

## From Pietism to Romanticism

### *The Early Life and Work of Friedrich Schleiermacher*

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SCHOLARSHIP HAS YET TO PROPERLY ASSESS THE IMPORTANCE OF PIETISM IN FRIEDRICH Schleiermacher's earliest work. Recent research on Schleiermacher has been limited to specific areas in philosophy and theology;<sup>1</sup> however, no full scale intellectual biography exists. Richard Crouter has focused on the philosophical influences on Schleiermacher and his role in the Enlightenment and the development of Romanticism.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the work of B. A. Gerrish has emphasized his central role in the history of Christian thought and the development of modern evangelical theology.<sup>3</sup> This distance in research, between Schleiermacher as philosopher or Christian theologian somewhat misses the mark in understanding the syncretic nature of his early thought.<sup>4</sup>

Since Wilhelm Dilthey's still untranslated classic, *Life of Schleiermacher* (1870), scholars have stressed that he cannot be considered apart from his cultural and historical context.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, while it is widely recognized that Schleiermacher never renounced his Moravian heritage,<sup>6</sup> there is very little research devoted to understanding exactly how his early work was influenced by his Pietist heritage.

1. See Allen G. Jorgenson, *The Appeal to Experience in the Christologies of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Rahner* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); Jacqueline Mariña, *Transformation of the self in the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

2. Richard Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

3. B. A. Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

4. The work of Redeker, published in 1970, is the closest any scholar has come to a full intellectual biography of Schleiermacher. See Martin Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, trans. by John Wallhauser (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973).

5. Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism*, 2.

6. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, ed. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) xii; Jacqueline Mariña, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 2; Richard B. Brandt, *The Philosophy of Schleiermacher: The Development of His Theory of Scientific and Religious Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941) 19–22.

This lack of scholarship is largely due to an overemphasis on the first two speeches of *On Religion*,<sup>7</sup> and a neglect of the second half of the book.<sup>8</sup> This problem in Schleiermacher scholarship dates back to Hegel's critique of *On Religion* in 1802 in his book *Faith and Knowledge*, where he challenged Schleiermacher's internalization of religious truth.<sup>9</sup> This failing continues to this day in the work of religious theorists such as Russell McCutcheon and Wayne Proudfoot, who overemphasize Schleiermacher's definition of religion as an intuitive feeling and disregard his emphasis on church reform.<sup>10</sup>

This misunderstanding, stretching from Hegel to McCutcheon, seems to have arisen because Schleiermacher defined religion as a pre-reflexive feeling that arises from the heart and has nothing to do with "scholastic and metaphysical" barbarism:

What I assert and what I should like to establish for religion include the following: It springs necessarily and by itself from the interior of every better soul, it has its own province in the mind in which it reigns sovereign, and it is worthy of moving the noblest and the most excellent by means of its innermost power and by having its essence known by them.<sup>11</sup>

However, this is only one aspect of Schleiermacher's definition of religion. A more thorough reading of *On Religion* reveals Schleiermacher's argument that religion is necessarily social.

Schleiermacher tried to re-affirm the 'true' nature of religion and condemn the misguided divisions that dogma incites. He achieved this by critiquing religious institutions for focusing on intellectual and external rituals and, like the Pietists, he argued for an authentic and heartfelt religious experience, and the importance of small devout gatherings of believers.

7. See Andrew Dole, "The Case of the Disappearing Discourse: Schleiermacher's fourth Speech and the field of Religious Studies," *The Journal of Religion* 88 (January 2008) 1–28; Thomas E. Reynolds, "Religion within the limits of History: Schleiermacher and Religion—a Reappraisal," *Religion* 32 (2002).

8. Another problem is that scholarship on Pietism is still a rather undeveloped field. Only since 1970, has this field moved beyond the small circle of German church historians to become an international and interdisciplinary inquiry. For more on this see Jonathan Strom, "Problems and Promises of Pietism Research" *Church History* 71.3 (2002) 536–54.

