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Brent A. R. Hege

„Zurück zu Schleiermacher! und von Schleiermacher aus vorwärts!“

Georg Wobbermin and the Legacy of Schleiermacher in Weimar Liberal Protestantism

Abstract: As dialectical theology rose to prominence in the years following World War I, the new theologians sought to distance themselves from liberalism in a number of ways, an important one being a rejection of Schleiermacher's methods and conclusions. In reading the history of Weimar-era theology as it has been written in the twentieth century one would be forgiven for assuming that Schleiermacher found no defenders during this time, as liberal theology quietly faded into the twilight. However, a closer examination of this period reveals a different story. The last generation of liberal theologians consistently appealed to Schleiermacher for support and inspiration, perhaps none more so than Georg Wobbermin, whom B. A. Gerrish has called a “captain of the liberal rearguard.” Wobbermin sought to construct a religio-psychological method on the basis of Schleiermacher's definition of religion and on his “Copernican turn” toward the subject and resolutely defended such a method against the new dialectical theology long after liberal theology's supposed demise. A consideration of Wobbermin's appeals to Schleiermacher in his defense of the liberal program reveals a more complex picture of the state of theology in the Weimar period and of Schleiermacher's legacy in German Protestant thought.

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The motto I have chosen to conceptualize the religio-psychological method is exclusively this: “Back to Schleiermacher! and from Schleiermacher forward!” – Georg Wobbermin¹

¹ Georg Wobbermin, *Systematische Theologie nach religionspsychologischer Methode*, vol. 2, *Das Wesen der Religion*, 2nd unaltered ed. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1925, vi, English translation: *The Nature of Religion*, trans. Theophil Menzel and Daniel Sommer Robinson. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1933, xi. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the German are my own.

In his review of the second volume of Georg Wobbermin's *Systematische Theologie nach religionspsychologischer Methode*, Daniel Sommer Robinson, a former student of Wobbermin's and the American translator of some of Wobbermin's early works, remarks that "to those who agree with the motto 'Back to Schleiermacher and from Schleiermacher forward,' this work will be hailed as one of the most significant contributions made to systematic theology in our generation."² Despite such high praise from this American observer, however, Wobbermin's theology ultimately met a less illustrious fate, being, as Robinson feared, "pigeon-holed as a belated defense of a dead issue."³ What happened in the course of the 1920s to blunt the impact of such a "significant contribution," so much so that very few contemporary theologians and historians of Christian thought even recognize the name of Wobbermin?

The search for an answer to this question leads us to a consideration of the legacy of Friedrich Schleiermacher in Weimar German Protestantism. Wobbermin embarked on a mission to continue what he called the "Luther-Kant-Schleiermacher line" of Protestant thought and attempted a contemporary synthesis of these three thinkers in the 1920s and early 1930s.⁴ However, the history of this period of German Protestant thought as it has been written in the twentieth century is the history of dialectical theology's triumph over liberalism beginning with the publication of Karl Barth's *Römerbrief* in 1919 and coalescing in the pages of the group's organ, *Zwischen den Zeiten*.⁵ That dialectical theologians had no love lost for Schleiermacher is similarly well-documented, particularly with Barth's frequent criticisms in a number of venues⁶ and also with Emil Brunner's salvo in *Die*

2 Daniel Sommer Robinson, "Wobbermin's Interpretation of Religion." *JR* 3.6 (1923): 657–663, 663.

3 Ibid.

4 This task played such an important role in Wobbermin's scholarship and teaching that his *Festschrift* was given the title *Luther, Kant, Schleiermacher in ihrer Bedeutung für den Protestantismus. Forschungen und Abhandlungen. Georg Wobbermin zum 70. Geburtstag (27. Oktober 1939) dargebracht von Kollegen, Schülern und Freunden*, ed. F. W. Schmidt, R. Winkler and W. Meyer. Berlin: Collignon, 1939.

5 Published from 1923 to 1933 by the Christian Kaiser Verlag in Munich and edited by Georg Merz.

6 For example, see Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Schleiermachers. Vorlesung, Göttingen, Wintersemester 1923/24*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl. In: Karl Barth, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Hinrich Stoevesandt, Abt. II, Akademische Werke, 11. Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1978, English translation: *The Theology of Schleiermacher. Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923/1924*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982; Karl Barth, *Die Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert. Ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte*. Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947, English translation: *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century. Its Background and History*, new ed., trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002; and Karl Barth, "Nachwort." In *Schleiermacher-Auswahl*, ed. Heinz Bolli, 290–312. München: Siebenstern Verlag, 1968, English translation: "Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher." In Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, 261–279.

Mystik und das Wort.⁷ What remains obscured in contemporary memory is the ongoing positive reception and use of Schleiermacher by the last generation of liberal theologians in the Weimar period, particularly Wobbermin. Wobbermin's motto expresses an enduring desire to defend Schleiermacher and his legacy against the rising tide of dialectical theology in the years following the First World War, and it was to this task that Wobbermin set himself in the last years of liberalism's influence in German-speaking Protestantism. That he failed is as much an indication of the *Zeitgeist* as it is a reflection of his skills as a theologian.

Georg Wobbermin (1869–1943) presents an interesting case study for the historical theologian. A theological liberal, he zealously supported extreme right-wing political organizations throughout his life and joined the Nazi Party already in 1933.⁸ He concerned himself with a wide range of research topics, including early Christian liturgical works,⁹ German materialist philosophy,¹⁰ metaphysics,¹¹ the philosophy and theology of history,¹² the psychology of religion,¹³ and

7 Emil Brunner, *Die Mystik und das Wort. Der Gegensatz zwischen moderner Religionsauffassung und christlichem Glauben, dargestellt an der Theologie Schleiermachers*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1924, 2nd ed., 1928.

8 For a detailed biography of Wobbermin with special attention to his political sentiments, see Matthias Wolfes, *Protestantische Theologie und moderne Welt. Studien zur Geschichte der liberalen Theologie nach 1918* (Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 102). Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999, 251–403.

9 See Georg Wobbermin, *Altchristliche liturgische Stücke aus der Kirche Ägyptens. Nebst einem dogmatischen Brief des Bischofs Serapion von Thmuis*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1899.

10 See, e. g., Georg Wobbermin, *Ernst Haeckel im Kampf gegen die christliche Weltanschauung*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1906; and Georg Wobbermin, *Der christliche Gottesglaube in seinem Verhältnis zur heutigen Philosophie und Naturwissenschaft*. Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1907, English translation: *Christian Belief in God. A German Criticism of German Materialistic Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Sommer Robinson. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1918.

11 See Georg Wobbermin, *Theologie und Metaphysik. Das Verhältnis der Theologie zur modernen Erkenntnistheorie und Psychologie*. Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1901.

12 See especially Georg Wobbermin, *Geschichte und Historie in der Religionswissenschaft. Über die Notwendigkeit, in der Religionswissenschaft zwischen Geschichte und Historie strenger zu unterscheiden, als gewöhnlich geschieht*, 2. Ergänzungsheft zur Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, no. 191. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1911.

