göttingen, he advanced to *Privatdozent* (lecturer) in 1868 and then to Associate Professor in 1871, publishing works on Marcellus of Ancyra (1867), the *Shepherd of Hermas* (1868), Ignatius of Antioch (1873), and a critical edition of the Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp (1876). In addition, he earned his doctorate and served as university preacher. Unable to secure a permanent position in Göttingen, he left in 1877 to become professor at Kiel, where he formed a lifelong friendship with Friedrich Blass, known especially for his work in New Testament Greek grammar. Zahn remained in Kiel for only eleven months before moving to Erlangen where he was called to replace Hofmann, his former mentor. Ten years later, in 1888, he moved to Leipzig, where he remained until 1892, to serve as Dean of the theological faculty. He then returned to Erlangen, where he spent the rest of his career (1892–1909) teaching pedagogy and New Testament exegesis.

Zahn's contemporaries knew him as a scholar and a practitioner. Throughout his academic life, he frequently preached in surrounding churches, addressing many of life's practical concerns. Although he retired from Erlangen in 1909, he continued to study, write, and preach until his death on March 15, 1933, at the age of ninety-five.

Major Views and Methodology

Zahn's scholarly goal throughout his life was to present a historical understanding of early Christianity through an independent investigation of the historical sources from the biblical and patristic records (including the *Shepherd of Hermas* and Ignatius's letters) up to 450 CE.³ Although Zahn preferred to characterize his method as "historical-philological,"⁴ it bore a resemblance to the historical-critical method widely practiced in his day. Unlike most of his scholarly peers, however, Zahn believed that the Bible was historically and theologically accurate, including its record of supernatural events.

According to Zahn himself, the question that remained close to his heart was, "How is a sanctifying faith in Jesus related to the facts by which God revealed Himself to us in Jesus, through Jesus, and by Jesus?"⁵ Since Zahn believed that the New Testament accurately recorded history, he was convinced that through an ardent study of the New Testament data one could accurately reconstruct the historical events surrounding the life of Christ. Thus Jesus' virgin birth, his sacrificial and atoning death, and his literal bodily resurrection were not fabrications or misrepresentations by the New Testament and early Christian writers but were in keeping with actual historical events. Zahn confidently stated: "The Christian faith is indeed based on facts and is tied to facts, regarding its origin as well as its continued existence, to such an extent that it stands or falls with these facts."⁶ Likewise, Zahn regarded the Old Testament as an accurate record of the history prior to Christ's coming.

Methodologically, Zahn reached the conclusion that the New Testament was accurate by *tracing canonical history backward* from the third century CE.⁷ His argument was as follows. A new Christian sect, the Montanists, arose in the mid-third century that laid claim to new inspiration. This claim forced the early church in 170–220 CE to state that authority was confined to the apostolic writings. Zahn suggested that during this time of the formation of the Christian canon the church accepted the four Gospels, Paul's thirteen Epistles, Acts, and Revelation as authoritatively inspired.⁸ Continuing his retrospective argument, Zahn examined the era 140–170 CE. He concluded that rather than creating the first canon, Marcion simply responded to an already-fixed orthodox recognition of canonical works. This he found confirmed by the use of canonical books by other heretics.

Given the depth, consistency, and distribution of this tradition by the mid-second century CE, Zahn concluded that the canon (the four Gospels, Acts, and Paul's

3. Zahn, "Theodor Zahn: Mein Werdegang," 233.

4. Merk, "Zahn," 479.

5. Zahn, *Apostles' Creed*, 5.

6. Zahn, *Altes und Neues*, 16.

7. Zahn, *Forschungen*.

8. Others recognized Hebrews, 1 Peter, and 1 John, while fewer included the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Didache*.

Epistles) was solidified as early as 80–110 CE.⁹ The New Testament tradition, then, prompted by the Apostles and maintained accurately by the early church Fathers, reliably portrays history and represents an orthodoxy that was faithfully perpetuated in successive generations. Unlike many of his conservative contemporaries, however, Zahn arrived at this conclusion not through dogmatic presuppositions but by way of a historical-critical study of the data.

Similarly, Zahn argued for the reliability of the Apostles' Creed utilizing historical rather than dogmatic means. For Zahn, the Apostles' Creed was the hallmark of orthodoxy and historically and theologically accurate. In *Apostles' Creed*, Zahn argued that the "contents of the Creed . . . give no ground for supposing it to have come into existence later than 120 [CE], but rather allow of its being referred back to the 1st century, even to the lifetime of St. Peter and St. Paul."¹⁰ For Zahn, the "assertion that the Apostles' Creed was a production of the 5th or 6th century" is historically dubious.¹¹ His affirmation of the Creed is a natural corollary of his belief in the historical and theological accuracy of the New Testament documents. Since the latter are correct and since the Creed represents them accurately, the Creed is to be trusted. Zahn concluded: "History, not legend, gives us a right to the ennobling thought that in and with our Creed we confess that which since the days of the Apostles has been the faith of united Christendom."¹²

Since the New Testament and later Christian writings, including the Apostles' Creed, were historically and theologically accurate, Zahn's goal as an exegete was simply to expound upon, reconstruct, and harmonize the data found in these documents. According to Zahn, the exegete's task was to determine what the original author said and meant (i.e., to ascertain "authorial intent"). The historian's task was to address the question of historical validity.¹³ Thus Zahn distinguished the role of the interpreter from that of the historian, maintaining that it was not the former's task to question the historicity of events recorded in the biblical texts (following Gottlob Keil [1788–1810]).¹⁴

Zahn's diligence as an exegete and interpreter is evident in his voluminous biblical commentaries. His commentary on Galatians (1905) serves as an example of his efforts to harmonize biblical data. A demonstration of exegetical detail is found in his commentary on John's Gospel (1908). Zahn's belief that exegetical detail forms the foundation for theological conclusions is apparent in his Romans commentary

9. Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:368.

10. Zahn, *Apostles' Creed*, 78.

11. *Ibid.*, 101.

12. *Ibid.*, 222.

13. Zahn, *Evangelium des Matthäus*, 1.

14. Swarat, *Alte Kirche und Neues Testament*, 422.

(1910). His concern for factual history can be seen clearly in his commentary on Luke (1913).¹⁵

Although Zahn's conclusions were conservative, he rejected the notion of inerrancy, which he called a "dogmatic theory" not found in any Lutheran confession. Instead, Zahn claimed to be interested only in "a historical investigation regardless of the desired results."¹⁶ However, he never claimed to be without presuppositions but approached the Bible as a believer, contending that faith does not make one uncritical but gives one "greater freedom in the literary-historical and material criticism of the Gospels" than naturalistic philosophy.¹⁷

In summary, Zahn's methodology and interpretive theory were similar to those of his liberal peers in at least two respects. First, he desired to uncover actual history by way of critical methods. Second, he tirelessly engaged the primary sources, seeking to be true to the historical background of the biblical and extrabiblical data. At the same time, he differed from his contemporaries. Most importantly, he consistently came to conservative conclusions, affirming the historical accuracy of Scripture and other early Christian sources. Also, rather than upholding the ideals of scientific neutrality and complete objectivity, Zahn believed that a scholar's faith could aid rather than hinder his historical investigation.

