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## ARE HUMAN BEINGS RELIGIOUS BY NATURE?\*

Schleiermacher's Generic View of Religion  
and the Contemporary Pluralistic, Secular Culture

Wessel Stoker

### 1. The Problem

Schleiermacher defends the importance of religion and church for society. In his philosophy of culture, he claims that, next to other institutions like the family, the state, science and next to hospitality and friendship, the church is indispensable to society (E1812/13, III, 7-262).<sup>1</sup> He argued, over against the intellectuals of his time, in his *Über die Religion* that religion belongs to human nature: "Everything that belongs to the true life of humankind and what should be a continually living and active impulse in them must, however, come from the most inward part of the spirit itself. Religion is something like that. It subjects everything to itself and shapes all action and thought to a theme of its heavenly power of imagination" (139; 37). In his theological encyclopedia he presents us with the idea that if religious communities are not to be considered mistakes, their existence "must be seen as a necessary element for the

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\* This article was read as a paper at the 12th Biennial European Conference on the Philosophy of Religion, Hofgeismar (27-30 August, 1998).

<sup>1</sup> Schleiermacher's works will be cited in abbreviated form as follows: *Über die Religion* (1799), ed. R. Otto (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1920 (= ÜR); *Ethik 1812/13: Einleitung und Güterlehre*, Schleiermachers Werke II, ed. O. Braun (Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1927) (= E1812/13); *Ethik 1814/16*, Schleiermachers Werke, ed. O. Braun (= E1814/16); *Dialektik* (1814/15), ed. A. Arndt (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988 (= D1814/15); *Dialektik* (1822), ed. R. Odebrecht (Darmstadt: WB, 1976) (= DO); *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums ...* (1830), ed. H. Scholz (Darmstadt: WB, 1993) (= KD); *Psychologie*, Sämtliche Werke III/6, ed. L. George Berlin: G. Reimer, 1862 (= PS); *Der christliche Glaube* I (1830), ed. M. Redeker, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960). In this case I will be using the English translation *The Christian Faith*, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1968) (= CF). Unless otherwise indicated, the numbers following the abbreviations refer to the paragraph number in question.

development of the human spirit” (KD 22). It is precisely with this that the aspect of the philosophy of culture in the introduction of *The Christian Faith* begins. In order to show the entire unique identity of the church, he refers to its basis: piety is essential for human beings. Human beings are religious beings. Given that, according to Schleiermacher, the human being is always a human being in community, the necessity of a religious community is thereby displayed (CF6). Religion is not coincidental or an accident but belongs to the essence of humanity. In Schleiermacher's view, the feeling of absolute dependence or God-consciousness belongs to human nature.

I would like to discuss Schleiermacher's view of religion in the context of our contemporary pluralistic culture. It can be asked if one does justice to Schleiermacher if his view of religion is discussed in light of a different culture than that of Prussia at the beginning of the nineteenth century in which Protestantism was dominant. In the Europe of our time Christianity is one of the many world religions among new religious movements and secular worldviews such as humanism, Marxism, nationalism and, in the Netherlands at least, a growing number of people who do not opt for any particular available worldview but have themselves constructed an orientation for their lives, composed of fragments of the reigning values and norms in society. Keeping Schleiermacher's own cultural situation in mind, it seems possible to investigate his generic view of religion with an eye for contemporary pluralistic, secular Western culture. Therefore our discussion will also include the views of some contemporary writers who also defend a generic view of religion.

When Schleiermacher states that religion is generic, that it belongs to the genus of humankind, what should we understand by religion? In the first place, Schleiermacher views religion as piety, as religiosity. He makes this clear by indicating the essence of piety in *The Christian Faith* as a feeling of absolute dependence or as God-consciousness. This raises the question of how, on the basis of this generic view of religion, the phenomenon of indifference to religion is to be interpreted. The situation is at present more urgent than in Schleiermacher's time since many people now appear to have no need for religion and that secular worldviews now exist alongside religions. Is this not in conflict with a generic concept of religion?

In the second place, Schleiermacher also views religion as organized religion, as empirically describable religious communities of Catholics and Protestants and as a way of referring to the world religions (CF6 Postscript). This second meaning of religion is closely connected with the first, because Schleiermacher, as we will see, does not view religion in an intellectual way but in terms of the experience of the human heart from which it emerges.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “The tendency of the human mind in general to give rise to religious emotions, always considered, however, along with their expression, and thus with the striving for fellowship, *i.e.* the possibility of particular religions ...” (CF6.Postscript). Schleiermacher uses yet a third definition for religion: religion in general as an irreducible phenomenon over against other

If the essence of piety is the feeling of absolute dependence or God-consciousness, do (the adherents of) non-monotheistic religions also fall under this concept of religion? For Schleiermacher, the term non-monotheistic religion referred primarily to polytheism and fetishism (2.2). According to him, one could hardly speak of a feeling of absolute dependence in these religions. With respect to Buddhism, his description of religion is problematic. Many Buddhists would find it difficult to recognize themselves in this description of the essence of religion (3.1).

I will discuss Schleiermacher's generic view of religion or piety primarily in the light of contemporary Western society which is to some extent indifferent to religion (2). In connection with this, we will also discuss the question of how the generic element, the feeling of absolute dependence, functions with respect to other religions (2.2). We will explore the question of whether the objections I will cite (in what follows) against the generic view of religion can be met by contemporary writers who, sharing Schleiermacher's intention, defend a generic view of religion (3). Like Schleiermacher, I also maintain that religion is indispensable for society. Given that a generic view of religion appears to be problematic for today's society, I will suggest a different way of understanding the generic element (4).

Schleiermacher worked out his view of religion primarily in his *Über die Religion* (1799) and later in the introduction to *The Christian Faith* (1821/22). I will limit myself to the view of religion found in the later Schleiermacher as expressed in the introductory section to the second edition of *The Christian Faith* (1830).

## 2. The Human Being as a Religious Being

### 2.1. The Essence of Piety: The Feeling of Absolute Dependence

Schleiermacher searches for access to the phenomenon of religion not via the institution of the church or via doctrine but via the human being as person. The *place* of piety is not Knowing or Doing but immediate self-consciousness or Feeling. The *essence* of piety is the feeling of absolute dependence or, in other words, that we are conscious of being in relation to God. I will first discuss the place of piety.

Schleiermacher follows Kant insofar as he also holds that the transcendent ground of human beings and the world cannot be known. The unconditional cannot be comprehended by the conditional. We do not arrive at the transcendent ground via our thinking and willing. Without going into the line of thought in the *Dialektik* I will point only to the result of this for his views on religion.

