

# The Concept of Universal Salvation

## *Apokatastasis* in the Thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher.


### An Outline

Wojciech Szcerba

**ABSTRACT** The article analyzes the concept of universal salvation—*apokatastasis* in the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher especially with reference to his early Speeches on Religion and the later treatise *The Christian Faith*. It moves from Schleiermacher’s understanding of religion *per se* to his soteriological and eschatological theories. He understands the nature of religion as the feeling-intuition of the Infinite and points to a certain aspect of mystery, which religion contains. He rejects in the *Speeches on Religion* the anthropomorphic understanding of God and speaks of God-Universum. In the treatise *Christian Faith*, he reinterprets the theological concept of original sin and depravation, and points to a natural process of development of humankind from Godless-consciousness to God-consciousness. From the Protestant-reformed tradition Schleiermacher adopts the concept of predestination. However, he rejects the so called “double predestination” of salvation and condemnation. According to him, all people are chosen to be saved “in Christ”. This way, Schleiermacher continues the Reformed tradition, however he understands the election in universal categories. He rejects God, who chooses for salvation only some people, but accepts God-Universum, who maintains the unity of creation and leads people to perfect communion. This drives the German thinker to universalistic beliefs.

In the convictions pointing to the final unity of humankind, Schleiermacher exposes his deep humanism. He assumes that it is impossible to reconcile the traditional view of eternal hell with God’s love. Divine punishment can serve as an aspect of overall *paidagogia*, leading to the maturing of humanity. However, it

✉ Wojciech Szcerba, Von Hügel Institute, St Edmund’s College, University of Cambridge, Evangelical School of Theology, Wrocław, ul. Św. Jadwigi 12, 51-253 Wrocław, Poland  
✉ w.szcerba@ewst.edu.pl      0000-0002-4265-506X

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cannot be understood as a retribution, based on God's wrath and cruel *lex talionis*. Such an understanding of God is for Schleiermacher unacceptable.

Understanding soteriology in these terms, Schleiermacher refers to the *apokatastatic* tradition of the Church Fathers and the classical concept of *apokatastasis*. In the modern context he continues and develops the personal aspect of *apokatastasis*, but also—through his affinities to the thought of Spinoza—draws near to its macro-scale, cosmological form.

**KEYWORDS** anthropology; apokatastasis; eschatology; Romanticism; salvation; soteriology; Schleiermacher, Friedrich

The philosophical concept of universal salvation—*apokatastasis*, shaped in Greek and Christian thought, basically means the restoration of the primal state of the existence of creation, which has been lost due to original sin or the law of necessity<sup>1</sup>. In the early philosophical traditions, the restoration is understood most of all in the macro-cosmic scale and refers to the entire reality. In the thought of the Ionian philosophers, Heraclitus or—later—the Stoics, cosmos periodically returns to the essential form of the *arche*-principle. In the later, post-Platonic philosophical systems, where the human being becomes the center of interest, *apokatastasis* is rendered particularly with reference to the human soul or the divine element embodied in rational creation. Restoration of the primal state means here i.a. the abolition of evil, including suffering and death, and the renewal of the perfect-original relationship between Creator and creation or—alternatively—actualization of the intended plan of the Creator for creation (Szczzerba 2014, 21–31; 2008, 23–4). In Christian thought the concept of the universal scope of salvation takes various forms and various levels of certainty. Sometimes *apokatastasis* is understood in terms of amnesty (Didymus the Blind, Evagrius Ponticus, Gregory of Nyssa), especially in the thought systems which particularly stress the sovereignty and the power of God (Szczzerba 2008, 113–6, 126–40). Yet, sometimes (e.g., Clement Alexandrinus, Origen) *apokatastasis* takes the form of general repentance, where the emphasis is put on the freedom of creation and the pedagogical dimension of the relation of the Creator to creation (Szczzerba 2014, 202–44). In most cases the Christian version of

1. For example, in the thought of Plato, when he discusses the basis for the incarnation of souls, we can find references both to the original fall of the soul (*Phaedrus* 246a, 248c) and to the law of necessity (*Timaeus* 41b–e). In the later sense, the incarnation reflects—expressed in mythological language—the arbitrary will of the Demiurge or cosmic necessity conveyed in the language of the strict philosophical argument-*logos*.

universal salvation assumes the eschatological preservation of the individuality and consciousness of creation. However, some Christian thinkers (e.g., Eriugena), especially those affiliated with the Neoplatonic tradition, point to the possible eschatological dissolving—in the qualitative, not quantitative sense—of creation in God-One-Absolute, culminating in the return of rational beings to the “idea in the mind of God” (Kijewska 2005, 105–15), in such a way that finally “God will be all in all” (I Cor 15, 28).

*Apokatastasis*, defined in such a way, especially in its Christian version, may be perceived in terms of hope for the final, perfect culmination of history (Origen). After all *Deus semper maior est*, and his nature and plans are ultimately a mystery to the limited creation. Yet, with the appropriate systemic assumptions, e.g. (1) perceiving nature and action of God in terms of salvific love, (2) understanding evil as an absence of good and (3) seeing human beings as related to God (*imago Dei*), *apokatastasis* can be taken not only as a hope, but rather as a necessary culmination of a thought system, eschatological certainty-doctrine (Gregory of Nyssa).

