

Slenczka, Notger
Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

‘To be ashamed.’ On the meaning and theological fruit of a phenomenology of negative self-awareness

Over the course of this presentation, I will simply work through each of the elements of my title. I will first explain what phenomenology is. Then I will make some phenomenological remarks about shame – that is the longest section. Then I will have a brief summary of what was achieved, in which I will present a thesis – or better, a generalizing supposition – regarding what one experiences about human self-awareness in the phenomenon of shame. Then, finally, I will turn to the theological fruit.

1. WHAT IS ‘PHENOMENOLOGY’?

‘Phenomenology’ is the title of a philosophical method that finally goes back to Edmund Husserl. Essentially, rather than speaking about concepts, it is about going back to the ‘things themselves,’ to which the concepts refer. But concepts do not just refer to ‘things,’ rather to the experience of things: Concepts are summaries of experiences that we have in contact with reality. The concept ‘apple’ or ‘orange,’ for example, gathers a host of experiences together – an experience of touch, when we have taken the orange into our hands: a smooth, porous surface; the cool meat of the fruit; the colour we see, a particular odour, and a sweet-sour taste. Whoever uses the word ‘orange,’ summarizes with it all these experiences under a single concept. And whoever has had these experiences, understands what the concept ‘orange’ means.

All *science* about oranges, the questions that biology asks and answers, are subsequent to this experience. Of course I can ask how this specific orange came to be; I can ask how the plant in general came to be in the course of evolution; I can ask which chemical reactions occur when my tongue senses the taste of the orange. But I can only ask all these questions because I know what an orange is. And I know this from contact with it, through the experiences that my senses have had with it – with the orange – and these experiences the concept summarizes.

This is the basic insight of phenomenology: At the beginning is not a concept or language but plain experience, called ‘mute experience’ by Husserl. All discourse about ourselves, all discourse about reality, is the result of this contact to the world we call ‘experience’. We cannot speak first of ourselves, then of the world, and in the third place of our contact with the world. Rather, the possibility to discourse about the world and ourselves is something we only have because we have contact with the world and, while being in the world, have contact with ourselves. What we know and say of ourselves and what we know and say of the world stems from the experience, stems from subject and world being together. First comes the experience, then the subject and the world. Our concepts are summaries of the experience, not language about things themselves.

Still, all phenomenologists presume that our concepts separate themselves from these experiences that they summarize. Then we draft great theories about the world, its origin, its existence, its constitution; or theories about the subject, its abilities, its freedom; and we forget that ‘the world’ is that which we experience here and now, and that the concept ‘world’ summarizes only this. We forget, that we, who experience the world, are ourselves the subject. We forget, that the concepts ‘subject’ and ‘world’ only summarize that we experience and what we experience. What matters, according to the phenomenologists, is to rediscover the experience that corresponds to the concepts we use, to which these concepts refer.

If that were true: What about the concept 'God'? Does this concept also summarize 'experiences'? If yes: Then it must be possible to rediscover and describe the experience contained by the concept 'God.'

Now this thesis – that the concept 'God' summarizes certain experiences – is much older than the phenomenological philosophy of the 20th century. Luther, for instance: "What does it mean to have a god, and what is that: a god"? Luther asks this in his Large Catechism in the exposition of the 1st commandment, and does not answer: 'God is a highest being, a pure spirit, most perfect intelligence and all governing will'. No, he answers – I summarize: A god is that, from which you expect good and where you go to save yourself in times of need. The presupposition in Luther is that man is, in his life, working through a basic problem: Man knows himself threatened and knows he is dependent on aid. He is always grasping for something from which he can expect aid and rescue – and exactly *this* is what everyone means, when they say 'God.' In prayer and not in theological speculation is man directed toward the reality indicated by the concept 'God.' Anyone who wants to explain what God is must describe this situation of waiting to be rescued.

