



**Simon Gerber**

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## **„They Shall Be All Taught of God“**

Schleiermacher on Christianity and Protestantism

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## “They Shall Be All Taught of God”

### Schleiermacher on Christianity and Protestantism

#### I

Therefore it is time to take up the subject from the other end and to start with the sharp opposition in which religion is found over against morals and metaphysics. That was what I wanted. ... Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. ... Praxis is an art, speculation is a science, religion is sensibility and taste for the infinite.<sup>1</sup>

Thus wrote the young Reformed chaplain Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1799. His friends from the Berlin romantic circle had urged him to write a philosophical book, and so Schleiermacher had taken advantage of a stay of several months at Potsdam as a vicarious court preacher, far from his ordinary affairs as hospital chaplain at the Charité in Berlin. The result was five apologetic speeches on religion, addressed to its cultural despisers. When Enlightenment theologians had defended religion, they had tried to show its utility for the common life: Religion makes a man moral; it helps one to achieve virtue and blissfulness. You do not like those “poorly stitched together fragments of metaphysics and morals that are called rational Christianity,”<sup>2</sup> Schleiermacher tells the despisers of religion; nor do I. But, he says, I can show you what is genuine religion; it belongs properly to human nature, but nowadays it is “held in a despicable slavery.”<sup>3</sup>

Now, what kind of feeling and intuition would be genuine religion, freed from that slavery? It is an intuition of the universe that seeks to “accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite.”<sup>4</sup> If you view the world around you not only as an aggregation and accumulation of separate particulars to be explored and worked upon, but, rather, you feel everything, including yourself, as belonging to the one universe and representing the universe, you are religious.

A crucial point for the interpreters is the question of whether religion as intuition, according to Schleiermacher, is an attitude only of passiveness and affec-

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1 Schleiermacher 1799:50, 52 f (1984:211 f; 1996:22 f).

2 *Ibid.*:25 (1984:199; 1996:12).

3 *Ibid.*:26 (1984:199 f; 1996:13).

4 *Ibid.*:56 (1984:214; 1996:25).

tion, or whether elements of activity – that is, of interpretation and construction of the particulars, perceived as the one coherent universe, also pertain to it.<sup>5</sup> Later on, in his scientific system of philosophy and theology, Schleiermacher modified intuition into his theory of feeling as immediate self-consciousness, which is the point of indifference preceding intellect and will. This immediate self-consciousness continues unchanged while acts of reflection and of will alternate and relieve one another. Religion is feeling and has its anthropological place at the very base, in the immediate self-consciousness, beyond intellect and will (or, as the Speeches have it, beyond metaphysics and morals).<sup>6</sup> It is the feeling of absolute dependency, the feeling of one’s relation to God.<sup>7</sup>

Back to the Speeches on Religion! Religion as intuition of the universe has two peculiar attributes: it is individual, and it seeks community and communication. A particular religion or individual instance of religion arises “through free choice by making a particular intuition of the universe the center [or central intuition or fundamental intuition] of the whole of religion and relating everything therein to it.”<sup>8</sup>

Such arbitrarily centralized intuitions are the positive religions, despised and rejected by the friends of enlightenment, who prefer a natural or rational religion that can be common to all.<sup>9</sup> Schleiermacher replies:

So-called natural religion is usually so refined and has such philosophical and moral manners that it allows little of the unique character of religion to shine through.<sup>10</sup> ...

You will find that precisely the positive religions are these determinate forms in which infinite religion manifests itself in the finite, and that natural religion cannot claim to be something similar inasmuch as it is merely an indefinite, insufficient and paltry idea that can never really exist by itself.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, individuality and positiveness of religion do not mean that each individual has his own hermetically secluded religion. On the contrary:

Once there is religion, it must necessarily also be social. That not only lies in human nature but also is preeminently in the nature of religion. You must admit that it is highly unnatural

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Albrecht 1994; Grove 2004; Lauster 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Schleiermacher 1806:44–78 (1995:43–64); 2002, I:141–143 (Dialectics, lectures 1814/15, lesson 35, § 214 f); 1830–1831, I:§ 3.2–5 (2003, I:22–32).