The concept of *apokatastasis* was condemned at the 2nd Council of Constantinople (553 A.D.) and the subsequent councils (“The Fifth Ecumenical Council. The Second Council of Constantinople” 1988, 316–21; Starowieyski 1982, 181–2; Baron and Pietras 2003, 307–83). Nevertheless, it has not disappeared from Christian thought in its various provenances, both in the medieval and modern ages. In the ninth century *apokatastasis* was taught by Eriugena (Gersh 1990, 113–4). Aspects of universal hope can be found in the thought of Julian of Norwich (Sweetman 2011, 66–95). Some anabaptists of the sixteenth century, like John Denck were inclined to the universalistic vision of the end of times (Williams 1962, 155–7, 202, 246, 252). So called the Platonists of Cambridge, Peter Sterry and Jeremiah White, puritans associated with Cromwell, defended the unlimited scope of salvation in the seventeenth century (Hickman 2011, 95–116). In the context of German pietism, the hope for universal salvation taught i.a. J.W. Petersen and F.C. Oetinger (Walker 1964, 11–8), pointing to the love of God as the main hermeneutical perspective on the relation of Creator—creation. Similar eschatology was adopted by James Rely, propagating universalism in American Methodism of the eighteenth century (Clymer 2011, 116–41). About the same time Elhanan Winchester founded the Universalist General Convention in the United States, which was named later The Universalist Church of America (UCA) (Parry 2011, 141–71).

At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Friedrich Schleiermacher, an important philosopher and theologian of the Reformed tradition, gets close in his thought system to the concept of universal

salvation—apokatastasis. How does Schleiermacher, growing out of conservative pietistic, Protestant circles, reach the hope of salvation of all people? Does the apokatastatic hope of Schleiermacher refer only to creation or perhaps can it also be understood in the macro-cosmic scale? How does the concept of apokatastasis fit into the thought system of Schleiermacher in the context of the epoch, which to a large extent shaped the thinking of the German philosopher?

#### METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main focus of the article is the relation of Schleiermacher's thought to the concept of *apokatastasis*, as it was formulated in Greek and Early Christian thought, and then developed throughout the centuries. I am referring to the question of an *apokatastatic* aspect of Schleiermacher's philosophy by relating deductively (1) to his understanding of religion *per se*, (2) to the significance, which he ascribes to Christianity from his religious perspective, and most of all (3) to the motive of soteriological universalism present in his thought. In other words, I am trying to answer the question to what extent Schleiermacher can be seen as a continuator of the classical concept of *apokatastasis* most of all in its personal aspect, but also macro-cosmically in the context of nineteenth century German philosophy. The article takes the form of an outline, not a thorough analysis of the thought of Schleiermacher. Hopefully, this will be further developed in my subsequent studies.

In my description of Schleiermacher's understanding of religion and his soteriology, I am limiting my study most of all to his early treatise, *Speeches to its Cultural Despisers* (hereinafter abbreviated as *Speeches*)<sup>2</sup>. Especially the first, unrevised edition is important from a philosophical perspective (Godlove 2014, 102–16; Crouter 2008, XI–XXXIX). It has an apologetic character and is directed mainly to the representatives of German Romanticism, skeptical towards religion especially in its

2. The critical edition (*Kritische Gesamtausgabe* hereinafter KGA): Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, KGA I/12, (2.-) 4. Auflage, Monologen (2.-)4. Auflage. Edited by Günter Meckenstock, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1995. Another important edition: Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Über die Religion. Reden an de Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, Berlin. Edited by Johann Friedrich Unger 1799. In *Schleiermachers Werke*. Edited by Felix Meiner in Leipzig 1911, vol. IV, 207–401. <https://archive.org/details/werkemiteinembil04schl/page/206/mode/2up>. The English edition I am using in this article, unless it is indicated otherwise: *On Religion. Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. & ed. Richard Crouter (2008). It is an edition based on the first German version of *Speeches* from 1799. Also, when it is needed, I am referring to the English edition based on the third German edition of *Speeches* with references and comments to the First Edition translated by John Oman (1893).

Christian form. In this treatise, the author on the one hand goes beyond the traditional, Reformed understanding of religiosity, and on the other hand opposes the rational, rooted in the Enlightenment approach to religion. Schleiermacher renders religion as a universal, intersubjective, human experience, intuition-feeling of the universe (Speech II), then he relates it to the religious systems shaped in particular socio-historical contexts (Speech IV), and finally to the ideal Christian community-*ecclesia* (Speech V). In these considerations Schleiermacher indicates his sympathy to the monistic concepts of Spinoza, identifying God with the universe and rendering his understanding of religion in a macro-scale as a common experience of humanity (König 2016).

Equally important for the analysis of the concept of religion in the thought of Schleiermacher is his later treatise, *The Christian Faith*<sup>3</sup>. It is a much more mature and dogmatically correct writing than the early *Speeches*. Schleiermacher is not concerned here with apologetics, but rather writes a book on dogmatics as a Reformed minister and scholar for those who are supposed to be ordained in the unified, Lutheran and Reformed, church of Prussia (Vial 2013, 40). The work indicates the evolution of the thought of the German thinker, yet it also shows the coherence of its main threads. Thus, when talking about religion, Schleiermacher does not refer here to the intuition so much, as it can be easily related to Kant's theories. Instead, he emphasizes the sense of total dependence and God-consciousness as the core of religion. Schleiermacher is also sensible not to show too much of his affinity to the *pantheistic* perspective of Spinoza. Yet, the motives of the interrelation of humanity, "intersubjective subjectivity" and—broader—interdependence of nature with the reference of the universal experience of religion are present here as well (§ 10nn).

Additionally, Schleiermacher's essay *On the Doctrine of Election: with Special References to the Aphorisms of Dr. Bretschneider*<sup>4</sup> may be seen as some kind of introduction to the treatise, *Christian Faith*. In the essay the

3. The critical edition (*Kritische Gesamtausgabe* hereinafter abbreviated as KGA) *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelische Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt* (1821/22), vols. 1 and 2. Edited by Hermann Peiter 1980 and the later edition *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der Evangelische Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt* (1830/31), vols. 1 and 2. Edited by Rolf Schäfer 2003. The English translation which I am using in this article is: *The Christian Faith* (2016). Hereinafter abbreviated as *The Christian Faith*.

4. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Lehre von der Erwählung; besonders in Beziehung auf Herrn Dr. Bretschneiders Aphorismen*. In *Theologisch-dogmatische Abhandlungen und Gelegenheitsschriften* (Kritische Gesamtausgabe – KGA, vol. I/10). Edited by Hans-Friedrich Traulsen and Martin Ohst (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1990), 145–222. The first edition of the essay appeared in 1819, in *Theologische Zeitschrift*, p. 1–119.

theologian refers to the doctrine of predestination but portrays it in a radical way as the preordination of all people to salvation by God. A pretext to these considerations is Schleiermacher's discussion with the chairman of the Lutheran council in Saxony, Dr. Karl G. Bretschneider, in the context of the Lutheran—Reformed union signed by the king of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm III in 1817 to celebrate 300th anniversary of the Reformation<sup>5</sup>.

#### SCHLEIERMACHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF RELIGION

How does Schleiermacher then understand religion? Most of all he opposes treating the core of religion as a category of "outer" doctrinal and ecclesiastical-political systems (*Speeches* I, 12; Eaghill 2011, 114–8). Religion understood in such a way is nothing more than the product of the calculation of the human mind. It shrinks transcendental matters to the imperfect, although necessary, language and images of people. *De facto*, doctrines and ecclesiastical systems do not constitute religion *per se* (*Speeches* I, 13–4), at best they reflect religious experience and describe it in an immanent way. Similarly, Schleiermacher maintains that the essence of religion is not knowing or acting, "a particular type of contemplation of the universe" combined with "a particular behavior and character" (*Speeches*, II, 21–3). Also, religion should not be restricted to morality. Piety is not the *sine qua non* of moral life. As Spinoza proved, it is possible to live morally while not believing in God.

Should not the one who intuits it [universe] as one and all thus have more religion, even without the idea of God, than the most cultured polytheist? Should Spinoza not stand just as far above a pious Roman, as Lucretius does above one who serves idols? But that is the old inconsistency that is the gloomy sign of a lack of cultivation, that they reject most vehemently those who stand on the same level as themselves, only at a different point on that level! (*Speeches*, II, p. 52)

5. There have been several publications concerning the thought of Schleiermacher, which influenced this article in a considerable way. Some of them refer to the universalism of the thinker from various perspectives. Most of them reflect the contemporary reading of the thought of Schleiermacher especially with reference to his understanding of religion as inter-subjective phenomenon. However, since the evolution of the interpretation of the thought of Schleiermacher is not the main concern of the article, I am referring in a few places—when I find it important in the context of universal salvation—to earlier interpretations of Schleiermacher's philosophy. In particular, I would like to notice the following publications, which influenced this article: (Dole 2008; König 2016; Ravenscroft 2019; Vial 2013; Dierken et al. 2018; Lamm 1994; DeVries and Gerrish 2005; Gockel 2006; Crouter 2008).

Admittedly, religion strives to describe reality and points out how a person should live. Nevertheless, it is far away in its nature from the empirical sciences and it cannot be reduced to a simple code of how a person should or should not act (Vial 2013, 37).

And what does your morality do? It develops a system of duties out of human nature and our relationship to the universe; it commands and forbids actions with unlimited authority. Yet religion must not even presume to do that; it must not use the universe in order to derive duties and is not permitted to contain a code of laws.” (*Speeches II*, p. 20)

Finally, religion should not be equated with metaphysics, since metaphysics—according to Kant’s epistemology presented in the *Critique of Pure Reason*—reduced to the sphere of human experience (Crouter 2008, 23; Rae 2011, 172–3) “proceeds from finite human nature and wants to define consciously, from its simplest concept, the extent of its powers, and its receptivity, what the universe can be for us and how we necessarily must view it” (*Speeches II*, 23). Getting tangled up with the metaphysical attempts to describe religion leads at best to new mythology and a false image of religion.

Thus, to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion. But whatever would go beyond that and penetrate deeper into the nature and substance of the whole is no longer religion, and will, if it still wants to be regarded as such, inevitably sink back into empty mythology.... To present all events in the world as the actions of a god is religion; it expresses its connection to an infinite totality; but while brooding over the existence of this god before the world and outside the world may be good and necessary in metaphysics, in religion even that becomes only empty mythology (*Speeches II*, 25–6).

Schleiermacher admits that religion refers to a similar area as metaphysics and morality, i.e., human being, the universe and relations between them. Yet, according to the German theologian, there is no equals sign between metaphysics, morality and religion.

If you put yourselves on the highest standpoint of metaphysics and morals, you will find that both have the same object as religion, namely, the universe and the relationship of humanity to it. This similarity has long since been a basis of manifold aberrations; metaphysics and morals have therefore invaded religion

on many occasions, and much that belongs to religion has concealed itself in metaphysics or morals under an unseemly form (*Speeches* II, 19).

In the *Speeches*, Schleiermacher defends the *apophatic-cataphatic* nature of religion, pointing to the mystery, which is inevitably included in it and the natural aspect of the religious phenomenon (Ravenscroft 2019, XII). It is *apophatic*, as it refers to the Infinite, whose nature-*ousia* exceeds the cognitive capability of finite creatures. “In every religion”, he says, “the holy, remains secret and hidden from the profane” (*Speeches* V, 124). Yet, it is *cataphatic*, as the Infinite reveals itself to human beings in the finite order, the universe. The core of religion, according to Schleiermacher, is based on a particular kind of sense-feeling (*Gefühl*) and intuition (*Anschauung*) of the Infinite, where the Infinite signifies not as much endlessness or supernaturality, or unspeakable One-Absolute, but rather “the causal nexus in which each part of the Universe acts on every other part” (Vial 2013, 39). The intuition and feeling, however integrated, are formally distinguished by Schleiermacher in the second Speech, as they describe various dimensions of the same experience. The intuition, analogously to Kant’s perspective, signifies the outer aspect of the experience, the representation of the world. The sensation is located in the subject-person. Thus, the core of religion is the “immediate experience of the existence and action of the universe” (*Speeches* II, 26), an experience when a sensuous being intuits the totality of the universe and senses his/her absolute dependence on it. (Frank 2005, 28; Machoń 2018, 361–9). The universe “manifests itself as totality, as unity in multiplicity, as system and thus for the first time deserves its name.” (*Speeches*, II, p. 52). The sense-intuition of the universe is not a one-time mystical experience, rather it refers to the entire self-consciousness, which underlies the whole activity and thus, the whole existence of a being.