Luther introduces the concept 'God' by indicating and describing the experience in which we are directed toward what is meant by the concept of God. Back to my orange-example: I only understand what an orange is when I remember the fullness of experiences that these fruits awaken when I come into contact with them. Accordingly, it becomes clear to me what the concept 'God' intends through the description of the experience that the concept summarizes: Prayer, to feel ultimately dependent, to reach out for help: That is to understand what the term 'God' means. In the passages cited, Luther clarifies what is meant by a common concept or its meaning, in that he describes the experience in which someone refers to that which the concept intends. In the following, I will refer to that as the recourse to the 'initial situation'.

Such a procedure presumes that there is a common understanding, a semantic content, associated with terms; in other words that we more or less understand what we mean, when we say 'God.' Namely, a "highest spiritual entity" or the "embodiment of all reality," etc. The phenomenological method begins in all of its forms with the presumption, that such conceptually fixed pre-understandings have loosed themselves from the initial situation, from the actual seeing and experiencing of the thing intended. We just speak; we just have the concept – without any perception that corresponds to it. For the concept of God, explicated with the help of Luther: He presumes that God is the 'highest good,' the embodiment of all good things; but to have actually grasped and understood what is meant by the concept, I have to place myself into the attitude of reception – of faith – and to pray. The *concept* 'God' implies exactly what I make reference to, what I also presume *in* this attitude of faithful and confident hope. Awaiting all good things, I refer to the reality the concept 'God' summarizes. And if I do not find myself in this attitude of reception, then I have nothing to do with what is intended with the concept 'God.'

So phenomenology is the recourse from concepts to the experience in which that to which the concepts actually and originally refer, shows itself and is grasped. Terms for objects summarize experiences in which an object appears to a subject – they do not simply describe the object *per se*. To clarify the meanings of terms means describing the subject and its experience. And to describe the subject means describing the world that contains it. Theologically, with Bultmann: whoever wants to understand what God is, must speak of himself – and above all, vice versa: Who exegeses himself cannot avoid making use of the concept of God.

2. SHAME AND 'BEING ASHAMED'

That was the basic program of phenomenology as Husserl and his students, who critically followed him, present it. Now, finally, to 'being ashamed':

2.1 'Shame' in the theological tradition

I have called it a "negative self-awareness", and implicitly asserted that an engagement of this phenomenon could be theologically fruitful. Traditionally – in the sense of 'pre-Reformation'-tradition – the term has a meaning outside of ethics in the context of two institutions in middle-age theology and religion: First in the description of hell. The punishment of hell, as for example in Honorius of Autun, is not only of bodily, but also of spiritual nature. It consists in the shame that springs from having the life of man uncovered and laid out before all, such that nothing in it can be hidden: Everybody sees me as the person or sinner I am. The second institution is the sacrament of penance, where shame also plays an important role: Shame is the extreme of the contrition, which is necessary for a valid confession. The sacrament of penance is the place, in which the shame conflict is handled and removed in a controlled fashion. This conflict leads, in the absence of such a place of coping, to hell, which is the pain of being seen the way we are, and that itself – according to Luther – is hell, be that on earth or hereafter.

With these few remarks about the connection between the sacrament of penance and damnation or judgment, the background is called to mind, without which Luther's theology, at least historically speaking, cannot be understood. Historically, Luther's theology presumes the expectation of a judgment, the consciousness of being lost, and the inescapable nature of hell, out of which man is rescued through the promise of the gospel. The objective content of this background – of the judgment as of the sacrament of penance – is lost for us. But the concept of shame associated with both we know – and, when it is pursued, it shows itself to be an initial situation of the described sort, in which the central driving force of Luther's theology is explicated.

2.2 Phenomena

Now a few steps toward a phenomenology of shame, for which, on the one hand, Scheler, and on the other, Sartre, but not just they, provide something of an aid – for this is what we have to do: read and interpret the self-awareness of being ashamed and what is hidden inside it, as one would normally read and interpret texts.

2.2.1 *Shame and blushing*

I begin with a phenomenon attached to shame: 'blushing.' The experience of shame has this characteristic, that we blush, and in a very particular manner: in the face, on the neck, and in extreme cases – trust me! – on the upper part of the chest, that is – this insight is unfortunately not mine – on parts of our body that is hidden to *our own* sight, but subject to the sight of *others*. And if you recall situations when you were ashamed, you in fact realize that they are so structured, that we know ourselves to be seen by others. For example, another person barging into our intimate personal space causes shame. We feel shame, when we publically fail, but also, when we are too highly praised. Then we blush in those places, where we are seen – on the face and neck. Shame is connected to a situation of being seen, as Sartre says: connected to the phenomenon of another's gaze.

