

- wise – just – brave – moderate // obedient – diligent – conscientious – humble // faith – hope – love -

SM 150103 Heart- -God

Len Swidler

THE HEART OF ART- GOD

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Karl Schlecht
Stiftung

... Seeking and Fostering **GOODNESS itself**

- qualitative ? – innovative ? – prepared ? – flexible ? – competent ? – value conscious ? -

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s.a. SM 170620-Goodness; 180303-Multirelig WE >SM 180620.Relig-Transzd-Weltansch>SM 131001-Das Gute

Len Swidler emailed me this in 150103. KSG people should read it carefully as it is related to

Worldethos Idea unites” and concerning KSG-Motto **“GOODNESS itself”**

and ART as essential Element for Leadership Excellence –see SM 150727 (darin..Kunst, Bronbacher...)

EDITORIAL

“THE HEART OF ART”

God is one. The cosmos is one. The Earth is one. Humankind is one. Throughout reality there is a pervasive, intimate, overarching **oneness**, unity. The great religions emphasize this oneness of God. In Judaism God is *Echad*, “One”: *Shema Yisrae . . . Eloheinu echad!* (Remember Israel . . . our God is one!). In Islam God is *Tawhid*, “One”: *La ilaha illa 'lahu* (There is no god except God). In Christianity God is *Unum*, “One”: *Credo in unum Deum* (I believe in one God).¹



At the same time, in at least three of the great religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity—there is a Threeness, a **Trinity**, in God. Even in Judaism and Islam, which so emphasize the **oneness of God**, there is a manifoldness in **the expression** of God.

In Judaism there is *Hohmah*, the Wisdom of God; *Ruach*, the Spirit of God; *Shechinah*, the Presence of God.

In Islam there is *al Haqq*, God as Truth; *al Rahman*, the Merciful; and, indeed, *al asthma' al-husna*, the Ninety-Nine Most Beautiful Names of God.

So, too, in **humankind** there is both a **profound oneness and an infinite manyness**. Though we humans share our humanity with all other humans—which we have come truly to recognize only in the last 200 years with the idea of “*human rights*,”² we also share an endless diversity.

Each human is unique, a whole world, as the Rabbis noted over a millennium-and-a-half ago.

Thus, humanity, as both one and many, manifests the oneness and the infinity of the Divine—in the words of Genesis (1:26), each human is an *Imago Dei*, an image of God.

This dialectic, this dialogue—indeed, this Deep-Dialogue—consequently is characteristic of the art that humans produce. If we do not somehow perceive an underlying unity on some level in the art object, we do not recognize it as art but just as some random matter.

Yet, if the object were completely devoid of manyness, were simply total oneness, total repetition, it would be passed over as boring, mechanical.

Thus, on a deep ontological level art has the capacity to help us humans recognize and embrace the fundamentally dialogical nature of all reality, including the Source of reality, for there is a constitutive

¹St. Thomas Aquinas's first and most famous treatise is *De Deo Uno*, “On the Oneness of God,” *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 1ff.

²Leonard Swidler, “Human Rights: A Historical Overview,” in Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann, eds., *The Ethics of World Religions and Human Rights, Concilium: An International Review of Theology*, no. 228 (1990, no. 2); also French, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese editions: “De mensenrechten: een historische schets,” *Concilium Internationaal tijdschrift voor theologie*, 228 (1990, 2), pp. 19-28; “Die Menschenrechte: Ein geschichtliche Überblick,” *Concilium Ein internationaler Zeitschrift von Theologie*, 228 (1990, 2), pp. 98-104; “Les droits de l'homme,” *Concilium Revue internationale de théologie*, 228 (1990, 2), pp. 19-31. [what pp. in the E.T.?] [why list editions but not title and pages in them?]

Deep-Dialogue between Creator and creation, between God and cosmos, between *Deus* and the *Imago Dei*.

If we are truly open to art, we will enter into the Deep-Dialogue that is embedded there. True art reflects the very structure of even the physical universe, which is dialogic.

For, at the **micro** level, there is the dance between the proton and electron, the positive and the negative forces, between matter and energy;

and, at the **macro** level, the relationship between the *Big Bang* (before which the whole cosmos was concentrated in a super-dense ball of matter no larger than a human fist) and the seemingly endless Universe expanding at the rate of 186,000 miles/second for over 13,000,000,000 years, forming billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars.