Contribution

Zahn contributed to the ongoing debate prompted by the historical-critical method used by his predecessors and contemporaries. Adherents to this approach, epitomized by Harnack (see below), were typically diminishing the New Testament's value as a historical source in their pursuit of objective history. Zahn represented a self-consciously conservative voice practicing a version of this method, a scholar of faith who was nonetheless committed to serious engagement with the historical data. For Zahn, unlike most of his contemporaries, faith and scholarship were two sides of the same coin.

Zahn's most important contribution to biblical scholarship is his massive *Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Introduction to the New Testament)* where he utilized historical criticism yet came to consistently conservative conclusions. Thus Zahn argued that Paul wrote all the letters attributed to him at the dates traditionally assigned to him. Although he was uncertain regarding the author of Hebrews, Zahn nonetheless affirmed the book's canonicity. Zahn also made a case for the Petrine authorship of both 1 and 2 Peter.

The Gospels, according to Zahn, were written by the authors whose names they bear, with Matthew, originally written in Aramaic, preceding Mark, who literarily

15. Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:372–73.

16. Swarat, *Alte Kirche und Neues Testament*, 478.

17. *Ibid.*, 479.

depended on Matthew. Luke, also the author of Acts, used Mark but not Matthew's Aramaic version. John probably used the Synoptics while composing his Gospel. In addition, Zahn believed, there were other sources, both written and oral.¹⁸ Many of these conclusions challenged F. C. Baur's thesis that, out of the thirteen letters traditionally attributed to Paul, only four were authentically Pauline (the so-called *Hauptbriefe* ["Major Epistles"], Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, and Galatians).¹⁹

KARL GUSTAV ADOLF VON HARNACK (1851–1930)

Biographical Information

Adolf Harnack was born May 7, 1851, in Dorpat (now Tartu), Estonia. He enjoyed a long, fruitful academic career and died on June 10, 1930. From an early age, Harnack was at home in the academic world, since his father Theodosius (1817–89), a theologically orthodox Lutheran, was Professor of Pastoral Theology, and his maternal grandfather served as professor at the University of Dorpat. Harnack's mother, née Evers, a highly intellectual woman, died at the age of 49, leaving behind five children.

Harnack's academic journey began with studies at the universities of Dorpat and Leipzig. In 1874, he was appointed *Privatdozent* (lecturer) at Leipzig and subsequently became professor in 1876. Three years later, in 1879, Harnack was appointed Professor of Church History at the University of Giessen, where he taught until 1886. After teaching for three years at Marburg (1886–88), the faculty at Berlin called him amidst objections from conservative Lutheran leaders, beginning a 38-year tenure there as professor.

During his years of teaching at Berlin, Harnack's accomplishments were as diverse as they were impressive. Besides writing voluminously, Harnack co-founded and edited the *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (1876), became an active member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences (1890), and served as President of the Evangelical Congress (1902–12) and as Director of the Royal Library in Berlin (1905–21). In addition, Harnack guided his students in editing the weekly *Christliche Welt*, a paper that targeted educated members of Protestant churches.

Many of Harnack's peers classified him as a liberal because he was a student and follower of Albrecht Ritschl.²⁰ The Prussian Church, for example, forbade him to serve as an academic examiner for prospective pastors and barred him from any official role in the Church or on its councils. Nevertheless, Harnack is widely considered to have been a leading figure in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German Protestantism. He often receives the title "Prince of Church Historians" owing to his work in

18. Baird's assessment of Zahn's *Einleitung in History of New Testament Research*, 2:369–71.

19. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, 1–111.

20. Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:122, discusses Harnack under the heading "The Zenith of Liberalism."

patristics. Moreover, because of his extraordinary teaching acumen, “thousands of students who later became ministers gave him an enthusiastic hearing.”²¹

Major Views and Methodology

Harnack’s complexity and depth, demonstrated in his over 1,600 (!) publications, make reducing his historical, theological, and biblical positions to a few simple propositions a virtual impossibility. Harnack was an ardent practitioner of the historical-critical method and approached his task with scientific fervor and generally anti-supernatural presuppositions. At the risk of oversimplification, the following discussion attempts to describe some of the numerous ways in which Harnack applied critical methods to his research.

The effort to understand Harnack’s theories involves an examination of at least two facets of his life and method. To begin with, Harnack viewed himself foremost as a historian. It is therefore fitting to start with his historical theories and methodologies. In addition, Harnack made a contribution to theology and biblical interpretation as he applied his historical method to the study of specific passages of Scripture. Thus these two aspects of Harnack’s work each require examination in their own right.

Harnack the Historian

Before calling himself a theologian or an exegete, Harnack would have called himself a church historian. Historical study was Harnack’s driving passion, because he thought that, when rightly pursued, this avenue of research would result in a positive impact with regard to both the present and the future. Thus Harnack was essentially a church historian for whom historical study was not just about discovering “what happened.” Rather, he saw historical study as the opportunity to intervene in the course of history in a proper way. One does this by rejecting the past when it negatively affects the present and by acting responsibly in the here and now while anticipating the future in a circumspect manner. The historian, then, acts as a judge over past events in deciding what should be allowed to continue and what should be altered. In this way, the past should serve as a guide to what the historian judges to be the most desirable present and future.²²

In terms of his overall vantage point, Harnack studied history from the perspective of *ideas*, believing that these served as impetus for the development and power of institutions, which in turn governed and perpetuated those ideas. While an idea may have called an institution into being, the institution’s influence may continue long after the seminal idea has faded.²³ Applied to the history of Christianity, Harnack argued that the idea of the gospel summoned the early ecclesiastical institutions into

21. Pauck, *Harnack and Troeltsch*, 6, 14–18.

22. Harnack, *Reden und Aufsätze*, 7.

23. Pauck, *Harnack and Troeltsch*, 21.

existence. These institutions soon departed from the original ideas that had prompted their existence. Through the Roman Catholic Church, however, their power continued for many subsequent centuries.

The lynchpins of history, for Harnack, were not the mundane events of everyday life. Rather, they were “epoch-making” events, the memorials that they produced, and history’s grand institutions that served as the cruxes of history.²⁴ Thus, “the way that Harnack wrote history was to [establish] that basic idea which a particular person (or movement, or epoch) manifested, and then to identify its power, chart its direction, and describe its result.”²⁵ On this basis he would judge the wisdom of continuing or discontinuing these effects in the present and into the future.