“Is it really a miracle if the eternal world affects the senses of our spirit as the sun affects our eyes?” asks Schleiermacher in the *Speeches*, “Is it a miracle when the sun so blinds us that everything else disappears, not only at that moment, but even long afterward all objects we observe are imprinted with its image and bathed in its brilliance? Just as the particular manner in which the universe presents itself to you in your intuitions and determines the uniqueness of your individual religion, so the strength of these feelings determines the degree of religiousness” (*Speeches* II, 34–5).

From this perspective knowing and acting, by which religion-piety is often defined, have a subsequent significance. Knowledge and activity are the



results of the desire to be “unified with the universe.” Knowing is an imprint, which the universe makes in human perception. Activity results from reflection on reality, rooted in the influence of the universe on a person as a passive receiver. In this sense, knowing-science and activity-morality stem from piety, which is based in the original encounter with the God-universe. “You are only giving back what that original act of fellowship has wrought in you, and similarly everything the world fashions in you must be by the same act” (*Speeches II*, 45, trans. Oman).

Schleiermacher points out then that:

It [religion] does not wish to determine and explain the universe according to its nature as does metaphysics; it does not desire to continue the universe’s development and perfect it by the power of freedom and the divine free choice of a human being as does morals. Religion’s essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe’s own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe’s immediate influences in childlike passivity. Thus, religion is opposed to these two in everything that makes up its essence and in everything that characterizes its effects (*Speeches II*, 22–3).

See *The Christian Faith* § 3, 5–12; § 30, 125–126). In the first edition of the *Speeches*, Schleiermacher writes about the “sensibility and taste for the Infinite” (*Speeches II*, 23), intuition of the world, stressing the direct, relation to the universe<sup>6</sup>. In the later editions and the treatise *The Christian Faith* he defines religion rather as a feeling of total dependence on God-universe, “the Whence of our receptive and active existence” (*The Christian Faith*, § 4. 4. 16), and in the letter to his friend Lücke he points to the religious, direct “existence-dependency” (Schleiermacher 1981, 55–6; Mariña 2005, 169–71; Forster 2017, 23). At the same time Schleiermacher maintains that religion is God-consciousness, which every person at least potentially has and which is nothing else than the feeling of “total dependence” (*das schlechthinnige Abhängigkeitsgefühl*).

The common element in all howsoever diverse expressions of piety, by which these are conjointly distinguished from all other feelings, or, in other words, the self-identical essence of piety, is this: the consciousness of being

6. In the later editions—perhaps trying to avoid connotations of the Kantian concept of intuition—Schleiermacher replaces this term with the word “feeling” (*Gefühl*). (Frank 2005, 28; Adams 2005, 36–7).

absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God. (*The Christian Faith* § 4. 12).

With such an approach to religion, Schleiermacher understands the universe totally as an *analogon* of God-deity, possible to be experienced by spatiotemporally-limited human being. The universe signifies the world, which is permeated by the divine spirit. The universe as a whole is a reflection or aspect of divine fullness (*Speeches* II, 54). The universe in its totality creates and conditions humanity and its realm. In the spatiotemporal world the infinity reveals itself to human beings (Potępa 1995, 20). The religious predisposition—according to Schleiermacher—is universal in its character. After all, all people are equal, which is expressed by the biblical-theological concept of *imago Dei* (Schleiermacher 1890, 64, 7, 140, 55, 212). Every person is an image of infinity in the finite world. Every person, just as *de facto* everything in the earthly reality, is an integral part of the whole-universe, “carved out of infinity” (*Speeches* II, 24)<sup>7</sup>. This capacity-potency exists in every person, reinforcing the feeling of dependence on the universe, strengthening God-consciousness in them (*Speeches* III, 59). The reference to the interrelationship or interdependence of people, being an integral part of the universe indicates so-called post-Kantian Spinozism of Schleiermacher. Its aspects can be seen most of all in the concept of organic monism, but also in the non-anthropomorphic perspective on God and, following it, ethical determinism in the thought of the German philosopher (Lamm 2018, 683) (Amerkis 2012, 53–8; Forster 2012, 81–3).

Schleiermacher’s feeling is the immediate intuition of the Infinite in the finite. No leap of faith is necessary because the gap between the finite and the Infinite, between phenomena and noumena, has been closed by his organic monism, thus making a new form of realism possible. In his *Speeches on Religion ...* Schleiermacher would come to refer to his position as a higher realism and would continue to associate this with Spinoza (Lamm 1994, 503).

7. There is also a similarity of perception of human being as an integral part of the whole-universe in the thought of Schleiermacher and the concept of individual human being as the exemplification of the whole human nature in the thought of Gregory of Nyssa e.g. *De hominis opificio*, 17, PG 44, 189; *Ad Ablabium*, GNO 3/1, 53n. (Szczzerba 2008, 233–8) and the Neoplatonic concept of the personal soul as the extension-exemplification of the cosmic soul in the process of emanation from the One, see Plotinus, *Enneads* I, 6, 8; II, 4, 2-5; IV, 8, 1. (Szczzerba 2014, 48–50).