9. For Hegel, the manifestation of community and religious truth are more intertwined than they are with Schleiermacher. Religion is to be embodied by people in a universal church. It is necessarily social not just in the sense of community but of consciousness: "It is with the consciousness of the community—which thus makes the transition from mere humanity to God-man, to the intuition, consciousness, and certainty of the union and unity of the divine and human nature—that community begins." See G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, The Lectures of 1827*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

10. McCutcheon and Proudfoot both criticize Schleiermacher for associating religion with feeling and protecting it from historical analysis. This interpretation of Schleiermacher is inherited from Hegel's critique in 1802 but it differs sharply. Hegel charged Schleiermacher with internalizing religion because he associated it with small, freely associated communities of faith. For Hegel, Schleiermacher paid too much attention to cultural, social, and historical contingency. Ironically, McCutcheon and Proudfoot, critique Schleiermacher for ignoring the cultural, social, and historical contingency of religion. See "Case of the Disappearing Discourse: Schleiermacher's fourth Speech and the field of Religious Studies," 2–3; See also Russell McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers: Resdescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany: State University Press, 2000).

11. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 17.

In this essay, I show the ways in which Friedrich Schleiermacher's earliest book, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (1799) is influenced by Pietism. First, I situate Schleiermacher's work in the context of late eighteenth century Germany, discussing his Moravian (*Herrnhuter*) education and Pietist influences, as well as the similarities between Pietism and the Early Romantic Movement. Second, I illustrate how Schleiermacher's *On Religion* is influenced by his Pietist roots. This involves a brief comparison of Schleiermacher's work with Philipp Jakob Spener to reveal the similar themes on an inner heartfelt experience, religious community, and church correction. This combined approach exposes Schleiermacher as an eclectic spirit who conjoined his Pietist roots with a Romantic worldview. It also demonstrates the complexity of the intellectual environment from which Schleiermacher arose; a world in which deists, skeptics, and rational theists were increasingly debating the factuality of religious belief and its moral importance.

## Early Life and Influences

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was born in Breslau in southeastern Saxony and was raised and educated among the Moravian Brethren.<sup>12</sup> The *Herrnhuter* (the Lord's Watch)<sup>13</sup> community was founded in Berthelsdorf by Count Nicholas L von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) in 1722. Zinzendorf's theology was a liberal version of Philipp Jacob Spener's (1635–1705) original message. He was convinced that the true essence of religion was "something very different than holding an opinion"<sup>14</sup> and thought religion was to be "grasped by sensation alone, without any concepts," advocating a religion of the heart.<sup>15</sup> Anticipating Schleiermacher's work, Zinzendorf spoke of humans having a *sensus numinis*, a feeling of absolute "dependence on something superior."<sup>16</sup> As Peter Vogt has argued, Zinzendorf "paved the way for Schleiermacher's notion of religious intuition."<sup>17</sup>

Pietism began as a reaction against the stale religiosity of the established institutional churches. From the *collegia pietatis* of 1689–1690<sup>18</sup> to the founding of the Moravian community, an emphasis on devotional group worship was integral to the early manifestations of the movement. Pietism forced Religion out of the state sponsored churches and into conventicles by emphasizing its pivotal role as a transformative power for the community and the individual.

12. Schleiermacher's early life is well documented in his personal letters and autobiography. There he tells the story of his life and details his inner conflict with theology and philosophy. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Schleiermacher as Unfolded in His Autobiography and Letters*, vol 1, ed. Frederica Rowan (London: Smith, Elder, & co., 1860).

13. F. Ernest Stoeffler, *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (New York: Paulist, 1983) 20.

14. Peter Vogt, "Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf," *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) 213.

15. Vogt, "Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf," 213.

16. *Ibid*, 213.

17. *Ibid*, 220.

18. See the useful chapter on the *collegia pietatis* in Tanya Kevorkian, *Baroque Piety: Religion, Society, and Music in Leipzig, 1650–1750* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) chapter 6, "The Collegia Pietatis," 147–67.