13 See, e. g., Georg Wobbermin, "Aufgabe und Bedeutung der Religionspsychologie." In *Sonderausgabe aus dem Protokoll des 5. Weltkongresses für Freies Christentum und Religiösen Fortschritt*, ed. Max Fischer and Friedrich Michael Schiele. Berlin-Schöneberg: Protestantischer Schriftenvertrieb, 1910, 245–261; Georg Wobbermin, "Religionspsychologie." *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, Zweiter Ergänzungsband. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913, 411–418; and Georg Wobbermin, "Religionspsychologie." *RGG*², 4. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1930.

systematic theology.¹⁴ He produced the first German translation of William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*¹⁵ and sought a third way beyond the empirical psychology of Wilhelm Wundt in Germany and James Leuba in America on the one hand and the pragmatism of James and John Dewey on the other. But perhaps most significantly he tirelessly advocated a return to Schleiermacher's method and identification of the key problems of the psychology of religion and systematic theology, particularly in terms of the relationship between religious experience and the essence of religion in general and of Christianity in particular. In his early works, particularly the three-volume systematic theology, Wobbermin focuses his attention on Schleiermacher's anticipation of many of the problems of the psychology of religion and attempts to construct a foundation for systematic theology on what he calls the "Schleiermacher-Jamesche Problemstellung."¹⁶ In his later works, particularly those published in the interwar period, he turns his attention to a defense of liberal theology against the dialectical theologians, above all Karl Barth. The chief figure in these debates is Schleiermacher, who represents for Barth the origin of all that went wrong in the nineteenth century and who represents for Wobbermin the only hope for a viable, fruitful theology in the first decades of the twentieth.¹⁷

Perhaps one might wonder why contemporary historical and systematic theologians should concern themselves with the "belated defense of a dead issue" Wobbermin labored to provide in the Weimar period. There are several reasons why Wobbermin should prove to be a figure of some interest among contemporary

14 See Georg Wobbermin, *Systematische Theologie nach religionspsychologischer Methode*, 3 vols. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913–1925.

15 William James, *Die religiöse Erfahrung in ihrer Mannigfaltigkeit. Materialien und Studien zu einer Psychologie und Pathologie des religiösen Lebens*, translated by Georg Wobbermin. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1907. 2nd improved ed., 1914.

16 See especially *Systematische Theologie nach religionspsychologischer Methode*, vol. 1, *Die religionspsychologische Methode in Religionswissenschaft und Theologie*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913, part IV, "Die religionspsychologische Methode als Fortführung der Schleiermacher-Jameschen Problemstellung," 245–352.

17 In an essay on Schleiermacher, B. A. Gerrish refers to the "dissemination of poorly substantiated, ritualistically repeated stereotypes about Schleiermacher" originating in many cases within dialectical theology, above all from Barth and Brunner. He also notes that Schleiermacher did have some defenders in this period, such as Wobbermin, who "were not only sophisticated Schleiermacher scholars who immediately perceived the flaws in the dialectical theology's historiography, but also astute theologians in their own right who had strong reasons for believing that Protestant theology was on the verge of taking a wrong step." B. A. Gerrish, "Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834)." In: B. A. Gerrish, *Continuing the Reformation. Essays on Modern Religious Thought*, 147–177, 174. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

historical and systematic theologians. First, as suggested in the work of Matthias Wolfes, Michael Aune, and others,¹⁸ the assumption that liberal theology quickly faded into obscurity soon after Barth's *Römerbrief* famously dropped like a bomb in theology's playground fails to account for liberalism's lively and wide-ranging theological production well into the 1930s. At the forefront of that effort was Wobbermin, who completed his systematic theology in 1925 before turning his attention to historical and methodological questions raised by the emergence and eventual dominance of dialectical theology by the end of the Weimar period.

Wobbermin wrote more about Schleiermacher than about any other theologian, most of it *after* liberal theology's apparent demise following the First World War. As Schleiermacher's legacy in the twentieth century often rested in the hands of his critics among the dialectical theologians and their followers, it is particularly important and beneficial to consider how he informed the work of a theologian who counted him as a master and ally. As Schleiermacher came under heavy and sustained attack in the Weimar period, we have a useful resource in Wobbermin to consider how Schleiermacher's work positively impacted a later generation of theologians, particularly those who, like Wobbermin, sought to defend the basic insights and approaches of Schleiermacher against those who desired to move theology in a radically different direction.

Wobbermin did not simply parrot Schleiermacher's positions, however; rather, he interpreted, reconfigured, and passed down what he had received from Schleiermacher with reference to contemporary problems and needs. It is therefore instructive to consider what Wobbermin took to be of value in Schleiermacher's corpus and what he overlooked or dismissed as insignificant or irrelevant for his own situation. By so doing we are, of course, more concerned with Wobbermin's interpretation than with Schleiermacher's own intentions, but such concerns should not detract from the very real value and benefit of such an inquiry. Instead, we will be able to ascertain the degree to which Schleiermacher's ideas survived in this new era as well as the extent to which they were modified, corrupted, or abandoned.

¹⁸ See, e. g., Wolfes, *Protestantische Theologie und moderne Welt*; Michael B. Aune, "Discarding the Barthian Spectacles, Part I: Recent Scholarship on the History of Early 20th Century German Protestant Theology." *Dialog* 43 (2004): 223–232; Michael B. Aune, "Discarding the Barthian Spectacles, Part II: Rereading Theological Directions, 1910–1914." *Dialog* 44 (2005): 56–68; Michael B. Aune, "Discarding the Barthian Spectacles, Part III: Rewriting the History of Protestant Theology in the 1920 s." *Dialog* 45 (2006): 389–405; Michael B. Aune, "Discarding the Barthian Spectacles, Conclusion: Might We Be 'Liberals' After All?" *Dialog* 46 (2007): 153–165; and Brent A. R. Hege, *Faith at the Intersection of History and Experience. The Theology of Georg Wobbermin*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009, particularly the introduction, 1–14.

Perhaps Wobbermin first encountered Schleiermacher during his brief studies at the University of Halle in 1888–1889; however, he first engaged deeply with Schleiermacher’s work while completing his doctoral degree at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-University in Berlin, where he studied with Dilthey, Kaftan and Harnack.¹⁹ A survey of Wobbermin’s dialogues with Schleiermacher reveals a selective reading of Schleiermacher’s works, as Wobbermin consistently engages only a few sections of the *Glaubenslehre* in his appeals to Schleiermacher.²⁰ Most of these references concern Schleiermacher’s definition of the essence of piety as the feeling of absolute dependence and the implications for the theological method of such a definition. This definition of religion forms a significant portion of the foundation of Wobbermin’s systematic work, which he constructs as a “systematic theology according to the religio-psychological method” on the basis of

19 Wobbermin’s doctoral dissertation foreshadows many of the research problems he would investigate over the course of his career, especially the psychology of religion, the centrality of religious experience, and metaphysics, as well as some of the key figures in his later writings, especially Kant and Schleiermacher. See Wobbermin, *Die innere Erfahrung als Grundlage eines moralischen Beweises für das Dasein Gottes. Eine methodologische Studie*. Berlin: C. Vogts, 1894. Years later, in a moment of autobiographical reflection, he remarks on his return to Berlin to occupy a chair in systematic theology as a return to the place where he first engaged Schleiermacher: “Where once, as a student in Berlin, I first began to engage with Schleiermacher, and later, as an assistant and young professor in Berlin, I placed Schleiermacher in the center of my teaching activities in lectures and seminars, I may now, having come full circle and returned to Berlin in the course of my academic activity, once again place my vocational work in the service of Schleiermacher research in Berlin.” Georg Wobbermin, “Schleiermachers protestantische und vaterländische Sendung: Eine Erinnerung anlässlich der Berliner Tagung der Deutschen Christen.” *Deutsches Christentum* 3 (1938), nr. 22.