2.2.2 *To have to see oneself through the eyes of another*

Shame grows out of knowing oneself to be gazed upon – someone is looking at me. But is that enough? That most of you are looking at me here does not embarrass me very much. A sense of shame would appear, if I would suppose that you are internally accompanying my lecture with the lost question of what I might actually be trying to get at. But in reality, also that would fail to produce a sense of shame, because I trust myself to make this clear to you in the course of my lecture. But the sense of shame would be truly unavoidable, if I suddenly, while speaking,

would come to the realization that even I myself cannot say what this analysis of shame is supposed to accomplish. This shows, first of all: The sense of shame comes not when a foreign gaze coincidentally falls on me, but when it evaluates. To be even more precise, shame has to do with a disapproving gaze. And second is shown: Not every disapproval evokes shame. The sense of shame comes much more first then, when this disapproval ceases to remain on the side of the foreign gaze. The foreign gaze does not remain foreign, but enters at the same time into me and becomes my gaze upon myself. Shame comes from the disapproval that we are forced to agree with. The sense of shame presumes that we have nothing with which to counter the disapproval, that we can do nothing else than adopt this gaze and the judgment in it. Shame has to do with the interesting phenomenon, whereby the gaze of another becomes my own gaze upon myself.

Thus shame has to do not only with the foreign gaze, but also with a change of perspective. It is the experience of the disapproving gaze of another becoming my own view of myself: Without being able to counter with anything, I have to see myself with someone else's eyes and I cannot but accept the foreign disapproval.

2.2.3 Shame as the rupture of 'friendship with oneself'

Admittedly: The acceptance of disapproval alone awakens no shame. Someone disapproving of my being a lousy mathematician embarrasses me very little. He is right, I agree – but so what? Shame arises, when this judgment of the other person has a rupturing character, when the gaze of the other, which seeks to become mine, forces me into a judgment over myself, one, which foils my original judgment about myself. The sense of shame only arises when I am first in accord with myself, an accord that one can call – using a phrase from Plato's *Politeia* – 'friendship with oneself.' Shame appears when this feeling of friendship with myself is no longer possible, because the gaze of the other not only externally contradicts it, but also forces me to concur. Shame is the experience of self-contradiction, into which I am placed by the disapproval of another that forces me into agreement.

Shame therefore presumes this basic 'feeling of friendship with oneself,' when it ruptures exactly that.

2.2.4 'Friendship with oneself' as 'consciousness of being approved'

But also this is not yet the centre. This 'friendship with oneself' is for its part no simple phenomenon – something seen most easily, when one considers the phenomenon of 'being ashamed of someone else.' Here too, an example: I was at a football game with my son. Somehow my reactions were failing to correspond to those of the other spectators, and so after a half hour, I asked my son which team was actually the one we supported. It turned out that I had been cheering for the wrong team, which my son acknowledged with the words: "Wow dad, you are *embarrassing!*" He was ashamed of me, and this has a number of implications: First, we can only be ashamed of someone else, when we somehow identify him or her with ourselves – to this I will return. My son found me, with whom he identifies, to be the object of the disapproving gaze of others, and could not avoid concurring with it. This tells us not only that shame is preceded by a state in which my son stands in a relationship of friendship to me, but also that he reckons in this relationship of friendship, that, usually, his dad is the object of the approving gazes of others. Before I behave such that he becomes ashamed of me before others, he is aware that not only he, but also all others who are relevant, approve of me. This requires further development – but it points toward a property of the 'feeling of friendship with oneself': The experience of shame is not preceded by the state wherein no judging gazes of others fall on me, and I am in accord with myself, but rather the state in which I am silently aware of being

approved of, of being recognized by the world around me. The situation of shame is not only the rupture of *self*-approval, but also the rupture of the consciousness of being approved by others ('honour'). The feeling of friendship with oneself is just as externally induced as the shame. It is the consciousness of being approved or of being recognized. Shame grows out of the change of this gaze of others, and the sense of shame draws attention to the fact that this change of gaze realizes itself in the one who is ashamed.