Zinzendorf intended for the Moravian community to gather together true Christians, for the establishment of a community of regenerate souls.<sup>19</sup> He did not want to institute this community as a separate church or the only true Christian community, but rather as a “tent” under which Christians from various faith perspectives could work together to expand Christ’s reign. At the time of his death, the Moravian movement had about two dozen settlements in North America and Europe, each advocating the importance of community and a heartfelt religious experience.<sup>20</sup>

Schleiermacher was trained in this “Jesus-centered piety” of the Brethren from 1783 to 1787. He grew up in the home of Reformed pastors. His mother, Katharina-Maria Schleiermacher,<sup>21</sup> and his father Gottlieb Schleiermacher, himself a Reformed military chaplain, were descended from families of clergymen. Friedrich shared his parents with two siblings, an older sister, Charlotte, and a younger brother, Carl. It was here, together with his family in the Moravian environment, that he established his love of classics and religious life. It was here that Schleiermacher was taught the value of the imagination and immediacy of joy in the process of salvation; it was an influence that had a lasting effect.<sup>22</sup>

The egalitarian environment of the Moravians advocated active involvement in the community for the benefit of all believers and stressed a continuous conversation regarding personal religious experience. Life among the Moravians included four services per day, monthly confession, and monthly communion.<sup>23</sup> As Peter Vogt has noted, the Moravian community stressed the importance of sharing personal religious experiences, in both letters and conversation. This environment developed within Schleiermacher a deeply religious and biblical vision of community. Its lasting influence upon him can be seen in his many personal letters that detail his religious feelings and doubts, and in *On Religion* itself, which is written as a series of speeches. For example, in the first speech in *On Religion* Schleiermacher describes, with a confessional tone, the importance of his religious upbringing in the formation of his identity:

Religion was the maternal womb in whose holy darkness my young life was nourished. In it my spirit breathed before it had discovered the world of external objects, experience, and scholarship. Religion helped me when I began to examine the ancestral faith and to purify my heart of the rubble of primitive times. It remained with me when God and immortality disappeared before my doubting eyes. It guided me into active life.<sup>24</sup>

19. Peter Vogt, “A Voice for Themselves: Women as Participants in Congregational Discourse in the 18th Century Moravian Movement,” in Beverley M. Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, ed., *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California 1998) 228.

20. Ibid, 228.

21. Katherina-Maria Schleiermacher died in 1783, just as Friedrich entered the Moravian school. See, Redeker, *Schleiermacher*, 10.

22. Encyclopedia Britannica (2009), from the Encyclopedia Britannica Online: <http://search.eb.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/eb/article-6476>, “Friedrich Schleiermacher.”

23. Redeker, *Schleiermacher*, 11.

24. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 8.

Schleiermacher's relationship with the Moravian Brethren was not always easy. From an early age he had difficulty accepting the Dogma of the church. At a seminary school in Barby, which he attended from 1785 to 1787, he belonged to a secret club where Kant and Goethe were read and debated.<sup>25</sup> Here Schleiermacher was subjected to a strict religious education that sought the intensification of piety and which trained him in the pietistic relation to the world. It was a severe environment that relied upon the submission to authority and demanded almost monastic seclusion from the external world.<sup>26</sup> However, Schleiermacher's skeptical spirit soon manifested itself in a rejection of the Moravian Christology. Schleiermacher came to the conclusion that Christ's sacrifice was not atonement for all of humanities' sin; as evidence, he pointed to the fact that Jesus had never explicitly stated this fundamental Christian truth himself. On January 21, 1789, he wrote to his father:

Faith is the regalia of the Godhead, you say. Alas! Dearest father, if you believe that, without this faith, no one can attain to salvation in the next world, nor to tranquility in this—and such, I know, is your belief—oh! then, pray to God to grant it to me, for to me it is now lost. I cannot believe that He who called Himself the Son of Man, was the true Eternal God. I cannot believe that His death was a vicarious atonement. Because He never expressly said so Himself; and I cannot believe it to have been necessary, because God, who evidently did not create men for perfection, but for the pursuit of it, cannot possibly intend to punish them eternally, because they have not attained it.<sup>27</sup>

To his father this seemed like a rejection of God, but for Schleiermacher this was not the case. As he wrote later in the same letter: "I entertain doubts about the doctrine of the atonements and the divinity of Christ, and you speak as if I were denying God."<sup>28</sup> Schleiermacher may have universalized the idea of God but he never renounced it. He merely favored the Enlightenment view of man, which stressed the perfectibility of the human spirit over the emphasis on sin and redemption taught by his Pietist teachers.