20 One notable exception to this pattern is his doctoral dissertation and, to a lesser extent, his systematic theology, in which he engages the *Reden* (and the *Dialektik* in the dissertation) in addition to the *Glaubenslehre*. Despite this early engagement with more of Schleiermacher’s works, in his later publications Wobbermin almost exclusively turns to the *Glaubenslehre* for Schleiermacher’s support. In his systematic theology, for example, he often refers to a passage from the *Reden* before abandoning it in favor of its fuller articulation in the *Glaubenslehre*. For example, in *Das Wesen der Religion* he remarks, “It goes without saying that in reaching a full understanding of Schleiermacher it is absolutely unjustifiable to subordinate the *Glaubenslehre* to the *Reden*, as, for example, even Natorp does. The *Reden* must rather be subordinated to the *Glaubenslehre*. For on the whole the *Glaubenslehre* presents Schleiermacher’s clearest and most mature position.” Wobbermin, *Das Wesen der Religion*, 103, English translation: *The Nature of Religion*, 74–75.

Schleiermacher's definition of religion and William James's analysis of the varieties of religious experience.²¹

The religio-psychological method of systematic theology concerns Wobbermin's desire to avoid what he considers to be the twin dangers of *Historismus* and *Psychologismus*, the former referring to a one-sided objectivism and the latter referring to a one-sided subjectivism in terms of theological method. *Historismus* ignores personal religious experience in favor of the supposed security of knowledge of or assent to the historical facticity of Christian doctrine or revelation and the objective "data" of Christian faith provided by historical-critical research, while *Psychologismus* ignores the objective reality of Christian revelation in history in favor of the supposed security of immediate personal, subjective religious experience. In a number of venues Wobbermin advocates a method that transcends this binary opposition of objective and subjective emphases, both of which fail to account for the irreducibly relational character of a Christian faith defined by the interaction of objective fact and subjective experience.

In Schleiermacher's definition of piety as the feeling of absolute dependence Wobbermin locates the key to transcending these two extremes. As Schleiermacher puts it in the fourth proposition of the *Glaubenslehre*, "The common element in all ever so diverse expressions of piety, by which these are together distinguished from all other feelings, or, in other words, the essence of piety itself, is this: that we are conscious of ourselves as being absolutely dependent, or, to say the same thing, of being in relation with God."²² Wobbermin expands this definition to incorporate a trinitarian structure that emphasizes the quality of relationality:

The essence of religion, then, is for us the relationship of human beings to an over-world in which one believes and which one also intuits in faith (*geglaubten und im Glauben geahnten Überwelt*), on which one feels oneself to be dependent, in whose protection one knows

21 William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience. A Study in Human Nature, Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901–1902*. New York: Longmans, Green, 1902. While serving as a visiting professor at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1907, Wobbermin had the pleasure of spending time with James during visits to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where James was teaching at Harvard University. That same year Wobbermin published his German translation of *Varieties of Religious Experience* and soon after began work on the first volume of his systematic theology, published as *Systematische Theologie nach religionspsychologischer Methode*, vol. 1, *Die religionspsychologische Methode in Religionswissenschaft und Theologie*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913.

22 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt* (1830/31), ed. Martin Redeker, de Gruyter Studienbuch. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999, § 4, I:23, English translation: *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. R. Stewart. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989, 12.

oneself to be secure and which is the goal of one's longing. The essential core of religion lies, then, in the intuitive and believing relationship to a reality that is to be characterized in its essential nature and intrinsic value as an over-world, over against the finite sense-world conditioned by space and time. This relationship reflects itself in the feeling trinity (*Gefühls-Dreierheit*): the feeling of dependence (*Abhängigkeitsgefühl*), the feeling of security (*Geborgenheitsgefühl*), and the feeling of longing (*Sehnsuchtsgefühl*). The feeling of dependence is the fundamental religious feeling, which is differentiated in the polar opposite and conflicting antitheses of the feeling of security and the feeling of longing, in order once again to resolve this opposition into a unity within itself. This tension between the feeling of security and the feeling of longing includes the dual tendency of spiritual striving and consciousness of ethical duty.²³

In this definition we find two germinal ideas that Wobbermin will develop much more fully in later works: the religio-psychological circle (*religionspsychologischer Zirkel*) and the "twin poles" (*Gegenpole*) of faith, or the interrelation of the *fides quae creditur* and the *fides qua creditur*. For Schleiermacher, Christian doctrines are accounts of the religious affections brought to speech.²⁴ This means that the theologian must consider how a particular datum of the Christian faith (ultimately related to the consciousness of moving from a state of sin to a state of blessedness due to the saving influence of the Redeemer) is expressed in the religious consciousness of the Christian community in the present. Hence dogmatics is, for Schleiermacher, classified as a historical discipline.²⁵ For Wobbermin, Christian doctrines emerge from the fruitful interrelation of the individual Christian's

23 Wobbermin, *Das Wesen der Religion*, 254, English translation: *The Nature of Religion*, 181–182. At least one American reviewer applauded Wobbermin's expansion of Schleiermacher's definition of piety as an improvement on Schleiermacher's insight: "This constitutes a reversal of Schleiermacher's order along more realistic lines, making the feeling of dependence a consequence of the relationship." Edwin Ewart Aubrey, "Schleiermacher Revised." *JR* 14.3 (1934): 368–369, 368. In this definition Wobbermin also incorporates some of Schleiermacher's insights from the *Reden*, particularly his definition of religion in the first edition as an intuition and feeling of the universe. Earlier Wobbermin suggests that "when Schleiermacher in the first edition of the *Reden* describes religion as the intuition and feeling of the universe, and then, in the later editions, more and more subordinates the idea of intuition to that of feeling, there already lies in this fact an approximation of the theory of the feeling of absolute dependence." Wobbermin, *Das Wesen der Religion*, 104, English translation: *The Nature of Religion*, 75. Later he clarifies his preference for the *Glaubenslehre* when he argues that "the theory of the feeling of absolute dependence brings into still clearer and sharper expression the interest in the content of the religious object." *Ibid.*, 106, English translation: 77.

24 Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, § 15, I: 105, English translation: *The Christian Faith*, 76.

25 See Schleiermacher's division of theological labor in the *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums*. In Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Hermann Fischer et al., part I, vol. 6, *Universitätsschriften, Herakleitos, Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums*, ed. Dirk Schmid. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998.

experience and conviction of the objective reality of the data of Christian faith. Hence dogmatics is, for Wobbermin, classified as a religio-psychological discipline. But it is Schleiermacher's attention to the subject, particularly his or her feeling of absolute dependence and experience of redemption, that provides the foundation for Wobbermin's prosecution of systematic theology. Therefore theology is defined as "the science of the Christian religion in its significance for the religious life,"²⁶ with the psychology of religion supplying its "unitary and distinctive method."²⁷

In spite of his emphasis on feeling and experience, Wobbermin warns of the danger of assuming that the fittest method for determining the content of religious experience or feeling is empirical psychology, such as that practiced by such psychologists as Wilhelm Wundt in Germany or James Leuba in the United States.²⁸ The most empirical psychology can hope to accomplish is a descriptive treatment of religious phenomena, but Wobbermin argues that empirical psychology has no grounds for making judgments of value because this would locate faith exclusively within a subjective state of mind and would lack any objective referent (resulting in what he calls *Psychologismus*).²⁹ Judgments of value properly belong to what he calls the transcendental psychology of religion, an approach that includes a consideration of the truth of religion itself, a concern that is fundamental to the spiritual life and finds expression in the religious experience

26 Wobbermin, *Die religionspsychologische Methode*, 107.

27 *Ibid.*, vii.