2.2.5 Shame as conflict

At the same time, the example of being ashamed of others makes the following clear: Shame is related to the fact that I cannot, without further ado, adopt the judgment of another. Just as my son is at the same time bound in the connection to his father and cannot completely distance himself from me, so in general, a person who has to adopt the disapproval of others is bound in the connection to himself, in the approval of himself. In the experience of shame, he can do nothing else than to disapprove of himself, but he can also do nothing else than to hold to himself. Shame springs from the inability to become another person, in two senses: For one, it is the inability to change oneself as the object of the disapproving gaze, such that the disapproval ceases and one can be united with oneself. And it is also the inability to become one with the gaze of another and thus to distance oneself from oneself.

2.2.6 The tendency of shame to over-generalize

A penultimate observation: Shame experiences have an unusual tendency toward generalizations. Who is ashamed of himself, is not ashamed of an individual remark or mistake that is the cause of the shaming, rather of himself. One notices this, in that shame experiences are experiences of annihilation, or rather are accompanied by the desire to annihilate oneself or at least to dissolve – this comes to expression in sayings like: "I'd just have soon sunk into the floor." Or: 'I wish I was invisible!' The disapproval experienced in the gaze of another and adopted in the moment of shame allows for no approval to exist alongside it. It intends, regardless of the usually insignificant cause, my whole person.

Shame is the feeling that indicates the whole – and not only the partial – rupturing of 'friendship with oneself.' It stems from the necessity of adopting the foreign, disapproving gaze as one's own gaze on oneself, and thus from the inability to be united either with oneself, or with the foreign gaze.

To this belongs the fact that shame tends to separate itself from the situation in which it was born. The experience of shame is more than a non-participating observer sees in the moment. It cannot be rationalized, and usually does not go away when the one who has been shamed makes clear to himself that he is standing before a limited group of people and experiencing disapproval for a limited mistake. Even if shame only has something limited as its trigger, still it provides the situation and the instance before which one is ashamed, a quality that transcends the moments of the situation. He who is ashamed of himself experiences in the thing that triggered disapproval and in the instance, for which he is ashamed, more than just a limited failure and just a random group of people. And this is true, in reverse, and to an even greater extreme, for the feeling of 'friendship with oneself' that lies at its base. It is not just the consciousness of the approval of certain people or certain qualities, but an encompassing feeling of being approved, that may have individual qualities and individual attentions as its trigger, but that transcends them in their importance as experiences. The consciousness of being approved, as the consciousness of disapproval that ruptures it, is encompassing and general, and not bound to the particular persons and particular situations in which it came to be.

3. A GENERALIZING CONJECTURE ON THE BASIS OF NEGATIVE SELF-AWARENESS: THE MEDIATED CHARACTER OF SELF-AWARENESS

This has only been a piece of all the observations that could be presented on shame – but it allows a generalization: Shame – and all forms of negative self-awareness – grasps the *mediated character of self-awareness*. The negating, disapproving relation to myself is a most unnatural relation. It arises not in an isolated subject but takes place by means of another person whose gaze at me is integrated into my own self-awareness. This integration of the foreign gaze, though, does not begin with shame. We have seen, that the antithesis to shame, ‘self-approval,’ the rupture of which shame shows, is no pure relation to self, but a ‘knowing oneself to be approved.’ And this allows the following generalizing conjecture: This integration of the foreign gaze does not appear first with the shame; rather, we have always only been aware of ourselves by means of the foreign view: We know ourselves to be ‘for others’ and we are related to ourselves by the means of this foreign perspective. This does not mean that we are constantly performing painful analysis of the behaviour of others toward us, looking for approving or disapproving gazes. Rather, in our sense of self, in the immediate self-realization, the foreign gaze through which we are in accord – or discord – with ourselves, is, strangely enough, always present. Our relation to self is always simultaneously the internalized foreign perspective. Foreign subjects are not just the forums before which we lead our lives. Foreign subjects are, at the same time, constitutive for the perspective of ourselves that we maintain.