In order to discover and to assess accurately the ideas in human history that prompted the emergence of institutions, movements, and epochs, and thus become an effective historian, Harnack believed that one must possess (1) a “practical wisdom” that can detect and understand the relationships between facts; (2) philological and critical competence in the use of the primary sources; (3) an ability to understand all the factors that go into historical memorials, events, and institutions; (4) the ability to understand the *Geist* (spirit or mind) of an era, which is possible, Harnack believed, because the mind that is at work in the present is the same that worked throughout history; and (5) the ability to represent the facts well.²⁶

Of these five qualities, competence in the primary sources is paramount: “From the beginning to the end of his work, critical, grammatical, philological competence is held to be the *sine qua non* for the historian.”²⁷ The historian should follow these principles with complete objectivity and without any dogmatic or theological presuppositions. Harnack, therefore, suggested that, since all other scholarly disciplines operate in this way, the study of the Bible should receive the same kind of treatment.²⁸ Thus one should study the writings of Scripture in keeping with this overall historical methodology.

Harnack the Theologian

According to Harnack, it was history, not dogma, that was the only proper means of studying Jesus and the Bible. Dogma was the theological layers that were added to Christianity by Jesus’ early followers and by early ecclesiastical structures, creeds, and doctrinal institutions “in [their] effort . . . to render the gospel comprehensible in the . . . Hellenistic world view.”²⁹ These layers obscure the true Christian faith by adding unnecessary accretions to it. The early church became dependent upon metaphysics

24. Harnack, *Reden und Aufsätze*, 15.

25. Glick, *Reality of Christianity*, 117.

26. *Ibid.*, 111.

27. *Ibid.*, 106.

28. Kümmel, *New Testament*, 369.

29. Pauck, *Harnack and Troeltsch*, 23.

instead of relying on true history, resulting in a “fancied Christ” who replaced the real one.³⁰

The theologian’s task, then, is to study ecclesiastical history, including the New Testament documents, in order to remove these dogmatic layers that the church added to the essential gospel. This was Harnack’s central theoretical task around which his entire scholastic life revolved. This task of stripping the dogmatic layers off the gospel lies at the center of his work *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*), his most widely read publication. In this book, he sought to provide a scholarly, scientific foundation for Christianity, one that was grounded in the historical-critical method and that resulted from the rigorous study of history.

Harnack thought that the Reformers took the initial step of recovering the essence of the gospel by peeling away some of these dogmatic presuppositions. They did this through their maxim of *sola scriptura*, which, for the first time, allowed biblical interpreters to see the Bible through spectacles (partially) freed from dogma. Until this time, interpreters were shackled to the Roman Catholic Church’s traditional interpretations. *Sola scriptura* wrested biblical interpretation from the ecclesiastical hierarchy and placed it squarely into the hands of individual interpreters.

Harnack believed, however, that this was only one step in the right direction, since dogmatic layers (such as the belief in Christ’s deity or in biblical inspiration) continued to play a large role in post-Reformation theology. He perceived a need to remove these additional layers in order to isolate Jesus’ essential teachings and deeds. Harnack held that, owing to these added dogmatic accretions, the true gospel had little in common with modern ecclesiastical positions. In order for the gospel to retain its power in our day, not unlike Bultmann after him, Harnack sought to liberate it from any associated dogmatic elements.³¹

Only when approaching the Bible historically, Harnack believed, is one capable of discerning true *revelation*. Revelation—an unscientific notion—is not found in texts to which some attribute inspiration. Rather, revelation is discovered by peeling away every dogmatic accretion, added by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, that obscures the true gospel. This true gospel, in turn, is found in the teachings of Jesus on the kingdom of God that point to God, but reveal no unique relationship between Jesus and God.³² The Bible, for Harnack, was itself overgrown by layers of tradition and perhaps fabrications that later communities and individuals had added to the actual events of history.

These historical husks, in turn, shrouded true history and its proper interpretation and the apprehension of its significance. Ultimately, “Harnack held that the Bible is literature and therefore subject to every rule of critical literary and historical

30. Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, 140.

31. Harnack, *Outlines of the History of Dogma*, 1–37.

32. Glick, *Reality of Christianity*, 233.

study.”³³ In fact, the sacredness of Scripture can be explained historically. Writings become sacred simply when venerable people write them, when the content is noble, and/or when they evoke holy thoughts in those who read them.³⁴

Although revelation, as Harnack defined it, could be ascertained, he rejected the notion of biblical *canonicity*. The Old Testament, while historically helpful and beneficial to read, is in no way canonical. It provided the church with a crucial aid at a particular time in history but is no longer necessary. The New Testament serves as a vehicle to retrieve accurate history but does not constitute an objective rule of faith. Such a canonical view would require the historian to lift certain documents from their historical contexts in an unscientific manner and attribute qualities to them that are not found in the documents themselves. The way Harnack saw it, this would require the interpreter to view history through the lenses of dogma.

Flowing logically from his view of canon was Harnack’s view that the question of *biblical authority* is irrelevant. As mentioned, for Harnack, the historian is, or should be, the objective judge of past events. If he is the judge, then how can a historically distant document have authority over the judge? The document(s) can only contain objective authority to the extent to which the historian assigns such to it. Moreover, belief in scriptural authority requires a dogmatic presupposition that all true historians should eschew.

In summary, Harnack’s theory is the epitome of the historical-critical method. The essence of the gospel is found in the life and teachings of Jesus, which have very little in common with the later dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church. All later additions to this gospel are dogmatic accretions supplied by the New Testament writers and their successors. The goal of the biblical interpreter is to remove these layers by way of objective, historical research in order to ascertain the true gospel, which is centered on Jesus, who, historically speaking, “is exemplar and beyond that—mystery.”³⁵

Contribution

Harnack’s illustrious career produced an astonishing amount of scholarly publication. His most significant contribution to biblical studies is his perpetuation of the historical-critical method introduced by Semler and others a century earlier. Historical criticism reaches its zenith in Harnack through his relentless pursuit of the historical method and his staunch resistance to dogmatic presuppositions. Nevertheless, within the scope of his rigorous application of the historical method, Harnack continued to believe that Jesus’ teachings have an important influence on the present. Harnack also contributed significantly to scholarship as a historian by integrating the study of church history and New Testament research. Subsequent generations of scholars

33. Rumscheidt, “Harnack,” 492.

34. Glick, *Reality of Christianity*, 220.

35. *Ibid.*, 198.

could no longer seek to uncover the earliest forms of Christianity without reckoning with Harnack's critical and historical methods.

A giant in both historical and biblical studies, Harnack was no stranger to a variety of areas of New Testament study. Surprisingly, many of his contributions resulted in conservative conclusions, though they “largely serve[d] his liberal agenda.”³⁶ Apart from the larger contributions noted above, Harnack contributed to a variety of specific areas of New Testament research.³⁷ With regard to *textual criticism*, Harnack concluded from a detailed argument that the Eastern text of Acts 15:29, which includes *πνικτῶν* (“that which is strangled”), is preferable to the Western text which omits it.