28 Wobbermin laments the fact that Schleiermacher himself often spoke of his program as "empirical," which serves only to confuse the issue. However, by "empirical" Schleiermacher meant something other than experimental psychological observation. According to B. A. Gerrish, Schleiermacher sought to distinguish two types of approaches in ethics, broadly conceived as "the science of reason – of all that pertains to the human spirit, its history and culture" (of which theology forms a part). "Within ethics so defined, two *kinds* of knowing are distinguished: the 'speculative' kind is directed to essence and works with concepts, while the 'empirical' kind is directed to existence and works with judgments." Gerrish, "Friedrich Schleiermacher," 152. Gerrish also comments on the incongruity of using the term "empirical" to describe Schleiermacher's conception of theology, remarking that today we would be more likely to call it "phenomenological." Wobbermin also made this connection, claiming that Schleiermacher in fact anticipated the phenomenological approach of Edmund Husserl and others. Georg Wobbermin, "Der Streit um Schleiermacher in seiner Bedeutung für die heutige Gesamtlage der evangelischen Theologie." *ZevRU* 39 (1928): 280–94, 293.

29 For discussions of *Psychologismus*, see Georg Wobbermin, "Psychologismus." *RGG*², 4, 1930, 1646; and Georg Wobbermin, "Im Kampf gegen Historismus und Psychologismus: Aus dem Vorwort zur schwedischen Ausgabe meiner *Richtlinien evangelischer Theologie zur Ueberwindung der gegenwärtigen Krisis*." *ThBl* 10 (1931): 257–258.

of the subject.³⁰ It is just this type of theological approach that he traces to Schleiermacher's method in the *Glaubenslehre*.

Above all, the question of the truth of Christianity, and therefore of the status of Christian religious consciousness and experience, concerns the idea of revelation given in history and proceeding to influence the present through the Scriptures and the Christian community. Just as Schleiermacher suggested that the life of the Christian community proceeds from the appearance of the Redeemer in history and continues to live by his influence in that same community, for Wobbermin the divine revelation in Christ and in the Scriptures that bear witness to Christ functions as the first of the "twin poles" of Christian faith as the source of the objective data that fund the religious experience of the Christian (the second "pole"). The process by which the theologian analyzes the Christian's subjective experience and incorporation of the objective data of Christian faith and the resulting conviction of faith is the religio-psychological circle, which forms the core of Wobbermin's theological method. As Wobbermin puts it,

We want to attain the criteria of pure religiosity for the purposes of evaluating and norming our own individual religious life on the basis of historic facts. By means of these historic facts, namely the forms of expression of religious life in the history of humanity, we can understand and interpret in no other way than according to the requirement of our individual religious experience, of our individual religious consciousness.³¹

Thus the religio-psychological circle prizes both psychological analysis and rigorous historical criticism. Historical criticism isolates what is genuinely historic in Christianity, particularly in the figure of Christ and his redemptive influence, while transcendental psychological analysis permits the theologian to inquire into the question of absolute or ultimate truth contained in every genuine religious experience. To accomplish this task Wobbermin employs a strict distinction between *Geschichte* and *Historie*, the former signifying what is original and continuously effective in the divine revelation and the latter defining the results of historical-critical investigation of the broader context and subsequent unfolding of that original revelation. To put it another way, historical-critical research strips away the false supports for faith by isolating what is genuinely historic in the image of Christ that is present in the New Testament and the history

30 For a more detailed discussion of the distinction between empirical and transcendental psychology, see Wobbermin, "Religionspsychologie." *RGG*², 4, 1930. For more on Wobbermin's use of psychology in his systematic theology, see Wolf-Ulrich Klünker, *Psychologische Analyse und theologische Wahrheit. Die religionspsychologische Methode Georg Wobbermins*, Göttinger theologische Arbeiten 33. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985.

31 Wobbermin, *Die religionspsychologische Methode*, 405–406.

of Christianity. It is this historic image, immediately accessible to faith, that provides the foundation for the religious experience of Christians in every time and place: “In Christianity the relation to history is concentrated in the picture of Jesus Christ as it radiates outward toward us from the New Testament, as it is available and comprehensible to every religious experience independent of all historical criticism of the tradition.”³²

There are some striking similarities here to Schleiermacher’s interpretation of the redemptive influence of Christ in the Christian community. According to Schleiermacher, the impulse that proceeds from Jesus of Nazareth ripples outward through the Christian community across time and space through the proclamation of the Word, which draws women and men into the community of blessedness that is the church. The portrait of the Redeemer that is presented in the preaching of the church is identical with the historical Christ and is the same image that was available to the disciples. As Schleiermacher puts it in reference to the relationship between faith and conversion:

If faith arises in the same way [for all people in all times], conversion must happen in the same way. Now in the first disciples both were effected by the Word in the wider sense, that is, by the whole prophetic activity of Christ. And we must be able to understand this which we have in common with them, if necessary without a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, just as the disciples understood their own condition without this doctrine. The constant factor is above all this same divine power of the Word – taking the expression in the same wide sense – by which conversion is still effected and faith still arises. The only difference is that the self-presentation of Christ is now mediated by those who preach him; but because these have been appropriated by him as his instruments, the activity really proceeds from him and is always essentially his own.³³

It is precisely this question of the efficacy and power of Christ’s redemptive influence across time and space that informs Wobbermin’s use of the historical-critical method. While Schleiermacher did not address the historical method in any significant detail in the *Glaubenslehre*, being confident that the image of Christ presented in the proclamation of the church would be the same image available in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth himself, Wobbermin proceeds more cautiously, and perhaps for good reason. Between Schleiermacher

32 Wobbermin, “Psychologie und Erkenntniskritik der religiöse Erfahrung.” In *Weltanschauung, Philosophie und Religion in Darstellungen von Wilhelm Dilthey und Anderen*, ed. Max Frischeisen-Köhler. Berlin: Reichl, 1911, 341–363, 349. For an extended discussion of Wobbermin’s attitudes toward historical-criticism, particularly his use of the distinction between *Geschichte* and *Historie*, see Hege, *Faith at the Intersection of History and Experience*, 15–77.

33 Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, § 108, II: 165, English translation: *The Christian Faith*, 490–491.

and Wobbermin stand decades of intense debate and controversy concerning the possibility of constructing a reliable historical foundation for faith.³⁴ Publications such as David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*,³⁵ Martin Kähler's *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus*,³⁶ and Arthur Drews's *Die Christusmythe*³⁷ each in their own way raised the specter of historical relativity and insecurity for Christian faith and forced future generations of theologians to take historical questions into account in their deliberations on the significance of Jesus Christ for faith. Wobbermin responded to this demand by making a strenuous (if sometimes labored) distinction between *Historie* as the subject matter of historical research and the method used to provide and analyze that subject matter and *Geschichte* as the sum total of the bare facts of history in their power and efficacy for the present.³⁸

This distinction between *Geschichte* and *Historie* provides an early key to Wobbermin's work, particularly his concern to safeguard the redemptive power of the image of Christ in an era of increasing historical skepticism, and it supplies the theoretical framework for his later systematic work as well. The purpose of such a strict distinction is to provide faith with certain unassailable facts (or what Kähler called a *sturmfreies Gebiet*) of the historical life and work of Jesus, facts which form the seeds of religious experience that blossom into a fully formed spiritual life. The religio-psychological method is designed to take both elements into account by analyzing both the objective side of the relationship (the *fides*

34 To be sure, the problem of history (particularly the historical Jesus) was already well-entrenched by Schleiermacher's time, going back to the posthumous publication of Reimarus's "fragments" by G. E. Lessing and to Lessing's own reflections on the relationship between accidental truths of history and necessary truths of reason. And Schleiermacher himself gave the first-ever lectures on the life of Jesus in 1819 (not published until 1864). But the problem of history certainly intensified in the decades following Schleiermacher's death, as evidenced by Albert Schweitzer's study, *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, 2nd ed. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1926, English translation: *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1st complete ed., ed. John Bowden and trans. W. Montgomery et al. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001.