Thinking has its limits and, although one can pose the question of the transcendental<sup>3</sup>—the unity of reality—at those limits, the transcendental itself lies

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phenomena like science or morality—piety as a modification of the feeling of immediate consciousness (CF3).

<sup>3</sup> In Schleiermacher the term transcendental means: 1. that which cannot be thought or

outside the boundaries of thought. Willing, too, can only pose the question of the transcendental. Schleiermacher searches for the point where the difference between knowing and willing is sublimated, a point that he finds in the *immediate self-consciousness* or *feeling*. In feeling we 'have' the transcendental in an immediate way that is not possible in thinking or willing. In feeling, as a condition of the unity of thinking and willing, we have the "analogy with the transcendent ground" (DO289). Schleiermacher often simply equates the transcendental or the transcendent ground with 'God': "God is ... given to us as part of our essence" (D1814/15 216.2).<sup>4</sup> He calls the God-consciousness the *religious* element of our immediate self-consciousness. Religious expressions arise on the basis of this element of our self-consciousness.

We should distinguish the immediate self-consciousness from the reflexive self-consciousness in which the human being itself has become the object (DO288). The immediate self-consciousness or feeling is our pre-reflexive consciousness of our existence in the sense of a unity. Feeling does not refer to something subjective but to "the universal form of having oneself" (DO288).

In the prolegomena to *The Christian Faith*<sup>5</sup> Schleiermacher returns to the immediate self-consciousness of feeling and explains its religious aspect (3).<sup>6</sup> Feeling is the "immediate presence of whole undivided Being" (3.2) in distinction from 'Knowing' and 'Doing'. It is the place where our feeling is most internalized into a fundamental feeling like joy or grief (3.2).

Schleiermacher speaks not only of the feeling of *absolute* dependence but also of the feeling of *partial* dependence and a feeling of *partial* freedom, which are also to be found in immediate self-consciousness. This distinction between the feeling of partial dependence and partial freedom is crucial for understanding Schleiermacher's concept of the feeling of absolute dependence. We will therefore look at what he means by these two terms and how he connects them with the feeling of absolute dependence.

How do we feel dependent upon God in the core of our existence? In this connection there is an important fundamental distinction in human consciousness that Schleiermacher employs: receptivity and spontaneity (PS, pp. 501, 15f.; 532, 13f.; CF4.1). Submission and doing, receptivity and activity characterize the fundamental

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known (this is often what the term 'transcendent' means in philosophy as well); 2. the condition for or the basis of thinking (and willing). Schleiermacher himself does not wish to make any distinction between 'transcendent' and 'transcendental'. Cf. L. Oranje *God en wereld. De vraag naar het transcendentale in Schleiermachers 'Dialektik'* (Kampen: Kok, 1968), p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> Oranje, *God en wereld*, pp. 180ff.

<sup>5</sup> The numbers in the text refer, unless otherwise indicated, to the paragraphs of this work.

<sup>6</sup> "The piety ... is considered purely in itself, neither a Knowing nor a Doing, but a modification of Feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness" (3).

structure of human beings. Sometimes we are passive and at other times active, depending on whether the initiative comes from outside or from within ourselves. He formulates this distinction in paragraph 4.1 somewhat differently as “a self-caused element” (*ein Sichselbstsetzen*) and “a non-self-caused element” (*ein Sichselbstnichtsogesezthaben*). From the latter it appears that the self-consciousness is as it is through *dependence* on something outside of myself. Existence is not only task but also gift. We are born into a particular culture and during our lives we appear to be continually dependent upon others. Thus, by speaking about “a non-self-caused element,” Schleiermacher explains receptivity as dependence, which in itself is not to be considered as identical to dependence.<sup>7</sup> How is this dependence related to our freedom?

Our feeling of dependence expresses the fact that we are influenced by that which differs from us and our feeling of freedom expresses the fact that we influence that which differs from us (4.2). With this feeling of dependence and freedom the human subject stands within this reciprocity with other human beings and the world (4.2; PS, p. 66). With respect to receptivity it is the other that is the active pole that works on us, whereas with respect to activity the other is the passive pole on which we work. Thus self-consciousness stands over against humans and things partly in a *relative* freedom from and partly in a *partial* dependence on them. There is no *absolute* dependence nor *absolute* freedom in our relation with the world, nature and society. Our freedom finds its limit in our dependence and our dependence in our freedom. The kind of relation determines which pole will have the upper hand. In his social philosophy Schleiermacher shows how this reciprocity of partial dependence and partial freedom is determinative for social relationships.<sup>8</sup> Thus dependence is dominant in the relation of citizens to the government or of children to parents (4.2/3).

Decisive for Schleiermacher is the *experiential fact* that the sequence dependence/freedom is at the same time hierarchical, because dependence is primary. We cannot conceive of ourselves without others and the other. Our activity is always dependent on an object on which it wants to exercise influence. Even when we are active, one can always point to a previous moment of receptivity which determines the direction of the original activity (4.1). *Absolute freedom* is therefore impossible.

How, in our partial dependence and partial freedom, do we now stand in a relation of *absolute* dependence on God? Absolute freedom, as stated above, was not

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<sup>7</sup> “The common element in all those determinations of self-consciousness which predominantly express a receptivity affected from some outside quarter is the *feeling of Dependence*” (4.2).

<sup>8</sup> Y. Spiegel, *Theologie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1968), ch. 2.

possible, but is absolute dependence possible? It is not possible if we are talking here of dependence on an object, for that can always be influenced by our action. Partial dependence finds its boundary in partial freedom. That from which the human being receives her life and on which she is entirely dependent can, in other words, not be the *world* (32.2). We can only feel absolutely dependent upon *God*. Feeling absolutely dependent is, according to Schleiermacher, nothing else than our conscious relation to God: “The *Whence* of our receptive and active existence, as implied in this self-consciousness, is to be designated by the word ‘God’” (4.4).

How is this God-consciousness to be understood? As we will see, it concerns a transcendental-phenomenological description of religious experience. Schleiermacher seems to suggest that on the basis of the negation of an absolute feeling of freedom one can conclude only one other possibility, i.e. absolute dependence. He states the following in a very obscure way:

But the self-consciousness which accompanies all our activity, and therefore, since that is never zero, accompanies our whole existence, and negatives absolute freedom, is itself precisely a consciousness of absolute dependency; for it is the consciousness that the whole of our spontaneous activity comes from a source outside of us in just the same sense in which anything towards which we should have a feeling of absolute freedom must have proceeded entirely from ourselves. But without any feeling of freedom a feeling of absolute dependence would not be possible. (4.3)

One could ask whether the negation of the feeling of absolute freedom leads in fact to the feeling of absolute dependence. One can point to a third possibility: the feeling of partial freedom connected with the feeling of partial dependence. The negation of absolute freedom does not mean that our total activity is completely dependent on a source outside of ourselves but only that we can never transcend our situation of partial freedom and partial dependence.<sup>9</sup>

Logically, this is correct but one then goes beyond Schleiermacher's intention. The starting point for him is, as stated above, the *experience* that receptivity is primary over against activity (4.1).<sup>10</sup> The decisive point is therefore not so much, as Jorgensen correctly remarks, the negation of absolute freedom in itself but the

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. K. Heim, *Das Gewissheitsproblem in der systematischen Theologie bis zu Schleiermacher* (Leipzig, 1911), p. 370.