<sup>7</sup> Schleiermacher 1830–1831, I:§ 4 (2003, I:32–40).

<sup>8</sup> Schleiermacher 1799:259 f, cf. 265 (1984:303, cf. 305 f; 1996:104, cf. 106).

<sup>9</sup> Cf., e. g., Kant 1794:167–183 (1914:115–124); 1798:70–115 (1917:48–69).

<sup>10</sup> Schleiermacher 1799:243 (1984:296; 1996:98).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*:248, cf. 274 f (1984:298 f, cf. 309 f; 1996:100, cf. 109).

for a person to want to lock up himself what he has created and worked out. ... But the most proper object of this desire for communication is unquestionably that where man originally feels himself to be passive, his intuitions and feelings.<sup>12</sup>

## II

What is Christianity? It is one positive religion among others, one of the forms in which infinite religion realises itself. And what is its *differentia specifica* among religions? According to the Speeches on Religion, the original intuition of Christianity is:

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 ... Corruption and redemption, enmity and mediation are two sides of this intuition that are inseparably bound to each other.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the problem of human history and of religion itself is the material for the original intuition of Christianity; among religions, Christianity is raised to a higher power.<sup>14</sup>

The introductory paragraphs of Schleiermacher's Dogmatics, his "Glaubenslehre," undertake a definition of Christianity from the perspective of philosophy of religion and apologetics. Christianity is a monotheistic religion, above Judaism and Islam, the purest realisation of the monotheistic idea that has up to now appeared in history.<sup>15</sup> Its piety is teleological; that is, Christianity refers to the ethical idea of a coming kingdom of God.<sup>16</sup> And its peculiarity is that everything relates to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is the principal object of Christian piety. He has more dignity than Moses has for the Jews or Mohammed for the Muslims, because Jesus is not only a teacher or prophet of a doctrine, who has to follow the doctrine himself. For Christians, Jesus is the one

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*:177 (1984:267; 1996:73).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*:291 (1984:316; 1996:115).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*:293 f (1984:317 f; 1996:116).

<sup>15</sup> Schleiermacher 1830–1831, I:§ 8.4, 9.2 (2003, I:70 f, 78–80). Judaism, because of Jehova's predilection for Abraham's offspring, is akin to fetishism; from the notions of Jehova's commanding will and of his reward and retribution for all human deeds it ensues that Jewish consciousness of God relates more to the active than to the passive states of human consciousness. Islam, by virtue of its passionate and sensual character and its aesthetic fatalism, has analogies with polytheism.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, I:§ 9 (2003, I:74–80).

who is without sin and doesn’t need redemption for himself; his position as the Redeemer is not amidst his congregation but over against it.<sup>17</sup>

Since all positive religions emerge from an individual and original religious intuition, Christianity is not the continuation or perfection of the Old Testament religion. Rooted in Old Testament and Jewish monotheism, Christianity is nevertheless a new religious idea.<sup>18</sup> In his fifth Speech on Religion, Schleiermacher had already declared:

[E]very intuition of the infinite exists wholly for itself, is dependent on no other, and has no other as a necessary consequence.<sup>19</sup> ...  
I hate that type of historical reference in religion. Its necessity is a far higher and eternal one, and every beginning in it is original.<sup>20</sup>

Insofar as the apostles’ preaching was addressed to Jews as well as to Gentiles, Christianity stands in an equal relation to both.<sup>21</sup>

What Schleiermacher writes at the beginning of the “Glaubenslehre” in order to define Christianity from an external point of view, he expresses at the beginning of his lectures on church history as his confession of faith: First of all, Christianity begins with Christ. Christ is neither a reformer of Judaism nor merely a wise man like the antique philosophers; he is the beginner of something new, and the history of Christianity is the evolution and realization of that new thing in the world. Second, that which is new in Christ is a religious idea, and so it can also be called a divine revelation. It is destined to be conveyed to the whole human race.<sup>22</sup> So Schleiermacher’s confession of faith refers both to the religious originality of Christ and Christianity and to the universal tendency.