35 David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*. Tübingen: C. F. Osiander, 2 vols., 1835–1836, English translation: *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot. New York: Continuum, 2005.

36 Martin Kähler, *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus*, 2nd ed. Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1896, English translation: *The So-called Historical Jesus and the Historic, Biblical Christ*, trans. and ed. Carl E. Braaten (Fortress Texts in Modern Theology). Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964, repr. 1988.

37 Arthur Drews, *Die Christusmythe*, 4th ed. Jena: E. Diederichs, 1910, English translation: *The Christ Myth*, trans. C. Delisle Burns (Westminster College – Oxford Classics in the Study of Religion). Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1998.

38 See especially Wobbermin, *Geschichte und Historie in der Religionswissenschaft*.

quae creditur or the facts of Christian faith) and the subjective side of the relationship (the *fides qua creditur* or the personal experience of these facts in the conviction of faith). In this interrelation Wobbermin hopes to secure a faith that takes seriously the historic character of revelation while remaining impervious to the vagaries of historical research on the one hand, while also remaining sensitive to the realities of religious experience while avoiding the pitfalls of a full-fledged subjectivism on the other, thus overcoming the temptation to succumb to the twin dangers of *Historismus* and *Psychologismus*.

In order to locate and occupy this middle ground, Wobbermin turns to the history of Protestant thought to support his interrelational method. He proposes that such a method follows in the footsteps of the three great figures of Protestant thought: Luther, Kant, and Schleiermacher. In these three figures he finds three “Copernican revolutions” or turns toward the subject, seismic shifts in the theological landscape that point the way toward a theology that can withstand the assaults of psychological reductionism and either unwarranted historical skepticism or confidence, all of which he deems a threat to Protestant theology in the early twentieth century.

In the years following the publication of his systematic theology, Wobbermin increasingly turned his attention to issues of method, particularly to the challenges posed by the new dialectical theology to a theology constructed on the foundation of liberalism. As Barth had famously maligned liberal theology as little more than anthropology in disguise and a program that speaks of God only by “speaking of man in a loud voice,”³⁹ Wobbermin sought to defend his religious-psychological method as the rightful heir to the Protestant tradition. To do so he published a series of articles in which he situated his theology along what he called the “Luther-Kant-Schleiermacher line” of Protestant thought. In these articles we find the most sustained analysis of Schleiermacher’s legacy in Weimar liberal Protestantism.

In Luther, Kant and Schleiermacher Wobbermin finds three kindred spirits who revolutionized theology by inaugurating decisive turns toward the subject, or what Wobbermin calls the Copernican revolutions of religious thought (Luther),

39 The full passage is in fact a condemnation of Schleiermacher and his legacy: “With all due respect to the genius shown in his work, I can *not* consider Schleiermacher a good teacher in the realm of theology because, so far as I can see, he is disastrously dim-sighted in regard to the fact that man as man is not only in *need* but beyond all hope of saving himself; that the whole of so-called religion, and not least the Christian religion, *shares* in this need; and that one can *not* speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice.” Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton. New York: Harper, 1957, 195–196.

epistemology (Kant), and theological method (Schleiermacher).⁴⁰ Each of these revolutionaries protested the objectivizing tendencies of their contemporaries and sought to strike a balance between objectivism and subjectivism in their work. For Luther, this meant taking seriously the conviction of faith in God unmediated by the hierarchy and sacramental system of the Roman Catholic Church, instead anchoring itself in Scripture and experience. For Kant this meant retreating from unabashed confidence in the powers of reason toward a more nuanced analysis of reason's structure as well as the role experience must play in reason's functioning. For Schleiermacher this meant privileging the relational character of the human being's consciousness of God and its expression in the religious affections, the proper subject matter of dogmatics. For Wobbermin, these three revolutions justify his attention to the subjective character of Christian faith as something grounded in the experience of redemption mediated by the historic image of Christ available in the proclamation of the church through the ages.

As Wobbermin consistently advocates a theology that transcends the subject-object dichotomy by privileging the relational character of Christian faith, he finds in Schleiermacher a stalwart ally in his efforts to champion such a method against what he views as the excessive objectivism of dialectical theology. In the *Reden* Schleiermacher describes the psychological foundations of piety, specifically the decisive role of intuition in the religious life. But it is in the *Glaubenslehre* most especially that Schleiermacher makes his greatest impact on the subsequent history of theology, particularly in his definition of piety as a determination of feeling or self-consciousness and of religion as the feeling of absolute dependence.

The dialectical theologians often attacked Schleiermacher and his disciples for removing God from the center of theological deliberation, to be replaced by the human consciousness of God. Psychology (or anthropology) thus takes the place of genuine theology, or "speaking about God." However, Wobbermin interprets Schleiermacher differently. The dialectical theologians, he argues, mistake Schleiermacher's attention to the subject for an abandonment of the object of faith. Instead, Schleiermacher wants to "show the way to achieve objectivity through subjectivity."⁴¹ Wobbermin suggests that Schleiermacher's relational language might be the source of this confusion, but he also notes that it is only by holding both the objective and subjective elements of faith together that

⁴⁰ Georg Wobbermin, "Luther, Kant, Schleiermacher und die Aufgabe der heutigen Theologie." *ZThK NF* 5 (1924): 104–120.

⁴¹ Georg Wobbermin, *Schleiermacher und Ritschl in ihrer Bedeutung für die heutige theologische Lage und Aufgabe* (Sammlung Gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte 125). Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1927, 28.

either a one-sided objectivism or a one-sided subjectivism can be avoided. In *Das Wesen der Religion* he defends Schleiermacher against such a charge by noting that Schleiermacher immediately introduces the concept of God to define the “co-determinant” of the feeling of absolute dependence:

This must mean, as he himself remarks, that this concept expresses first of all what in that feeling is the ‘co-determinant’ (the objective corresponding pole). [...] An objective relation and an objective content are certainly included in the feeling of absolute dependence. Indeed, this objective content is precisely the highest reality determining all finite existence.⁴²

Later, in “Luther, Kant, Schleiermacher,” he equates Schleiermacher’s intention in the *Glaubenslehre* with Luther’s intention in his exposition of the First Commandment,⁴³ both of which seek to safeguard the primacy and priority of God in this interrelational approach:

Clearly this relationship is such that it is not arbitrarily effected by us; rather, it is established by God and can only be established by God. Thus Schleiermacher prefixes the concept of the feeling of absolute dependence. But this feeling of absolute dependence has an objective content or an objective corresponding pole just as self-evidently and as unconditionally as the trust and faith of the heart in Luther.⁴⁴

Schleiermacher himself lamented just such a misunderstanding in his first open letter to his friend Friedrich Lücke, in which he remarks, with some exasperation, “It is said that my ‘God-consciousness’ should not be confused with ‘consciousness of God,’ and immediately afterward it is also said that the God-consciousness in humans is supposed to be God itself! Poor me! Even when I believe I have made every effort to be most grammatically precise, the result turns out to be the exact

42 Wobbermin, *Das Wesen der Religion*, 108–109, English translation: *The Nature of Religion*, 78–79. The English translation includes a bit of commentary in its rendering of Wobbermin’s phrase, “*der objektive Gegenpol*,” which it gives as “the objective being over against the one who has the feeling of dependence.” Additionally, Wobbermin’s term “*Mitbestimmte*” (“co-determinant”) is slightly altered to read “determining agency.”