In Sartre, whom I have followed on several points, the analysis of shame has the function of demonstrating that the subject, which we all are, is just as originally the ‘I among others’ as it is self-relation. This is introduced in Sartre through the experience of the gaze of another, and he describes being with others as an extremely conflict-laden relation. But this is not the interesting part. Rather, interesting is the condition, via which this gaze of another does not first belong to us when another appears; rather – I draw on an expression from Heidegger here – it is existential. Existential are the determinations of the subject, which first make certain relations possible. This requires a long explanation, but I will save all of us that and allow myself an only partially appropriate abbreviation of the concept ‘existential’: You can translate “existential” with “predisposed toward...”: In the described characteristic of the self relation, it can be seen that we are predisposed to have the world and fellow men. Even if I had never had contact with other men, I would still be structured as “being among others” and predisposed to perceive myself through the medium of foreign approval or disapproval. The gaze of another does not first achieve reality, when it is actually directed at me; rather, the subject is structured, that it has always known itself to be the object of a foreign gaze. The foreign gaze does not first come to be with the actual existence of another, rather, it adheres to me. The foreign gaze is not the actual gawking of another, but actually an enduring consciousness of being seen, of being subjected to approval or disapproval. This enduring consciousness is simply actualized in concrete experiences – and this is the reason that this actual being-seen can so suddenly generalize itself, that I feel as though I were standing defenceless in every relation and naked before the whole world.

The consciousness of ourselves, the sense of ourselves – that we are, always has a consciousness of a foreign gaze weaved into it, namely the accord or conflict with that gaze. The phenomenon of shame, if it is analyzed with regard to these foundational existential structures, is borne by a consciousness of being approved and of the always present possibility of being shamed – the possibility that this approval could be ruptured by a disapproval that translates itself irresistibly into a disapproval of self. We are, in our knowledge of ourselves – or better, in our sense of ourselves – not free.

4. THEOLOGICAL FRUIT: THE FOREIGN-DETERMINED SHAME CONFLICT AS EXPERIENCE OF GOD

With that, I have come to the theological fruit of these considerations, and so I will first summarize. The analysis of shame presented led to the insight, that the human relation to self is so constituted, that, in it, man not only knows of himself, but also judges himself, and in the case of shame, in the *modus* of disapproval of self. I attempted to show that this negative relation to self of shame is in fact the indicator for a positive relation to self, which is ruptured in the shame experience. I called it a sense of 'friendship with oneself'

Then we saw that this disapproval of self and the self-approval that it ruptures present no autonomous process in the sense of the subject originally and actually only having to do with itself. Rather, it has to do with self-awarenesses, for which the integration of a foreign gaze is constitutive. The self-referential evaluation is the consciousness of being evaluated; the accord with oneself is the 'consciousness of being approved.'

Finally, it became clear that the phenomenon of shame – and correspondingly the foundational self-approval – is all-encompassing and depicts the experience of the negation of the whole person, not only certain individual aspects of it; further, that it has a tendency to generalize, to separate from the particular others who disapprove of me, as also from the particular qualities which are the object of disapproval.

And finally, we have determined that these externally introduced self-awarenesses are no ontic equipping of the man, but rather an apriori basic structure of his self-realization. The man is essentially in relation to himself through others.

Shame is the indicator that this evaluative self-awareness or this self-sense does not lie in our hand, and that, as such, it is endangered.

Thus I come to the first theses regarding the theological fruit of these considerations: *Christian discourse about God – I leave the question open, whether this also holds for all religious discourse about God – Christian discourse about God brings this foreign determination and endangering of the self-sense into words and concepts.*

This thesis is less obvious than it sounds. One could understand it, such that I might mean to say, that the God of which Christian tradition speaks is being claimed as the source and precipitant of this self-sense. That would be relatively boring. It would mean, firstly, that we (wherever from) know, that such an entity 'God' exists, and second, that this entity precipitates (however) a sense of self in us.