However subjective the feeling-intuition of the God-universe may be, religion, according to Schleiermacher is always social in its character. Especially in the fourth Speech of *Reden*, he maintains that in reality nothing like generic, primordial religion exists. “Once there is religion, it must also necessarily be social” (Dole 2008, 279–309; Jensen 2003, 417; Ohst 2018). Religious communities, institutions and systems of doctrines unavoidably develop as observable phenomena out of the religious feeling experienced subjectively by individuals but in the intersubjectivity of humankind. Actually, Schleiermacher maintains that if religion is left alone, especially by political systems, it would develop into religious communities, which are tolerant and characterized by freedom of belief and expression of spirituality. They would be free from political-ecclesiastical compromises, which result in fossilized doctrines and lifeless institutionalisms like in Prussia at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Dole 2008, 3).

#### THE PLACE OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE THOUGHT OF SCHLEIERMACHER

Religion, as it is understood by Schleiermacher, is universal and intersubjective in its character. Intuition-feeling cannot be limited to one theological-ecclesiastical system, but has to be general in its character, as it denotes the sense of the Infinite in the finite context of being. Nevertheless, even though the religious intuition-feeling is limitless in its nature, still—by necessity—it is exemplified in personal piety-religion and in historically shaped religious systems. The ideal “general religion” does not exist in itself, in the earthly reality of subjective human being, but religion is always expressed in various spiritualities, in various historical religions (Eaghl 2011, 108; Dierken 2018, 263–79).

There is no primordial religion that then ramifies into various specific religious forms. All religions share a form or structure in that they are centered around an intuition of the infinite ... determined by the contingencies of history, language and personality (Vial 2013, 45).

In this sense, Schleiermacher cannot equate Christianity and religion *per se*. He can at most maintain that Christianity is one of the forms-expressions of religion, which can be captured and described by various traditions and practices. Actually, it is even possible to imagine a religion without any concrete deity, which—in Schleiermacher’s understanding—Spinoza tried to portray in his monistic thought system (*Speeches* II, 52).

Friedrich Schleiermacher upholds—after Immanuel Kant—the conviction that a person is determined spatially and temporarily, and is some

kind of product of a particular culture and history (Mariña 2019, 1–2). It means i.a. that the religious experience is interpreted differently in various cultures and historical contexts. The effect of this conditioning are various outer religious forms, which are essentially of “the same kind” (*Speeches V*, 96–98). Yet, the religious experience lying at the roots of the numerous outer religious forms differs depending on the historical-cultural context in which it is manifested. The differences are apparent both in the macro-scale of cultures but also in the micro-scale of communities and individuals, according to the principle of “self-individualization” of what is infinite in finite earthly reality.

In accord with its concept and essence religion is Infinite and immeasurable, even for the understanding; it must therefore have in itself a principle of individualization, for otherwise it could not exist at all and be perceived. Thus, we must postulate and seek out an infinite number of finite and specific forms in which religion reveals itself... It may also be distorted by the transient influences to which the imperishable has lowered itself and by the unholy hand of humankind (*Speeches V*, 97).

It does not surprise, then, that even though it is possible to group religions according to similarities in descriptions of religious experience, still religion as a phenomenon is experienced subjectively by individuals in the intersubjective context of humanity. From this perspective, Christianity can be seen as a *religious cluster*, which is nonetheless internally diverse (*Speeches V*, 103–6).

With his references to historical religions, Schleiermacher maintains that while they all express the genuine experience of the Infinite, each of them represents a different stage of development and different kinds of religious form (*The Christian Faith* § 7. 31). Thus, he creates a particular taxonomy of religion, placing fetishism at the bottom, then polytheism and finally monotheistic religions. Within monotheism Schleiermacher refers to Judaism, which nevertheless “betrays a lingering affinity with fetishism Islam, which with its “passionate character” gets at times closer to polytheism and finally Christianity, which presents the highest form of monotheism” (*The Christian Faith* § 7.4.37–8). Schleiermacher grants Christianity the highest position among historical religions, arguing that it “most often and preferably watches the universe in religion and its history” and as such it is a kind of *religion of religions*. Or, put in different words, in Christianity “everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth” (*The Christian Faith* § 11.52; Potępa

1995, 41–3). Christ, in his understanding, is the highest mediator between human beings and God. In the series of lectures from 1819, published posthumously, Schleiermacher points out that Christ was human, with perfect God-consciousness, which embodied in him the divine and through him developed in other people's religious predispositions (Forster 2017, 24). Christianity from this perspective exemplifies the higher religious potency. Therefore, Schleiermacher maintains that the original intuition of Christianity is always valid and all religions in a sense refer to the core of Christianity as God-consciousness, so they become somehow the palingenesis of Christianity.

For Schleiermacher the diversity of religious expressions is important, for each [religion] will have a different, necessary incomplete, intuition of the infinite in the finite. That said, the perfect God-consciousness was found only in Jesus and Schleiermacher fully expects that over the full course of human history and development of all religions will naturally begin to pass over into (Protestant) Christianity (Vial 2013, 46).

In the treatise *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher optimistically maintains that finally all religions will pass away and all religious divisions will disappear on behalf of Christianity, which will finally embrace all the nations (Eaghl 2011, 11). Yet, Christianity as such has its limits as well and will reach them in the eschatological sense. "Christianity" says Schleiermacher, "exalted above them all [religions], more historical and more humble in its glory, has expressly acknowledged this transitoriness of its temporal existence. A time will come, when there shall no more be any mediator, but the Father shall be all in all" (*Speeches V*, 122).