In his contributions to *Gospels research*, Harnack argued that Luke was the author of the Third Gospel and of Acts, reaching this conclusion by suggesting that Luke's prologue originally included the author's name. In addition, he suggested that Luke created a new genre by writing Acts. Harnack contended that Matthew's notion of the virgin birth did not derive from Hellenistic mythology but from a popular, messianic interpretation of Isa 7:14, which was already present in Judaism. Harnack also contributed to *form criticism* through his studies of the hypothetical document called “Q” (from German *Quelle*, “source”) by suggesting that Matthew followed Q more closely than did Luke.

Harnack contributed to *the study of the Christian canon* by questioning the reason why the New Testament books were initially canonized. The early Christians pronounced the New Testament authoritative alongside the Old Testament in order to elevate Jesus' teachings and life, to make authoritative a certain segment of early Christian writings, to counter Marcion's canon and the Gnostic writings, and to combat the Montanists' claims. The early Christians, Harnack contended, canonized four Gospels as a compromise among various churches, each of whom preferred a different Gospel. In addition, Harnack wrote an important monograph on Marcion.³⁸

Harnack also contributed to *Pauline studies*, especially with regard to the collection and canonization of Paul's letters. He suggested that thirteen of Paul's letters had been collected by the end of the first century. Another contribution was Harnack's argument that the early tradition of Christ's resurrection (1 Cor 15:3–8) was a developing rather than completed tradition. Harnack also famously suggested that Priscilla wrote Hebrews, which is rendered unlikely by the masculine participle *διηγούμενον* (“tell”) with reference to the author in Heb 11:32.³⁹

Last but not least, Harnack is known for his *missiological* contribution, in particular his monumental *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*.⁴⁰ Harnack held that the missionary activity of Judaism paved the way for

36. *Ibid.*, 135.

37. See Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:129–35, for a fuller treatment.

38. Harnack, *Marcion*.

39. Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 2:133–34.

40. Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung*.

the early Christian mission but that it was Jesus who provided the decisive impetus. According to Harnack, the appeal of Christianity lay in its universal, all-embracing scope, its sublime ethic, its future hope, and its pervasive message of love. Only recently has Harnack's missiological work been superseded.⁴¹

ADOLF SCHLATTER (1852–1938)

Biographical Information

Adolf Schlatter was born on August 16, 1852 in St. Gallen, Switzerland, into the devout Christian home of Stephan (1805–80) and Wilhelmine (1819–94) Schlatter. Stephan was a Baptist, and Wilhelmine a Lutheran. Adolf Schlatter, the seventh of nine children, and, interestingly, Theodor Zahn's cousin on his mother's side of the family (see above), began his studies in Basel, Switzerland at the young age of nineteen, where he remained for two years (1871–73). This was followed by a year of study in Tübingen, Germany (1873–74). After passing his exams in Basel in 1875, Schlatter pastored churches in Kilchberg, Neumünster, and Kesswil, Switzerland. In Kesswil, he met Susanna Schoop, the 21-year old daughter of a businessman. They married on January 15, 1878. Susanna loyally supported her husband in the German world of academia, which was uncharted territory for her. They had five children: Paul, Dora, Hedwig, Theodor, and Ruth.

Soon after getting married, Schlatter began his formal scholarly career by agreeing to teach in Bern, Switzerland, where he spent the first eight years of his long teaching career (1880–88). This is also where he published his first and prizewinning monograph, *Der Glaube im Neuen Testament* (*Faith in the New Testament* [1885]). In 1888 Schlatter left Bern to teach New Testament in Greifswald, Germany, before relocating to Berlin in 1893, where he lectured in Systematic Theology until 1898. During his stay in Berlin, Schlatter encountered Harnack's liberal theology. In fact, "Schlatter's chair in Berlin was established by the king of Prussia to counterbalance Harnack's influence following a controversy when Harnack told students he wished the church would give up using the Apostles' Creed."⁴² Also during his time in Berlin, Schlatter became editor of the important series *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*. In 1898, Schlatter moved to Tübingen, where he taught New Testament for twenty-four years and spent the bulk of his productive and enduring academic career.

Difficult years followed Schlatter's move to Tübingen. His wife died on July 9, 1907, and his son Paul passed away on October 14, 1914 as the result of a war wound. Schlatter remained a widower the rest of his life and continued his scholarly endeavors, focusing intensely on consolidating his prior theological work into four volumes: a two-volume *Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (New Testament Theology)—*Das*

41. See Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*.

42. Köstenberger, "Translator's Preface," 12 n. 11; cf. Morgan, *Nature of New Testament Theology*, 172 n. 43.

Wort Jesu (1909) on Jesus and the Gospels and *Die Lehre der Apostel* (1910) on the early church and the other New Testament documents⁴³—as well as *Das christliche Dogma* (1911; a Systematic Theology) and *Die christliche Ethik* (1914; a treatment of Christian Ethics). During this period, he also wrote his major New Testament commentaries: Matthew (1929), John (1930), Luke (1931), James (1932), 1–2 Corinthians (1934), Mark (1935), Romans (1935), the Pastorals (1936), and 1 Peter (1937). Shortly before his death on May 19, 1938, Schlatter penned his final publication, *Kennen wir Jesus?*, a biblical theology presented in the form of daily devotional thoughts.⁴⁴

Schlatter's autobiography was published posthumously by his son Theodor (who added material on Schlatter's last 15 years) at the occasion of Schlatter's one-hundredth birthday in 1952.⁴⁵

Major Views and Methodology

Schlatter's methodology is characterized by what Stuhlmacher calls "*a third way*,"⁴⁶ that is, a mediating position between a dogmatic, isolationist fundamentalism on the one hand and an anti-supernaturalist, "scientific" criticism on the other. Schlatter was comfortable utilizing the historical-critical method of his day, since "the abuse of method does not nullify its rightful use."⁴⁷ However, he would also hasten to add that "no critical method should prevent one from seeing God at work in history."⁴⁸ Schlatter addressed these theological tensions when commenting that "the desired goal [of scholarly methodology] remains for both historical and dogmatic activity that we work our way up out of the two extremes of either specialization [i.e., critical and faith-based scholarship], with its immersion in amassing of tiny details [criticism], or the abstract trafficking in accepted ideas [fundamentalism] that characterize our 'disciplines.'"⁴⁹ Schlatter's "third way" characterized and pervaded his entire methodological approach.

The majority of biblical interpreters in the tradition that grew out of the Enlightenment believed that true scientific exegesis required the setting aside of one's faith; anything less was mere fundamentalism. Decades ahead of his time, Schlatter vehemently disagreed. In his article "The Significance of Method for Theological Work,"

43. The scholarly responses to Schlatter's *Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments* are chronicled in Köstenberger, "Reception."

44. Translated into English as Schlatter, *Do We Know Jesus?* For additional biographical information on Schlatter, see Köstenberger, "Translator's Preface," 9–15; Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche*; and Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: A Biography*.

