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## The Meaning of Religion

Multi-religious Elements of a Dialectical Concept

By

Edmund Weber

*In memory of my academic teachers*



Friedrich Heiler  
(1892-1967)



Wolfgang Philipp  
(1915-1969)

*Religio est experientia relationis dialecticae  
fundamenti figurationumque existentiae*

I\*

When *evolution* released pre-human consciousness from the domination of instincts, it had to deal with its henceforward indeterminable nature. Lacking any alternative *indeterminability constitutes human existence*. Neither natural objects nor cultural products including self-made or self-chosen ones are able to restrict this new nature however powerful their attraction or repression may be. No unchangeable determinants and no ultimate definition of existence can be found inside human consciousness. That is the fundamental truth of human existence.

Lacking instinctive regulations consciousness uses the power of imagination for surviving. But this is in its essence likewise in-determined and therefore forced to use creative spontaneity. The boundless capacity of imagination has become the only opportunity for forming existence. The basic structures the spontaneous creativity of imagination uses for forming existence are till now three in number.<sup>1</sup>

But none of these structured products can ever be used as infinite ground of existence because they are as reversible creations of consciousness only finite ones.

The indeterminable ground freely determines its creations and dissolves them again including the highest aspirations and deepest exasperations.

The indeterminability of existence implicates nothing else than the *productive negation* of all the formations including so-called self-determination.

Even the modern misuse of produced self-determination as pretended ground of existence is only idle self-fixation, seized with panic by the indeterminability of existence.

Existence is never in-determined. It is ultimately indeterminable and is able to determine itself. Therefore the determinations are neither illusionary nor essential but accidental.

Existence is the play of indeterminability: it is basically subdued neither by alien nor by one's own determinations. *Existence has no ultimate destination*.

It has no value because it is the producer of all values; it has no purpose because it is the inventor of all purposes; it is meaningless because it is the parturient of all meanings.

II

*Religion* in its proper sense, let us call it *authentic religion*, is the inevitable holistic reaction of human consciousness provoked by the evolutionary development. This reaction to the human condition consists in confronting the dialectical correlation of the indeterminable ground and determined formations of existence.

Religion, the occurrence of confronting that existential correlation, articulates its new experience. By that it necessarily produces a formation even of the ground of existence.

In order to articulate indeterminability religion has to predicate it. In this unavoidable cognitive process of self-reflection religion inevitably makes the ground of existence a formally finite artifact. That is the reason why the illusion arises that the articulated forms of indeterminability were identical with its meant and felt content.

Articulating the ground of existence in the logical form of a finite entity religion has something completely different in mind: it means and feels the ultimate interminability of existence.

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\* I thank Mrs. Renate Rauch for her help in preparing an English version of this article.

<sup>1</sup> Cf., Wolfgang Philipp: *Trinität ist unser Sein - Prolegomena der Vergleichenden Religionsgeschichte*. Hildesheim 1983; *Irenische Dogmatik - Marburger Vorlesungen*. Hildesheim 1983.

The matter of religion can not be articulated in an unambiguous but only in a *paradoxical* manner. If religious articulation is understood in an immediate manner it twists the meaning of religion; the form would be identified with the intrinsically meant and felt content. Such an immediate and therefore naive and indeed wrong understanding of existence betrays its proper essence: indeterminability.

Due to the fact that formed existence gets always a finite shape *religious* culture i.e. the total of religious formations seems likely a finite formation too. Therefore it has always to get its own expressive ambiguity in mind. Because of that ambiguity religious truth was and is still disfigured by cognitive, decisive or emotional fixation of defined existential creations (i.e. by ortho-doxy, ortho-practice, ortho-esthemy).

Religious culture having lost the knowledge of its own paradoxical character degenerates into a sectarian cultural phenomenon and by that causes the wrong impression religion and non-religion were random alternatives.

In the wrong perspective of such a self-alienated religious culture even authentic religion is misunderstood as an existential formation only. This wrong concept of religion gives one the idea that authentic religion could be deselected and substituted by an alternative. But authentic religion as such is not at all selective or exchangeable. It is unavoidable that mind (germ. Geist) is confronted with its own internal dialectics.

The engine of that internal relation is *productive negativity*. This productive negativity constitutes the revolutionary dynamics of existence. But through the religious revolts, recurring in regular intervals, the productive negativity blazes the trail for reformation.

If Indeterminability being the absolute reality of existence there is no way out: even if a religious culture is perverted into a self-forgotten religious ideology - a fate authentic religion is suffering all the time and which Immanuel Kant recognized as "self-imposed immaturity"<sup>2</sup> – the humans are are compelled to form their existence out of their indeterminability; therefore they cannot hide themselves behind any alien- or self-determination.

The fundamental insight of religion is the knowledge that even religious culture cannot identify a positive or negative purpose of existence.

In order to make sure of the indeterminable ground of existence consciousness has produced *paradoxical* formations, terms like the Holy, God, the Transcendent, grace, forgiveness, apocalypse, eternity etc. Producing these paradoxical formations consciousness secures the corruptibility of all its cultural products; in this way it avoids submitting to its own products and disguising its own in-disposable indeterminability. If the religious forms i.e. symbols, metaphors, signs and myths of the Holy are not understood in a paradoxical way these items will lose their specific cognitive quality. It is the genuine task of religious culture to protect un-determinability against its abuse as an ideological instrument to justify creations of consciousness as ground of existence.

