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## Religion and the Religions. The 'Fifth Speech' in Dialogue with Contemporary Concepts of a 'Theology of Religions'<sup>1</sup>

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A public dialogue usually involves two parties whose positions are to be presented to the hearers. In this case, we have, on the one hand, the "pluralistic theology of religion" and on the other, Schleiermacher's view of religions as presented in the fifth speech of his *On Religion. Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*. The dialogue in question is a dialogue not only between persons but between the centuries separating those positions. On this account, something like a moderator is needed. In taking on this role for this particular dialogue at a conference dedicated to the study of Schleiermacher, I will only briefly outline the position of recent pluralistic theologies of religion before dwelling in a more detailed manner on Schleiermacher's fifth speech. Limited space does not permit the presentation of a complete picture of both positions. Thus, regarding the structure of my paper, I intend first to concentrate on one problem which arises in the pluralistic theology of religion (I.); then, in the second section, I will endeavor to show how Schleiermacher deals with this problem in his fifth speech (II.). In the final and shortest, section, I will summarize by way of a short comparison, and present three theses for discussion (III.).

### I. The concept of religions in the pluralistic 'theology of religions.'

#### 1. The program of a 'Theology of Religion'.

The term 'pluralistic theology of religion' pools positions presented, for instance, by John Hick, the late Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Raimund

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Jacob Corzine, M.Div., who edited and corrected the English text.

Panikkar<sup>2</sup>; in the German speaking realm, by Gustav Mensching and – in the current generation – Reinhold Bernhardt or the former Catholic theologian, Perry Schmidt-Leukel.<sup>3</sup> All these theologians and philosophers are opposed to the mutually exclusive truth claims of specific religious traditions and are unified in the aim to find a non-exclusive understanding of religion. In the following remarks, I will focus on one of them, John Hick, along with his student, Perry Schmidt-Leukel<sup>4</sup>.

The context of John Hick's argument is an apologetic one.<sup>5</sup> He points out that all religions are faced with the challenge of modern atheism; all of them are involved in a debate with a 'naturalistic' alternative which interprets the religious claim of living in the presence of a transcendent reality as a projection or delusion. One of the arguments this naturalistic alternative brings forward is the plurality and apparently irreconcilable contention between and within the different religions. According to the naturalists, the variety of concepts of a transcendent beyond the visible reality, as they present themselves in the different religions, is indicative of a lacking reality-relatedness in these concepts of God.<sup>6</sup>

John Hick, however, tries to convert this argument against the reality-relatedness of religious concepts into an argument in favor of the reality of something as 'God.' He suggests that the indisputably present differences in conceptualizing the transcendent reality across a variety of religious doctrines and concepts of God are due to the one transcendent reality, in whose presence all religions claim to live, being symbolized in mediums of encountering the transcendent which are culture-

<sup>2</sup> For instance: John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human responses to the Transcendent* (Houndsmills and London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1989); Wilfried Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979); John Hick, Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987); Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, rev. ed. 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Mensching, *Toleranz und Wahrheit in der Religion* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1955); Reinhold Bernhardt, *Der Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums: Von der Aufklärung bis zur Pluralistischen Religionstheologie* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 2nd ed. 1991); Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Theologie der Religionen: Probleme, Optionen, Argumente, Beiträge zur Fundamentaltheologie und Religionsphilosophie 1* (Neuried: Ars una, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> For Perry Schmidt-Leukel, I will concentrate on his most recent book *Gott ohne Grenzen: Eine christliche und pluralistische Theologie der Religionen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> For the following cf. Hick, *Interpretation*, 7-9; 111-25; 210-30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9; 12-15.

dependent and therefore distinct from each other. These mediums include persons, ministries, rites, and ways of life.<sup>7</sup>

*„A contemporary apologetic for belief in the transcendent, then, must start from the new situation revealed by our modern awareness of religious plurality and conceptual relativity. It must see religious thought and experience as a global continuum containing an immense variety of forms in a history moving from archaic beginnings to the present still evolving state of the great world traditions. It must recognise to the full the presence of culture-relative projection and symbolization within this long history. And it must show reason to believe that this vast and multivarious field of human faith is nevertheless not wholly projection and illusion ... but constitutes our variously transparent and opaque interface with a mysterious transcendent reality.“<sup>8</sup>*

Thus it is evident that the pluralistic theology of religion, as presented by John Hick, has an apologetic background. This is also the reason why, at the core of his position, there lies the question of whether the concept of God or of a transcendent is a delusion, or whether it signifies a reality that exists.