<sup>10</sup> “But as we never do exist except along with an Other, so even in every outward-tending self-consciousness the element of receptivity, in some way or other affected, is the primary one; and even the self-consciousness which accompanies an action ..., while it predominantly expresses spontaneous movement and activity, is always related ... to a prior moment of affective receptivity, through which the original ‘agility’ received its direction” (4.1).

irreversible order of partial dependence and partial freedom from which this negation of absolute freedom emerges and which makes one conscious of the essential receptivity of existence as absolute dependence.<sup>11</sup>

In paragraphs three and four Schleiermacher analyses immediate self-consciousness in a transcendental-phenomenological way as absolutely dependent.<sup>12</sup> It concerns the generic structure of the religious consciousness that is arrived at by abstracting from the concrete God-consciousness of the believer. Schleiermacher describes God-consciousness as absolutely dependent in connection with the feeling of freedom. The self-consciousness encounters free activity as a given. One should note the final sentence of the quote above: “But without any feeling of freedom a feeling of absolute dependence would not be possible.” In combination with the primary experience of dependence free activity refers to absolute dependence. The feeling of absolute dependence thus expresses our consciousness of finitude (5.1; 8.2; 33).<sup>13</sup>

The issue here is an original experience beyond or behind which one cannot go. It is a fundamental experience that is given to us as a revelation: “God is given to us in feeling in an original way” (4.4). The feeling of absolute dependence and the immediate self-consciousness that becomes God-consciousness is an “original revelation of God to man or in man” (4.4).

The way in which Schleiermacher postulates God-consciousness gives rise to several questions.<sup>14</sup> One question especially merits our attention with respect to our topic: is the essence of piety, the feeling of absolute dependence, Schleiermacher's definition of religion? In seeking the answer to this question we will see how religion as piety and as institutionalized cohere closely together.

If piety is viewed merely as the possession of a feeling of absolute dependence,

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<sup>11</sup> T.H. Jorgensen, *Das religionsphilosophische Offenbarungsverständnis des späteren Schleiermacher* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1977), pp. 216f.

<sup>12</sup> Proudfoot incorrectly produces a contradiction when he states: “In fact, Schleiermacher's characterization of the feeling more nearly resembles a transcendental version of the cosmological argument than an attempt to direct the reader to a particular aspect of experience” (W. Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley, etc.: University of California Press, 1985), p. 19). Schleiermacher is indeed concerned to describe the religious experience in such a way. Cf. R.R. Williams, *Schleiermacher the Theologian* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), ch. 1.

<sup>13</sup> We can see how Hegel's objection to Schleiermacher's religious feeling, i.e. that it would be exclusively a matter of absolute dependence and that therefore “a dog would be the best Christian,” is unjustified (cf. G.W. Hegel, “Vorrede zu Hinrichs 'Religionsphilosophie'” *Sämtliche Werke* (Stuttgart, 1958, pp. 19, 20). It is precisely in connection with his own partial freedom that the human being experiences his absolute dependence.

<sup>14</sup> Such as, for example, the question of the relation of this experience of God with language and the question of whether one can speak here of immediate experience.

one ends up with a distorted image of what Schleiermacher intends by his generic view of religion, the human being as a religious being. The image that he sketches of the religious human being and of religion as organized religion is more complex. In paragraphs three and four that we just discussed he discusses piety in the abstract, whereas paragraphs five and six, albeit in general terms, take up the believer and organized religion in the practice of everyday life. In everyday life the feeling of absolute dependence functions continually in connection with sensible self-consciousness (5) and with our life within a religious community (6). And the religious community is always an historically determined community: Jewish, Christian, Islamic, etc. For our understanding of Schleiermacher's view of religion as generic this is important in the following way.

We are not conscious of the feeling of absolute dependence in itself but continually in connection with our existence in the world which is characterized by 'antithesis' (5.3).<sup>15</sup> The antithesis is transcended in the feeling of absolute dependence, the relation to God (5.1; 4.4). Therefore Schleiermacher speaks of the feeling of absolute dependence as something that is continually self-identical or the same, whereas the *difference* in piety arises through the feeling of absolute dependence being joined with a continually changing sensible consciousness (5.4) characterized by antitheses. The expression that the human being is a religious being should not be understood in a static way on the basis, for example, of the doctrine of innate ideas. He views it in a dynamic way by distinguishing grades of religiosity: "And the more the subject, in each moment of sensible self-consciousness, with his partial freedom and partial dependence, takes at the same time the attitude of absolute dependence, the more religious is he" (5.3). If pious self-consciousness is called an "essential element in human nature" it is an ontological statement that leaves open the ontic question of the extent to which that can be realized by the individual human being. Thus Schleiermacher describes the feeling of absolute dependence as a tendency that can break through into the human being: "the tendency which we have described, as an original and innate tendency of the human soul, strives from the very beginning to break through into consciousness" (5.3). This breaking through cannot succeed on the level of the confused animal grade of self-consciousness. The condition for such breaking through is that one is on the level of sensible consciousness. In feeling partly free and dependent on the finite, the human being thus also feels absolutely dependent on God. The more he feels this way, the more pious he is (5.3/4).

The *actual appearance* of the feeling of absolute dependence (in its being joined with sensible self-consciousness) is described in general terms in the sixth paragraph, the final paragraph of the *Lehrsätze* from his *Ethics*. We receive God-consciousness

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<sup>15</sup> Schleiermacher sees the reality of human beings and nature as characterized by antitheses, such as receptivity and spontaneity, freedom and dependence, reason and nature, body and soul, etc. See F. Siegmund-Schulze, *Schleiermachers Psychologie in ihrer Bedeutung für die Glaubenslehre* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1913), ch. 2.

via revelation and the Church. The main thesis of paragraph six states that the religious communions originated necessarily out of pious self-consciousness.<sup>16</sup> For this Schleiermacher appeals to the consciousness of the human being as a consciousness of kind. The human being is always human being in community, according to Schleiermacher in his *Ethics* (E1814/16), p. 455, note). The consciousness of kind begins with the recognition of others as human beings and this comes to expression in communication with others and taking up of their views into oneself (PS, p. 524). We therefore leave the limitation of our own personality and take up facts from others into ourselves. The feeling of absolute dependence is not only internal but is brought to expression by means “of facial expression, gesture, tones and (indirectly) words” and is thus perceptible to others (6.2; E1812/13, 212). Thus Schleiermacher describes the origin of religious communion from the pious consciousness.