#### UNIVERSALISM IN THE THOUGHT OF SCHLEIERMACHER

Schleiermacher's perspective on religion in terms of intuition and feeling of God-universe leads him close to a pan(en)theistic-monistic understanding of reality, according to which the divinity contains in itself the world or rather reveals itself through the world, but the world does not necessarily limit the divinity (Lamm 1994, 503–4). According to his position, historic religions including Christianity, exemplify the primal experience of the universe; an experience, which is available to every person of all times and cultures. However subjective in its nature, it is a fundamentally intersubjective experience in the context of the organic interrelation of humanity. Such an understanding of the essence of religion leads the theologian to universalistic, soteriological beliefs (*The Christian Faith*

§117–20; § 163, p. 717–22). How does he get close to the concept of universal salvation?

Schleiermacher, coming from the Pietistic-Reformed, conservative tradition, redefines the Calvinistic teaching of predestination. Following Augustine and Calvin, he upholds the radical version of the doctrine, pointing out that it has strong basis in Scripture and tradition. However, while the Calvinistic concept of predestination contains the double aspect of predestination to salvation and condemnation based on the twofold will of God for two elected groups of people (Rainbow 1990, 64–181), Schleiermacher claims that (1) the doctrine should be rendered with reference to the whole of humanity, not individual people and (2) it should be understood in terms of one God's decree, predestining the whole human race to salvation (The Christian Faith § 120.2.4; DeVries and Gerrish 2005, 202).

Friedrich Schleiermacher clearly articulates this concept in the essay *On the Doctrine of Election: with Special References to the Aphorisms of Dr. Bretschneider*<sup>8</sup> and then, in a more moderate way, in the treatise *The Christian Faith* (§ 117–9). In the essay, the German theologian refers i.a. to the statement of Dr. Bretschneider that the doctrine of predestination should be abandoned and replaced with the teaching of salvation equally available to all people. In response, Schleiermacher points to the danger of such a position. He indicated that a concept proposed by Dr. Bretschneider is prone to Pelagianism, according to which a person co-decides about their destiny, and Manicheism, in which good and evil are understood as two opposing powers possessing equal strengths and ontic statuses. Faithful to the Reformed concepts of the sovereignty of God, Schleiermacher is convinced that Christianity needs a doctrine of election in a radical form, which will affirm the total dominion of God and indicate the subjugated place of human being in the *ordo salutis* (Gockel 2006, 28–9). A similar perspective on God's total sovereignty of pan-predestination may be seen in the thought of the students of Origen, such as Didymus the Blind (Szczerba 2008, 113–26), Evagrius Ponticus (Szczerba 2008, 126–40) and later, Gregory of Nyssa. Especially the last thinker maintains that God is the owner of the whole of

8. In his essay the German theologian refers to the article of Dr. Bretschneider criticizing the position of Schleiermacher in the context of the planned union of the Lutheran and Reformed churches. Bretschneider advocates a type of union, which may lead to the full doctrinal unification of the churches. He rejects the perspective of Schleiermacher, who believes that the fellowship of the churches may exist regardless of doctrinal differences, particularly in secondary—adiaphora issues. E.g., Bretschneider criticizes the Calvinistic doctrine of election and believes that churches should reject this teaching on behalf of the belief that God wants to save all people (Gockel 2006, 13–4).

reality and the sovereign director of the cosmic drama of salvation. As such, God preserves everything through his decree and determines the salvation of every rational creature, leading them in various ways to repentance and also—when it is needed—purifying them in a fire of cleansing judgment (Szczerba 2008, 272–8). In a macro-cosmic scale, such a determinism can be seen in the teaching of Stoic philosophers, stressing the unity of the entire realm and the overall-divine providence, which determines every aspect of reality, including the fate of human beings (Cicero, *De natura deorum* II.14.37; *De divinatione* I.55.125). In a similar way Spinoza constructs his monistic thought system with ethical determinism (Lamm 1994, 476–505).

Schleiermacher does not explicitly advocate the concept of the final renewal of all things—*apokatastasis*, but gets very close to the personal form of the theory of salvation of all people and its cosmic aspect of perfect interrelationship of the entire realm, the universe. In his essay on the doctrine of election he opposes the teaching of the eternal condemnation and is aware that such a position brings him closer to the teaching of the final restoration. He affirms e.g., that from a strictly human perspective it is difficult to accept the concept of the limited scope of salvation if God, the final owner and director of reality, wants “all people to be saved” and still—according to the traditional Christian teaching—a considerable portion of humanity is supposed to be eternally separated from the divine (I Tm 2, 4; 2 Ptr 3, 9 NRSV). Perhaps, Schleiermacher ironically points out, those believers, who maintain the limited scope of salvation, lose their ability of *sympatheia* towards other people, but will they not—in such a case—also lose an important aspect of their own salvation? (Gockel 2006, 35)

Only in [this idea] reason finds rest, if it shall combine coherently the original and developed differences of human beings with everyone’s dependence on divine grace, the divine power of redemption with the products of human resistance and finally the misery of the unbelievers with the word of grace attached to their memories (Schleiermacher 1990, 218–9; Gockel 2006, 36).

The climax of the history of salvation—*Heilsgeschichte*, is the work of Christ, which was accomplished in a particular point of time. However, that means that not only the very act of salvation but also the implementation of salvation is temporal, and consequently always partial. It is continuously possible to indicate people, who seem not to be “saved” yet. This way Schleiermacher points to the successive development of the Kingdom of God; in a broad perspective it is always growing and finally—he believes—will include the whole humanity, according to the will of God (*The Christian*

*Faith*, §119.2), “who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Tm 2, 4 NRSV).