All these elements of religious culture lose their proper religious function and practical capacity if they become unable to arouse the consciousness of existential dialectics. Then they have become fossils of the history of religion. *Thomas Luckmann* can say traditional religious culture today is more or less a total of traditional pods filled with modern religion.<sup>3</sup>

The disguise of authentic religion, this always recurring illusion of the multi-farious orthodoxy, aroused by the terror of the in-eradicable freedom of existence, produces the abysmal *existential suffering*. Suffering the indeterminability of existence one does not confront utopia and timelessness as origins of the formations time and space. Instead one bows to these for-

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<sup>2</sup> Cf., Immanuel Kant: *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* Berlinische Monatsschrift, 5. Dezember 1783. English translation of the whole definition of enlightenment: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. Sapere Aude! [dare to know] "Have courage to use your own understanding!" –that is the motto of enlightenment. In: *Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* In: [http://www.artoftheory.com/what-is-enlightenment\\_immanuel-kant/](http://www.artoftheory.com/what-is-enlightenment_immanuel-kant/).

<sup>3</sup> Cf., Thomas Luckmann: *Das Problem der Religion in der modernen Gesellschaft*. Freiburg 1963

matted products as if existence could be calculated and measured. Calculation and measurement are both elements of the formative level of existence but if they are used to define the ground of existence they produce an existential disaster: the so-called absurdity of existence. However existence is basically beyond absurdity just as success because it is free and indeterminable.

All the formations of existence are metaphorically speaking always dancing on the *volcano of existence*. This volcano has the irresistible power of producing and dissolving all creations of human consciousness.

The revelation of the indeterminable ground of existence and the freedom of formation is the actual anthropogenesis. Human being became human in the moment he realized his formatted existence roots in its ultimately indeterminable ground. Through these basic specifics of human condition the inevitability of generation and corruption of all cultures is very explainable. But existence as such can not be explained because it is in its essence ultimately unexplainable. It is unexplainable because there is nothing to explain.

Any culture being in power till today can always become a *world of difference*. Serious religious culture remembers all the time and everywhere the irreversible indeterminability of existence as well as the reversibility of all formations. Particularly all self-determinations and all other cultural efforts misused as all-determining identities have been and will always become corroded by the irresistible indeterminability of existence.

By this eroding indeterminability recovers lost space for *meaninglessness*, the intrinsic truth of existence. As truth of existence meaninglessness is the honor and pride of human existence. Therefore, ultimate meaninglessness of existence is definitely not reason for ultimate resignation. Just the opposite is true. Meaninglessness is the only constancy of existence, and by that it opens the way to truthful consolation and honest serenity.

*Frits Staal* has shown that a proper religious ritual demonstrates nothing else than its own meaninglessness.<sup>4</sup> Ritual however is the original nucleus of religion. Therefore ritual is obviously the first and indeed the most resistant organization of the shocking primordial experience of the meaninglessness or indeterminability of human existence.

### III

Even though marveling the following *old epigram* gives an example of that serenity briefly and succinctly articulating the truth religion actually means:

*Don't know from where I come,  
Don't know whereto I go,  
I am wondering at my cheerfulness.*<sup>5</sup>

### IV

*Ramprasad Sen*, the famous Bengal poet and singer of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, whose poems are even today well known and enthusiastically sung everywhere in his homeland, was the most powerful and very modern man revolting against his very traditional conviction that existential formation, i.e. his aims and desires, are the ground of existence. But he could not elude the magic of Kali, the mad girl and mother goddess. Although he was always fiercely fighting with her he could not shake her off, the voice of the indeterminable ground of his existence. He was forced to confront his problem of existence in his relation to this in his eyes most ambiguous goddess. He bitterly realized her as free, playful, mad, tricky, friendly, grateful will

<sup>4</sup> Frits Staal, *The Meaninglessness of Ritual*. NVMEN Vol. XXVI, Fasc. 1 (1979)

<sup>5</sup> The epigram is wondering because it is its innate idea that cheerfulness can be a reaction to a determined formation of existence only but contrary to its expectations makes just the opposite experience.

say completely unaccountable. He always complained that his own life and death were in reality nothing else than her own play with him; but nevertheless he realizes that she unmasks him as a card sharper who abuses his existence - given by Kali - for realizing his self-determinations as ground of existence. However, he got aware of the shocking existential reality that beyond his own illusionary but deeply felt aspirations of life and fears of death as well as the cruel experience of the mad girl's destruction of all these self-determinations there is an unbelievable existential possibility. Independently from all self-referred desire and fear the indeterminable ground can let him feel in the shape of the motherly goddess Kali - the all self-made but illusionary hopes and frustrations transcending kindness of existence - a kindness which is without any reason and therefore unexplainable.

All his existential experience he shouts out towards Kali, the crazy girl and graceful mother, in the following songs:

*Who can explain Your play, Mother?  
What do You take, what give back?  
You give and take again.*

*For you dawn and dusk are the same.  
Nothing can stop Your perfect freedom.  
You give exactly what's deserved.<sup>6</sup>*

...  
*O Mother, who really  
Knows Your magic?  
You're a crazy girl  
Driving us all crazy with these tricks.*

*No one knows anyone else  
In a world of Your illusions.  
Kali's tricks are so deft,*

*We act on what we see.  
And what suffering –  
All because of a crazy girl!*

*Who knows what She truly is?  
Ramprasad says: If She decides  
To be kind, this misery will pass.<sup>7</sup>*

Ramprasad was bitterly disappointed when he became old, poor and sick and had to face death. However, he realistically confronted the disenchanting death as the destroyer of his own absolutized existential aspirations. But he learned in a painful process this disenchanting death has not the power to nullify existence. He saw Kali using the formation fear of death to destroy the attachment to self-made formation which is misused as ground of existence. He confessed Kali was the ground of existence, and therefore beyond all formations.