45. T. Schlatter, *Adolf Schlatters Rückblick*. Also, Schlatter's lectures for his course "Introduction to Theology" when last taught in the summer semester of 1924 were published in 2013 on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of his death as *Einführung in die Theologie*.

46. Stuhlmacher, "Schlatter's Interpretation of Scripture," 444.

47. See Yarbrough, "Schlatter's 'The Significance of Method,'" 69.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*, 66.

Schlatter, under the subheading, “Historical and Dogmatic Work,” noted that historians are not completely objective and that they need not shed their “dogmatics” (or faith) entirely. Instead of adopting a stance of utter objectivity (a virtual impossibility), interpreters ought to engage in both “historical” and “dogmatic” work.⁵⁰ What is more, Schlatter reminded the historical critics of his day that “behind every historical method there lurks a dogmatics.”⁵¹

Many Enlightenment scholars also presupposed the inaccessibility of the “historical Jesus.” In any case, any hypothesis regarding the historical Jesus was ultimately irrelevant, since one’s personal, existential faith overrode uncertain historical events. Schlatter, by contrast, suggested that the historical Jesus was “prior to all faith”⁵² and that “Jesus’ person, teaching, and work could be gleaned and distinguished from what the New Testament writers proclaimed.”⁵³ Like Zahn (see above), Schlatter stood boldly and confidently against the academic current of his day by espousing his own method for engaging in historical Jesus research. According to Schlatter, this meant “that Jesus already in his earthly life was Son of God and Christ, and that he was not only described and known as such at a later date [but was known] on the basis of the Easter event [i.e., his resurrection and appearances].”⁵⁴

Another methodological feature of Schlatter’s approach was his *emphasis on the Jewish background of Jesus and the New Testament*. In this Schlatter stood against the prevailing scholarship of his time (the history-of-religions school, including Bultmann, who came into prominence late in Schlatter’s career), which held the Hellenistic and/or Gnostic background of the New Testament to be preeminent. If Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, Schlatter argued, his Jewish background must be given its full due. For this reason also, in contrast to many of his academic peers, Schlatter advocated the primacy of Jesus’ Jewish background in John’s Gospel.⁵⁵ It is only in recent years that Schlatter’s views on the Johannine background have been fully vindicated, especially since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and in view of the affinities they display with John’s Gospel.

For Schlatter, therefore, Jesus as the messianic Son of God constituted the foundational building block in his exegesis.⁵⁶ In his foreword to *Die Geschichte des Christus (The History of the Christ)* in 1923 Schlatter wrote, “The knowledge of Jesus is the *foremost, indispensable centerpiece* of New Testament theology.”⁵⁷ This stands in marked contrast to Rudolf Bultmann, who opened his famous two-volume *New Testa-*

50. Ibid., 73–74.

51. Stuhlmacher, “Schlatter’s Interpretation of Scripture,” 440.

52. Ibid., 442.

53. Köstenberger, “Translator’s Preface,” 14.

54. Stuhlmacher, “Schlatter’s Interpretation of Scripture,” 441.

55. See esp. Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Johannes*.

56. Yarbrough, “Schlatter, Adolf,” 520.

57. Schlatter, *History of the Christ*, 21.

ment *Theology* by declaring: “The message of Jesus is a *presupposition* for the theology of the New Testament *rather than a part of that theology itself*.”⁵⁸

The *pursuit of holistic biblical interpretation* was another of Schlatter’s major methodological distinctives. While form critics in his day sought to reconstruct the oral prehistory of various textual units of Scripture, Schlatter sought to make sense of the final text of Scripture as a whole. As mentioned, Schlatter did not completely eschew the methods of his day, but rather advocated their discerning use. While employing critical methods, however, he never lost sight of the forest for the trees, utilizing these methods as a means to the end of arriving at a synthetic grasp of the entire message of Scripture, holistically conceived.

A case in point is Schlatter’s *Einleitung in die Bibel (Introduction to the Bible)* where he sought to interpret the Old and the New Testaments in conjunction with one another.⁵⁹ Although many of his peers disparaged his work, considering it elementary and lacking scholarly rigor, some recent scholars have commended Schlatter for his holistic approach to biblical interpretation. Thus Stuhlmacher has stated, “[T]o my knowledge he [Schlatter] was the only one of the great exegetes of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to do so.”⁶⁰

Another feature of Schlatter’s approach is that of *methodological integration*. Instead of relying only on one specialized area of research (such as historical study), Schlatter believed that full-fledged biblical interpretation required the use of all the available tools in the scholar’s exegetical toolbox, including historical and linguistic study, theological and philosophical investigation, and other forms of inquiry. This is evident in the sheer diversity of his writings (over 400 publications), which include works on history, exegesis, theology, philosophy, ethics, and devotional literature. Schlatter’s prolific output in his pursuit of the integration of various scholarly disciplines stood in marked contrast to the highly specialized academic culture of his day.

Schlatter’s distinction between historical and doctrinal investigation represents another vital aspect of his methodology.⁶¹ Schlatter believed that the interpreter’s first task was that of engaging in rigorous historical research, insisting, “It is the historical objective that should govern our conceptual work exclusively and completely, stretching our perceptive faculties to the limit. We turn away decisively from ourselves and our time to what was found in the men through whom the church came into being. Our main interest should be the thought as it was conceived *by them* and the truth that was valid *for them*.”⁶²

58. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 3. In the original, Bultmann italicized “*The message of Jesus*” but here I have emphasized other words as pertinent to my discussion.

59. Schlatter, *Einleitung in die Bibel*; see also his *Erläuterungen*; cf. Stuhlmacher, “Schlatter’s Interpretation of Scripture,” 438.

60. Stuhlmacher, “Schlatter’s Interpretation of Scripture,” 438.

61. Köstenberger, “Translator’s Preface,” 13.

62. Schlatter, *History of the Christ*, 18.

Only *after* this, Schlatter contended, should the interpreter turn to the second, “the doctrinal task, through which we align ourselves with the teachings of the New Testament and clarify whether or not and how and why we accept those teachings into our own spiritual lives, so that they are not only truth for the New Testament community, but also for us personally.”⁶³ Thus Schlatter was never content with uncovering merely the meaning of the ancient text in its first-century context, since to stop there would have fallen short of the proper end of biblical interpretation, that is, the application of biblical truth to the interpreter’s own life and to that of his community. Schlatter thus assumed that the Bible had an enduring message that must be lived out by every generation.