Thus, perhaps the most famous, and surely the most influential, “sentence” of the twentieth century encapsulates in just five symbols this dialogue between energy and matter: $E=MC^2$.

If the universe and its Source are thus at their heart dialogic, and if true art in some creative way replicates reality, then our rapport with art, to the extent that it is open and deep, will necessarily lead us in a dialogic direction.

How, then, does all this relate to religion?

First, let us be clear about what religion is. Religion is *not* the practicing of externals or the proclaiming of certain dogmas or formulas or even the adhering to certain ethical rules, though all of these elements have a role to play in authentic religion. Let us begin with a simple, clear description of religion, and then proceed to develop the notion:

Religion is an explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly, based on a notion and experience of the Transcendent.

It normally contains the four C’s: Creed, Code, Cultus, and Community-structure.³

“**Creed**” refers to the cognitive aspect of a religion; it is everything that goes into the “explanation” of the ultimate meaning of life.

A “**code**” of behavior or ethics includes all the rules and customs of action that somehow follow from one aspect or another of the creed.

“**Cultus**” means all the ritual activities that relate the follower to one aspect or other of the Transcendent, either directly or indirectly—prayer being an example of the former and certain formal behavior toward representatives of the Transcendent, such as priests, of the latter.

“**Community-structure**” refers to the relationships among the followers; this can vary widely, from a very egalitarian relationship, as among Quakers, through a “republican” structure as Presbyterians have, to a monarchical one, as with some Hasidic Jews *vis-à-vis* their Rebbe, or Shia Muslims *vis-à-vis* their Supreme Ayatollah.

The “**Transcendent**,” as the roots of the word indicate, means “that which goes beyond” the everyday, the ordinary, the surface experience of reality. It can mean spirits, gods, a Personal God, an Impersonal God, Emptiness, *Brahman*, *Yahweh*, *Allah*, *Sunyata*, *Tao*, etc.

Especially in modern times there have been developed “**explanations of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly**” which are *not* based on a notion of the Transcendent, e.g., atheistic Marxism or secular humanism. Although in every respect these “explanations” function as religions traditionally have in human life, because the idea of the Transcendent, however understood, plays such a central role in religion, but for the sake of accuracy it is best to give a separate name to these “explanations” that are not based on a notion of the Transcendent; the name often used is ideology.

³For further detail, see Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

Hence, to be fully “**ecumenical**” in our reflections most, if not quite all, of what I say here will, “changing what needs changing” (*mutatis mutandis*), also apply to ideology, even when the term is not used.

What, then, is art? In Latin and related languages the root meaning is “to join together,” as in the English term “to articulate.” So, basically, art means **putting something together that was unrelated before** or was not related in this new manner.

An obvious example of putting something together that was previously unrelated is to bring together paint and canvas; an example of changing the relationship of what was previously related might be to change the relationship of the parts of a block of wood to each other before and after carving it.

Hence, it is clear again that the very foundation of art is the dialectic or dialogic relationship of various elements with each other. The most profound, most intimate dialogic relationship is that between, first, the artist; second, her artifact (of whatever form: wood, stone, sound, movement); and third, the receiver.

Again, this reflects the grand dialogue in the making of the grand art: The Great Artificer (God), the great artifact (the cosmos), and the great receptor (humanity).

Where, then, in religion does art fit? Clearly, everywhere! In the cultus area it is obvious, with the focus on the celebration of liturgy, public and private, official and popular.

Second, religious creed has inspired myriad productions of the visual arts, song, literature, dance, and so on. The connection of art with the religious community-structure and with the code of behavior may not be so immediately obvious, **but it is profoundly there**. I should like to offer just a very few reflections about art in the area of community-structure, and then concentrate more on art and code, or ethics.

As noted above, there have been many different kinds of relationships within the various religious traditions, from the very democratic to the most autocratic. **The great goal of the art of human relations is to promote the welfare of both each individual and the whole community—**

again, *dialogue* is at the heart of this art. Perhaps there was a time when a more autocratic form of community-structure nurtured these goals, but with the gradual maturation of the human race this is surely no longer the case.

Like a good parent, the **role of religion is first of all to provide a stellar example of how to live a fully authentic human life**, in Christian terms, a holy life.

In the Christian tradition one speaks of “salvation” as the goal of life.

The term “salvation” comes from the Latin *salus*, which means “health,” “whole”—hence, our English terms “salutary,” “salute,” and the like. In German, the term for “salvation” is “*Heil*,” from which in English we derive precisely the words meaning “salvation,” namely, “heal,” “health,” “whole,” and, most interestingly, “holy,” which in German is “*heilig*.”