The songs of Ramprasad demonstrate religion is not a fatuous cultural phenomenon people have created by reason of the incapacity of solving their real problems in a rational way. On the contrary religion is the most rational way of confronting the evolutionarily conditioned and irreversible indeterminability of existence. Whatever kind of expression human beings use for meeting the existential ground whether mythological, de-mythologized, scientific, poetical or musical ones, indeterminability does not care because it does not depend on its own formations.

The worshippers of the mad girl who destructs existential illusions about one's own even high culture and the devotees of the gracious mother who forces one to accept the human condition

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<sup>6</sup> *Grace and Mercy in Her Wild Hair. Selected Poems of the Mother Goddess by Ramprasad Sen.* Translated by Leonard Nathan & Clinton Seely. Boulder 1982, p. 32

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30

as her irreversible good will are indeed more rational than those who believe that human being's value and meaning depends on its own questionable formations.

Ramprasad, a layman only, belongs to the people who rediscovered authentic religion. Honest with his reality he acknowledged the dialectical correlation of ground and formation of existence.

## V

There is another amazing example *Hindus practicing the religious revolt* against the ideology of formationism and realizing the dialectical truth of existence. It is the performance of *Krishna's lilas*. Lila means nothing else than that all the formations of existence are only plays arranged by Krishna himself.

In *Brindaban*, in the Holy Land of *Braj*<sup>8</sup>, the place where young Krishna together with the shepherds performed most of his lilas, those plays are re-enacted every year. Relating to the dialectics of existence the most meaningful one is the lila *The Theft of the Flute*.<sup>9</sup>

Krishna, the Black One, the All-Attracting One, has a flute like all the other shepherds (a flute). But when he plays his flute then not only the cows, more amazingly the gopis, the girls and women of the shepherds too immediately start to run through the lanes of the village to meet the player.

The gopis are attracted by Krishna's flute but nevertheless frustrated. Hearing the sound they are emotionally overwhelmed so that they leave their children, husbands, homes, and their daily work which they love so much. In the hope they can solve their existential contradiction the gopis steal the magic flute so that they (were anymore) would no longer be attracted by its seductive alluring sound. Krishna however does not give up. Immediately he takes the gopis to court.

*Radha*, his favorite and nevertheless the leader of the protesting gopis, is at the same time the queen of *Braj*. As such she is the supreme judge of the country too. After a long dispute *Radha* being forced to defend justice decides with a heavy heart in favor of Krishna. But when the gopis intervene Krishna should be allowed to play his magic flute only when they have finished their daily work, he says the remarkable words:

*Look sakhi*<sup>10</sup>, *it is not just you who's in the kitchen,*  
*and not just two or three others like,*  
*but thousands, hundreds of thousands!*  
*From sunrise until sunset*  
*you're busy blowing on the coals of the stove you cook on.*  
*It never stops, this housework of yours.*  
*Do you think I'm just going to stop playing my flute all that time?*  
*No, that just can't be.*<sup>11</sup>

There was no way out: *Radha*, the queen, being the representative of social reason and in charge of defending justice has to unconditionally return the flute to the legal owner.

Therefore, the gopis, the souls of human beings, are still facing their old existential problem: Every moment it can happen that they are taken out of their beloved daily work, their highly esteemed formation of existence, by the uncountable and irresistible sound of Krishna's flute, the sweet siren melody of the indeterminable and therefore un-countable ground of existence.

The *Brijbhasis* know very well that all the formations of existence are a play staged by Krishna, and they know this truth is all the time and everywhere ready to assault unpredictably their consciousness filled with all the adherences they are accustomed to. The *lilanukara-*

<sup>8</sup> District of Mathura, U.P., India.

<sup>9</sup> John Stratton Hawley in association with Shrivatsa Goswami: *At Play with Krishna. Pilgrimage Dramas From Brindavan*. Delhi 1992, pp. 115-154

<sup>10</sup> *Hindi*: girl-friend.

<sup>11</sup> John Stratton Hawley in association with Shrivatsa Goswami: *At Play with Krishna. Pilgrimage Dramas From Brindavan*. Delhi 1992, p. 152

nas, the exceptional forms of their religious culture, remind the Brijbhasis the basic essence of existence transcends all their highly esteemed and extremely beloved culture but they are at the mercy of indeterminable power of their existence nevertheless.

In our case the powerful flute is the overwhelming weapon of the existence's indeterminability which can abrogate all formations even the most meaningful one called 'identity' today. This indeterminability is not a dualistic or Gnostic destroyer of work or *karman* but its origin and border. The all-transcending Krishna of our story loves the gopis and the people of Braj enthusiastically and takes joyful part in their wonderful culture. But sometimes he reminds his beloved ones of the original relation of indeterminability and determined formations of their existence. He reminds them existence can not be reduced to culture; such an existential mutilation would rob the human beings of their original dignity: the indeterminability of their existence which no formation can substitute or extinguish.

It is indeed amazing that the simple people of Braj are in a popular way preserving and representing the most important truth of existence till today.

## VI

The same understanding of existence we find in the religion of Shiva, the Graceful One.<sup>12</sup> *Manikkavasagar*, the most famous Tamil singer initiated one of the most effective Hindu revolts against karmic ideology. This ideology makes human formations, *karman*, and its reincarnative fruits, *phalas*, the fundament of existence; it mercilessly chains its producer to his deeds and the so-called results of his deeds.