Consequently, the introduction to the “Glaubenslehre” numbers among the natural heresies of Christianity two views that deny the universal salvation accomplished by Christ: Pelagianism and Manichaeism. Pelagianism (historically, an early fifth-century view that contradicted the doctrine of original sin and taught the participation of the human free will in salvation) refers here to the notion that humanity, or a part of it, has no real need for redemption by Christ. Manichaeism (historically, a late-antique syncretistic religion combining a doctrine of salvation with a dualistic philosophy of nature alloying elements of Zoro-

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, I:§ 11.4 (2003, I:98–101).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, I:§ 12.1 (2003, I:103).

<sup>19</sup> Schleiermacher 1799:249 (1984:299; 1996:100).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*:287 (1984:314; 1996:114).

<sup>21</sup> Schleiermacher 1830–1831, I:§ 12.2 (2003, I:103–105).

<sup>22</sup> Schleiermacher 2006:22, 473 f (Church History, lectures 1821/22, lesson 2).

astrism, Hellenism, Gnosticism, Judaism and Christianity), conversely, refers to the idea that parts of humanity cannot be redeemed by Christ, because they are too wicked to receive redemption.<sup>23</sup> Both views are heretical, for the notion that all of humanity needs salvation and is redeemed by Christ's work of salvation is essential to Christian faith.

According to Schleiermacher, Christianity represents what is, for the present, the highest degree of evolution among religions.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, there is no reasonable evidence of the truth of Christian religion. A religion whose truth is proved would no longer be religion, but philosophical metaphysics.<sup>25</sup>

Is Schleiermacher's theory of religion a kind of rationalization of religion? Yes and no. No, because it strictly separates religion from philosophical doctrines of God, metaphysics and philosophical ethics; Schleiermacher denies that utility and rationality are criteria of religion's value. Yes, because this separation hangs together with a transcendental philosophy and theory of human self-consciousness<sup>26</sup> and with a certain ethical theory of culture that gives religion a distinct place within human culture and history.<sup>27</sup> All of these fit together, and none can be assigned logical priority. For example, Schleiermacher rejects the idea of God's wrath. Is that because he thinks it is not compatible with the God preached by Jesus,<sup>28</sup> or because God, as the absolute subject implicitly presupposed by every act of human thinking,<sup>29</sup> cannot be angry? We do not know, nor did Schleiermacher.

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**23** Schleiermacher 1830–1831, I:§ 22.2 (2003, I:156–158). Cf. Schleiermacher 1843:369 f (Christian Ethics, lectures 1822/23).

**24** In Schleiermacher's historical thought there is an ambiguity between the individuality of the historical phenomena stressed by him and the universal goal of all human development; cf. Pauck 1970:49–51.

**25** Cf. Schleiermacher 1829:492–496 (1990:348–352); 1830–1831, I:§ 3.4 (2003, I:27–29).

**26** The young Schleiermacher borrows from Immanuel Kant the criticism of conventional metaphysics and of the ontology of substance, but he doesn't follow Kant's proof of God's existence by practical reason. With Baruch Spinoza, Schleiermacher agrees that the object of religion is not a personal God standing outside and over against the world, but the whole and infinite, which (contra Spinoza, but according to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza) is not an intellectual intuition, but an intuition by feeling – the intuition of the universe. Spinoza's infinite is changed into a Kantian form of intuition. Cf. Arndt 2011.

**27** Cf., e. g., Schleiermacher 2006:13 f (Introduction to Church History, lectures 1806, lesson 4); 1913:310–318 (Ethics, lectures 1812/13, doctrine of goods, detailed explication, § 204–251).

**28** Cf., e. g., Schleiermacher 1831:189; 2015:400 (Sermon 159 on 2 Corinthians 5:17 f, October 24, 1830).

**29** Cf. Schleiermacher 2002, I:108, 119–122, 136 f, 141–150 (Dialectics, lectures 1814/15, lessons 19, 25, 31 and 35–39, §§ 163–166, 183 f, 200–202, 214–223).