Hence, salvation, holiness, means literally “to be whole,” “to be healthy.” Once again, to be healthy/whole/holy means that all the parts need to be present and in the right relationship to each other, that is, not in an antagonistic but a dialogic relationship.

So, the great art is to live a whole, a holy life, and to foster it in all individuals and in the community at large.

The question, then, is: How does religion provide this stellar example of how to live a (w)holy life? It must do it, of course, in dialogic fashion, fostering a creative dialogue among all the elements of reality and between reality and its Source.

This is the great art to be practiced. Every element of the cosmos needs to be brought into play in this grand dialogue. Each human sense and sensibility needs to be engaged and put into creative dialogue. First with itself, then with all the others (the many), penultimately brought together in integrative fashion in the human person (the one), and ultimately with **The One**, who as Impersonal/Person is The-Many-in-the-One—who, as St. Augustine said, is “closer to me than I am to myself,” and as Mohammed remarked, “is closer to me than my jugular.”

Again, one might ask: Where does **art**, in the usually understood sense **as producing objects of beauty**, fit into religion, into this grand dialogue scheme? The philosophers and religious thinkers thought much about this question.

Here is how I describe it.

The medieval philosophers and theologians, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim, and behind them the Greek philosophers and theologians (and in their own ways, the great ancient Indian and Chinese thinkers) — all spoke of the fundamental unity of the ultimate in terms known as the “metaphysicals,” and as being “convertible” one with another. For them, the convertible metaphysicals are simply ultimate reality looked at from varying perspectives: **the one, being, truth, goodness, beauty**.

Moreover, each of them is fundamentally dialogic: The one cannot be grasped except as distinct from—i.e., in dialogue with—the many, nor can being be understood except as in contrast to—i.e., in dialogue with—nonbeing.

The dialogic structure of truth, goodness, and beauty is even more apparent, for **truth** is reality viewed by the **knowing faculty**, **goodness** by the **appetitive faculty**, and **beauty** by the **esthetic faculty**.

To know something is fundamentally a relational, unifying, dialogical act—a bringing of the knower into dialogue with the known, as my eye comes into dialogue and oneness with color when I see.

To love is the act of perceiving the good and being drawn into a dialogue with it, the act of drawing the good to one’s self.

To appreciate the beautiful is the pleasure, the joy springing from the perception of intelligibility’s shining through an object, whether in a painting, a sunset, the dirty face of a smiling child, an act of kindness, or . . .

Thus, knowing the truth, loving the good, and appreciating beauty are all constitutively relational, unitive, dialogic acts. They all bring us ever closer, ever more intimately into relationship, into unity, into dialogue with ultimate reality. It is this grand dialogue that we humans are **designed by our very nature** to pursue. (KS---- iLove my doing...see SM 160101 iLove; SM 180202e Sexy Six of Love)

Some of the world’s greatest geniuses focused on ultimate reality as impersonal, as did Leonardo da Vinci, who sought always **to know nature ever more deeply**, and Spinoza, who wrote of *Deus sive Natura*, “God, or rather, Nature.”

But, I am drawn more by those who **understand the ultimate** not as object, but **as subject**, not as impersonal, but **as person**. It is striving toward this goal that maturing as a human person should lead us—to know, **to love**, to **appreciate everything for its own sake**, for its very being, leading us thereby onward through the **great chain of being to self-conscious being**, to **person**.

Thus, **beauty and art** should always lead us to ultimate reality, to person, but not in such a way as to submerge each individual human person in the Person of God. —for, as St. John noted in the Christian Scriptures,

*“Whoever says that he loves God, whom he cannot see, but does not love his neighbor, whom he can see, is a liar.”*⁴

No, God is loved in every reflection of God, in every *Imago Dei*, in every person—indeed, in every being, for the one, the true, the good, the beautiful, and being are all “convertible,” are all ultimate reality viewed from different perspectives.

Hence, **all art should lead us** through the grand dialogue with being to appreciating **the beautiful, knowing the truth, loving the good**. (Motto KSG !)

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est, “Where there is charity and love, there is God;”

Ho Theos agape estin, “God is love.”⁵

Leonard Swidler

⁴Bible, 1 Jn. 4:20. My paraphrase from the Greek.

⁵Ibid., 1 Jn. 4:8. My direct translation of the Greek.