In the same paragraph he emphasizes something else. Here the existence of the pious community is presupposed and leads in turn to the feeling of absolute dependence. Paragraph 6.2 thus ends as follows: “As regards the feeling of absolute dependence in particular, everyone will know that it was first awakened in him in the same way, by the communicative and stimulative power of expression or utterance” (cf. 10.2). In my view, this does not contradict the main thesis of this paragraph in any way. The main thesis emphasizes that (ontologically) a pious community is based on a revelation given by God to the pious consciousness, whereas the closing sentence of 6.2 is concerned (ontically/historically) with the concrete, actual religious community. After all, Schleiermacher had previously spoken of the feeling of absolute dependence as an event of an original revelation of God in the human being (4.4). That receives more depth here by Schleiermacher’s pointing out that it concerns an event within a historical community via the “revelation” of another human being.

In brief, Schleiermacher does not restrict himself to the feeling of absolute dependence as a religious *a priori*. He is concerned with piety as it actually appears. What is said in general in paragraphs five and six about the actual appearance of religion is made concrete in the following paragraphs for the history of religion (7-10) and for Christianity (11-14). The feeling of absolute dependence does not define religion but is the defining characteristic that makes a certain experience a religious experience or a certain phenomenon a religious phenomenon. Schleiermacher’s generic view of religion is historical and dynamic. It does not say that every person is religious but that the human being is potentially religious and the mature person should realize that potential. Religiosity is present in humans in grades, depending on the religious community of which she or he is a part.

The feeling of absolute dependence is the essence of piety. It is the universal, the

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<sup>16</sup> “The religious self-consciousness, like every essential element in human nature, leads necessarily in its development to fellowship or communion ...” (6).

generic element of 1) the religiosity of human beings and 2) the actual historical religions. This raises questions in connection with our topic. Does the generic view of religion entail that those indifferent to religion also display this feeling of absolute dependence but then deny it or do not recognize it? And what are we to do with the adherents of non-monotheistic religions? Do they also have that feeling of absolute dependence or God-consciousness? Is the feeling of absolute dependence a criterion for distinguishing between true and false religions?

I will first discuss God-consciousness and the non-monotheistic religions and then the generic view of religion and the phenomenon of indifference to religion.

## 2.2. The Feeling of Absolute Dependence and the Non-monotheistic Religions

In the *Lehrsätze* from the philosophy of religion (7-10) Schleiermacher describes the differences between religions in order to determine the place of Christianity. The feeling of absolute dependence is the defining characteristic of religion. How does he relate the universal, the feeling of absolute dependence, and the particular/actual to each other? Does the feeling of absolute dependence function here as a criterion for true religion or as an ordering principle for describing the religions? In the first option, the feeling of absolute dependence would function as an *a priori* measure for determining the truth of the religions. In this way in philosophy of religion an argument could be made for the truth of Christianity. The thesis that human beings are religious by nature, however, is just as difficult to defend if one views religion from the perspective of the Christian religion. The second option is more concerned with a question of understanding, a phenomenological description of religion. This distinction does not say everything, however, for an ordering principle can also include a theological assessment and this can have consequences for the thesis that human beings are religious by nature.

As we will see, Schleiermacher discusses the distinction between true and false religion (7.3). Nonetheless, he is concerned (so I hold with Welker and Offerman, contra Flückiger) not with an *a priori* measure for distinguishing between true and false religions but rather with a description of the historically given forms of faith.<sup>17</sup> The following reasons may be adduced for this:

1. In the prolegomena to *The Christian Faith* Schleiermacher sees philosophy of religion not as a normative discipline concerned with the question of truth but as a 'critical' historical science aimed at describing the different pious communities (2.2;

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<sup>17</sup> K.E. Welker, *Die grundsätzliche Beurteilung der Religionsgeschichte durch Schleiermacher* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), *passim*; D. Offermann, *Schleiermachers Einleitung in die Glaubenslehre* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969), pp. 139-234; F. Flückiger, *Philosophie und Theologie bei Schleiermacher* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag AG, 1947), pp. 42-48.

KD23; E1812/13 III, 231).<sup>18</sup> The *Lehnsätze* from his *Ethics* give, as we have seen, the general essential element of piety, the feeling of absolute dependence. On the basis of this the *Lehnsätze* from the philosophy of religion give a description of the different forms of the religious communities (2. Postscript 2; 11.5; KD23). If Schleiermacher calls philosophy of religion a “critical discipline” as a branch of historical science, this stems from the fact that he derives the concept of church (and religion) from ethics (2.2).

2. What is characteristic for an empirical community like the Christian community can never be understood nor deduced purely scientifically: “For no science can by means of mere ideas reach and elicit what is individual, but must always stop short with what is general” (2.2; KD32). Therefore, Schleiermacher rejects any *a priori* construction in the area of history. It is thus impossible that the feeling of absolute dependence serves as a measure, for the universal cannot attain the individual form of religion.<sup>19</sup> One finds this idea already in *Über die Religion*: “[B]ut in order to penetrate to the characteristic of the separate individual, one must abandon the universal concept with its properties” (256).

Schleiermacher's position therefore differs from that of the deists and rationalists of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment concept of natural religion, after all, functioned as a criterion for true religion, with the consequence that the differences - what was unique in the positive religions - were reduced to the universal.<sup>20</sup>

3. In comparison with the Christian theologians during the time of the Enlightenment Schleiermacher gives a new view of the relation of the universal and the particular. It was usual with the Anglican apologists and the German neologists to see the particular, the unique aspect of a positive religion, as a *supplementation* of the universal, natural religion. The objection to this presentation of the matter is that the particular of a specific religion is seen as a supplement of the universal that is identical for all religions, such as belief in God. It was not that the differences between the religions were despised, but they were viewed as secondary in relation to the universal.

In paragraph ten Schleiermacher specifies the relation between the universal and the particular in an entirely different way. He does state that the feeling of absolute dependence is continually identical to itself and that difference arises through its being joined with a sensible consciousness (5.4), but this is not to be viewed in the sense of supplementation. Both the universal and the particular determine the individual

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<sup>18</sup> “By Philosophy of Religion is understood a critical presentation of the different existing forms of religious communion, as constituting, when taken collectively, the complete phenomenon of piety in human nature” (2.3).