## 2. The soteriological experience and its different symbolizations.

But according to John Hick, a religion is not merely a set of insights referring to a transcendent reality. Following Karl Jaspers and Robert Bellah, Hick distinguishes 'archaic' and 'postaxial' religions.<sup>9</sup> Only the latter sort is of interest here. All postaxial religions are essentially focused on a soteriological insight: human beings are seen as being in need of redemption. At the core of these religions lies the redemptive concept of a "human transformation" from "self-centredness" to "reality-centredness." For them, to live in the presence of God means to be centered in reality instead of in oneself:

*„The great post-axial traditions ... exhibit in their different ways a soteriological structure which identifies the misery, unreality, triviality and perversity of ordinary human life, affirms an ultimate unity of reality and value in which or in relation to which a limitlessly better quality of existence is possible, and shows the way to realise that radically better possibility. ... the generic concept of salvation / liberation, which takes a different specific form in each of the great traditions, is that of the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness.“<sup>10</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 233-51.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 9, emphasis mine.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 21-35.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 36; cf. 299-303.

At the core of the postaxial religions lies a soteriological experience, a transformation of the structure of human existence. All dogmatic and ethical conventions are nothing more than means of eliciting and symbolizing this experience. The existing positive religions are 'human responses' to the experience of a transcendent reality.

The plurality of existing religions is due to the fact that this transformation and its framework are mediated through different experiences and therefore symbolized differently in different cultural contexts. According to Hick, the followers of the different religious traditions should distinguish their own symbolization of an ultimate reality upon which life is to be focused, from this reality itself. Unfortunately, in order to adequately distinguish between the ultimate reality, which he calls 'the Real', and the variety of culturally differing concepts of God with the particular traditions, Hick turns to Kant's distinction between phenomenon and noumenon (that is, between the *Ding an sich* and its appearance).<sup>11</sup> 'The Real' is something beyond personal or impersonal concepts of God in the particular religious traditions. The religious traditions become means of encountering the transforming influence of this 'reality beyond reality,' and thus means of being in the presence of the ultimate. But no religion should confuse its set of concepts, rites and visualizations of the ultimate with the ultimate itself.<sup>12</sup>

This distinction between the ultimate and its symbolization in the different religions, together with the distinction between religious concepts and the soteriological effects of religions, makes it possible, according to John Hick, to treat all religions as individuals of a common species who have in common the orientation of the life of believers toward an ultimate reality, albeit under different names – as in a title of one of his first books: 'God has many names.' He writes:

„It is in relation to different ways of being human, developed within the civilisations and cultures of the earth, that the Real, apprehended through the concept of God, is experienced specifically as the God of Israel, or as the Holy Trinity, or as Shiva, or as Allah, or as Vishnu ... And it is in relation to yet other forms of life that the Real, apprehended through the concept of the Absolute, is experienced as Brahman, or as Nirvana, or as Being, or as Sunyata ...“<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 241-251.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 246-77.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 245.

### 3. Preliminary summary

This is an abridged version of the basic insight of one of the most influential representatives of a 'pluralistic theology of religion.' At the center rests, first, the distinction between the Real and the variety of personal and non-personal concepts of God in religious traditions; second, the distinction between the soteriological concept of an existential transformation from self-centeredness to 'Real'-centeredness as found in the doctrines and rites of the positive religions; and third, the interpretation of the positive religions as an actualization or symbolization of this transformation in persons, rites and other means of encountering God or 'being in the presence of the ultimate reality.'