Finally, Schlatter advocated and practiced a “*scholarship of humility*.”⁶⁴ In an era where historical avenues of research reigned supreme, Schlatter exhorted his fellow scholars to recognize the limitations of historical research, cautioning them not to make assertions that went beyond the evidence (something Schlatter labeled “fantasy”). To be sure, scholars are called upon to venture educated guesses that stretch the limits of the available sources, but they should do so humbly, not claiming to have more knowledge than they actually possess. As Schlatter noted, there is no need to know the causes of everything that was said and done in the New Testament. Etiological pursuits are important, but they are not preeminent.⁶⁵

In these methodological distinctives, as mentioned, Schlatter stood against the prevailing scholarly currents of his day. The impetus for his resolute stand was his faith in Jesus as God’s Son and Savior, the one who, Schlatter believed, literally and physically rose from the dead and who historically understood himself to be the Messiah. While Schlatter engaged in continual dialogue with the academy, he simultaneously conversed with the church. His ardent search for historical facts never diminished his reliance on his supernatural God. These bedrock convictions provided the unshakable foundation for the application of his methods that were scorned by many of the more critically-oriented (i.e., historically skeptical) scholars of his day.

In summary, Schlatter’s methodology represented the conservative minority position in his period. His entire approach stood beneath the umbrella of his “third way” by which he sought to navigate the tension between historical research and faith in the supernatural God. Schlatter applied this approach to the Bible holistically, resisting the destructive disintegrating effects of much of contemporary scholarship. He urged a careful distinction between historical and doctrinal work, maintaining that both were important in their own right, yet insisting that historical and exegetical work precede theological work and application to the interpreter’s own life. Schlatter carried out his program with characteristic humility. Scholarship and faith were never at odds for Schlatter; to the contrary, they were inextricably related.

63. Ibid.

64. Köstenberger, “Translator’s Preface,” 14.

65. Yarbrough, “Schlatter’s ‘The Significance of Method,’” 74.

Contribution

Like Zahn, Schlatter contributed to the ongoing debate of his day between historical and faith-based critical methods. Succinctly put, his primary contribution to biblical scholarship “is his highly sophisticated and multifaceted defense of Scripture as primary source and arbiter for redemptive relatedness to the God who took on flesh in Jesus.”⁶⁶ In an age when liberal scholarship carried the day, Schlatter stood firm in his advocacy of a conservative approach to biblical interpretation and theology. Schlatter tirelessly showed that a conservative scholar could use historical-critical methods, a contribution that continues to affect scholarly research to this day.

In this, Schlatter also contributed to Karl Barth’s legacy. “Schlatter’s conviction that biblical exegesis was the only proper foundation for systematic theology anticipated Barth,” who thought that “historical-critical commentaries were only a ‘prelude’ to a commentary.”⁶⁷ By contrast, historical critics, such as Harnack, thought that when one completed one’s critical work, correct interpretation was achieved. Schlatter, and later, Barth, looked beyond this to suggest that exegesis is the handmaiden of theology, and biblical interpretation a necessary prerequisite to Systematics.

Another contribution made by Schlatter was his distinction between the two “horizons’ of the biblical text, the ancient and the contemporary one, and his affirmation of the preeminence of the first horizon [which] are as timely today as they were then.”⁶⁸ This distinction remains prevalent among many evangelical scholars today.

Schlatter also contributed to the historical Jesus debate. “In an age when scholars had grown skeptical of the very possibility of finding the historical Jesus in and through the Gospel documents, Schlatter expressed his confidence that Jesus’ person, teaching, and work could be gleaned and distinguished from what the New Testament writers proclaimed.”⁶⁹ Thus he “rejected an arid scholasticism, an approach to scholarship that was primarily concerned with current critical fashions, statistics, and ‘purely historical’ reconstruction, urging instead a holistic understanding of the time in which Jesus lived and an effort to understand his theology comprehensively.”⁷⁰

Finally, a major contribution that largely went unrecognized at the time was Schlatter’s emphasis on the Jewishness of Jesus and of the New Testament writings. In this, Schlatter stood against the towering stature of Bultmann and the history-of-religions school that gave primacy to the Hellenistic background of the New Testament. Schlatter’s sustained defense of Jesus’ essential Jewishness has been abundantly vindicated in the successive decades. If scholars had listened to Schlatter rather than

66. Yarbrough, “Schlatter, Adolf” 521.

67. Köstenberger, “Translator’s Preface,” 12–13; Johnson, “Barth,” 437.

68. Köstenberger, “Translator’s Preface,” 13.

69. *Ibid.*, 14. For a thorough analysis of Schlatter’s treatment of the historical Jesus, see esp. Schmid, *Erkenntnis des geschichtlichen Christus*, 240–431.

70. Köstenberger, “Translator’s Preface,” 14.

Bultmann, biblical interpreters in the second half of the twentieth century might have been spared numerous scholarly dead ends.⁷¹

COMPARISON OF ZAHN, HARNACK, AND SCHLATTER

Of the three scholars discussed, Harnack represents theological liberalism and a full-fledged historical-critical approach to the study of Scripture as prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while Zahn and Schlatter pose a conservative alternative. All three men, born within fourteen years of each other, grew up during the heyday of the historical-critical method, and each had their respective followers. The following comparisons are offered.

First, Zahn and Schlatter are compared and contrasted with one another. Since both of these scholars advocated a conservative approach, more parallels than contrasts emerge. Second, Zahn and Schlatter are jointly compared to Harnack. Since Zahn and Schlatter were theologically and methodologically similar and disagreed substantially with Harnack, they are compared to Harnack jointly. Finally, Zahn and Harnack are compared at length because of sustained personal correspondence between them.

Zahn and Schlatter

Zahn and Schlatter shared more commonalities than differences. The work of both held the following presuppositions and distinctives in common. (1) Both believed that God exists. He is not the figment of an overzealous imagination. Rather, God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe who is actively involved in his creation. (2) Both agreed that Jesus is God's Son, who was God incarnate and came to earth to redeem humanity from its sin. (3) Both adhered to a belief in the supernatural. They held that the miraculous claims of the Bible are historically accurate and consistent with the existence of a supernatural God. Both, therefore, accepted the major tenets of historic Christianity, including the virgin birth, Jesus' deity, and his bodily resurrection. (4) Both believed that the Bible was inspired by God and thus theologically and spiritually authoritative. They viewed the Bible as a book that is special in relation to other documents in history, including those written concurrently with the Bible. Yet neither of them affirmed the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Both affirmed the Bible was true and authoritative, but neither argued there could be no errors, however minor, in any biblical claim, statement, or representation. (5) Both considered the historical-critical method to be a useful tool in biblical interpretation. However, they agreed that this method alone was inadequate for a full and proper hermeneutic, believing that faith was an important part of the interpretive process.

71. Ibid. Concerning the continuing relevance of Schlatter's contribution, see also Bockmühl, *Die Aktualität*; and Yarbrough, "Schlatter on the Pastorals."

Aside from these larger agreements, Zahn and Schlatter also agreed on many detailed historical and biblical points of interpretation. (1) Both held that the thirteen letters traditionally attributed to Paul were authentically Pauline (contra F. C. Baur). (2) Both adhered to Matthean priority and believed that the Gospels were written early (prior to 90 CE). (3) Both believed that Luke wrote both the Gospel and Acts. (4) Both held that the apostle John wrote the Gospel attributed to him around 80 CE. (5) Both affirmed the authenticity of the Catholic Epistles (except that Schlatter did not hold to the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter).