<sup>19</sup> As Offerman, *Schleiermachers Einleitung*, correctly notes, pp. 142f.

<sup>20</sup> W. Stoker, *De christelijke godsdienst in de filosofie van de Verlichting, een vergelijkende studie over de geloofsverantwoording in het denken van Locke, de deïsten, Lessing en Kant* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1980), ch. 2.

shape of a religion. In the discussion of the monotheistic religions he remarks that “the same thing is present in all, but present in a quite different way in each” (10.2). It is not that these religions share belief in one God to which obedience to the law is added in Judaism, in Christianity faith in Jesus Christ or in Islam belief in the prophet. As far as Christianity is concerned, the belief in Jesus Christ has a decisive influence on the God-consciousness. Christianity is essentially determined by the redemption through Jesus of Nazareth (11). In every particular pious community the self-consciousness is therefore always differently determined (10.2; 32.3). Thus the individual form of a religion is guaranteed. In this connection Schleiermacher refers to an analogy with the human individual in his relation to the human species: “every man has in him all that another man has, but it is all differently determined” (10.3).

We can establish that the essence of religion is not determined here in a supratemporal way but that it unfolds in the historical, concrete religion. This is expressed in a second ordering principle alongside the feeling of absolute dependence. In paragraph nine the religions are ordered according to the way in which the feeling of absolute dependence is joined with a certain type of sensible self-consciousness (cf. 5). The religions are described phenomenologically by means of the two positions of the sensible self-consciousness that are diametrically opposed. On the one hand, there are the “teleological” forms of piety which in relation to the pious affections subordinate the natural to the moral and on the other the “aesthetic” where the opposite is the case.<sup>21</sup> In the first all the emphasis is on the activity of the self-consciousness in its coherence with the feeling of absolute dependence, as in Judaism (because of its accent on ethics) and in Christianity (because of the devotion to the Kingdom of God), whereas in the second all accent lies on receptivity as in Islam (for which Schleiermacher referred to its fatalistic inclination) and, on another level of development, Hellenistic polytheism (9.1/2).

Of primary importance for our topic is that other ordering principle, the feeling of absolute dependence or, better, monotheism (8). We already stated that it does not function as a measure for true religion. Let us see how it functions as an ordering principle. Here an assessment based on Christian theology appears very much to play a decisive role.<sup>22</sup>

Schleiermacher does not speak only of different levels of development and about kinds of pious communities (7; 9). He also introduces a hierarchical order: “Those forms of piety in which all religious affections express the dependence of everything finite upon one Supreme and Infinite Being, i.e. the monotheistic forms, occupy the highest level; and all others are related to them as subordinate forms, from

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<sup>21</sup> “The widest diversity between forms of piety is that which exists, with respect to the religious affections, between those forms which subordinate the natural in human conditions to the moral and those which, on the contrary, subordinate the moral to the natural” (9).

<sup>22</sup> In my view, Offerman does not emphasize this enough.

which men are destined to pass to those higher ones” (8). The highest level consists of monotheism as that takes concrete form in a specific religious community.<sup>23</sup> All other forms of piety, such as fetishism<sup>24</sup> and polytheism, are subordinated to this. The intention here is that they develop into the higher forms. The starting point is monotheism, on the basis of which the lower forms are described. Schleiermacher remarks in connection with this: “supplementation [*Ausfüllung*] from above through comparison with monotheism” (German text, p. 51b). In addition, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are critically assessed with respect to the extent to which they have been influenced by fetishism or polytheism. Schleiermacher concludes that Christianity is “the most perfect of the most highly developed forms of religion” (8.4). This remark contrasts sharply with the phenomenological description of what is unique to these three religions in 9.2. And he had also previously warned his readers that the recognition of other forms of piety on the same level of development did not have to be in contradiction with the Christian belief in the exclusive excellence of Christianity (7.3).

We can ascertain that monotheism is not a normative concept in the sense that it, as a constant, erases the differences between the religions. It is a principle that arranges the religions according to different levels of which monotheism is the highest. In this a theological—or, more broadly, the general Western—assessment of the nineteenth century on its own religion plays a role.

Thus a problem seems to arise with the statement that the human being is religious, i.e. has a feeling of absolute dependence or God-consciousness. In the preceding discussion it was stated that Schleiermacher held that there are grades of piety in the individual, according to the extent to which the feeling of absolute dependence works unhindered in him or her. At issue here are religious phenomena such as fetishism and polytheism where the feeling of absolute dependence has not entirely broken through in the adherents of these religions. Should we conclude that, according to Schleiermacher, one cannot speak of religion in these instances, because they lack what, in his view, is the defining feature of religion?

I would explain Schleiermacher's thesis that human beings are religious in a broader sense by interpreting it as *the direction towards*. This explanation is supported by a suggestion made by Schleiermacher himself (33.2) and by his doctrine of truth. True and false religions do not stand over against each other as true over against untrue. According to Schleiermacher, in line with Romans 1:21 false religions

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<sup>23</sup> The monotheistic form of faith is presented as “believing in one God on whom the religious man regards himself as being (along with the world of which he is a part) absolutely dependent” (8.2).

<sup>24</sup> This is described as worshipping the “particular idols which belong to the family or the locality or the particular occupation in which [someone] lives” (8.2).

also have an idea of the truth. He works with the maxim that error does not have an independent existence but always depends on that which is true. Error can be understood only in connection with the truth and the 'true' with which it is connected (7.3; DO334). Thus Schleiermacher does recognize the lower forms of religiosity very much as piety, even though their adherents lack God-consciousness in the strict sense. Of fetishism he remarks that the higher and lower forms of self-consciousness are so little distinguished from each other that the feeling of absolute dependence is still too much influenced by the object of worship in question (8.2). Partial and absolute dependence are not yet distinguished in fetishism. The same obtains for polytheism: the feeling of absolute dependence does not appear here in its full unity and non-differentiation over against everything that is claimed in the sensible self-consciousness. The feeling of absolute dependence as a universal consciousness of finitude has not yet been realized (8.2). We can understand why Schleiermacher remarks that, with such a form of piety individuals are destined to move towards a monotheistic form of religion (8).

In brief, although the feeling of absolute dependence is the defining characteristic of religion, this is not to say that he denies that non-monotheistic religions are religions. The feeling of absolute dependence can be explained in a broad sense so that adherents of non-monotheistic religions also fall under the *direction towards*. This expresses an assessment of non-monotheistic religions based on Christian theology. Non-monotheistic religions do indeed have their place in the history of religion, according to Schleiermacher, but monotheism is the "highest level" (8). However, the feeling of absolute dependence, derived from the Christian experience of faith of being created by God, is too limited to function as the defining characteristic of religion. The thesis that the human being is by nature religious is implausible. In actuality, it means that the human should become religious (in the sense of acquiring the feeling of absolute dependence).