Manikkavasagar however praises in his hymns<sup>13</sup> Shiva as the essentially graceful father who saved his son from the world of fixed formations and opened his eyes for the ground of existence.

The Graceful One – that is the meaning of the Sanskrit term *shiva* - does not demand any good work as a pre-condition for his love and does not condemn his son for bad deeds. In the view of Shiva, who is nothing else than the indeterminable ground of existence, the karmic or formation fixed ideology requiring award or punishment according to the deeds of human beings is a men made illusion trying to feign existence as depending on one's own formations. Shiva, the Graceful One, loves his son unconditionally and does not in the least look at his self-made cultural appearance.

Although adhering to his formation as ultimate destination Manikkavasagar experienced Shiva, the Grateful One, still as his loving father. Because of indeterminability Shiva can love his son although he has forgotten him. He does not require any 'advanced payment' to concede his favour; he himself saves Manikkavasagar only because he is his son. The behavior, *karman*, of the human being, its formation, is not at all a reason for Shiva's intervention. He intervenes out of his own grace and changes the heart of the human beings without demanding any approval from his creatures. In his *Holy Hymns* Manikkavasagar enthusiastically praises his father:

*Is nobody there who worships and says:  
"My Father is that one only who dwells in Perunthurai<sup>14</sup>  
and fulfils us with blissful joy?" (T 47, 2)*

*The Lord came to earth and dwells in Perunthurai.  
He is standing there and pitching his sharp  
and uncovered spear into my heart. (T 47, 3)*

<sup>12</sup> The Sanskrit adjective *shiva* means *graceful, benign, friendly, beneficial*.

<sup>13</sup> *Das Tiruvasagam von Manikkavasagar*. Aus dem Tamil übersetzt von Albrecht Franz und P. Nagarajan. Karaikudi 1977 (= T); tr. by the author.

<sup>14</sup> Holy Pilgrimage Centre of Shiva in Tamil Nadu, India.

*His mercy is endless and he dwells in Perunturai.  
He is the balsam which heals the whole grief of future.  
He stood in front of me  
and brushed away all my old double deeds.<sup>15</sup> (T 47, 4)*

*He makes me crazy, killed all my births<sup>16</sup>  
and fulfilled my heart with great blissful joy  
which goes beyond all words.  
He is my father of Perunthurai  
who had me to his own  
and looked at me with powerful grace.<sup>17</sup> (T 47, 6)*

Shiva brushes away all Manikkavasagar's clinging to existential formations and instead he implanted into his son a joy which is independent of all the attachments for cultural aspirations. The implanted grace of Shiva which means the ultimate freedom of existence from all formations does not fulfil the human being with terror; the opposite is true: the existential freedom fulfils the human consciousness with a joy of existence which does not derivate from any element of formation. It is the ground of existence which is the only source of incomparable joy. Manikkavasagar, the holy singer, restored the authentic religion by his experience with Shiva.

Another representative of the Shaiva religion was *Umapathi Sivachariyar* of Koravankudi (in Tamil Nadu), a Brahmin priest of Shiva's, i.e. the dancing king's temple of Chidambaram (also in Tamil Nadu). He lived between the last quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the 1<sup>st</sup> first quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>18</sup>. In his famous treatise *Thiruvarutpayan* or *The Gain of Divine Grace* he shows that human consciousness always trusting its own formations or cultural undertakings cannot touch its own ground of existence. Therefore, Shiva, the Grateful One who is identical with his *Arul*<sup>19</sup>, must revolt against that self-imposed bondage of self-dependency. The liberation from that delusion consists in the existential realization that the truth of human existence does ultimately not consist in its formations but in Arul, the grace, the Grateful One. Umapathi compares the soul with a fish which undertakes actions although there is no need for them. The soul has Arul as absolutely sufficient for her existence, nevertheless man deludes himself by producing and realizing the idea he had to create his own existential fundament by actions:

*As fish plunge for prey though they live in a sea of milk,  
So too, spirits enveloped in Arul,  
Plunge time and again into the sea of delusion.<sup>20</sup>  
Can any man think it was by his own prowess  
When, of His own, that (noble) One His favours showered  
Who is he such claims to make?<sup>21</sup>*

Because every soul is enveloped in Arul like a fetus in mother's womb Umapathi concludes nobody can claim for having earned grace by his own prowess. No: Arul is free of charge; therefore existence as such is in reality not under the bondage of one's own formations anymore; therefore no one can claim the enveloping Arul i.e. the ground of existence to be his own product.

<sup>15</sup> Good and bad deeds.

<sup>16</sup> Shiva liberates the human being from *samsara*, the cycle of rebirth, being caused by justice in order to counterbalance the fruits of good and bad deeds.

<sup>17</sup> *Tiruvagam*, p. 232

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Jaswant Raj SDB: *Grace in the Saiva Siddhāntham and in St. Paul*. Madras 1989, p. 51

<sup>19</sup> Like the Holy Ghost, the creative grace, is identical with God, is God himself, in the same way Arul is identical with Shiva and Shiva himself.

<sup>20</sup> *Thiruvarutpayan* c. IV, 34. Quoted and tr. by: Joseph Jaswant Raj SDB: *Grace in the Saiva Siddhāntham and in St. Paul*. Madras 1989, p. 455

<sup>21</sup> *Thiruvarutpayan* c. VII, 34. Quoted and tr. by: Joseph Jaswant Raj SDB: *Grace in the Saiva Siddhāntham and in St. Paul*. Madras 1989, p. 467



The Saiva Siddhantham is indeed one of the most radical revolts against the self-dependence of human consciousness.