Still, is it possible that a part of humanity will not enter the “inner community” and will be eternally condemned? Schleiermacher does not answer all the possible questions concerning the scope of salvation. After all, eschatology exceeds the cognitive possibilities of human beings and gets close to metaphysical considerations (*The Christian Faith*, §157.2; § 159.2; Adams 2005, 46–7). With this view in mind, Schleiermacher discusses in *The Christian Faith* (§ 160–163) four eschatological doctrines, which he calls “prophetic doctrines” (*prophetische Lehrstücke*): the return of Christ, the resurrection of the flesh, the last judgment and eternal blessedness. He is aware that in these cases, doctrines cannot be treated traditionally as a “description of actual consciousness” (*The Christian Faith* § 157.1) but at most as “the efforts of an insufficiently equipped faculty of premonition” (*The Christian Faith* § 95.2). He approaches them critically and shows that these “prophetic doctrines” cannot be interpreted literally; they all contain fantastic metaphors and however read, lead to a number of aporias. The perfection of the church, the survival of individual personality or the idea of separation of believers from nonbelievers are embedded with unsolvable questions. Similarly, the teaching on eternal blessedness, “the completest fullness of the most living God-consciousness” (*The Christian Faith* § 163). Is it going to be mediated, but then it “can scarcely be harmonized with the retention of personality or unmediated”, but then “we should steadily have knowledge of all that wherein God makes Himself known.” The solution, according to Schleiermacher, is impossible to be reached in the contemporary context, so

we therefore always remain uncertain how the state which is the Church’s highest consummation can be gained or possessed in this form by individual personalities emerging into immortality (§ 163.2).

With all the questions in mind Schleiermacher admits that it is impossible to combine the idea of eternal blessedness with eternal damnation. According to orthodox Christian dogmatics, the possibility of eternal condemnation should be admitted as conceivable (*The Christian Faith*, § 119.3; §163; appendix, p. 720–2). Yet, the doctrine of eternal blessedness excludes the alternative and the number of theological arguments opposes, according to the German thinker, the concept of the limited scope of salvation.

First, the final condemnation contradicts the concept of the sovereignty of God, which the Reformed tradition and Schleiermacher maintain. God fully and undeniably rules over created reality, and his decrees are absolute



in their character. Even faith of a person is finally worked out by God, although it appears as a free act from the level of human perception. (*The Christian Faith*, § 109.1). If, according to one God's decree the human race is created and redeemed in Christ, is it possible then that some people will definitely reject God and be rejected by God?

For the decision as to who is to attain to conversion and when we have already assigned, not to the realm of grace, making it depend on Christ, but to the realm of power, making it depend on God; which is the Father's drawing men to the Son. (*The Christian Faith* 190.3; Rae 2011, 183–5).

Second, the eternal condemnation contradicts the endless love of the sovereign God (*The Christian Faith*, §166–7), who creates human beings according to his image, bestows his Spirit upon them and pre-destines people to salvation. If God grants salvation to all people, in his sovereignty works out faith in them and in the macro-scale of human history introduces his sublime plan of redemption, is it possible then that anybody can effectively oppose the will of the Creator? Especially given that—according to Christian orthodoxy—human beings are related (*imago Dei*) to God, and evil—understood as the absence of good—does not have ontic status? Similar arguments can be found in the writings of such *apokatastatic* early Christian writers as Origen, Didymus the Blind, Evagrius Ponticus or Gregory of Nyssa. The overwhelming love of God, the nature of human beings compatible with the nature of the Creator and the ontic non-existence of evil lead these theologians to the conviction that at the end all people, or more broadly, all rational beings, will be effectively drawn to God and God will be all in all (Szczerba 2008, 113–40, 307–45, I Cor 15, 28).

Third, the concept of eternal condemnation seems to undermine the effectiveness of the redeeming work of Christ. If Christ is—in the Biblical language—the archpriest, who serves all the people, intercedes for every person, and finally dies for everybody, then, how is one to combine it with the fact that some people are eternally rejected by God based on his sovereign will? Does it not discredit the work of Christ?

If all in this fashion are included in the divine fore-ordination to blessedness, then the high-priestly dignity of Christ for the first time comes out in its whole efficacy—an efficacy which implies that God regards all men only in Christ. This very point can be applied also to the previously considered case. So that at least this result clearly emerges, that if we take the universality of redemption in its whole range (which cannot really be conceived without this

high-priestly dignity of Christ and all its consequences), then we must also take fore-ordination to blessedness quite universally; and that limits can be imposed on neither without curtailing the other (*The Christian Faith*, §120; postscript, p. 560).

Fourth, it is difficult to accept—according to Schleiermacher—the possibility of final condemnation of part of humanity from a simply psychological perspective. If the redeeming means the conversion of the consciousness of a person, according to which the sensuous self is absorbed by the God-consciousness, then the original egocentrism must be replaced by God's love, i.e., care for another person and in its broadest sense for the entire human race. Such was the attitude of Christ, characterized by *sympatheia* for the whole humanity and for every person. Such is also the attitude of the true Church, which absorbs Christ's consciousness through direct relationship with the Redeemer (first generation of Christians), or through the influence of the community of faith, the Church (next generations), in which the Spirit of Christ is cultivated (*The Christian Faith*, § 146). Taking into consideration the necessary Christian attitude of care for another person, it is difficult to mentally hold the concept of eternal damnation of part of humanity alongside a simultaneous belief in the unending happiness-salvation of another part. Due to human *sympatheia*, the eternal punishment is unacceptable and the only alternative is the universal restoration of all souls (Wyman 2017, 641).

If we now consider eternal damnation as it is related to eternal bliss, it is easy to see that once the former exists, the latter can exist no longer.... Now if we attribute to the blessed a knowledge of the state of the damned, it cannot be a knowledge unmixed with sympathy. If the perfecting of our nature is not to move backwards, sympathy must be such as to embrace the whole human race, and when extended to the damned must of necessity be a disturbing element in bliss, all the more that, unlike similar feelings in this life, it is untouched by hope.... From whichever side we view it, then, there are great difficulties in thinking that the finite issue of redemption is such that some thereby obtain the highest bliss, while others ... are lost in irrevocable misery. We ought not to retain such an idea without decisive testimony to the fact that it was to this that Christ Himself looked forward; and such testimony is wholly lacking. Hence, we ought at least to admit the equal rights of the milder view ... that through the power of redemption there will one day be a universal restoration of all souls (*The Christian Faith*, §163; appendix, p. 722; Adams 2005, 47).