43 “To have a god is nothing other than to trust and believe in that one from the heart [...] the trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true one, and in turn where your trust is false and wrong, there you do not have the true God. For the two belong together, faith and God. Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your god.” Martin Luther, “Der große Katechismus.” In *WA* 30.I, 560, English translation: “The Large Catechism.” In *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles P. Arand et al. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000, 386.

44 Georg Wobbermin, “Luther, Kant, Schleiermacher,” 117–118. Emphasis in original.

opposite.”⁴⁵ Wobbermin claims to locate the source of the confusion in the “literary defects” of Schleiermacher’s fourth proposition, in which he equates the feeling of absolute dependence with the consciousness of being in relation to God. Wobbermin summarizes the problem as one of crude grammatical construction:

To my knowledge no one has ever called attention to the literary defects in this formulation. “The common element is this: that we are conscious of ourselves.” Schleiermacher never allowed himself such a literary imprecision and crudeness of expression. If he used it in precisely this fundamental proposition it cannot be accidental. It is obviously due to the fact that this cockeyed way of putting it characterizes especially well the uniqueness of the process he had in mind. The interrelation of the objective and subjective factors of the process comes to expression in this formulation. So far as its methodological character is concerned, therefore, the theory of the feeling of absolute dependence as the essence of religion lies in the direction of the religio-psychological circle.⁴⁶

Here again it is the notion of interrelationality that characterizes both the essence of the methodology and the source of interpretive difficulties and misunderstandings. It would appear, then, that any theological method proposing human consciousness or experience of God as a starting point must expect to defend itself against charges of sacrificing genuine theology for anthropology or psychology, despite its ardent insistence to the contrary.⁴⁷

45 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On the Glaubenslehre. Two Letters to Dr. Lücke*, trans. James O. Duke and Francis Fiorenza (AAR Texts and Translations 3). Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981, 45–46. In *Schleiermacher und Ritschl* Wobbermin defends Schleiermacher against this attack that he has abandoned theology for anthropology: “But nothing is more preposterous than such a judgment. When Schleiermacher speaks of religious affections or the religious states of consciousness he not does mean human affections or states of consciousness in their mere subjectivity, for as such they would not be for him truly pious or religious in the strict sense of his usage. Rather, he always uses them with the qualification that they are first made truly religious or pious (i. e., oriented toward the religious object) in relation to God.” Wobbermin, *Schleiermacher und Ritschl*, 24.

46 Wobbermin, *Das Wesen der Religion*, 58–59, English translation: *The Nature of Religion*, 43–44.

47 In fact, years later, Wobbermin was subjected to a similar charge by Rudolf Bultmann, who suggested that in Wobbermin’s work the proper object of faith (God) has been replaced by the alternation between the objective and subjective poles of faith itself. In this case, then, neither the objective content nor the subjective appropriation of that content provides the data for theologizing; rather it is the interrelation itself that provides the content, essentially making the process itself the subject matter of theology. Rudolf Bultmann, *What Is Theology?* ed. Eberhard Jüngel and Klaus W. Müller, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Fortress Texts in Modern Theology). Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997, 43–44.

The twentieth-century reaction against Schleiermacher's turn toward the subject and its subsequent unfolding in liberal theology and its corollaries is well-known, perhaps none more famous than Karl Barth's bitter rejection of his former teachers during the debacle of World War I and his later criticism of Emil Brunner's proposals for a natural theology.⁴⁸ But liberalism did find something of a champion in Wobbermin, however unsuccessful his efforts to stem the tide of dialectical theology's ascendancy proved to be.

The most instructive of Wobbermin's analyses of the conflict between liberal theology and dialectical theology, particularly over the legacy of Schleiermacher, is found in his article, "Der Streit um Schleiermacher in seiner Bedeutung für die heutige Gesamtlage der evangelischen Theologie," published in 1928. In this article Wobbermin surveys the terrain of contemporary theology and proposes that the controversy between liberalism and dialectical theology has to do primarily with the points of departure of their respective methods rather than with Schleiermacher's own doctrinal conclusions. The root of this divergence of methods is each school's attitude toward the *fides qua creditur*, the "individual, personal conviction and experience of faith."⁴⁹ Liberal theology (more specifically Wobbermin's religio-psychological theology or what he here also calls "*glaubenspsychologische Theologie*"⁵⁰) wants to take the *fides qua creditur* as one of two starting points for theology along with the corresponding *fides quae creditur*, the objective content of faith, while dialectical theology rejects the *fides qua creditur* as a proper starting point and proceeds solely from the *fides quae creditur*.

48 In his study of the early Barth, Bruce McCormack cites a letter from Barth to Wilhelm Herrmann in which Barth accuses his former teacher of contributing to Germany's catastrophic entry into the First World War with the liberal emphasis on experience: "Especially with you, Herr Professor (and through you with the great masters – Luther, Kant, and Schleiermacher), we learned to acknowledge 'experience' as the constitutive principle of knowing and doing in the domain of religion. In your school it became clear to us what it means to 'experience' God in Jesus. Now, however, in answer to our doubts, an 'experience' which is completely new to us is held out to us by German Christians, an allegedly religious war 'experience'; i. e. the fact that German Christians 'experience' their war as a holy war is supposed to bring us to silence, if not demand reverence from us. Where do you stand in relation to this argument and to the war theology which lies behind it?" Karl Barth to Wilhelm Herrmann, November 4, 1914, cited in Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology. Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 113. For Barth's rejection of Brunner's appeal for a natural theology, see Karl Barth, *Nein! Antwort an Emil Brunner*, Theologische Existenz heute 14. Munich: C. Kaiser, 1934, English translation: Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology, Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel. London: G. Bles, Centenary, 1946.

49 Wobbermin, "Der Streit um Schleiermacher," 282.

50 Ibid., 281.

According to Wobbermin, a properly evangelical theology must give priority to the relationality of faith, which always includes both an objective referent (God) and a subjective referent (the believing human being):

For religious faith represents a relationship (*Beziehungsverhältnis*), and indeed a relationship in the fullest sense of the word, a relationship (*Verhältnis*) that signifies a relation (*Beziehung*) between two things. The understanding of any religious conviction of faith must be directed toward two sides: toward the objective, i. e. God, and toward the subjective, i. e. the believing human being, toward the faith of the believer. *The fundamental methodological position of evangelical theology must therefore take care consistently to emphasize the objective and the subjective sides of the conviction of faith.* That happens when the fundamental relation of both poles of religious conviction (the objective and subjective poles) to one another is carried out. Now the objective pole (God) is not directly accessible to methodological work, however. The latter must first concern itself with the historic objectification of religious conviction and the constant relationship between this historic objectification and the subjective, requiring religious conviction going back to the individual, personal experience of faith.⁵¹

The religio-psychological circle provides the key to interpreting the relationship between this individual, personal experience of faith and the objective referent that would otherwise remain inaccessible to theological analysis. To support such a move, Wobbermin frequently cites Luther's exposition of the First Commandment in the *Large Catechism*, where Luther states that it is the faith and trust of the heart that make both God and idol.⁵² In order to understand God *pro nobis*, one must begin from faith. Or, to quote Anselm's *Proslogion* (which also serves as the epigraph to Schleiermacher's *Glaubenslehre*), "Nor do I seek to understand in order that I may believe, but I believe in order that I may understand. For the one who does not believe does not experience, and the one who does not experience does not understand."⁵³

By ignoring the experience and conviction of faith as a legitimate and indeed indispensable point of departure for dogmatics, dialectical theology fails to account for one half of this relationship and thus lacks the necessary support for developing its systems. Wobbermin thus defines dialectical theology as a "theology of false alternatives" because it "rips the *fides quae creditur* and the *fides qua creditur* apart from one another, in the false opinion that only in this way can the majesty of God (the *fides quae creditur*) be fully emphasized."⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁵² See n. 43.