It is indeed true too that the religion of the seers of Saiva Siddhantham and of St. Paul and his followers are comparable. Like people of other religions they belong to the revolutionary thinkers who rediscovered and are still within the limits of their own culture rediscovering authentic religion.

One of the basic doctrines of the *religious revolt of Buddhism* is the well-known existential idea of all-conditionism. Nothing is unconditional or in Pali language *atta* and in Sanskrit *atman*. All the real and possible formations of consciousness are conditioned and there is nothing independent. Everything is *an-atta*, is not *atta*, is conditioned. In other words: *an-atta* means there can be nothing found in the world of formations which could be named as *atta*. The indeterminable ground of existence is *atta* only.

The *atta* ground is not available by formations of human consciousness. It creates and transcends the definable and manageable world. The world of the *an-atta* formations is nevertheless the ordinary reality of life and it becomes illusory only if misused as possible ground of existence.

Nirvana happens when consciousness realizes the adequate correlation of *an-atta* formation to its *atta* ground. It does not at all mean the destruction of the formations.

Siddharta was shocked about his dependence on his formations. As Buddha however he conceived self-dependence could not be dissolved by self-made formative acts. When he realized existence is not at all depending on anything, not even on oneself then the religion of karmism came to an end. He recognized karma religion as a senseless attempt of human consciousness to establish its self-made ground of its existence by means of its own drafts and deeds salvaged according to morality, law and justice. Therefore human acts not misused in the karmic way and rejected as existence founding deeds are conditioned but pure formations of existence.

It is beyond all doubts that Buddha belongs to the people having rediscovered authentic religion.

## VII

*The religious revolt in Judaism* we find e.g. in the liturgical prayer-book *Sidur Sefat Emet*. In one of the *Morning Prayers* the pious Jews express the same experience with the indeterminable Holy. They confess their own behavior and deeds even their own piety have no value in the eyes of God. All depends only on his mercy:

*Sovereign of all worlds!*  
*Not because of our righteous acts do we lay our supplications before thee,*  
*but because of thine abundant mercies.*  
*What are we? What is our life? What is our piety?*  
*What our righteousness? What our helpfulness?*  
*What our strength? What our might?*  
*What shall we say before thee,*  
*O Lord our God and God of our fathers?*  
*Are not all the mighty men as nought before thee,*  
*the men of renown as though they had not been,*  
*the wise as if without knowledge,*  
*and the men of understanding as if without discernment?*  
*For most of their works are void,*  
*and the days of their lives are vanity before thee,*  
*and the pre-eminence of man over the beast is nought,*  
*for all is vanity.<sup>22</sup>*

<sup>22</sup> *The Standard Prayer Book*, tr. by Simeon Singer [1915], p. 9. In: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/spb/index.htm>.

Another well known document of religious revolt is the Biblical story of *Abraham's election*.<sup>23</sup> The existential model of Abraham is described as a relation between God and Abraham which has absolutely nothing to do with a business relation following the principle of *do ut des*; it is a relation of unconditioned divine love. God elects Abraham only by his own will and there was nothing required as pre-condition for that love from Abraham.

Even today the central intention of this story is not forgotten in the Jewish community although the Halacha, the law, is dominating the practical life of many Jews. The German Jewish monthly *Die Jüdische Zeitung* is publishing a whole page entitled *Thora Lectures* in every issue. In the issue November 2012 the relation of God and Abraham as a one-sided love of a father to his son is similar to Shiva's relation to his son Manikkavasagar:

*God's love for Abraham and his covenant with him and his followers did not accrue from Abraham's external character and his good qualities. They are more comparable with the 'essential love' of a father to his son, a love which is not caused by the good qualities of the son but a love which exists because the father sees a part of his own self within the son. Such a love is decreasing neither by the lapse of time nor by any changing circumstances. Just as God's love to the Jewish people does not depend on the fact whether the Jew is worthy of this love or not; rather that love is a part of himself [sc. of the Jew], whether it is all right with by him or not.*<sup>24</sup>

This is the classical description of the indeterminable ground of existence which is in no way ruled and dominated by the humans' formative character and qualities. The essence of human nature, God's paternal love, does not depend on something else and as innate quality the ground of existence cannot get lost even if the person would deny it and declare any formation e.g. a law her so-called identity.

## VIII

*The religious revolt in Christianity* developed the idea that the human existence is based on the Trinitarian God. This God creates existence out of nothing. The human being does not stand up its mystery and tries always to make its evolutionarily developed free existence meaningful. That trick seems like putting the cart before the horse. By abusing its existential freedom it squeezes itself into its self-made cultural corset.

Such a self-made meaning or self-definition of existence is exactly what is called 'sin' in the Christian tradition. It's the attempt to destroy one's own existential freedom in favor of self-formatted determined fictions.

'Sin' does not mean the breach of the formation called 'law'. The law as total of man made formations has to regulate the human life. The breach of law is only an affair within the world of existential formation. Therefore in the strict theological sense sin means the abuse of law.

A produced formation like law cannot give any reason for existence which could stand the power of radical doubt or rational criticism. The human consciousness can stand this its own indeterminability if it realizes in its consciousness or in the theological term 'believes or has faith' that the human being can live and die without any so-called sense or non-sense of life.

The religious revolt against the abuse of the formative power of consciousness is the idea of God as self-sacrificing savior.

According to the religious ideology of counterbalancing justice the human being's existence ultimately depends on its own works or formations. But if the God takes over all effects and consequences of formations, works or deeds, to justify existence they lose their function of grounding existence and become insofar existentially useless. The formations have to be made for living and dying but have nothing to do with supplying self-made ideas of sense or non-sense of existence.