To the philosopher Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who had declared himself a heathen by reason but a Christian by feeling, Schleiermacher wrote, “My philosophy and my Dogmatics are strictly resolved not to contradict each other.” They are like the two foci of an ellipse.<sup>30</sup>

### III

“They shall be all taught of God, and they shall not teach every man his brother.” With this combination of biblical citations (John 6:45, Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 8:11), Schleiermacher describes the end and the aim of the development of Christianity.<sup>31</sup> All of humanity is redeemed by Christianity. The spread of Christianity throughout the human race has two functions, extension and intension: propagating the Christian faith to those that do not yet have it, and increasing the piety of those who have it already.<sup>32</sup>

The early Christian church was stamped by Jewish culture and tradition. As it is disseminated to the nations, Christianity interacts with many cultures and languages and takes in some peculiarities, ideas and practices from which it must later be purified. The intension of Christianity has to correct what came into it by way of extension. Thus, the state and condition of the Christian church in the world are always developing and changing, and various forms of Christianity emerge that often are in competition with each other.<sup>33</sup>

Of these several forms of the Christian church, there are two in which Schleiermacher has a special interest: Roman Catholicism und Protestantism. Protestantism is Schleiermacher’s own form of the Christian church, on whose behalf he practices theology, while Roman Catholicism is the form from which he most dissociates himself and with which he is chiefly in contest. In the “Glaubenslehre,” he declares:

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Schleiermacher 1994:395 f (letter to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, March 30, 1818).

<sup>31</sup> Schleiermacher 2006:24, 480 (Church History, lectures 1821/22, lesson 5); 2006:684 (Church History, lectures 1825/26); 1829:494 (1990:350).

<sup>32</sup> Schleiermacher 2006:22, 474 (Church History, lectures 1821/22, lessons 2 and 3); 1843:373–377 (Christian Ethics, lectures 1822/23).

<sup>33</sup> Schleiermacher 2006:22–24, 474–480 (Church History, lectures 1821/22, lessons 3–5); 1843:209 (Christian Ethics, lectures 1826/27); 2005:468 f (Ecclesiastical Statistics, lectures 1833/34, lesson 2).

An explanation of the Dogmatics of the occidental church in the present cannot be indifferent to the opposition between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism; it has to belong to one of these two parts.<sup>34</sup>

In his lectures on ecclesiastical statistics, Schleiermacher tells the students some features of Roman Catholicism: The proceedings at the election of a pope are “a regular form of irregularities, indecencies, intrigues and God knows what else.”<sup>35</sup> Around St. Agnes’ Church at Rome, the lambs are fed up: Their wool is used as the material of the archiepiscopal capes. A house at Loretto is said to be the very house where it was announced to St. Mary that she was the elected mother of the Saviour; when the Saracens occupied Palestine, angels lifted the house from Nazareth and brought it to Italy. The monks and clergymen in Spain and Portugal are weaker in their education than any monk far away in the Syrian desert. A nunnery near Lisbon was long a harem for the king and princes. Processions, bullfights and fireworks are indispensable to the celebration of a holiday.<sup>36</sup>

So Roman Catholicism might seem to be the unreasonable and Protestantism the reasonable form of occidental Christianity. But Schleiermacher himself wouldn’t maintain that. The peculiarities of South European Catholicism stem from its isolation; the more isolated Catholicism is, the more superstitious it becomes. In France and Germany, Catholics have to compete with Protestantism, and here we find Catholic erudition, the art of preaching, biblical studies and but little superstition.<sup>37</sup> The actual difference between the two occidental churches is a sociological one; it refers to their respective relations between the clerics and the laics.

## IV

Any religion strives for communication, sociability and organization. The two essential functions of a religious community are those of the clerics and the laics; the former act more spontaneously and as instructors, while the latter are more passive and receptive.<sup>38</sup> In Catholicism, the distinction between clerics and laics

<sup>34</sup> Schleiermacher 1830–1831, I:§ 23, Leitsatz (2003, I:160).

<sup>35</sup> Schleiermacher 2005:251 (Ecclesiastical Statistics, lectures 1827, lesson 16).

<sup>36</sup> Schleiermacher 2005:273 f (Ecclesiastical Statistics, lectures 1827, lesson 24).

<sup>37</sup> Schleiermacher 2005:297 f, 358–360, 371 (Ecclesiastical Statistics, lectures 1827, lessons 30, 47 and 50).