### 2.3. The Generic View of Religion and Indifference to Religion

Schleiermacher recognizes that there are facts that argue against his view that human beings are religious. One could object, for instance, that for the individual there is a time in which the feeling of absolute dependence is not yet present. Schleiermacher fends off this objection, however, because this is the period of the *incompleteness of life*, as can be seen partly from the animal confusion of consciousness that still reigns and partly from the slowly emerging development of vital functions (6.1). The same obtains for the objection that there are societies—we already encountered them—in which this feeling has still not been awakened. That is also a matter of the *undeveloped state of human nature* that can also be discovered in their other vital functions (6.1).

A decrease in religiosity and the decline in the number of adherents to the official religion would not, for Schleiermacher, finally count against his generic view of religion, as can be seen from the way in which he responds to the indifference of people to religion in his own society. He holds that such people must recognize that religion is not alien to them and that at certain moments they experience the feeling of absolute dependence, even though they use other terms for it (6.1; 11.2). Elsewhere he discusses atheism in its different forms. One of these forms is licentiousness and is stamped as “a sickness of the soul” (33.2). Another form he explains on the basis of the struggle against incorrect presentations by Christian theology of the pious consciousness, as in the eighteenth century the tyranny of the Church evoked a struggle by atheists against doctrine (33.2).

Religion can be seen as something accidental or coincidental only if, according to Schleiermacher, one can show that the feeling of absolute dependence has no higher value than other non-religious feelings or that there is something that is equal in value to the feeling of absolute dependence. If that is so, the feeling of absolute dependence does not belong to the “complete human nature for everybody” (6.1). As stated, Schleiermacher believes that the opposite is the case.

If we can explain non-monotheistic religions as orientations towards God-consciousness, this is less possible with respect to conscious choices for indifference to religion. Schleiermacher calls the relatedness of the sensible consciousness to the higher self-consciousness, the feeling of absolute dependence, “*the consummating point of the self-consciousness*” (5.3. italics mine). This entails that religion belongs to human maturity. Schleiermacher's position over against unbelief corresponds to the thesis of the Dutch psychiatrist H.C. Rümke who saw unbelief as a disturbance in the development of the person.<sup>25</sup>

Schleiermacher formulates his generic view of religion in the society of his time. The two objections that I will now cite are in themselves separate from a certain cultural situation but weigh heavily in the current pluralistic, secular culture:

1. the feeling of absolute dependence is too limited to serve as a general denominator for religions, as proved to be the case in our discussion of non-monotheistic religions.
2. In this conception of a generic view of religion those who are indifferent to religion cannot be equal partners in discussion and this is equally true with respect to the strongly growing secular worldviews after Schleiermacher. A hidden/unconscious understanding of God is ascribed to those who are indifferent to religion. The debate is thus decided before it even begins.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> H.C. Rümke, *Karakter en aanleg in verband met het ongeloof* (Amsterdam: Ten Have, 1963).

<sup>26</sup> In a discussion on my article, D.Z. Phillips (Swansea/Claremont) rightly remarked that critics of religion such as Freud and Marx can also accompany their critique of religion with a

Is the generic view of religion convincing enough to indicate in a pluralistic culture that religion is not something coincidental or accidental to society?<sup>2</sup> We will explore whether these two objections to this generic view of religion can be met. If not, then I, who share Schleiermacher's view that religion is not a marginal phenomenon, must attempt to realize his intention in a different way.

### 3. A Generic View of Religion and our Contemporary Secular Culture

In the twentieth century there have also been theologians like Paul Tillich and Wilfred Cantwell Smith who, like Schleiermacher, defend the thesis that religion is not accidental or coincidental by means of a generic view of religion.<sup>27</sup> Their generic conception of religion is important for us because they have developed this conception precisely in the contemporary context of a pluralistic, secular society. Our main purpose in looking at them is to see if they can avoid both of the above objections to a generic view of religion.

#### 3.1. 'Faith' Instead of the Feeling of Absolute Dependence

Over against a secular view of life that considers religion to be accidental or even a waste product, Wilfred Cantwell Smith defends the view that 'faith' is universally human (FB, 135f., 139).<sup>28</sup> His distinction between faith and cumulative tradition is well-known. On the one hand, there is faith, the relation with the divine transcendence, and, on the other, the expression of this in rites, prayer, dance and doctrine. Faith is universally human, but there are also the actual historical religions. The relation between universal and particular is not that of the Enlightenment model of the supplementation of the universal by the particular. The universal, as in Schleiermacher, is joined with the particular as its core. Faith interacts with the cumulative tradition. There is thus nothing of a uniform faith of human beings who belong to different traditions (MER 190). The kind of faith one has is contingent but having faith is a constant (FB 138).

Faith characterizes the human being as *homo religiosus*. It is "the essential

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generic claim: religion in general is a matter of projection or social alienation. Here too the debate is decided before it even begins.

<sup>27</sup> Defenses of a generic view of religion can also be found in Wolfhart Pannenberg, Mircea Eliade and in Catholic theologians such as Karl Rahner and Gerhard Oberhammer.

<sup>28</sup> I will refer to the following works by Smith: *The Meaning and End of Religion* (London: SPCK, 1978) (= MER), *Faith and Belief*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) (= FB); *Towards a World Theology* (London/Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, Ltd) (= TWT).

human quality: that is constitutive of man as human; that personality is constituted by our universal ability, or invitation, to live in terms of a transcendent dimension, and in response to it" (FB 129). It is "generically human" (FB 135; TWT 146, 171, 181). This is not intended in an abstract and static sense—one can, after all, not separate faith from the forms in which it appears. Like Schleiermacher, Smith also views the thesis the human being is religious in an historical dynamic sense (FB 138). Faith is not 'natural' and certainly not automatic: "Faith is normal: but to abnormality man is naturally prone" (FB 141). For that reason it is necessary that one be raised within a specific religious community (MER 189; cf. TWT 138).

Does this generic view of religion, of faith, do more justice to the non-monotheistic religions than the feeling of absolute dependence? Sometimes Smith speaks of the transcendent reality of God but sometimes in a broader sense. Faith is also expressed, for example, in the Theravadin Buddhist tradition, where an ultimate reality like *dharma* is itself a transcendent pattern of correct behaviour "so that even the intellectual expression of faith, let alone the practical, is in ethical terms" (MER 179).

