



UMEÅ UNIVERSITET

# A Theology for the Bildungsbürgertum Ritschl in Context

**Leif Svensson**

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för  
avläggande av teologie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt  
försvar i Hörsal E, humanisthuset, lördagen den 15 december, kl.  
13:15. Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology,  
Johannes Zschücker, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of  
Oxford, Oxford, England.

Institutionen för idé- och samhällsstudier

**Organization**

Umeå University  
Department of Historical,  
Philosophical and Religious Studies

**Document type**

Doctoral thesis, monograph

**Date of publication**

23 November 2018

**Author**

Leif Svensson

**Title**

A Theology for the Bildungsbürgertum: Ritschl in Context

**Abstract**

The subject of this historical-theological investigation is the German Lutheran theologian Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889). Ritschl's theology is understood in the context of the de-Christianization of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated middle class). It is demonstrated that an ambition to counteract this tendency runs all through Ritschl's theological thinking. More specifically, the study argues that Ritschl's theology can be seen as a response to three intellectual challenges to Christianity in general and Lutheranism in particular – historical criticism, materialism, and anti-Lutheran polemics.

Part I concentrates on historical criticism and Ritschl's interpretation of history. Chapter 1, which presents Leopold von Ranke's historicist-oriented historical school at the University of Berlin and Ferdinand Christian Baur's theological Tübingen school, provides the wider setting of Ritschl's historical analysis. It is argued, in chapter 2, that those schools had a significant impact – albeit in different ways – on Ritschl's understanding of history. The contribution of Ritschl to the so-called first quest for the historical Jesus is analyzed in chapter 3, which also points out that Johannes Weiss' and Albert Schweitzer's apocalyptic critique of the first quest undermined the historical foundation of Ritschl's theology.

In part II, the focus is on materialism and the metaphysical framework of Ritschl's theology. Chapter 4 discusses anthropological materialism, scientific materialism, and late idealism – three intellectual movements of relevance to Ritschl's metaphysics. In chapter 5, Ritschl's metaphysical framework is described as an attempt to safeguard the spiritual dimension of existence against the threat of materialism. This chapter also argues that Ritschl's metaphysics is indebted to Hermann Lotze's late idealist philosophy. Chapter 6 highlights the relationship between Ritschl's metaphysics and his protest against "classical metaphysical theology," and examines how Ritschl's metaphysical framework leads him to reject natural theology and the classical Christological and trinitarian dogmas.

Part III discusses Ritschl's theological ethics or understanding of Christian life in the context of the values of the *Bildungsbürgertum* and against the background of anti-Lutheran polemics. In chapter 7, an overview of the ethos of the educated middle class is provided. The subject of chapter 8 is Ritschl's defense of Luther's cultural importance against Paul de Lagarde's criticism of the Lutheran Reformation. Chapter 9 carries out an analysis of Ritschl's thinking on Christian life and its modern sources, especially noting the influences of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schleiermacher, and exploring the similarities between Ritschl's ethics and the values of the educated middle class.

In the Conclusion, the findings of the investigation are summarized in the claim that Ritschl's responses to historical criticism, materialism, and anti-Lutheran polemics demonstrate that his theology in many respects was a theology for the *Bildungsbürgertum*. The concluding chapter also reflects on the implications of the present study for the common characterization of Ritschl as a *Kulturprotestant* (mediator between the Protestant Reformation and modern culture), problematizes Ritschl's interpretation of the historical Jesus, and argues that Ritschl's theological project was essentially abandoned by his most famous students.

**Keywords**

Albrecht Ritschl, the kingdom of God, theology, Christian ethics, Kulturprotestantismus, Bildungsbürgertum, nineteenth-century Germany, historical criticism, historicism, the historical Jesus, materialism, late idealism, Luther and modernity, criticism of religion

**Language**

English

**ISBN**

978-91-7601-978-8

**Number of pages**

314