⁵³ Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, I:1. (Curiously, the English translation of the *Glaubenslehre* does not include Schleiermacher's epigraph.) See Anselm, *Proslogion*, ed. M. J. Charlesworth. Oxford: Clarendon, 1965, 2.

⁵⁴ Wobbermin, "Der Streit um Schleiermacher," 283.

There are profound implications for such a separation of the two poles of faith, but they are not limited to dialectical theology. In fact, for Wobbermin some of the misunderstanding can be traced to Schleiermacher himself, namely to a misidentification of the component elements of the two poles. The subjective pole of faith (the conviction of faith and the religious experience of the individual Christian) is relatively simple and straightforward. However, Wobbermin suggests that the objective pole (God) is actually subdivided into two elements, an inward or transcendental side and an outward or immanent side. The transcendental side of the objective pole is God *in se*, utterly inaccessible to dogmatic work. The immanent side of the objective pole is God as God has revealed Godself within history, namely in the Word (understood as Christ and his gospel). It is this pole that provides the point of contact for faith and opens the space for the relationship of the *fides quae creditur* and the *fides qua creditur* to develop.

Wobbermin contends that Schleiermacher failed to take into account this double-sided objective pole and therefore leaned increasingly toward the subjective pole, resulting in a full-fledged *Psychologismus* or subjectivism in some of his followers (such as J. C. K. von Hofmann and the Erlangen school). Also, Albrecht Ritschl, in efforts to synthesize Schleiermacher and Luther, increasingly leaned toward the immanent side of the objective pole, resulting in a full-fledged *Historismus* in his followers (most notably Ernst Troeltsch and the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*). Finally, the dialectical theological method grants priority to the transcendental side of the objective pole over the immanent side while completely ignoring the subjective pole, resulting in what Wobbermin calls a “false objectivism.”⁵⁵

Religio-psychological theology proceeds from the relationship between the subjective and objective poles, leading from that relationship through the immanent side of the objective pole (God’s revelation in history) to the transcendental side (God *in se*). The unifying thread between the subjective and double-sided objective poles proves to be Scripture, which for Wobbermin functions in two related ways: as God’s own revelation in history and as the early Christian community’s testimony to their experience of redemption through faith in

55 Ibid.

Christ.⁵⁶ In order for any contemporary religious experience to be validated as authentically Christian it must be confirmed by the Word, which remains ontologically prior and superior to faith as its source and norm.

The relationship between the individual believer and the divine revelation in the Word finds its methodological corollary in the correlative relationship between the subjective and the objective poles of faith. To support this position Wobbermin appeals first to Luther's claim that "*promissio et fides sunt relativa.*" Faith and the promise of God are inextricably related so that without the promise there can be no faith, but without faith the promise is meaningless.⁵⁷ As such, faith and the Word stand in a correlative, interdependent and reciprocal relationship. This point is reinforced by Schleiermacher's description of the communication of Christ's redemptive influence through the proclamation of the Word: "Herein has consisted the essence of all direct Christian proclamation ever since, which can always only take the form of testimony, namely testimony of one's own experience [of redemption], which shall stimulate in the others the desire to have the same experience."⁵⁸

Recognizing that the language of interdependence threatens to open his position to attacks of making God dependent on faith rather than vice versa, Wobbermin reiterates the ontological superiority of God to faith: "This is not interdependence in an ontological sense, not that the existence of God depends on human faith – it is interdependence only for us: God gives Godself to us in God's revelation to be grasped only through the mediation of faith – and accordingly we approach God only on the way of faith."⁵⁹

56 Wobbermin, *Wort Gottes und evangelischer Glaube*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931, 16. Interestingly, this is a position that bears some intriguing similarities to Schleiermacher's description of the divine workings of grace as both supernatural and natural: "These divine workings of grace are supernatural in so far as they depend upon and actually proceed from the being of God in the person of Christ. At the same time, being historical and formative of history, they are also natural in so far as they have a general natural connection with the historical life of Christ, and each individual work that establishes a new personality is bound up in its efficacy with the historical totality of Christ's effects." Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, § 108, II:167–168, English translation, *The Christian Faith*, 492.

57 Luther, "Divi Pauli apostoli ad Romanos Epistola." In *WA* 56, 45, English Translation: "Lectures on Romans." In *Luther's Works*, American Edition, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, 55 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986, 25, 39. Elsewhere Wobbermin paraphrases this to read "*Verbum dei et fides sunt correlativa.*" Wobbermin, *Wort Gottes und evangelischer Glaube*, 6.

58 Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube*, § 14, I: 95–96, English translation: *The Christian Faith*, 68–69.

59 Georg Wobbermin, *Richtlinien evangelischer Theologie zur Überwindung der gegenwärtigen Krisis*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929, 21–22.

Mapping the course of this “way of faith” led Wobbermin once again into contested territory, this time into the realm of existentialism and its expressions in Weimar-era theology. With the work of Martin Heidegger in philosophy and Rudolf Bultmann in theology, existentialism became a significant movement within German-speaking Protestant theology in the interwar period and beyond. Even those who, like Barth, chafed at the notion of drawing too deeply from the well of philosophy⁶⁰ nevertheless acknowledged a debt to the father of existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard. Wobbermin also hesitated to make theology too dependent on any philosophical system, but he nevertheless acknowledged the value of the existentialist program and sought to situate it within the broader history of Protestant thought, tracing it to Luther through Schleiermacher rather than Kierkegaard.⁶¹

In Wobbermin’s appraisal of the task of theology in light of existential thinking, because the Protestant doctrine of faith concerns the orientation of the entire human being to God in Christ, Protestant theology must finally be existential theology.⁶² Consistent with his religio-psychological method, Wobber-

60 Bultmann criticizes Barth for pretending to do his theology independent of any philosophical orientation. In a letter to Barth he writes, “You have a sovereign scorn for modern work in philosophy, especially phenomenology. What point is there in saying occasionally that the dogmatist must also be oriented to philosophical work if the presentation finds no place for this orientation [...]? It seems to me that you are guided by a concern that theology should release itself from dependence on philosophy. You try to achieve this by ignoring philosophy. The price you pay for this is in fact that of falling prey to an outdated philosophy.” “Rudolf Bultmann to Karl Barth, June 9, 1928.” In *Karl Barth – Rudolf Bultmann Briefwechsel*, Karl Barth, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Heinrich Stoevesandt, vol. 5, *Briefe*, Part 1, *Karl Barth – Rudolf Bultmann Briefwechsel, 1911–1966*, 2nd ed., ed. Bernd Jaspert. Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1994, 82, English translation: *Karl Barth – Rudolf Bultmann Letters, 1922–1966*, ed. Bernd Jaspert, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981, 38–39. Almost thirty years later the two men were still trading barbs about their respective estimations of existentialism, as Barth writes: “The most triumphant expansion of that philosophy over the whole earth could not make the slightest impression on me [...]. I am not an enemy of philosophy as such, but I have hopeless reservations about the claim to absoluteness of any philosophy, epistemology, or methodology.” “Karl Barth to Rudolf Bultmann, December 24, 1952.” In *Karl Barth – Rudolf Bultmann Briefwechsel*, 193, English translation: *Karl Barth – Rudolf Bultmann Letters*, 105.

61 In fact, Barth criticizes Wobbermin for hopping on the existentialist bandwagon rather than demonstrating any genuine interest in the movement precisely because Wobbermin does not engage Kierkegaard in any substantive way. He wryly remarks that Wobbermin’s forays into existentialism are “not without humor.” Karl Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, vol. 1, *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes. Prolegomena zur kirchliche Dogmatik*, Part 1, 5th ed. Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947, 18, English translation: *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Part 1, 2nd ed., trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. New York: T & T International, 2004, 20.