If we view faith as the relation of the individual with divine transcendence, leaving open the question as to whether it is personal or impersonal, one or many, moral or non-moral, gracious or demanding,<sup>29</sup> then the objection that the generic element does not do any justice to non-monotheistic religions has been met. Faith is unmistakably broader than the feeling of absolute dependence. It is an open description of "everything that a tradition means to an insider."<sup>30</sup>

Has the second objection, i.e. that a generic conception of religion does not do justice to secular worldviews, also been met? Smith is unclear on this question. He sees the "alienated nihilism" as the opposite of faith (FB 134f.). Smith is vague regarding the contemporary humanism that is indifferent to religion. He holds that it is sufficient to see faith as belief "in reason and truth, in justice and in man" (FB 134). But if the term faith includes the (older and contemporary) humanism, it then receives another, not strictly religious meaning than is generally the case in Smith. Belief in reason, truth and justice can be understood as being implicitly religious by means of a transcendental philosophy in the spirit of Tillich but we find nothing of this in *Faith and Belief*. P. Slater even holds that in Smith faith is broader yet and to be understood as a term for a cosmic basic trust.<sup>31</sup> Interpreted in this way every human being (with the exception of certain forms of nihilism) is certainly religious. But then the term faith (in Smith a strictly religious term for the most part) has been

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<sup>29</sup> This, according to John Hick, is what Smith understands by faith (MER XV).

<sup>30</sup> H.M. Vroom, *Religions and the Truth: Philosophical Reflections and Perspectives* (Grand Rapids/Amsterdam: Eerdmans/Rodopi), p. 76.

<sup>31</sup> P. Slater *et al.*, "Three responses to Faith and Belief: a Review Article," *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 10 (1981): 113.

stretched to a great extent.

### 3.2 Are Secular Worldviews Quasi-Religions?

Paul Tillich attempts to meet not only the first objection but particularly the second.<sup>32</sup> He replaces the feeling of absolute dependence by the term “ultimate concern.” Schleiermacher’s feeling of absolute dependence is “only a slightly narrower way of saying ultimate concern” (HCT 401). Religion is being grasped by an ultimate concern. The reference to gods is lacking in this definition of religion, allowing it to include, for example, Zen Buddhism. But Tillich takes yet another step by also including secular worldviews. He thus comes to his distinction between authentic religions and quasi-religions (GW 5, 51f.).

The concept religion can take on such a broad meaning if we understand religion as being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern that makes all others purely transient and in itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our lives. Such a concern has the character of an unconditional seriousness and it demands that every finite concern that comes into conflict with the infinite must yield. In the theistic religions that is God or a higher principle such as Brahman. In secular quasi-religions such as nationalism and humanism the nation and human beings, respectively, have that role. The term *quasi-religions* indicates that secular worldviews have an unintended actual correspondence with authentic religions that can be seen. They are distinguished from *pseudo-religions* which have an intended and professed correspondence with authentic religion (GW 5, 53).

J.E. Smith, in his *Quasi-Religions*, describes secular worldviews like humanism, Marxism and nationalism by means of Tillich’s generic view of religion.<sup>33</sup> He emphasizes the difference between the quasi-religions and the authentic religions: in the former the finite is absolutized. Nevertheless, they have something in common with authentic religion in that they function in a similar way. Smith investigates the world religions and concludes that they all show a general pattern: 1) a diagnosis of the human situation on the basis of the religious ultimate, which indicates the nature of the evil that separates us from the religious ultimate and 2) the quest for a liberator who restores the breach (QR 3). He subsequently shows that this same pattern is present in nationalism, Marxism and humanism. In addition, they have an ultimate

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<sup>32</sup> I will cite from the following works: “Das Christentum und die Begegnung der Weltreligionen,” *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5 (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1964), pp. 51f. (= GW); *A History of Christian Thought*, ed. C.E. Braaten (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968) (= HCT).

<sup>33</sup> J.E. Smith, *Quasi-Religions* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1994) (= QR).

concern, albeit something finite that has been absolutized for this purpose. The universally constant in quasi and authentic religions is their function of granting liberation.

Tillich and J.E. Smith seem to succeed in meeting both objections. They make the generic conception of religion fruitful in confrontation with secular worldviews. In any case, a basis for dialogue has been established through the establishment of a corresponding function: the granting of liberation. Religion is taken in so broad a sense that it merges with the quest for and reception of an answer to the meaning of life (GW 5, 52). In that sense one can claim that religion is a generic concept: even those indifferent to religion (in the strict sense) are 'religious' in their desire for meaning. The secular worldviews are a source of meaning and therefore belong to the genus religion. They have the same function as the authentic religions.

But what is the price? Their solution is not convincing for the following reasons:

1. The general pattern to which J.E. Smith refers is too vague and thus the term religion loses its specific content. It could also include the diet of the dietitian. Health is, after all, an ultimate value for some.
2. Here one has moved from a substantial definition to a functional definition. As a rule, Tillich views his definition of religion, being grasped by an ultimate concern, as a substantial one, as referring to another decisive reality that rejects the absolutization of something finite. This is one of Tillich's fundamental motivations, the so-called Protestant principle. Viewing secular worldviews as a type of religion can succeed only by way of an inconsistency: the substantial definition changes into a functional one. Secular worldviews can only be called (quasi-)religions because of their function, not because of their content.
3. There is a contradiction in Tillich's theology. In a closer analysis of what Tillich understands by religion, the defining characteristic of religion appears to be the principle of identity: the union of God and human beings.<sup>34</sup> He thus points out that Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence, just like his own ultimate concern, falls outside the subject-object schema (HCT 404f.). And that *cannot* happen if one's ultimate concern is something finite, as Tillich allows through his description of quasi-religions as "being grasped by the ultimate concern."
4. Like Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Schleiermacher, Tillich wants, with his generic conception of religion, to show that religion is an independent, irreducible phenomenon in distinction from other phenomena like art and science. As far as his own position is concerned, he rejects reductionism. Nevertheless, Tillich and J.E. Smith engage in reductionism, from the point of view of the adherents of secular worldviews, by characterizing these worldviews as quasi-religions. The humanist P. Kurtz calls such a definition of religion applied to humanism a "definition by

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<sup>34</sup> W. Stoker, "Het mystieke in de religieuze ervaring. De transcendentale ervaringstheologie van Tillich," *T\_schrift voor Theologie* 38/3 (1998): 238-255.

conversion.”<sup>35</sup>

In brief, Schleiermacher's generic view of religion can possibly be broadened by terms such as faith or ultimate concern with respect to non-monotheistic religions. The objection that a generic view of religion does little or no justice to the fact that many people and worldviews are indifferent to religion (in the strict sense of the word) remains. Either they are reduced to a form of (albeit often wrong) religiosity or religion (Tillich and J.E. Smith) or labelled as nihilistic or nihilism, a tendency in Wilfred Cantwell Smith (FB 134f.). I therefore consider a generic concept of religion to be of little use for the contemporary secular culture in which we have to deal with people and worldviews like contemporary humanism that are indifferent to religion.