<sup>23</sup> *Genesis*, c. 12,1-3

<sup>24</sup> *Jüdische Zeitung* November 2012, Nr. 81, p. 11

The Christian revolt started as a historical event. It continues insofar as the so-called Holy Spirit is preached all the time. This means consciousness should always remember the productive negativity of its creative indeterminability.

To get that consciousness pious people of the Medieval Ages sung:

*Veni, creator Spiritus  
mentes tuorum visita,  
imple superna gratia,  
quae tu creasti pectora.*

\*

*Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,  
and in our hearts take up Thy rest;  
come with Thy grace and heav'nly aid,  
To fill the hearts which Thou hast made.*

The Holy Ghost is filling the hearts with grace; it is the ground of existence which gives gratis and free of charge and does not require any formation of the real but not manageable fulfillment of the existence. The song is the basic religious act: remembering the innate truth of existence.

The gratis existence was the subject of *Martin Luther's religious revolt* too. His genuine religious discovery consists in the insight of the radical difference of the two Words of God: Gospel and Law. He confessed that for him as a convinced catholic priest and friar this insight was indeed a revolutionary, shocking and overwhelming experience:

*Before I did not miss anything making no difference between Law and Gospel and considering all as one and said Christ does not differ from Moses, at most in regard to the point in time and the grade of perfection. But by discovering the difference that the Law is one thing and the Gospel another one I got it.<sup>25</sup>*

Gospel means the formation transcending voice of the Holy as freely grace giving ground of existence, and Law as his rational voice for organizing the basic formation for the survival of mankind. The purpose of Gospel is the existentially relevant revelation that the ground of existence is "extra nos" –"outside of us" or "outside our reference". That means active consciousness has nothing to *do* with the grounding of their existence. In terms of Christian tradition grounding existence has been already completely established by the 'work' of Jesus Christ which has according to work-religion fulfilled all necessary works human beings have to do for getting salvation. Abusing the Law as means for getting salvation or condemnation by oneself which means grounding one's existence by one's own formations the human being's consciousness gives up its basic freedom and warps the grateful beauty of his indeterminability. But the inherent beauty of existence rejects all attempts of one's own works and opens itself only for faith i.e. noticing the risk of an only grace grounded existence but distrusting one's own formations as secure existential fundamentals. Martin Luther called that existential condition "the freedom of a Christian". His distinction between Gospel and Law and his radical rejection of the Roman Catholic idea that Gospel is only a better Law than that one of Moses has been one of the greatest religious revolts: He rediscovered the *contrary* difference between the indeterminability and formation of existence and by that authentic religion.

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther, *Tischreden* [Table Talks], 5, 5518. Weimar 1919, p. 210; tr. by the author.

## IX

*The religious revolt in Islam* started with Mohammed's revelation that true religion is the religion of Abraham. We read in the Koran:

*O people of the Scripture [kitab]!  
Why do you argue about Abraham,  
Thora nor Gospel were revealed only after him?  
Have you no sense? (3,65)  
Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian;  
he was devoted to God [muslim] as a deviant one [hanif]<sup>26</sup>  
He was no one who decoyed the demons [muschrik].<sup>27</sup> (3,67)  
Verily, those people are very near to Abraham  
Who follow him: this prophet and those who are faithful  
because God is a friend of the faithful ones. (3,68)<sup>28</sup>*

The proper sense of *God's Sermon to Jews and Christians* who were living together with Mohammed in Arabia is very clear: The people of the Scripture say the realization of the formation Scripture and its commands is the substance of proper existence. Therefore everybody who does not follow the orders of the Scripture is a deviant heathen and does not get God's benevolence. The formation Scripture is made in this way the absolute self-definition of human existence. But it was revealed to Mohammed that the human existence has been accepted by God before the appearance of the Scripture and its commands. Therefore Abraham who didn't know the Scripture and its commands and therefore could not do any prescribed deeds was nevertheless an elected one. The Scripture and the laws were given to Moses only centuries later. By the model of Abraham *God's Sermon* demonstrates existence does not at all depend on any formation and law. It depends inexplicably on its own ultimate indeterminability – traditionally called on God's unconditional grace. And the gratefulness of the ground of existence is revealed not to formation but to faith only. The fulfillment of the commands of the Scripture has another option than to be in the original relation to God. By the help of so-called commands or laws the God given reason tries in to regulate the formation of culture. But Abraham didn't know these laws; they were not given before Moses.

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<sup>26</sup> *Muslim*: one who is devoted [to God]; *hanif*: one who is deviating from the main stream, godless man, a heretic, a heathen; *muslim hanif*: a person who is devoted to God but nevertheless a heathen. *God's Sermon* reveals the People of the Scripture have a contradictory and illogical understanding of Abraham. If they argue that only by knowing and following the Scripture one can become a *muslim*, one who is devoted to God, than Abraham who did not know the Scripture and therefore was unable to fulfill the prescribed commands has been obviously a *hanif*, a heathen, necessarily going astray from the right way to God. But the People of the Scripture although basing their authority on Abraham, who has to be seen according to their own logics as a godless heathen and in no way a *muslim*, should see the contradiction of their position. That is the reason God criticizes them as people who "have no sense" whenever they "argue about Abraham". *God's Sermon* claims Abraham did not have the Scripture but he was nevertheless a *muslim*, devoted to God, and faithful. Faith is the original relation to God and not knowledge and practice of the Scripture and its commands. Devotion means to trust in the un-countable ground and not in the accidental formations of existence. Under the perspectives of formationism Abraham's behavior was risky: God did not give him the land and the great nation, he only promised it. Therefore Abraham had to decide: either to trust or not. His decision was risky because it could be possible that the promise and the voice were fakes only. But Abraham exposed himself to that existential risk which made him a *muslim*. The People of the Scripture did not accept the riskiness of existence; instead they want a calculable and controllable ground of existence managed by them by their formations. St. Paul too criticizes the Galatian Christians in the same way when they became likewise People of the Scripture (Gal. 3,1; 3,3; 3,6-9). Therefore the attacks of some Muslim scholars against the apostle ignore or want to ignore his close theological relationship with the religion of Abraham of Sure, 3 65 seqq.