Hick's distinction between 'the Real' and the specific personal or impersonal concepts of an ultimate entity is comparable to the distinction Cantwell Smith makes between belief – 'doctrinal opinion' or 'being convinced that ...' –, and faith in the sense of 'trust.'<sup>14</sup> Smith, too, argues that religion is essentially faith, by which he means a pre-theoretical "human orientation to transcendence" which is independent of particular beliefs in the sense of 'being convinced that ...': Therefore this orientation does not presuppose particular convictions, but it is, according to Smith, a transcendental anthropological category, a "capacity of faith" which finds its concrete form and expression in different religious beliefs. Because they link this faith to the condition of the affirmation of particular theoretical convictions or opinions, these beliefs are a continuous danger to the existential meaning of religion as an act of faith or way of trusting in an ultimate reality.<sup>15</sup>

It is undisputable that recent 'pluralistic theologies' do not achieve the level of sophistication of Schleiermacher's concept of religion. The main difference is the lack of an elaborate theory of subjectivity as foundation for their theory of religion. Nevertheless, all of them, as also Schleiermacher, are looking for a concept of religion or of faith that is not inseparably linked to being convinced that a certain doctrine is true or that a set of religious rites exclusively conveys salvation. In other words, they are, as Schleiermacher, seeking a concept of religion beyond 'knowing' and 'doing'.

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<sup>14</sup> Cantwell Smith, *Faith*, esp. 105-72, esp. 128-58; cf. Andreas Grünschloss, *Religionswissenschaft als Welt-Theologie – Wilfried Cantwell Smiths interreligiöse Hermeneutik, Forschungen zur Systematischen und Ökumenischen Theologie 71* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Cantwell Smith, *Faith*, 129-36.

#### 4. Religion and religions.

Now for the problem I promised to demonstrate – two problems actually: I have mentioned Cantwell Smith because, in his theory, the main operation of some of the representatives of a 'pluralistic theology of religion' can be identified: the concept of 'Faith' is a generic concept gained by an act of abstraction. This is true of most forms of a theory of religion hovering over the 'positive religions.'<sup>16</sup> However, the following question must be raised regarding the role or function of the positive religions: why do we have 'religions' aside from religion, why do we have gods as forms of 'the Real', why 'beliefs' in addition to faith? Hick, for instance, argues that all positive religions and concepts of God are culture-related realizations of the orientation toward the Real, i.e. of the reality-centredness of human existence. Living in different cultural contexts, human beings then use the means of these contexts to express their relation to 'the Real.' Accordingly, they also have different religious convictions, rites, doctrines, concepts of God (Hick) and beliefs (Smith), which are forms of being related to the ultimate reality of the Real beyond the Gods (Hick) or expressions of the attitude of faith. But the question remains: Why does religion (Real-centredness or faith) distinguish itself into different religions and their denominations? Is it impossible to be related to the Real without being a member of one of these positive religions? And if so: Why is that impossible? Why is it – as it seems – essential for the Real-centredness to divide itself into subspecies and denominations and into individual religious conceptions? Is that merely an accidental fact contingent on the cultural differences in which human beings live, or is it a fact that belongs to the essence of religion, and if so, why?

And that raises a second question: Where does this generic concept of faith or of religion or of 'the Real' come from? This question is relevant because the generic concept is not only derived by abstraction from all existing religions, but is fundamental to a criticism of such existing religious convictions. According to Hick, not all of these are equally acceptable. A religion which favors mutilation of women, the sacrifice of human beings, or war as a means of mission is, according to Hick or Schmidt-Leuckel, not a legitimate form of the orientation toward God or 'the Real'.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, this concept of 'religion beyond the Gods' is not simply gained by abstraction but is a normative concept; it implies ethical criteria not derived from but to be met by all existing

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-142.