After leaving seminary school<sup>29</sup> Schleiermacher enrolled at the University of Halle, where he remained until 1794.<sup>30</sup> When he began his studies at the university, he was deeply

25. Ibid, xii.

26. Redeker, *Schleiermacher*, 12.

27. Schleiermacher, *The Life of Schleiermacher as Unfolded in His Autobiography and Letters*, vol 1, 46.

28. Ibid.

29. In the spring of the same year Schleiermacher wrote another very "hesitant" letter to his father and told him that he could not return to the Brethren because of this disagreement with their doctrines:

Let me take away the consolation with me, that I am still in possession of your eternal affection, and that you may still entertain the hope that, although your son may never again return to the community of the Brethren (for I must confess that there is much in the doctrines and constitution of the latter which is not likely ever again to be approved of by me), he may, nonetheless, return to a true faith in Christianity (Schleiermacher, *The Life of Schleiermacher as Unfolded in His Autobiography and Letters*, vol 1, 58).

30. A Pietist but nonetheless secular University. See, Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, xii.

impressed by the work of Immanuel Kant.<sup>31</sup> To the followers of the Enlightenment, Kant was a breath of fresh air, encouraging intellectual freedom and moral responsibility that was founded upon reason. But to the Romantics,<sup>32</sup> who followed in the footsteps of Rousseau, Lessing, and Herder, Kant's first two critiques seemed cold and barren. Schleiermacher soon joined these Romantics in their critique of Kant, becoming disaffected with Kant's understanding of freedom and religion.<sup>33</sup> He studied the works of Plato<sup>34</sup> and Spinoza, and became friends with the Schlegel brothers.

Schleiermacher's early work was conceived in the creative environment of late 18th century Germany where deists, skeptics, and rational theists were increasingly debating the factuality of religious belief and its moral importance. Kant had attempted to undercut the debate with his distinction between *noumena* and *phenomena*, thereby making theoretical knowledge of God impossible and religion primarily a moral postulate.<sup>35</sup> Schleiermacher countered that religion was ultimately a lived experience that was distinct from philosophy, ritual, and institution; religion cannot be challenged by disproving biblical claims or by rational argument:

How wrongly, therefore, do you turn on religion with your reproaches that it is bent on persecution and spitefulness, that it wrecks society and makes blood flow like water. Indict those who corrupt religion, who want to inundate it with philosophy, and fetter it to a system.<sup>36</sup>

Schleiermacher wrote *On Religion* between the months of February and April of 1799, while he was acting as the interim court preacher in Potsdam.<sup>37</sup> At this time he was also collaborating with the Schlegel brothers, assisting them in their writing of the Romantic classic *Athenäum*.<sup>38</sup>

31. Let us not forget that Kant too had an upbringing colored with Pietism, and that the Enlightenment spirit of personal discovery is contemporaneous with Spener's movement. See Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, ed. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) xiv.

32. Defining Romanticism is a difficult task. Frederick Beiser divides it into three phases: early Romanticism (1797–1802), high Romanticism (1802–1815), and Late Romanticism (1815–1830). The early phase of Romanticism to which Schleiermacher belonged was not antirational, communal, nor opposed to individuality, those were later developments. See, Crouter, *Between Enlightenment and Romanticism*, 7. This being the case, Schleiermacher's influence from Pietism becomes even more relevant to understanding the argument in *On Religion*. His strong emphasis on communal worship and criticism of philosophical interpretations of religion have a precedent in Pietist literature that is lacking in early Romantic writings.

33. Schleiermacher ultimately rejected Kant's proof for God, and his conclusions, founded on moral grounds, regarding the reality of immortality. See, Redeker, *Schleiermacher*, 16.

34. Schleiermacher would later translate most of Plato's works (beginning in 1804 and stretching to 1828). These translations remained a standard in the field up into the twentieth century. See, Redeker, *Schleiermacher*, 183.

35. B. A. Gerrish and Sergio Sorrentino, "Schleiermacher, Friedrich," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12, 2nd ed. Detroit" (Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, Gale. University of Calgary (22 Sept. 2008) 8162.

36. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 28.

37. *Ibid.*, xvii.

38. Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism*, 6; see also Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (New York: State University of



With the publication of *On Religion* Schleiermacher argued for a theoretical shift in how religious experience was understood. He claimed that the integrity of the religious experience was guaranteed: “Religious experience maintains its own sphere and its own character only by completely removing itself from the sphere and character of speculation as well as from that of praxis.”<sup>39</sup> This theoretical development exhibits both Pietist and Romantic tendencies. From the Pietists he had learned to emphasize the inner individual experience, and from the Romantics he learned to stress the universal.<sup>40</sup> Essentially, the Romantics were concerned with combating the mechanical view of nature that was propagated by Enlightenment thinkers; they stressed the organic or spiritual reality of nature.<sup>41</sup>

Richard Crouter argues that when Schleiermacher left the Moravian seminary school for the University of Halle he became influenced by both Enlightenment ideals and Romantic writers. In his view, Schleiermacher’s work combined the poetic intuition of early Romantics with the Enlightenment rationality of freedom: “For Schleiermacher the artistry of poetic insight, the desire to clarify categories, and dialectical turns of reason prominent in early German Romantics combine to feed his Enlightenment rationality.”<sup>42</sup> What Crouter fails to document is how Schleiermacher continued to be influenced by his Pietist roots.

The continuing influence of his Pietist roots, even after his arrival at the University of Halle, can be found in Schleiermacher’s personal letters. For instance, in a letter Schleiermacher wrote to his father after passing his ordination exam on August 16, 1791, he told his father that university had not completely hardened him from spiritual aspirations: “My heart is properly cultivated . . . and is not left to wither under the burden of cold erudition, and my religious feelings are not deadened by theological inquiries.”<sup>43</sup> Hence, even though he rejected the Christology of the Brethren he retained their emphasis on “religious feelings”<sup>44</sup> and the importance of leading a religious life. As Schleiermacher wrote

New York Press, 2007). Millán-Zaibert argues that Schlegel’s journal, *Das Athenäum* was pivotal to the rise of Romanticism and stresses that it embodied the central philosophical tenets of Romanticism. For example, it was written in fragment and dialogue form. Millán-Zaibert argues that this expressed the Romantic opposition to traditional poetry and philosophy which attempted to base itself on an epistemological foundation. The Romantics were anti-foundationalists. Instead of trying to build knowledge into a coherent scheme they wanted to stress that all knowledge is boundless and in a state of becoming. See, Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the emergence of Romantic Philosophy*, 17.

39. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 23.

40. Schleiermacher’s idea of an ‘intimation of oneness’ was also influenced by the work of Spinoza. In his philosophy of monism, Spinoza argued that there is one substance which constitutes the essence of all being and is infinite. This substance has an infinite number of attributes, each of which is limited to its own nature. See Rudolfo Ahumada, *A History of Western Ontology: From Thales to Heidegger* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979) 86.

41. Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008) 278.

42. Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher*, 7.

43. Schleiermacher, *The Life of Schleiermacher as Unfolded in His Autobiography and Letters*, vol. 1, 95.

44. Note how even at this early period Schleiermacher emphasized the contrast between his religious experience and his intellectual pursuits; he assumes that these two spheres can function in harmony. See, Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church*, 26. This separation of religion and reason would be fundamental to Schleiermacher’s argument in *On Religion*.

years later, "I am convinced that the Moravians have a really good cause in religion; only, their theology and Christology are certainly unfortunate. But those are the externals."<sup>45</sup>

As a Moravian "defector" Schleiermacher would have felt a great affinity with the ideals and hopes of the Romantics. In fact, the Pietists have been called the "Romantic branch" of early modern Christianity.<sup>46</sup> Both the Romantics and Moravians attempted to live out an ideal version of the past. By adopting the symbols and cultural uniformity of ancient Greece, Romantics sought to create an ideal and harmonious world in contemporary culture.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, the Pietist movement begun by Spener attempted to revive the "true" Christianity of the early church. Just as Romantics attacked the transcendental freedom of Enlightenment thinkers as a restrictive category of practical reason,<sup>48</sup> so August Francke (1663–1727) criticized intellectual and theological Christianity in favor of a Christianity of the heart.<sup>49</sup> It is no surprise that Schleiermacher became infatuated with the early developmental stage of Romanticism.<sup>50</sup> His Moravian background had emphasized the restoration of an ideal past, the validity of subjective experience, and challenged overt intellectualism. Perhaps this is why, as one scholar put it, Schleiermacher embodied both movements with a "pietistic, introspective Romanticism."<sup>51</sup>

### From Pietism to *On Religion*

"Classical" Pietism, as defined by Harry Yeide Jr., is "an ecclesiola movement in which a great premium is placed on divinely initiated experiential religion as the foundation for renewal actions."<sup>52</sup> Yeide argues that the classical period of Pietism existed from 1670–1780, beginning with Philip Jakob Spener and stretching forward to the work of Zinzendorf. Schleiermacher's work differs from these classical Pietists, particularly in relation to their dogma, but there are many themes that he shares with them as well.