<sup>27</sup> *Muschrik*: someone who whistles or hisses in order to summon the devil and demons trusting them and having lost faith in God alone. Following the logics of *God's Sermon* these demons could only be the abused Scripture and its commands whistled by the People of the Scripture and perverted into demoniac means to get the right of entering paradise by one's own good deeds or to go to hell by one's own bad ones. In this way God lost his sovereign power and was provided with a second Lord: the abused Law. The People of the Scripture made the Law the judge over all human beings and God had only to execute that judge's judgment. Because the human acts decide the fate of the human being the grace of God as essence of existence is totally denied.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., Claus Schedl: *Muhammad und Jesus*. Wien, Freiburg, Basel 1978, p. 446

The religion of Abraham is doubtlessly the prototype of a realistic self-consciousness because it confronts the dialectical correlation of indeterminability and formation of existence, the dialectical correlation of God's absolute freedom concerning his creatures and his creations like law. Law is always changing; the ground of existence does not.

In order to exclude definitely any abuse of the formation law and to put emphasis on the absolute freedom of the existential ground some verses later the Quran says:

*The bounty is in the hands of Allah.  
He bestows it on whom He will. (3, 73)  
He selects for His mercy whom He will.  
Allah's bounty is infinite. (3, 74)<sup>29</sup>*

*Al-Bukhari* has delivered a hadith<sup>30</sup> which shows the formation of human existence is nothing worth in the end.

*Narrated Ibn Umar: Allah's Apostle said, "Your period (i.e. the Muslims' period) in comparison to the periods of the previous nations, is like the period between the 'Asr prayer and sunset. And your example in comparison to the Jews and the Christians is like the example of a person who employed some laborers and asked them, 'Who will work for me till midday for one Qirat each?' The Jews worked for half a day for one Qirat each. The person asked, 'Who will do the work for me from midday to the time of the 'Asr (prayer) for one Qirat each?' The Christians worked from midday till the 'Asr prayer for one Qirat. Then the person asked, 'Who will do the work for me from the 'Asr till sunset for two Qirats each?' "The Prophet added, "It is you (i.e. Muslims) who are doing the work from the Asr till sunset, so you will have a double reward. The Jews and the Christians got angry and said, 'We have done more work but got less wages.' Allah said, 'Have I been unjust to you as regards your rights?' They said, 'No.' So Allah said, 'Then it is My Blessing which I bestow on whomever I like.'<sup>31</sup>*

Forcing God to be just and to rate men according to their deeds is a useless attempt against God's sovereignty. The point of the parable is very clear: God does not reward the human being for its 'works' at all but he presents only blessings according to his own will. The People of the Scripture try to subdue God under the rule of counterbalancing justice and in this way attempting to force him to be an executor of the law only so that they would become sure that by their own deeds they get the power of the Last Judgment and they become lords of their existence. The hadith however put it straight God is not a slave of counterbalancing justice but the uncontrollable lord of existence. The story leaves no doubt that the formations done and controlled by the human beings are never able to become the ground of existence; sense and non-sense of existence is radically different from all the existential creations.<sup>32</sup>

Other examples of the Muslim idea that moral crimes are not deciding about the ultimate meaning of existence are given in other hadiths delivered by al-Bukhari too:

*Narrated Abu Dhar: Allah's Apostle said, "Someone came to me from my Lord and gave me the news (or good tidings) that if any of my followers dies worshipping none (in any way) along with Allah, he will enter Paradise." I asked, "Even if he committed illegal sexual intercourse (adultery) and theft?" He replied, "Even if he committed illegal sexual intercourse (adultery) and theft."<sup>33</sup>*

Worshipping Allah means to give up trusting in one's own self-dependence as a deeds rewarding rival of the grateful God.

<sup>29</sup> *The Holy Qur'an. Translation and Commentaries.* Istanbul 1998, p. 58

<sup>30</sup> Cf., the similar *Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard* (Mt 20.1-16)

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhari: *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Volume 4, Book 56 *Virtues and Merits of the Prophet and his Companions*, Number 665. In: [http://bahairesearch.com/english/Islam/Hadith/Bukhari\\_Vol\\_4.aspx](http://bahairesearch.com/english/Islam/Hadith/Bukhari_Vol_4.aspx). Cf., <http://www.usc.edu/org/cmje/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/056-sbt.php>.

<sup>32</sup> Seemingly the Jews and Christians who Mohammed met were strict religious legalists. He introduced once more the religion of grace. Afterwards even in Islam the religious legalism gained more and more influence.