The differences between Zahn and Schlatter are minor in comparison and are due primarily to specific scholarly interests and emphases rather than to underlying methodological disagreements. Zahn was a patristics scholar who was relentlessly concerned about historical detail. By comparison, Schlatter was more philosophically and hermeneutically oriented, often focusing on larger theological issues. He rivaled Zahn in philological rigor, as his monographs on faith and Josephus, as well as his extensive rabbinic researches, indicate. Zahn devoted much of his effort to detailed exegesis, which he thought would produce an accurate reconstruction of history. Schlatter, for his part, tended to view history holistically, since he thought it resulted from a complex of cause-and-effects events.⁷² Zahn was unswervingly committed to the historical-critical method. Schlatter utilized this method while simultaneously warning against an “atheistic” view of history, that is, one that neglects God in the interpretive process.⁷³

Zahn/Schlatter and Harnack

Harnack parted company with Zahn and Schlatter on many core issues while, surprisingly, coming to similar conclusions on some peripheral matters. The agreements between Harnack and Zahn/Schlatter are as follows. (1) All three agreed that God existed, though Zahn and Schlatter differed from Harnack concerning God’s interaction with creation. (2) All three believed that Paul penned the thirteen letters traditionally attributed to him. (3) All concurred that Luke wrote both the Gospel and Acts as a sequel. (4) All adhered to the early dating of the Gospels, a conclusion perhaps surprising in Harnack’s case. (5) All believed that Isa 7:14, not Hellenistic mythology, was the major impetus for the biblical teaching on Jesus’ virgin birth. (6) All three adhered to the historical-critical method, though each to varying degrees. For example, Harnack and Zahn placed more emphasis on and trust in the historical-critical method than did Schlatter.

The points of disagreement between Zahn/Schlatter and Harnack centered on broader philosophical and theological issues and are as follows. (1) Zahn and Schlatter disagreed with Harnack concerning the existence of the supernatural. In contrast

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

73. Schlatter, *History of the Christ*, 18–19; Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: A Biography*, 211–25.

to Zahn and Schlatter, Harnack presupposed the non-authenticity of (Jesus') miracles. Thus, for Harnack, the virgin birth, Jesus' resurrection, and other beliefs propagated by historic Christianity were later, inauthentic, and erroneous additions to the Gospel accounts. From Harnack's point of view, Christianity was strictly a historical phenomenon that had no miraculous impetus, whether by Jesus or Paul. Zahn and Schlatter, conversely, thought that Christianity had a supernatural origin while agreeing that the biblical writings should be studied historically. (2) Zahn and Schlatter disagreed with Harnack about the nature of Christ, holding that Jesus was divine, while Harnack concluded that he was merely human. Closely related to this was Harnack's emphasis on Jesus' teachings and ethics and Zahn and Schlatter's emphasis on Jesus' divinity, although not to the exclusion of Jesus' teachings. (3) Zahn and Schlatter disagreed with Harnack on the nature of the Bible, believing it to be inspired and authoritative. Harnack, on the other hand, thought that the Bible was simply a collection of ancient writings no different from any other documents in antiquity. (4) Zahn and Schlatter disagreed with Harnack regarding the nature of early Christianity. Harnack maintained that Christianity was syncretistic, reflecting a fusion of earlier religions and cultures, while Zahn and Schlatter believed that Jesus founded Christianity by supernatural means (albeit not divorced from history and culture), that Paul perpetuated it, and that later sects corrupted its earlier, pure version.

Zahn and Harnack

Zahn and Harnack deserve a lengthier and more thorough comparison since they corresponded personally for over 55 years (1873–1929), although not always amicably.⁷⁴ Harnack's dissertation, "Source Criticism of the History of Gnosticism," appeared in 1873 when Harnack was only 22 years old. The 35 year-old Zahn responded very positively and sent Harnack his new book on Ignatius of Antioch. Harnack responded to Zahn in a letter on July 6, 1873, expressing appreciation for the gift but also offering a critical review of the book.

Harnack and Zahn, along with Oskar von Gebhardt, collaborated in 1875 to produce a reliable edition of the Apostolic Fathers. Letters between them during this time expressed deep trust and cordiality, evident in Harnack addressing Zahn no longer as "Mr. Zahn" but as "Dear Zahn." Amidst this cordiality, however, Harnack frequently faulted Zahn for brushing aside critical concerns in favor of church tradition.⁷⁵

Harnack and Zahn had a sharp falling out beginning in 1883 or 1884.⁷⁶ When Zahn, in 1888, published the first volume of his *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen*

74. Schlatter and Harnack, who taught simultaneously in Berlin, also corresponded, becoming good friends amidst their theological differences. They did not exchange letters, however, to the extent that Zahn and Harnack did. See Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: A Biography*, 95–97.

75. Hauck, "Briefe Adolf Harnacks," 497–98.

76. Documented in an interchange in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (1883) 487–88 and (1884) 321–22. See Hauck, "Briefe Adolf Harnacks," 497–98.

Kanons, Harnack countered with *Das Neue Testament um das Jahr 200* (*The New Testament around 200 CE*). In 1900, Zahn called passages in Harnack's work "trivial," "frivolous," "examples of evil exegesis," and "nonsense."⁷⁷ Some specific disagreements are as follows. Zahn and Harnack disagreed about the canon. Zahn thought that the early church canonized the Bible before 100 CE, while Harnack believed that the canon was codified after 150 CE.

Moreover, Zahn accentuated the *continuity* between Jesus' disciples and the early church while Harnack strongly maintained that the two stood in marked *discontinuity*. Zahn saw Irenaeus as a faithful witness of apostolic tradition while Harnack saw him as a major representative of the new early Catholicism, that is, the ecclesiastical hierarchy forming in the second century. Zahn criticized Harnack for his inadequate knowledge of Syriac and Greek, his lack of thoroughness in exegesis, his overconfidence in his dating of primary sources, and his inability to connect historical data chronologically.⁷⁸

Harnack felt similarly about Zahn, warning him not to be overconfident in establishing dependencies and interconnections.⁷⁹ In reviewing Zahn's *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*, Harnack charged Zahn with biased research (*Tendenzkritik*) that did not qualify as scientific.⁸⁰ Most crucially, each had different faith commitments over the role and meaning of the Apostles' Creed. Zahn thought it accurately represented Christianity, while Harnack thought it obscured the true gospel.⁸¹

After decades of bitter dispute, a string of amiable letters from 1914 to 1928 culminated in two final letters from 1929 that signaled reconciliation.⁸² Harnack sent Zahn a letter wishing him a happy ninety-first birthday, calling him "the senior of theological studies" and thanking him for "rich stimulation, instruction, and correction." In return, Zahn sent Harnack a new publication, and Harnack responded with a heartfelt appreciative note of thanks.⁸³

Methodological Application

Based on the characterization of the respective approaches by Zahn, Harnack, and Schlatter, the following case study will seek to apply these insights to a specific text of Scripture, John 14:6, where Jesus is quoted as saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." It appears that none of these

77. Swarat, *Alte Kirche und Neues Testament*, 459.

78. For recent confirmation of Zahn's point with reference to Harnack's hasty dating and erroneous attribution of authorship of another important ancient text, see Tzamalikos, *Ancient Commentary*, 8 n. 34, 37 n. 309, 57 n. 493, 86–88.