62 Wobbermin, *Wort Gottes und evangelischer Glaube*, 20.

min locates the essence of religious existentialism in the concept of religious experience, specifically the personal experience and conviction of faith. Turning to Luther's many definitions of faith, he argues that there are two pairs of relationships in Luther's doctrine of faith. On the one hand faith is both experience (*Glaubenserfahrung*) and obedience (*Glaubensgehorsam*), and on the other hand faith is both obedience and decision (*Glaubensentscheidung*). In these pairs of relationships revolving around the axis of obedience, Wobbermin once again detects the familiar theme of the interrelation of the objective and subjective poles of faith. Faith as obedience is a whole-hearted trust in the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. Faith as decision is always a personal act rooted in experience, "and only in this way, always deciding for God anew, in daily struggle against despair, sin, and guilt, does one obey God's will."⁶³

Because the Word of God is addressed to the entire human being, not just to the intellect or the will or the emotions, revelation must be understood existentially rather than cognitively or intellectually. The Word prompts a conversion of the entire human being, not just the mind or the heart, and takes root in the depths of the whole person, manifesting itself in the conviction of faith and a renewed, invigorated spiritual life.⁶⁴ This event has been prefigured in the incarnation, in which the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14).⁶⁵ The method most appropriate for an existentialist analysis of Christian faith, according to Wobbermin, is the religio-psychological method that finds its origins in Schleiermacher. As he puts it, existential thought is "defined fundamentally by means of the comprehensive, highest point of view of the acknowledgment of the absolute dependence of our entire existence – that is existential thought."⁶⁶

Standing at the threshold of a new era in theology while resolutely defending the program of previous generations, Wobbermin certainly understood that the times were changing. Germany had suffered a humiliating and catastrophic defeat in the First World War, an event that left the politically conservative Wobbermin in a state of severe depression and despair. The long and noble tradition of nineteenth-century liberal theology was fading into the twilight as a new star rose on the horizon. And yet Wobbermin continued to champion the old way forward. Perhaps this is due in part to his naturally conservative tendencies, but it is also clear that he genuinely believed that his religio-psychological method most faith-

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁵ Wobbermin lifts up this passage from the prologue of the fourth gospel as "the fundamental proposition of evangelical Christian knowledge of God." *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

fully preserved and handed on the best of the Protestant tradition. As he writes at the end of an article on the common ground between Luther and Schleiermacher:

To summarize, the fundamental direction of Schleiermacher's theological thought tends toward a religio-psychological, existential theology that seeks to make the correlative relationship between the *fides quae creditur* and the *fides qua creditur* into the decisive methodological authority. Insofar and inasmuch as Schleiermacher represents that intention, he returns to Luther's basic Reformation position and attempts to make this the basis of theological and dogmatic work. In this sense can one speak of a "Luther-Schleiermacher" line. It is the line of religio-psychological existential theology.⁶⁷

In a marketing blurb for Wobbermin's book, *Wort Gottes und evangelischer Glaube*, an editor from Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht makes a rather startling prediction about the legacy of Wobbermin's theology:

One can predict with a fair degree of certainty that when a given time has passed, systematic theology will still have to contend with Wobbermin's method; Barth, however, will have become a significant – and, for a particular bygone time, important – historical figure.⁶⁸

While this prediction clearly proved to be a spectacular failure, it nevertheless reveals something important about Wobbermin's status during his own time as well as something instructive about his legacy. Wobbermin was well-known and widely read in his lifetime and he taught in some of the most distinguished theological faculties of the period, including Heidelberg, Göttingen and Berlin. He served on the editorial board of the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* and was a leading authority on the psychology of religion in Germany and the United States. Despite these many contributions to the history of Christian thought, Wobbermin is to be numbered among the "forgotten theologians" of the early twentieth century. One persuasive reason why this is the case concerns his political activities toward the end of his life, when he enthusiastically supported the Nazi Party and, for a time, the *Deutsche Christen*. In fact, his last book was to be a study of Schleiermacher's

⁶⁷ Georg Wobbermin, "Gibt es eine Linie Luther-Schleiermacher?" *ZThK* NF 12 (1931): 250–260, 257–258. It is important to note here that Wobbermin consistently treats Schleiermacher as if he were a Lutheran, completely ignoring the fact that Schleiermacher was at least as indebted to Calvin as to Luther. For more on Schleiermacher's relationship to the Reformers, see B. A. Gerrish, "Schleiermacher and the Reformation: A Question of Doctrinal Development." *ChH* 49.2 (1980): 147–159, 158–159. For more on the relationship between Schleiermacher and Calvin in particular, see B. A. Gerrish, "From Calvin to Schleiermacher: The Theme and Shape of Christian Dogmatics." In Gerrish, *Continuing the Reformation*, 178–195.

⁶⁸ Cited in Klünker, *Psychologische Analyse und theologische Wahrheit*, 9.

German nationalism (it was never published).⁶⁹ However, he died in 1943, still a devoted member of the Nazi Party, and did not have the same opportunity for personal repentance and rehabilitation as did theologians with similar political allegiances, such as Paul Althaus, Gerhard Kittel, and Emanuel Hirsch.⁷⁰

Another likely reason that Wobbermin has been largely forgotten after his death is that Daniel Sommer Robinson proved to be correct: much of Wobbermin's work was indeed "pigeon-holed as a belated defense of a dead issue." Dialectical theology eclipsed liberalism soon after the First World War and dictated the directions much of Protestant theology would take for the next generation and beyond. Wobbermin, as a "captain of the liberal rearguard"⁷¹ during the Weimar era, simply faded into dialectical theology's shadow even as he continued to produce original and insightful work.

Schleiermacher's legacy managed to survive dialectical theology's period of dominance in Protestant thought despite the fact that Wobbermin's did not.⁷² This leads us to an important question: why bother to consider Wobbermin and his reception of Schleiermacher at all? Two conclusions might be drawn here as a response to this question. First, Wobbermin's work grants us a unique perspective on Schleiermacher, particularly when read in the context of dialectical theology's ascendancy and its deep distrust of Schleiermacher, so that by considering Wobbermin's reception of Schleiermacher we might also gain fresh insights into Schleiermacher's own theology. But even more basic is the realization – perhaps only possible now that we have gained sufficient historical distance – that Wobbermin is an intriguing figure in his own right, that perhaps he has been unjustly neglected, and that he might have something valuable and rewarding to say to us even now.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁰ The careers and legacies of these three figures are chronicled in Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler. Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, and Emanuel Hirsch*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.

⁷¹ B. A. Gerrish, "Doctor Martin Luther: Subjectivity and Doctrine in the Lutheran Reformation." In Gerrish, *Continuing the Reformation*, 38–56, 53.

⁷² An interesting case in point here is to be found in an article by Van Harvey entitled "A Word in Defense of Schleiermacher." *JR* 42.3 (1962): 151–170. In it, Harvey takes stock of the recent debates between Barth and Bultmann on theological method and from there moves to a consideration of Schleiermacher's value to theology in the middle of the twentieth century. He discusses such issues as psychology, religious experience, relational theology, the objective and subjective poles of faith, existential interpretations of revelation and faith, and the relationship of Schleiermacher to Luther and Calvin. He points out some of the similarities between the methods of Bultmann and Schleiermacher, even claiming in one instance that Bultmann can rightfully be said to stand at the end of the "Schleiermacher-Ritschl-Herrmann line" (167). But nowhere in this article does Harvey ever mention the name of Wobbermin.