<sup>38</sup> Schleiermacher 1913:359–361 (Ethics, lectures 1812/13, Perfect ethical forms, § 196–209); 1830–1831, I:§ 6.4, II:§ 133 (2003, I: 57 f, II:342–346).



is very strict. Catholic clerics are priests who mediate between God and the congregation, and the laics must obey the priests, especially their father confessors. Without a priest there is no access to God for the faithful; the priest rules the conscience of the layperson. Protestants, by contrast, believe that every faithful person is a priest who has access to God. Clergymen are the teachers and instructors of the congregation; their function is to help the laics attain religious independence and autonomy, first of all by instructing them in how to read and understand the New Testament by themselves.<sup>39</sup>

The basic difference between the two churches is this different comprehension of the function of the clerics toward the laics, but it calls forth further differences. Protestantism has a natural interest in national education, while in Catholic states education is a work of opposition to the church.<sup>40</sup> According to Catholic doctrine, the priest is above the secular government, since the government officials are laic, and so the church requires clerical immunity to criminal procedures by the secular justice system.<sup>41</sup> Since Protestant churches, by contrast, do not constitute an interstate organisation, many Protestants believe the church to be an institution of the state; they might learn from Catholics that it is otherwise and that an interstate association of Protestant national churches might be desirable.<sup>42</sup> Finally, in the Protestant church individuals and laics have the competence to criticize the organized bodies of the church and to discuss whether the church has deviated from the doctrine of the New Testament. It was in this way, as a purification and alteration of the church starting from below and from individuals, that the reformation began and the Protestant church arose. According to Catholic doctrine, individuals must be obedient to the clerical representatives of the church;<sup>43</sup> any disobedience is destructive, and the state of Protestantism is the best illustration of what results therefrom.<sup>44</sup>

Measured by the aim and end of Christianity, Protestantism is a more developed form of Christianity than Catholicism. For Protestantism to have emerged, the intension of Christianity must have proceeded far enough for the laics, step

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**39** Schleiermacher 1843: Beilage 148; 175 f, 519–521 (Christian Ethics, lectures 1822/23); 1843:208, 366 f, 432, 434, 522–524 (Christian Ethics, lectures 1826/27); 2005:298–300, 394, 396 f (Ecclesiastical Statistics, lectures 1827, lessons 31, 56–57).

**40** Schleiermacher 2005:322 f (Ecclesiastical Statistics, lectures 1827, lesson 37).

**41** Schleiermacher 2005:249 f, 374, 392 (Ecclesiastical Statistics 1827, lessons 17, 50 and 55).

**42** Schleiermacher 1821:458 (1995:319); 2005:378, 394–396 (Ecclesiastical Statistics, lectures 1827, lessons 51 and 56).

**43** Schleiermacher 1843:182–205 (Christian Ethics, lectures 1822/23).

**44** Schleiermacher 2005:383, 388 (Ecclesiastical Statistics, lectures 1827, lessons 53 and 54); 1830–1831, I:§ 24.3 (2003, I:166 f.).

for by step, to have come of age and need less teaching by their brothers, the clerics, than they needed in the times of the apostles, the church fathers and the medieval bishops.<sup>45</sup> Since then, they have advanced on the path to equality with their teachers. At the end of this development there will be no more extension and teaching of Christianity, except for the education of children.<sup>46</sup> But that is still far in the future.

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<sup>45</sup> Schleiermacher 2006:24, 480 f, 629 (Church History, lectures 1821/22, lessons 5 and 91–93); 2006:680 f, 684–686 (Church History, lectures 1825/26); 1843:324–326, 432 (Christian Ethics, lectures 1826/27); 2005:322 f, 396 f (Ecclesiastical Statistics, lectures 1827, lessons 37 and 57); 1830–1831, II:§ 88.3 (2003, II:25).

<sup>46</sup> Schleiermacher 2006:24, 480 (Church History, lectures 1821/22, lesson 5); 1843:373 (Christian Ethics, lectures 1822/23); 2006:684 f (Church History, lectures 1825/26); 1830–1831, II:§ 119.3, 120 Zusatz, 125.1, 157.1, 164.1 (2003, II: 264 f, 276 f, 300 f, 456 f, 494 f).

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