79. Swarat, *Alte Kirche und Neues Testament*, 461–66.

80. Merk, "Zahn," 479, with reference to Zahn, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons*.

81. Bandstra, "Zahn," 399.

82. Kantzenbach, "Adolf Harnack und Theodor Zahn," 242–44.

83. Hauck, "Briefe Adolf Harnacks," 498, 502.

scholars commented extensively on John 14:6.⁸⁴ In light of their presuppositions and methodologies, how would they likely have understood this passage?

Theodor Zahn held to a high view of both Scripture and Jesus, affirming his divinity. As mentioned, Zahn believed it was not the role of the exegete to question statements such as John 14:6 in Scripture but rather to interpret them in such a way as to encourage others in the faith. At the same time, he believed in the historical investigation of biblical texts. In the case of John 14:6, he would therefore have pursued the question of the historicity of Jesus' saying.⁸⁵ In light of the Gospels' witness elsewhere, did Jesus likely claim that he was "the way, the truth, and the life" and that he alone provided access to God?

To answer this question, Zahn might have looked at later texts reflecting the beliefs of the early church, such as Acts 4:12, where Luke cites Peter as saying, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved." Contextual study reveals that the name spoken of here is unambiguously that of Jesus, as a look at Acts 4:10–11 indicates: "It is *by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth* . . . that this man stands before you healed. *Jesus* is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone'" (Ps 118:22). This makes the same claim that access to God and salvation are found only in Jesus. The willingness of many in the early church to suffer martyrdom rather than renounce their faith likewise is most plausibly accounted for on the assumption of the historicity of Jesus' statement.

Adolf Harnack, for his part, approached Scripture with an unbounded belief in the validity of the historical-critical method and a bias against Jesus' deity and the supernatural. He also believed that the Gospel texts in their present form were overgrown by layers of accretions that must be removed by painstaking historical research on the basis of modern research methodologies. At the same time, he believed that Jesus' example and teachings, once uncovered, were important in providing us with the essence of Christianity—its underlying "ideas"—especially as far as its ethical and moral standards are concerned.

Applying this perspective to John 14:6 indicates that Harnack might have questioned the historical basis for the statement attributed to Jesus there.⁸⁶ He might have argued that Jesus never claimed to provide exclusive access to God and that this teach-

84. It is hard to identify a passage that none of these three scholars engaged in his scholarly work, but John 14:6 is a good choice in that the passage does not feature centrally in any of these scholars' writings. For references to John 14:6 in the writings of these three scholars see further below.

85. As in Schlatter's case (see below), John 14:6 only receives one passing reference in Zahn's three-volume *Introduction to the New Testament* (3:315). His commentary on John's Gospel, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 557–58, does include an exegetical treatment of the passage, though Zahn does not specifically address Jesus' claim that no one comes to the Father except through him.

86. Harnack does not comment on John 14:6 in any of his major works, which is in part explained by the fact that Harnack wrote primarily as a historian rather than as a biblical exegete. He does provide a very interesting general treatment under the heading "The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to His Own Testimony concerning Himself" in *Outlines of the History of Dogma*, 58–76, which can serve as an overall framework for the present discussion.

ing was imposed on the Gospel record by John (whom Harnack held to be the author of the Gospel) at a later time. This would be in keeping with the *discontinuity* asserted by Harnack between Jesus and the early church. Harnack might have concluded that Jesus may never have uttered the saying and instead was a good moral teacher of high ethical ideals (such as those found in the Matthean Sermon on the Mount).⁸⁷ These ideals, for their part, are present in Christianity to a high degree, but they are also held by the proponents of other major world religions. In fact, Harnack believed, Christianity itself developed in many ways in dialogue with, and imitation of, other religious movements and ideas. In this view, it is these *ideas*, not any *exclusive claim of salvation through faith in Jesus*, that are the driving force of history, and it is these ideas that must form our ultimate point of reference as serious scholars and historians. In our quest to apprehend the true essence of Christianity, faith must not get in the way, lest our objectivity be clouded by religious sentimentality and scholarly dogmatism.

Adolf Schlatter, finally, would have approached John 14:6 decidedly as a believer, yet open to investigate the passage historically, especially in relation to other New Testament texts.⁸⁸ He would have looked for evidence elsewhere in the Gospel of John and the other canonical Gospels suggesting that Jesus claimed to possess a unique relationship to God and most likely would have concluded that Jesus did indeed assert such a claim. Thus he would have judged that the statement in John 14:6 was historically plausible and should be believed by Christians everywhere.

Schlatter would have maintained that there was no dichotomy between scholarship and faith and that, to the contrary, faith aided the Christian scholar in understanding the spiritual nature of biblical texts, including John 14:6. The interpreter of Scripture must submit to Scripture and be prepared to act in obedience to the claims made in the text. In the present case, this involved the proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God and the assertion that salvation was found only in Jesus, calling people everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus and the gospel.

CONCLUSION

Theodor Zahn, Adolf Harnack, and Adolf Schlatter sustained a fascinating relationship. Zahn and Schlatter were not only related in a familial sense, they also shared in common their approach to Scripture as believers and yet as rigorous historians. Both also saw as their overall goal that of establishing others more firmly in the faith. Harnack, while sharing their concern for historical research, viewed Christian faith on the part of the scholar as unhelpful and sought to rely solely on the historical-critical

87. See, however, Harnack's apparently positive assessment in *ibid.*, 65 n. 2: "See the farewell discourses in John, the fundamental ideas of which are, in my opinion, genuine, that is, proceed from Jesus" (but note that he speaks of "the fundamental *ideas*" here; see also *ibid.*, 64 n. 3).

88. John 14:6 receives only one passing reference in Schlatter's two-volume *New Testament Theology*. His John commentary includes a brief exposition (*Der Evangelist Johannes*, 293–94), and his popular commentary (*Erläuterungen*, 236) includes a short pious treatment. See also his devotional treatment of John 14:5–6 in *Andachten*, 85.

method. The theological liberalism he espoused soon gave way to a more realistic view of the world. Yet Harnack remains a towering figure in exemplifying rigorous historical research. Zahn and Schlatter, for their part, have bequeathed to conservative evangelical interpreters a rich legacy of faith-based Christian scholarship that nonetheless believes in the serious historical, literary, and theological investigation of the writings of Scripture.

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