

Essay: *Friedrich Schleiermacher, Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern (1799)* in *Schleiermacher Kritische Gesamtausgabe I Abt Band I* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984 (Fuller Library BX 4827 Ser. I v.2) p.185-326.

Since my native language is German I have chosen to study Schleiermacher in the original German. The terms used here might be slightly different from those in the English translation.

1. Introduction

Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Reden* are among the history making writings of the enlightenment. Schleiermacher is attempting to make "religion" presentable to the intellectual elite of the day. Schleiermacher's *Reden* contain five single speeches that progress from the defense of religion in the first speech to the definition of religion in the second and ultimately to an endorsement of Christianity as the best of the religions in the fifth speech.

2. What does Friedrich Schleiermacher mean by "religion"?

2.1. The personal experience

Schleiermacher's definition of religion is very special since he restricts the meaning of religion to what he sees as the central idea. Religion is something very dear and special to him that he expresses by referring to religion with "she" emphasizing the aspect of feeling (female is also the proper gender for the word "religion" in German).

Religion is revealing herself in a unique movement of the soul (German: Gemüt) as a response to the awesome view of the infinite (200). Looking at the universe (or world) is the highest formula of religion. By looking, we are under the influence of what we look at, and we finally can comprehend what is in our sight. The universe is revealing itself to us every moment in an uninterrupted flow of activities. All that is happening in the universe is God's action and his actions also influence us. To accept these actions as the description of the infinite is proper religion. All that ventures beyond this limit is retreating back into empty mythology (213-214).

Looking and feeling is intimately connected. A person that recognizes will have corresponding feelings (218). A person touched in such a way might have single exalted

thoughts like "heavenly sparks" flickering through the soul. This is the fulfillment of the aim and purpose of the life (201).

Since religion is looking to the infinite she also realizes that there is an infinite number of other valid viewpoints of the same material. Religion is tolerant and accepts other ways of looking at the universe (217). Religion is necessarily present in better persons who have spiritual understanding (321.8). Religion rules unlimited in that one's mind (204). The best and noblest persons are moved by her.

Religion cannot be communicated but has to be experienced. The mistake that the "despisers of religion" make is to look at religion from the outside. Religion can only be understood from the inside from its central point (255.37).

2.2. Relationship to Ethics and Metaphysics

The subject of religion as seen above is the relationship of humans to the world. The same subject is covered by metaphysics and ethics, but religion is not a mixture of morality and metaphysics or equal to either of these as many of Schleiermacher's contemporaries state (207).

2.2.1. Religion to be cleaned from ethics and metaphysics

Religion does never appear pure but is usually contaminated with ethics and metaphysics. Religion needs to be purged from the foreign parts that were attached to it. These foreign parts were once necessary to install a basic sense of religion into the primitive people in ages before us (210). One example of religion mixed with ethics and metaphysics is Scripture. To understand the traditions properly one has to read between the lines and free the "diamond" of true religion that is buried between metaphysical and ethical material (211).

2.2.2. Religion not for a purpose

According to Schleiermacher's definition religion does not try to explain the universe like metaphysics. Neither does religion develop the world further as ethics do. To

use religion for a such purpose means to despise her (204) and to take advantage of her. Religion in essence does not think or act but looks at the world in childlike passivity (211). Feeling and recognizing that one is a part of the whole of the universe is the true religion. The desire for the infinite frees the human being into unlimited freedom.

Religion is not to be found in perfected systems of dogmatics because these philosophies and abstract theologies are not able to move the soul. Quite in contrast they cause dispute and arguments that are of no use. Movements of the soul happen only in the religious life itself (201).

2.2.3. Ethics are self-evident

Ethics and moral laws as also civil law do not need religious support. They are self-evident and can stand on their own (202). It would be not prudent to demand someone to do religious acts that did not spring from his innermost being. Connecting religion to ethics or law would of necessity lead to such situations and has led to such situations in the past (203). Religion is not "driving" humans to do something. The devil possesses people and forces them to do things. True religion leads to freedom and gives people a calmness of the mind that enables them to make their own proper decision (220).

2.3. Effect of redefining religion

By taking ethics and metaphysics out of religion Schleiermacher has taken the items that often seem to be most offensive and outdated out of the discussion. There is not much anymore for his opponents to attack. On the other hand not much is left of his religion except for a kind of warm feeling when he looks at the world.

2.4. The distinction between outer and inner religion?

Religion comes from the inside and affects from that direction what we are doing (223) and all that we think and do is a topic of religion. Inner religion leads of necessity to ethical behavior (321.8).

One of the outer effects of religion is a desire to communicate the awesome experience of the universe to others. The missionary enterprise should be directed

exclusively to the ones that have no religion at all since other religions are equally valid and emphasize other aspects of the universe (272.3). Mission is communication of godly things and not pushing religion on others by force (272.35).

3. What is the relationship between "religion" and "Christianity"?

The basic idea of Schleiermacher is that essentially only one religion exists expressed in many religions all concerned about the same which is the relation to the "spirit of the universe". The terms Christianity and religion are not synonymous. Christianity is one of the religions, but is the most advanced of all of them since it does not include primitive retribution like Judaism and others but redemption and reconciliation through Christ. Christ is the revelation of mediation to the "spirit of the universe". The necessity of a dual nature of the redeemer -- according to the classic definition of Anselm -- is echoed in a slightly modified fashion by Schleiermacher (321.30).

Jesus is not the only mediator to the "universe". He is the model of a mediator. Other mediators can develop in the future and do the same or better than Jesus did. Jesus expected other mediators to come and never claimed to be the only one. Jesus got redemption for his kind of people. Other redeemers might reach different kinds of people with their message (322.23).

Schleiermacher is looking forward to the development of religion apart from ethics and metaphysics. He expects that humanity will reach a higher religiosity by restricting the communication of religion to the family. Science and progress in technology will hopefully enable humans to have more leisure time to communicate within the family the essence of religion. No Church or Christianity will be needed anymore when the young people will be guided by their father into the worship of the eternal (or infinite) (290.35). This will lead into an age when everyone is sharing openly leading to a perfection of the human nature, of the human will and of human understanding (291.35).

4. Difference between Christian experience and Doctrine?

Doctrine is something that leads away from true religion (283.37). It is an outward result of religion (321.8) which is dependent on the circumstances and the special focus that a special religious community has on the one aspect of the universe.

The church is a kind of educational facility for non religious people. When people grow and become more religious they need the church no more. The church helps people to develop their spirituality which is an individually distinct spirituality within the bandwidth of teaching of that religion (275.43).