#### 4. Worldview as the Generic Element in Contemporary Secular Culture and the Justification of Religion

With Schleiermacher I hold that religion is an irreducible given and not merely a coincidence. If a generic conception of religion carries little conviction in a secular culture, how can one show that religion is not a marginal concern? In this we need both to be attentive to the above discussion as well as to recognize secular worldviews for what they are. Schleiermacher, in my view, was right in seeking a generic element. In the interest of peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society one needs, however, to seek a generic element to which *all* people, religious or secular, can agree. I will make the following proposal in two steps: the first concerns the generic element and the second a small indication of the direction in which I would seek the further justification of religion.

##### 4.1. Worldview as the Generic Element

It is not religion but the idea of worldview that is given with human existence. According to Heidegger, it is, among other things, the task of philosophy to show that “something like a worldview belongs to the essence of human existence.”<sup>36</sup> This is a

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<sup>35</sup> The former chairman of the Humanist Society in the Netherlands, P.B. Cliteur, once remarked: Why is it so often asserted that atheists and agnostics are religious? I am repulsed by that. I am not a religious person.

<sup>36</sup> M. Heidegger, “Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie,” Gesamtausgabe, vol. V (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann), pp. 24, 13. ‘Worldview’ (*Weltanschauung*) refers not only to a view of nature but also to the meaning and purpose of human existence. It therefore includes ‘lifeview’ (*Lebensanschauung*) Cf. Heidegger, “Die Gründprobleme,” p. 7.

statement on the ontological rather than the ontic level. It does not concern indicating a specific, concrete worldview but an understanding of human existence to which a worldview as such belongs. It concerns understanding (human) reality prior to all experience of reality.<sup>37</sup>

For human existence orientation is necessary. That is what the term “understanding” points to in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Understanding is to be viewed as characteristic for the human way of existence. All understanding is “understanding as.” Understanding is possible because the things do not appear in isolation but stand in a referential totality. Our human existence as a being-in-the-world means that the relation between humans and the world is internal. In connection with this the concept worldview can be seen as an ontological or anthropological category.<sup>38</sup> It expresses the integrating and unifying character of our experience.

Worldview as an anthropological category shows itself in the communal character of human existence. It is the frame of orientation that has been passed on and taken over and therewith the presupposition of our being acquainted with the world. Worldliness, historicity and language are the ontological forms that are constitutive for the human life-world. These structures are always filled in by one or another worldview.

This indicates only indirectly that religion and secular worldviews are not something accidental for society. As an anthropological category, worldview appears concretely as secular or religious worldviews. I do not wish to suggest that it is a matter of indifference as to whether one has a religious or a secular worldview.<sup>39</sup> One should not conclude on the basis of the rejection of the generic view of religion that religion is thereby accidental or coincidental to human life. Therefore, by way of conclusion I will say something about a (further) justification of religion. That was, after all, the framework in which Schleiermacher presented his generic view of religion.

#### 4.2. A Programme for the Justification of Religion

I will only indicate the direction in which I would look for a justification of religion. It has the character of a programme. I will indicate this direction in connection with

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<sup>37</sup> Heidegger, “Die Grundprobleme,” p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> As G. Schultz, *Weltanschauung als Antwort* (Amsterdam: Centrale Huisdrukkerij Vrije Universiteit, 1992) correctly points out.

<sup>39</sup> I have elsewhere given a theological justification of the right of secular worldviews next to religious worldviews. Cf. W. Stoker, *Is the Quest for Meaning the Quest for God? The Religious Ascription of Meaning in Relation to the Secular Ascription of Meaning: A Theological Study* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 180-92.

Schleiermacher.

1. Over against those who reject an ultimate dimension (apart from the question of how to describe this more specifically) it can be philosophically established that there is such a transcendent dimension. Kant did this, in my view, convincingly in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>40</sup> How the ultimate dimension should be interpreted is a matter for further discussion.

2. In his *Dialektik* Schleiermacher shows how immediate self-consciousness or feeling precedes Knowing and Doing. Religion is rooted in this pre-reflective sphere of human existence. By viewing religion primarily as piety, as a determination of the immediate self-consciousness, he breaks with the intellectualization of religion by many in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. This has consequences for the justification of Christian faith.

3. Faith as the feeling of absolute dependence is fundamental. It arises from preaching (CF 14.3) through “experience as the demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (CF 14. Postscript). Schleiermacher seems to be referring here to Lessing’s *Über den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*.<sup>41</sup> He begins with his experience of Christian faith that is different from what it was for Lessing, no longer consisting in “necessary truths of reason” but rather in a proposal for the meaning of life. Schleiermacher thus does not want to call the ‘prolegomena’ to *The Christian Faith* a foundation of faith.<sup>42</sup> It is more modest to call it a justification, for the reality of the Christian faith is presupposed in the ‘prolegomena’ to the Christian faith.

4. A justification of faith following Schleiermacher consists in the explication of the rationality of the faith experience. This has been called the view of rationality in life philosophy (*Philosophie des Lebens*). Here it concerns a form of understanding in which time, fact and individuality play constitutive roles. With T. de Boer I hold that “after the crisis of reason as the source of eternal truths every experience has an equal right in a philosophy that is searching for the meaning of our actual, historical existence.”<sup>43</sup> A narrative theology could supplement Schleiermacher’s theology of experience.

5. For a peaceful coexistence between people with different worldviews, mutual dialogue is indispensable. It is precisely Schleiermacher who has philosophically defended the indispensability of dialogue. The concept of “immediate self-consciousness” brings with it, namely, the notion of *dialogical reason*. The subject does not ground itself nor is it comprehensible to itself. It cannot, as in Fichte, give knowledge of reality in a deductive way. As individuality, the finite subject is referred

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<sup>40</sup> On this see Stoker, *Quest for God*, pp. 201-08.

<sup>41</sup> Aldus C. Senft, *Wahrhaftigkeit und Wahrheit* (Tübingen, 1956), p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> “Zweites Sendschreiben an Herrn Dr. Lücke,” *Schleiermacher-Auswahl*, Munich/Hamburg: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, pp. 163ff.

<sup>43</sup> T. de Boer, *Langs de gewesten van het z\_n* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1996), p. 70.

for knowledge to *historical reality*. Thus people have their religion or secular worldview passed on by traditions or, more generally, by the culture of their time and give their own form to it.

Christian faith is a proposal for the meaning of life that, in dialogue with other religions and secular worldviews, needs to be investigated with respect to its tenability.