<sup>17</sup> Hick, *Interpretation*, 299-315, cf. 316-42.

religions. As Hick, also Schmidt-Leukel holds the opinion that these criteria are gained from the soteriological experience that lies at the core of religions. That implies, according to Schmidt-Leukel, that these criteria are derived from the specific soteriological experience of the one specific religion in which the interpreter participates – in the case of Schmidt-Leukel, Christianity. According to Schmidt-Leukel, this soteriological experience and the fundamental attitude derived from each religion's specific experience of salvation is the criterion by which these religions evaluate the truth claims of other religious convictions. He argues that, on the basis of the compatibility of these soteriological concepts, these religious traditions, notwithstanding their differences on the level of dogmatic convictions, can mutually acknowledge each other as being of equal intrinsic value. They aim at an identical soteriological transformation (Real-relatedness instead of self-relatedness) and at compatible existential and ethical effects of that transformation.<sup>18</sup> In this way, a pluralistic 'theology of religion' aims at the dialogue between different religious traditions in order to seek, not a conformity of doctrines or material convictions, but a conformity of the structure of life according to the soteriological experience of 'being in the presence of The Real' which results from these religious traditions. But this implies that the starting point of a generic concept of religion is one particular religious tradition, and such a generic concept is inevitably shaped by this starting point. There is no religion *an sich* apart from the actual positive religions; rather, religion always is realized in certain convictions, rites, and concepts of salvation. The generic concept of religions is derived from the perspective of the one religion in which the interpreter participates.

There is no 'religion *an sich*' apart from the 'positive religions.' To be religious means to participate in one specific, positive religion – this is the position Schleiermacher holds in his fifth speech entitled 'On the religions;' focusing now on this text, we will see that Schleiermacher deals with a comparable problem.

## II. Schleiermacher's concept of positive religions.

The systematic center of Schleiermacher's debate with the "cultured despisers" of religion, at first sight, is undoubtedly the second speech and its description of the essence of religion. But as far as I can see, he

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<sup>18</sup> Schmidt-Leukel *Gott*, 250-69.

does not actually reach his goal until the fifth speech. Indisputably, the third and fourth speeches, but also the fifth speech, develop the implications of the concept of religion which has already been outlined in the second speech. Nevertheless, some additional light is shed on that concept of religion by these explanations. In this section, I have a very limited aim: First, I will try to reproduce the argument of the fifth speech. Based on that, I will remark briefly on the systematic position of the fifth speech in the *Religionsschrift* as a whole; and I will try to show that the fifth speech is, in fact, the key to interpreting the speeches. Finally, coming back to the remarks on the recent 'Theologies of Religion,' I will draw some consequences for the hermeneutics of a theory of religion.

#### 1. The subject of the fifth speech.

As all of you know, the subject of the fifth speech is the relation of the concept of religion in the second speech to the existing, positive religions (positive religions are the givens, like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism).<sup>19</sup> Given the definition of religion as "intuition of the universe," and given that this is the very core of religious consciousness and the very core by which religions are religions – why do we need these positive religions at all? If religion is the intuition of the universe and if it is this intuition that makes a religion a religion, would it not be appropriate to deal, not with the particular ideas and rites and commandments of the various religious traditions, but instead to turn to a concept of religion that reflects this unity of religions at the foundation of the differences? The concept of a natural religion seems to be the model of religion better suited to the essence of religion Schleiermacher outlines in the second speech. So it is that Schleiermacher is at a decisive point in his speeches: He has to clear up the misunderstanding that his theory of religion is merely a concept of natural religion that is unable to come to terms with positive religions. Here is his counter-thesis:

"... if religion is exhibited only in and through such determinate forms [i.e., in and through positive religions; N.S.], then only the person who settles

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the thorough interpretation of the fifth speech by Markus Schröter, *Das 'unendliche Chaos' der Religion. Die Pluralität der Religionen in Schleiermachers 'Reden'*. Ulrich Barth et al. (eds.), *200 Jahre 'Reden über die Religion'. Akten des 1. Internationalen Kongresses der Schleiermachersgesellschaft* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 585-608.



down in such a form with his own religion really establishes ... an active citizenship in the religious world ..."<sup>20</sup>

So this is the claim: There is no 'intuition of the universe' apart from participation in the specific form of a positive religion. I will try to explain this by developing Schleiermacher's argument.

## 2. Why positive religions at all?

First of all, it is obvious from the concept of religion in the second speech that religion is not possible without an individual object, item or experience by which the intuition of the universe is elicited. If it is religion, as Schleiermacher writes in his second speech, to accept the individual and finite as part of the whole and as a representation of the universe<sup>21</sup>, then there has to be something finite and limited that is seen as part and manifestation or incarnation of the universe. It is in the finite that the religious subject sees infinity. The concept of religion implies a connection between something individual and the whole, something limited and the universe, something finite and the infinite.