Spener's seminal work, *Pia Desideria* (1675) was written as both a critique and a corrective for the Lutheran Church. In part one, "Conspectus of Corrupt Conditions in

45. Brandt, *Philosophy of Schleiermacher*, 21.

46. Ibid.

47. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, xxv.

48. Ibid, xxvi.

49. Ulrich Groetsch, "Pietism," *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. 5 (Detroit: Scribner's, 2005). P1821–1823. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*, Gale. Univ. of Calgary (22 Sept. 2008) 1821.

50. Religious sentiments were not foreign to the writings of Romantics. Schelling wrote that at death "the pious would be enraptured by God in a blessed delight as if by a universal magnet to which everything is attracted, such that they would now be completely suffused by Him and would see, feel, and want only within Him." F. W. J. Schelling, *Clara: or, On Nature's Connection to the Spirit World*, trans. Fiona Steinkamp (New York: State University Press, 2002) 52. Similarly, Schlegel affirmed that "the spirit comes equipped with an eternal proof of its own existence." Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, tr. Peter Firchow (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1991), 58. It is not hard to see how these authors could provoke Schleiermacher to reach for a more universal understanding of religion.

51. William E. Nix. "The Doctrine of Inspiration Since the Reformation," *JETS* 25/4 (December 1982) 453.

52. Harry Yeide Jr., *Studies in Classical Pietism: The Flowering of the Ecclesiola* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997) 144.



the Church” Spener argued that the clergy were defective, that they were more concerned with “sophistry” and “impertinent questions” than the Holy Spirit.<sup>53</sup> It was wrong to make Christianity an intellectual affair; he challenged the clergy to abandon theology for a firmer experiential foundation of faith.<sup>54</sup> Spener also encouraged the laity to understand the living faith taught by Luther,<sup>55</sup> chastising them to put aside devilish ways and to live righteously in communities, sharing their property and goods, as the early Christians. Calling upon Christians to “bear witness to [the] love of God and neighbor”<sup>56</sup> Spener argued that merely reading and hearing the Word of God is not enough. Believers must let “it penetrate inwardly into your heart and allow the heavenly food to be digested there.”<sup>57</sup> In part three of *Pia Desideria*, “Proposals to Correct Conditions in the Church” Spener outlined six measures to restore the “true” church. These included organizing small conventicles (*ecclesiola*) for meditation and the joint study of the Bible, an emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, a stress on practical rather than theological or intellectual Christianity, the abandonment of religious argument with other churches, a reorganization of the training of future ministers at the universities, and an increased emphasis on practical preaching for the education of the laity.<sup>58</sup>

Similar to Spener, Schleiermacher addressed an audience whom he feared had misinterpreted religion and ignored the transformational character of religious experience. He challenged established forms of Christianity in favor of a heartfelt experience, and stressed the role of community in religious experience. Moreover, like Spener, Schleiermacher critiqued the historical development of the church and sought to renew or “authenticate” religious expression.

The “cultured despisers” whom Schleiermacher was addressing in *On Religion* were those who had tried to discount religion as irrelevant by associating it with the traditional/institutional church, its hierarchy, and dogma. *On Religion* is a polemic against the Enlightenment view of natural religion, an interpretation that discounted the validity of individual revelation.<sup>59</sup> Schleiermacher’s response to this Enlightenment view was to distinguish between two forms of religion, the outer ritualistic state run church and the internal religious experience. He believed that only from an internal experience could a true form of Christianity be established. In his opinion, the cultured despisers did not know what true religion was; the only form of religion they were familiar with was the state-run church. As he wrote in the fourth speech of *On Religion*, “your opposition to the church, to every event aimed at the communication of religion, is still greater than your opposition to religion itself.”<sup>60</sup>

53. Philip Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965) 52.

54. Ibid, 56.

55. Ibid, 59.

56. Ibid, 61.

57. Ibid, 66.

58. Groetsch, “Pietism,” 1821.

59. Redeker, *Schleiermacher: life and thought*, 49.

60. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, 72.