<sup>33</sup> Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhari: *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Volume 2, Book 23: *Funerals (Al-Janaa'iz)*, Number 329

In order to avoid any misunderstanding that anybody could cause and secure one's ultimate meaning of existence the following hadith delivered by al-Bukhari adopts a very radical position in respect of the idea that even worshipping Allah gives no evidence of one's election. The hadith quotes a remarkable statement of Mohammed about his own existential fate:

*Narrated Kharija bin Zaid bin Thabit: Um Al-'Ala', an Ansari woman who gave the pledge of allegiance to the Prophet said to me, "The emigrants were distributed amongst us by drawing lots and we got in our share 'Uthman bin Maz'un. We made him stay with us in our house. Then he suffered from a disease which proved fatal when he died and was given a bath and was shrouded in his clothes, Allah's Apostle came I said, 'May Allah be merciful to you, O Abu As-Sa'ib! I testify that Allah has honored you'. The Prophet said, 'How do you know that Allah has honored him?' I replied, 'O Allah's Apostle! Let my father be sacrificed for you! On whom else shall Allah bestow His honor?' The Prophet said, 'No doubt, death came to him. By Allah, I too wish him good, but by Allah, I do not know what Allah will do with me though I am Allah's Apostle. By Allah, I never at-  
tested the piety of anyone after that.<sup>34</sup>*

Even the Prophet does not know the last meaning of his existence; it remains an indeterminable mystery and no self-definition even the worship of Allah provides existential security. Therefore he refuses the idea even piety i.e. worshipping Allah would warrant Paradise. Otherwise Allah would be controllable and manipulable by religious culture, and that is never in accordance with God's freedom.

Of course, the human being has to live by practicing the law and enjoying the gifts of Allah but these formations can never rule over the indeterminable ground of existence.

## X

The *deformation of religion* we are facing today is caused by *religious orthodoxists* declaring their self-chosen, transient and definite religious culture as the one and only essence of religion and also caused by *culturists* propagating religion as a cultural self-chosen alternative and in this respect exactly agreeing with their orthodoxist counterparts of all religious communities.

This unholy alliance is still trying to manipulate the collective consciousness. But the modern authentic religion being a private and an individual one is essentially immune against this manipulation consciousness slowly eroding the formal collective organization of traditional religious cultures and ignoring the culturists's ideological constructions if they are revealed. Segregating mankind into religious and non-religious sections only reproduces the traditional splitting into believers and infidels.

Identifying authentic religion and religious or what ever culture human beings lose their basic capacity of existential self-criticism concerning their own formations including religious culture. They are forced to become at last fanatic propagandists and jihadis for their self-made self-determinations however these artifacts of consciousness may be described and appear on the scene.

The conscience of even the strongest fanatic fighter who oppresses people of alternative self-destinations is nevertheless reserving the right of conversion for itself.

Like all the former fanaticism the modern one too is only a futile resistance against indeterminability of existence, a consequence of the *horror of freedom* which people fall victim to who are unable to stand the existential truth.

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<sup>34</sup> Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhari: *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Volume 2, Book 23: *Funerals (Al-Janaa'iz)*, Number 334.

## XI

Modern mentality predominantly touches the correlation of indeterminability and its formations by *emotion* so that the ideological manipulations, seductions and terrorism of all kinds have less success in controlling the individual's mind.

No wonder that more and more people informally or formally distance themselves from organized traditional religious or other 'ideological' communities, institutions and organizations which try to dictate them how to interpret and practice their existence.<sup>35</sup>

Feeling however has not got such precise contours like thought and deed; there is always the problem that even the by feeling one faces the difficulty of understanding one's own emotions and even more controlling them.<sup>36</sup>

Feeling has become the protecting shelter of the modern individual's private religion and religious culture. Particularly in the shape of music feeling has become the modern way to the intrinsic transcendence of existence. That is the reason why even hundreds of doctrinal lectures or moral sermons cannot compete with e.g. only one performance of Bach's St Matthew Passion today. Many churches have become more or less empty but when in the house of God *Frau Musica*<sup>37</sup> is dominating the same temple is very soon overcrowded.

By recognizing emotion as basic formation of existence today houses of worship can get back their original function: performing actual religion by expressing the sense of existential indeterminability or in traditional terms celebrating the liturgy of the Holy. However this remembering the true nature of human being becomes more and more an individual und private affair even though the traditional pods are not thrown away.

## XII

Religion is human consciousness's unavoidable confrontation with the dialectical correlation of ground and formation of existence. Religion is not a freely selectable cultural pattern but the constitution of human existence; even though it is sometimes forgotten, misunderstood, ignored or even despised and oppressed. Like the sound of Krishna's flute the religious revolts remind the people of their innate truth: the indeterminable nature of their existence.

*Friedrich Heiler*

*called **religion** the highest function of human mind.*

*Wolfgang Philipp*

*explained **religious cultures** as mere threefold tangents  
to the truth of existence.*

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. the early studies on distant religiosity: Trutz Rendtorff: *Die soziale Struktur der Gemeinde*. Hamburg 1958; Jens Marten Lohse: *Kirche ohne Kontakte?* Stuttgart Berlin 1967.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Karl Wilhelm Dahm: *Beruf: Pfarrer*, München 1971, where he argues the general public expects emotional stabilization as one of the primary tasks of church services.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Luther saw the overwhelming religious power of Lady Music for the Christian people: "In short, noble music is next to God's Word, the highest treasure on earth: it governs all thought, perception, heart, and mind". Tr. by Robin A. Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music - Principles and Implications*. Grand Rapids (Michigan) 2007, p. 78. God's Word means God's power and should not be confused with pastors' Sunday sermons' content. Today these sermons are moreover mostly moralizing according to the accidental interest of religious groups or the pastor's only. Therefore these sermons are lacking in any religious legitimacy.