But that alone does not imply that the positive religions have a constitutive function. It could be understood such that the religious subjects each have their own particular intuitions of the universe, which are stimulated in very different ways and by very different mediums – like seeking God in the forest – and therefore are not or not *exclusively* stimulated by means of positive religious traditions, rites, or persons. In a way, this is Schleiermacher's point of view: It is not possible to determine *a priori* the means by which the "sensibility and taste for the infinite"<sup>22</sup> is aroused or not aroused, and Schleiermacher does not rule out the possibility that a human being may be seized by the universe not as a member or by the elements of one of the existing religious traditions<sup>23</sup>, but otherwise made an "admirer of the universe."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, he emphasizes, as he did before in the second and fourth speeches, that even if a person's sense for the universe is opened in the context of an existing religion and in the way that thousands of persons before or after him have come to experience the universe, it is neverthe-

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion. Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 104 [261]. In the following, I will quote from this translation; in square brackets I will provide the page number of the 1799 edition.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 [56].

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 [53].

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-05 [262].

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 58 [143].

less an authentic, individual religious experience essentially independent of all heteronomous instances or it is nothing at all.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Schleiermacher deals with the concept of a natural religion on the one hand;<sup>26</sup> but the subtext of the fifth speech is his own position that describes religion as an irreplaceably individual reality. Here, he raises the question of whether this individuality of religion might not rule out a constitutive role of super-individual entities such as the positive religions are.<sup>27</sup> Thus it is that Schleiermacher intends not only to show that religion is always a particular and individual experience, but also that religion necessarily occurs in the super-individual form of positive religions with certain ideas, convictions, rites and founders. Religion – intuition of the universe – does not express itself in a way that is identical for all human beings – that is his antithesis against the concept of a natural religion; but, conversely, religion is also not individual in the sense that each human person shapes religious rites and convictions or holy commandments of his own. The sense and taste for the infinite is elicited, formed and shaped within the context of existing super-individual religious traditions.

### 3. The identity of positive religions.

Therefore, Schleiermacher has to precisely verify the connection of the intuition of the universe to positive religions, and he does so by determining what makes a specific religion: not a question of the specific distinguishing factors of a given religion, for instance of Islam or Christianity or Judaism, but generally of how religions are distinguished from one another. In other words: How does a religion gain or sustain a distinctive identity?<sup>28</sup>

Schleiermacher ponders three possible answers. The first: There are different symbols, doctrines, rites, certain feelings as joy, contrition etc., which he calls "elements of religion" or "religious material." The differences in this material or the fact that one religion has elements that another one lacks could be the basis of the specific identity. That would imply that all followers of one specific religion necessarily share the same feelings and opinions or convictions. This is a common but improper way to distinguish religions or to determine the identity of one given religion because, as Schleiermacher points out, these elements of

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 104-08 [261-72]; cf. 50 [121].

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 108-11 [272-79].

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 104-05 [262].

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 100 [249-50].

religion are accidental in the sense that they can change for instance in the lifetime of an individual person or in the history of a positive religion, without changing the identity of the religion. Thus, an inductive method of determining the identity of a religion leads nowhere.<sup>29</sup>

The second possible answer to the question of the means by which a religion gains a distinctive identity might refer to the different ways of symbolizing the universe or forming concepts of an ultimate reality – as a personal God or an impersonal highest principle or a panentheistic all-inclusive substance. But by such a deduction, or through such a diheresis, Schleiermacher argues, we are led to species of religions, but not to the individual positive religions themselves.<sup>30</sup>

Neither the given religious material nor the deduction of subspecies of the intuition of the universe enables us to determine the character or the identity of a positive religion. Thus, Schleiermacher suggests a third option: The identity of an individual religion is determined by an act of will, a free choice by which one special, particular intuition of the universe is made the organizing center and the core to which all the religious material is related and by which relation it gets its specific and distinctive shape:

"Let me say it briefly: An individual instance of religion such as we are seeking cannot be established other than through free choice by making a particular intuition of the universe the center of the whole of religion and relating everything therein to it. ... thereby the whole suddenly takes on a determinate spirit; everything that was previously ambiguous and indeterminate is fixed ... all individual elements now appear from a perspective of the same name that is turned toward that center ..."<sup>31</sup>

That means, for instance: The elements that the Christian tradition shares with the Muslim tradition – the conviction that God has created the world and rules it for a judgment to come – is shaped in either of these religions in a specific way by relation to one particular, individualizing intuition of the universe. Therefore, *the seemingly identical* expectation of a Final Judgment differs in Islam and Christianity.

"Through free choice," Schleiermacher writes, a particular intuition is made the center of a religion – but what does "free choice" mean? In the first instance, "free choice" means that this particular way of intuiting the universe cannot be deduced from the concept of religion, and it means that there is no *necessary* connection between the essence of religion and particular means of revelation, persons, or rites. In other words: It belongs to the essence of religion that it occurs by means, but

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 100-02 [250-55].

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-04 [255-59].

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 104 [259-60].

not by any particular means; that is: religion occurs contingently; it cannot be deduced. Put simply, religion is a historic entity. Secondly, this means that there are no privileged intuitions or privileged expressions of the intuition of the universe. Basically, in order to be a religious person, it is not necessary to become or stay a member of a *specific* religion.

But why and, above all, in which sense does an act of choice lie at the core of religion? In order to answer this question, Schleiermacher refers to the way personal identity is constituted, implicitly adopting John Locke's description of personal identity.<sup>32</sup> Schleiermacher shows that a human person is constituted neither merely by a particular body, nor by a set of circumstances of his course of life, nor by the choices he makes, nor by the influences he is under. All this is part or material of an individual person's identity. But identity, personal identity, is consciousness of identity leading back to a moment when this consciousness arose – not as an indeterminate moment, but as the consciousness that connects and organizes the given and future material of my life in a very special and particular way.

At this point, Schleiermacher draws a parallel between this concept of personal identity and the identity of an individual religion, or strictly speaking, two parallels<sup>33</sup>: The first is to the religious consciousness of an individual person. As already noted, a person is one and the same through the consciousness connecting the occurrences in his life. In the same way, a person has a religious identity that goes back to one decisive and underivable intuition of the universe. All the elements of his or her religious life – services, certain rites, certain ways of symbolizing the universe by particular concepts of God, specific ways of dealing with this God, are related back to this particular moment of intuition in which the sense of the universe has been aroused. And the same holds true with respect to super-individual religious traditions, like the positive religions. All of them go back to one individual religious experience, a *Stifterpersönlichkeit*, a founder-personage, not to be deduced or derived, who came to experience the universe and to symbolize and express this intuition in a way that became the means for others to become 'admirers of the universe'.

"Every such formation of religion, where everything is seen and felt in relation to a central intuition, wherever and however it is formed, and whatever this preferred intuition may be, is a truly positive religion. In respect to the whole of religion, it is a heresy ...because something highly volun-

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 106 sq. John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II, 27.

<sup>33</sup> For the following cf. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 106-08 [262-72].

tary is the cause of its having arisen. In regard to the community of all participants and their relationship to him who first founded their religion it is a own school and discipleship because he first saw that intuition in the center of religion."<sup>34</sup>

That implies that there exists not only a parallel between the religious identity of an individual person and the individual religions in the sense of religious traditions, but that the religious traditions are based on an individual person in whose life the sense for the infinite was aroused (as it may be in many other lives). However, this *special* intuition and its expression become the source of intuition of the universe for others and so a religious tradition comes to life, going back to one individual person in whose special way of experiencing and symbolizing the universe others can share. You could say that the individual religions are collective religious individuals – if you don't misunderstand this as an indication of religious heteronomy, for the following remains undisputed:

"In religion there is, of course, a mastership and discipleship. There are individuals to whom thousands attach themselves, but this attachment is no blind imitation and they are not disciples because their master has made them into this; he is rather their master because they have chosen him as that. He who, by expressing his own religion, has aroused it in others no longer has it in his power to keep them for himself; their religion is also free as soon as it lives and goes its own way."<sup>35</sup>