Like Spener, Schleiermacher argued that true religion is removed from the “mechanical” practice of tradition. He argued that dead concepts and books are not the source of religion.<sup>61</sup> It is for this reason that he constantly distinguishes between the spirit and the letter, and that the most commonly cited biblical allusion in *On Religion* is 2 Corinthians 3:6:

Thus they seek knowledge; their wisdom is only directed toward a lamentable empiricism, and thus religion can be nothing else for them than a dead letter, a holy article in the constitution in which nothing is real.<sup>62</sup>

However, Schleiermacher does not believe religion is an other-worldly experience or merely an internal phenomenon. Instead, religion is an experience that is firmly grounded in this world: “all who have religion believe only in this world.”<sup>63</sup> As the Moravians had emphasized the immediacy and importance of the individual experience and then related this to the community as a whole, so *On Religion* argues that religious intuition reinforces the personal relationship one shares with the universe and humanity and calls for the strengthened role of religion in the world. It is for this reason that Schleiermacher asserted that personal religious experience is a social experience. As he wrote in the fourth speech, “Once there is religion, it must necessarily also be social.”<sup>64</sup>

Schleiermacher’s idea for religious community was distinct from the age old German system of registering one’s quarters with the local police authorities. He advocated freely selected mutual relationships;<sup>65</sup> “Away” wrote Schleiermacher, with the “union of church and State.”<sup>66</sup> In the fourth speech Schleiermacher advocated individual communities of free association, distinct from the “great church,” where true religion was to be cultivated. He suggested that these communities had always existed and that they knew the true form of religion:

Perhaps something similar [true religious practice] is to be found concentrated only in a particular space in individual communities that are, as it were, cut off from the great church, but it is certain that all truly religious people, as many as there have ever been, have carried about not merely the belief but the living feeling of such a union and have actually lived in it. They all know how to esteem what one commonly calls the church at its real value, that is to say, not particularly high.<sup>67</sup>

In Schleiermacher’s vision of religious community there is to be no difference between priests and laity: “When a person steps forth before others it is not an office or appointment that empowers him to do so . . . It is the free stirring of the spirit.”<sup>68</sup> He speaks of a community of family and friends who share their individual experience and know

61. Ibid, 74.

62. Ibid, 8.

63. Ibid, 16.

64. Ibid, 73.

65. Ibid, 89.

66. Ibid, 90.

67. Ibid, 78–79.

68. Ibid, 75.

their value in relation to the whole group. Religion in this sense is a transformative power that brings people together:

The more each person approaches the universe, the more he communicates himself to others, and the more perfectly do they become one; none is more conscious of himself alone, but each is simultaneously conscious of the other. They are no longer merely people, but also humanity; going beyond themselves, triumphing over themselves, they are on the way to true immortality and eternity.<sup>69</sup>

Schleiermacher's notion of the "true church" was a combination of his Moravian and Romantic influences. As Redeker has argued, Schleiermacher transferred the Moravian ideal of the Brethren community to the levels of the romantic-idealistic conception of humanity.<sup>70</sup>

Schleiermacher wanted to use religion, not reason or idealist speculation (like Kant or J. G. Fichte), as a foundation for God that would overcome the conflict between Christianity and naturalistic views of the universe.<sup>71</sup> He felt that religious experience was a gateway to a better future where religious dialogue and social harmony would overcome the mechanical practices that dominated religious institutions, philosophy, and society at large.<sup>72</sup> Hence, his rejection of the state sponsored churches had one overarching goal, the renewal of religious piety. He anticipated that in the future the external differences that divided religion would melt away as people realized the true essence of religious practice. Ultimately, Schleiermacher thought that even Christianity itself would pass away, and all "mediators" (such as Christ) would be unnecessary. As he wrote in the fifth speech:

Sublime above them all, more historical and humble in its splendor, Christianity has expressly recognized this transitoriness of its nature; there will come a time, it declares, when there will be no more talk of a mediator but the Father will be all in all . . . I would desire it, and I would gladly stand on the ruins of the religion I honor.<sup>73</sup>

Spener also held chiliastic hopes for future reconciliation among Christians. He anticipated, in post-millennial confidence, the decline of the Catholic Church, confessional differences, and the conversion of the Jews in a new age of Christian harmony.<sup>74</sup> Schleiermacher shares the emphasis on renewal but differs from Spener and other Pietists because his hopes for renewal are not dependant on Christ but on an intuition of the infinite.