In the convictions, pointing towards the final unity of humankind, Schleiermacher exposes his deep humanism, in which—almost in a Neoplatonic way—he stresses the organic community and unity of humankind. In a similar way Gregory of Nyssa, in the fourth century A.D., upholds the unity of humankind and draws *apokatastatic* conclusions out of this teaching. According to him, all the people exemplify and *de facto* are integral parts of the human nature created by God in the first act of *creatio*. This ontological equity and inter-community of people should be practically translated into the attitude of care and responsibility for another person, especially those, who are outcast, are slaves, or simply are suffering (Gregory of Nyssa, *In Ecclesiastem* 4, PG 44, 664C–5D). Also, the act of redemption should be, according to Nyssa, understood both in terms of individual and—most of all—communal perspectives of purifying the *physis tou anthropou* (Szczerba 2008, 230–58).

Nonetheless, the eschatological future is a mystery and is ultimately covered for humanity. The eschatological future exceeds the cognitive horizons of humankind and it is not easy to speculate about its nature. Schleiermacher is aware of it and indicates directly that it is difficult to relate the present reality to the future surpassing the course of human history.

it is certain, too, that the consummation of the Church can never be manifested in this life, and that the state attained in the next life must bear a different relation to the consummation of the Church from that of our present state.... If we try to use the idea of the consummation of the Church so as to determine, from its relation to what as yet is unconsummated, the relation of the single life in the next world to the single life here, or the difference between the two, we can reach no fixed conclusion. And if we seek, by means of the idea of the future life, to assign a place to the consummated Church where it will no longer be a productive factor but a product only, again we fail. The one point of view will always tend to merge in what is mythical, i.e., in the historical presentation of what is supra-historical; the other point of view will always approximate to what is visionary, i.e., the earthly presentation of what is more than earthly (*The Christian Faith*, § 163; postscript, p. 722).

Individual consciousness *post-mortem*, possibility of conversion after death, metaphors of the final judgment, resurrection of all, return of Christ, etc. these are matters which are symbolically taught by Scripture, but the interpretation of which is not clear. Yet, they should affect the understanding of the present existence of human beings, strengthen their God-consciousness and shape their attitude of care for others. They should also point to

fundamental matters in God's plan of redemption, such as God's desire to save all people, future cleansing (i.e., the last judgment) of all people from the "elements of sinfulness, which still cling to them" (*The Christian Faith*, §162.1) or the hope for perfect community with God in the future and the fullness of God-consciousness. Yet, ultimately, these are religious metaphors and symbols, and the eschatological future remains a mystery for humanity.

But we really can solve neither problem; and we therefore always remain uncertain how the state which is the Church's highest consummation can be gained or possessed in this form by individual personalities emerging into immortality (*The Christian Faith*, §163.2).

By sketching such a perspective Schleiermacher expresses his hope for the future, universal and final restoration of all souls, *apokatastasis ton panton*.

Yet, besides the personal aspect of the concept of universal salvation, also its cosmic dimension may be associated with the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher. In his early years he is clearly drawn to the monistic system of Spinoza, which he clearly indicates in his essays devoted to the Dutch philosopher. As Julia Lamm indicates, such aspects in Schleiermacher's thought, including organic monism, ethical determinism, higher realism or a nonanthropomorphic view of God (Lamm 1994, 476) indicate his affinity to so-called post-Kantian Spinozism. Schleiermacher is not uncritical of Spinoza and in his later publications he makes sure that his theology cannot be accused of Spinoza's pantheism. However, both in the *Speeches* and in *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher retains the idea of the coherent universe and the "system of nature" (*Naturzusammenhang*, *The Christian Faith*, § 46.2) where everything is interconnected in the divine organism (Dole 2010, 36–8). The religious feeling, the immediate intuition of the Infinite, takes place in the context of finite reality.

To accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion.... To present all events in the world as the actions of a god is religion; it expresses its connection to an infinite totality" (*Speeches* II, 25–26).

It is possible, because, there is no chasm between the finite and the Infinite, there is a continuity between phenomena and noumena, and the universe is a "dynamic organism of forces and powers This is what Schleiermacher calls a higher realism in the *Speeches* and associates with Spinoza" (Lamm 1994, 503). If such a reading of the naturalistic framework of

Friedrich Schleiermacher is justified, then it is possible to ascribe to him not only the affinity to the personal dimension of the concept of *apokatastasis*, but most of all to the cosmic macro-scale of the idea. Everything is a part of the entire realm, interconnected and interrelated. Everything is an aspect of the Infinite, within which the finite reality exists. In a similar way—in Schleiermacher’s view—functions the late and post-Platonic philosophy, so important for him. This is the Platonism which overcomes the final dualism and maintains the ultimate “being held together and contemplating of the one through the other the organic monism” (Lamm 2018, 688–9). In such a context universalism does not necessarily need to be related to eschatological soteriology, but can be seen as in the Stoic or Neoplatonic philosophy *sic et nunc*. *Apokatastasis* in this context may refer to the unity and interrelatedness of the whole realm and from the personal perspective to the realization of the nature of being as an integral part of the Infinite. In a similar way Plotinus draws the philosopher’s realization of his/her place in the order of being and the encounter with the One-Infinite (Szczzerba 2004, 65–75). In a similar way Spinoza shapes his monistic philosophy, where the Absolute as the immanent cause constitutes the unifying aspect of the entire realm.

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