Regarding the question of in which sense the individual or super-individual religion gains its identity by an act of choice, it may be said that Schleiermacher underlines – as in the quote above – that this bond to a master and to his religious mastership is not heteronomous. Even so, the act of choice is not at the disposal of the individual person, just as the person is not free or does not choose to be seized by a religious experience. The intuition at the beginning of a religious tradition or at the beginning of an individual religious consciousness is the equivalent of the *Offenbarung* (revelation).<sup>36</sup> That means: in an experience that is not at the disposal of the human being, the universe, as Schleiermacher says, creates its own admirers.

In summary, the same way that the identity of a human person is shaped by the point of origin of a consciousness connecting all the experiences of a course of life in a special way, religion goes back to one point of origin where the subject's capacity for religion was elicited and

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 104 [260-61].

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 58 [141-42].

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 49 [118-19].

came into being. This holds true for the individual religious experience as well as for the super-individual positive religions:

"Religious people are thoroughly historical ... The moment in which they themselves have been filled by the intuition that has made itself the focal point of their religion is always sacred to them; it appears to them as an immediate influence of the deity ... Yet this whole of religion and the religious culture of a great mass of humanity is something infinitely greater than their own religious life and the small fragments of this religion they personally exhibit. They glorify this fact, therefore, in every way ... never exhibit one of its elements, without orienting and portraying it in connection with this fact."<sup>37</sup>

In these sentences, the autonomy of the individual religion is not relativized; but the individual religion is a fragment, a limited but indispensable modification in which the super-individual religious tradition presents and actualizes itself. The super-individual religious traditions, on their part, are forms and shapes in which the essence of religion actualizes itself in a variety of historical positive religions. At this point, the speeches are open to a history of religion – that is, to a determination of the essence of religion based on the variety of religions in the course of history.

#### 4. Why does religion need mediation?

The connection between positive religions and the development of the religious capacity sketched here still comes as a surprise, if one remembers how Schleiermacher emphasized the autonomy of the religious individual. Certainly, he does not revoke this autonomy, but now he emphasizes the difference between master and disciple. While in the speeches before he had strongly stressed the fact that this difference is to vanish,<sup>38</sup> in the fifth speech he emphasizes the fact that the current religious consciousness is permanently linked to its point of origin<sup>39</sup>. He seems to say that religious experience is necessarily mediated and elicited by means of a positive religion going back to a religious master and representing his way of intuiting the universe and expressing this intuition. As I said, Schleiermacher revokes nothing; but the emphasis has shifted in this last speech. He now underlines the fact that, indispensably and necessarily, the formation of the individual religious capacity, the intuition of the universe, is in need of mediation.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 112 [282-83].

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 7-8 [10-13]; 50 [121-22]; 58 [141-42].

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 104-03 [262-63]; 111-13 [282-84].

Once again, take note that Schleiermacher does not exclude that someone among us might have an intuition of the universe mediated by no particular religious tradition:

"... a person who does not fit into one of those that are readily available ... will surely not belong to any of them, but make a new one."<sup>40</sup>

But obviously, Schleiermacher is of the opinion that religious consciousness is usually aroused in the context of a positive religion and thus mediated by it. Given the possibility that religious consciousness may also arise outside of positive religions, how can he be so sure about this?

As far as I can see, the key to answering this question lies in the description of the essence, i.e. the core intuition of Christianity, which Schleiermacher outlines in the last pages of the fifth speech.<sup>41</sup> The basic intuition permeating and influencing all elements and material of Christian religion is that the finite strains against the infinite. At the core lies the intuition of an insurmountable tendency of the finite to be something in itself and not an individual as part of a whole, of the universe. In this sense, the finite has an insurmountable tendency to be nonreligious, to cling to the finite and not to relate it to the universe and to see it and itself as a part of the universe. But the basic intuition of Christian religion is not alone the insight into that corruption, but this insight combined with the experience of the universe overcoming this tendency by reconciling that enmity:

"[The basic intuition] is not other than the intuition of the universal straining of everything finite against the unity of the whole and of the way in which the deity handles this striving, how it reconciles the enmity directed against it ... by scattering over the whole individual points that are at once finite and infinite, at once human and divine. Corruption and redemption, enmity and mediation are two sides of this intuition that are inseparably bound to each other, and the shape of all religious material in Christianity and its whole form are determined through them."<sup>42</sup>

In the first instance, Christianity is the one religion at whose core lies this insight into the human tendency to be non-religious and therefore into the necessity of salvation by means of the self-'revelation' of the universe. And due to the fact that human beings cling to finite entities, this revelation has to have the form of a finite entity, in an underivable experience, eliciting the intuition of the universe – and that is the function of positive religions and their means of encountering the universe. So the Christian insight into human sinfulness implies the insight that

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 104 [262].

<sup>41</sup> For the following, cf. 115-22 [291-307].

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 115 [291].

religion – intuition of the universe – needs to be elicited by means of finite entities. In other words: No religion except by the means of positive religions. No religion without incarnation of the Deity.

Furthermore, to be non-religious, to cling to the finite, according to the first and second speeches, is not only a characteristic of atheistic positions but also of positions which, regarding themselves as deeply religious or even Christian, identify religion with moral or metaphysics, or doctrinal convictions, thus misunderstanding the essence of religion. Properly understood, Christianity is the positive religion that deals with this tendency to be non-religious and distinguishes pseudo-religion from true religion or, put in other words, distinguishes the Gods and the Universe. The core of Christianity is the criticism of pseudo-religion which Schleiermacher pursues in his speeches.<sup>43</sup> Christianity, according to Schleiermacher, is the self-criticism of religion.

Therefore, the concept of religion put forth by Schleiermacher in his speeches reveals itself in the fifth speech as the very essence of Christianity: the critique of making an object of religion and of the Universe. According to the fifth speech, it belongs to the very essence of Christianity to distinguish religion from the means by which religion is elicited and from the forms by which religion expresses itself – and exactly that is it what Schleiermacher does in his speeches. Therefore, the last of the speeches takes the veil away from this theory of religion. It claims to be a specifically Christian theory of religion – more than that, it claims to be the essence of Christianity.

### III. Three points.

That means – and this is the first point I want to make: the constitutive function of positive religions as the means by which religion comes into being and thus by which the human capacity for religion is aroused is not, as Schleiermacher wants to make us believe, derived from his concept of the essence of religion. Rather, it is due to an insight that is specifically Christian. Specifically Christian is the insight, *first*, in that the capacity for religion is corrupted and, *secondly*, in that it is therefore reliant on a medium by which this capacity is reinforced and the human person made to realize that all beings are but a part of the universe. And it is, *thirdly*, a specifically Christian insight because, by realizing this, the person is reintegrated into the whole, and thus, into the universe.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 116-19 [294-99].



This implies – with respect to the fifth speech and the connection of religion and religions, that Schleiermacher does not develop a concept of religion independent of his own devotion to Christianity. Rather, in this respect, his concept of religion is specifically tied to his Christian perspective. It is, with respect to this point, a distinctively Christian theory of religion.

Secondly, having this in mind, it would be interesting to ask whether this is only true for this aspect of the theory: It might prove that this theory of religion is fundamentally Christian, and that the fifth speech and its description of Christian religion is the key for the whole concept – and that means also for the second speech and its definition of the essence of religion.

Finally, thinking this over and going back to the recent 'Theologies of Religion' outlined in the first part of this paper, it might prove that it is not a fault that Schleiermacher could have avoided, but rather a basic systematic or hermeneutical insight to be gained through the *Speeches on Religion* and especially the fifth one. If it is true, firstly, that religion can only be understood by being a religious subject or by being seized by the universe, and secondly, that religion is not to be had except in the form of a positive religion, then it must *inevitably* hold, that a *theory* of religion also reflects the perspective of one specific religious tradition. The concept of an "essence" of religion necessarily reflects this perspective, as well, and this theory of religion deals with other religions from this perspective.