In the end, Schleiermacher's ideas on individual and Christian renewal existed between Romanticism and Pietism. He asserted that true religion was a universal quality

69. Ibid, 94.

70. Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, 53.

71. Ibid, 38.

72. See Douglas H. Shantz, "How the Lord revealed his Secrets to Me, One after Another": The Life and Thought of Johanna Eleonora Petersen (1644–1724) in Recent Scholarship: a Review Article," in *Perichoresis* 5 (2007): <http://www.emmanuel.ro/en.reasearch.perichoresis>, 76.

73. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 122.

74. Douglas H. Shantz. "How the Lord revealed his Secrets to Me, One after Another": The Life and Thought of Johanna Eleonora Petersen (1644–1724) in Recent Scholarship: a Review Article," 76.

that was best manifested in a free association of spiritual communion shared by truly pious individuals.<sup>75</sup> By arguing that Christianity must ultimately rid itself of Christ, Schleiermacher had moved beyond Pietism. By arguing that religion is necessarily social, he had moved beyond Romanticism.

Schleiermacher argued that devout men and women encounter the universe not through the true universal church, but through a community of pious worshippers who share in their devotion and love of God.<sup>76</sup> For the Romantics, religion was infinite and everything human was finite. They believed that there was one universal church and many finite and imperfect religious communities.<sup>77</sup> Hence, Romantics such as Goethe strongly rejected the church. It is perhaps for this reason that Goethe, upon reading *On Religion*, intensely disliked the fourth and fifth speeches.<sup>78</sup>

Schleiermacher was aware of his eclectic nature, and that his work existed beyond the confines of simple classification. Perhaps this is why, in 1802 after having a transformative experience on a brief visit to the community of the Moravian Brethren, he referred to himself as a Moravian of a higher order:<sup>79</sup>

Here it was that for the first time I awoke to the consciousness of the relations of man to a higher world . . . here it was that the mystic tendency developed itself, which has been of so much importance to me, and has supported and carried me through all the storms of skepticism. Then it was only germinating; now it has attained its full development, and I may say, that after all that I have passed through, I have become a Moravian (Herrnhuter) again, only of a higher order.<sup>80</sup>

## Conclusion

For Schleiermacher, religious experience provides us with intimations of universal oneness. In the fourth and fifth speeches he continually associates the intimations of oneness with the community, grounding religion in the physicality of the human experience; its cultural, social, and historical contingency.

Recent critics of Schleiermacher have not appreciated the social and historical dimensions of *On Religion*. Scholarship on Schleiermacher has focused rather narrowly on the first two speeches to the neglect of the last three. It is only upon a thorough reading of *On Religion* that the syncretic nature of Schleiermacher's early thought can be appreciated. Schleiermacher was deeply influenced and indebted to Enlightenment and Romantic thought, yet his upbringing and education in a Pietist setting was also crucial to the formation of *On Religion*.

75. Redeker, *Schleiermacher*, 51.

76. Ibid, 51.

77. Ibid, 52.

78. Ibid, 49.

79. Gerrish, *Prince of the Church*, 26.

80. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, xiii.

Although it is true that Schleiermacher abstracted religion to an internal sphere of intuition, to him, this was not distinct from the external world. In Schleiermacher's mind, to be religious demanded that one have an awareness of the intimate relationship all human beings share with the universe. This is impossible without group worship and a community to facilitate such an experience. Schleiermacher's two-pronged definition of religion incorporates the Romantics emphasis on the universal, the Pietist stress on inner religious experience, and the Moravian emphasis on religious community.

More research is needed to document how Schleiermacher's early work was influenced by Pietism. For example, a comparison between Schleiermacher and Zinzendorf or between Schleiermacher and Gottfried Arnold would be valuable. *On Religion* must be re-examined to place Schleiermacher's thought at the crossroads of his Pietist roots and his contemporary Romantic world.

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