But I want to say more with this thesis, namely: This self-sense is the introductory situation for the concept 'God.' The term 'God' does not indicate a transcendent reality with an existence that can be initially fixed without reference to us, which then could come into question as the elicitor of self-evaluations. Rather, the concept 'God' describes much more none other than a moment in the described self-evaluation. In the basic structure, I'm following Schleiermacher here: *The concept 'God' indicates nothing else than the foreign evaluation co-supposed in the self-evaluation, as a "whence" of the sense of self.* And indeed, it is, in the consciousness of the foundational affirmation, co-supposed as creator – and God saw, that it was very good; also in the consciousness of being negated, as the hidden agent and also as judge – "when you take away their breath, they die..." (Ps 104). The discourse about God in creation and judgment are understandings of the foundational self-awareness of knowing oneself to be affirmed, and of the experience of knowing oneself to be negated. Put differently: Where I experience myself as foundationally affirmed or totally disapproved of, I have the experience, the 'whence' of which tradition gathers under the term 'God.'

Admittedly, this includes the thesis, *that this negative and positive self-awareness cannot be otherwise expressed than through the adoption of the concept 'God.'* This means: The

phenomenon itself requires us to not be satisfied with identifying certain other people or a certain foreign gaze with the 'whence' of the shame or the 'friendship with oneself.' Only in that we speak of God, can we put to words what the phenomenon of shame entails. And I believe that this can be shown – I have indicated above that the experience of shame or the foundational consciousness of being approved cannot be reduced to a rational analysis of the moments and relations accessible in the situation. It is typical for the shame or for the consciousness of being affirmed, that more comes to expression in the situation than is actually present in it. The person or the people 'before' whom one is ashamed acquire a wholly different quality through the sense of shame. The thesis is thus not just that the concept of 'God' puts this aspect of the human self-awareness to words, but also vice versa: It is not possible to properly describe the phenomenon that is this self-awareness of shame and the foundational consciousness of being approved without implicitly or explicitly operating with the concept of "God." If I want to know what exactly the term 'God' is indicating, I can begin by spelling out the situation of externally induced self-evaluation, to which the phenomenon of shame (among other things) belongs. And vice versa, the traditional concept of 'God' is then understood as the summarizing formulation of that which we experience in this situation.

The specifically Christian concept, or better: the specifically Christian discourse about God – and thus I come to a second round of theses – depicts a certain way of dealing with the instability and endangering of this sense of self.

I want only to touch on this here, and I will begin at the Markan passion narrative. This is, without a doubt, the description of a situation of shaming. In it, Jesus' fate is fit into the structures of the experience which the psalms and Jeremiah describe using the Hebrew term 'bosch – to be shamed.' There, exactly that is meant, which is formulated in Ps. 22 or 35, namely, the situation in which the praying man puts his trust in something, makes a claim – and this claim clearly comes short, fails. Around the concept 'bosch' are arranged, on the one side, this failure, and on the other, the mocking of the observers. But the concept itself summarizes what happens to the subject in this situation: That it knows itself to be the object of appropriate mocking, which it would participate in, if it were not selbst the object. 'Bosch' indicates this situation.

The description of the cross in Mark is a description of such a shame situation: the rupturing of a very tense expectation and the friendship with oneself in this expectation. Consider the mocking of the observers at the cross, of the people, the soldiers, and the scribes. The crucified not only has nothing with which to oppose this mocking. In reality, he interprets it himself with his cry – my God, my God, why have you forsaken me – as the consciousness of a final and irreversible disapproval, that is, as an experience of God.

The resurrection is the contradiction to the mocking of the crucified. The resurrection is, in the first place, not a fact, but the object of proclamation. "He was awakened," proclaim the disciples. A counter-judgment manifests itself therein – the disciples assert that the failed crucified one was affirmed in God's judgment, that God confirmed him and contradicted the mockers – the same God who was experienced on the cross as the source of shame.

This judgment – that the crucified, who appeared to be rejected by God, is not rejected – is at the same time the determination, that also the last and final disapproval of us is not irrevocable; that behind and beyond the final judgment we have to speak over ourselves, a further judgment *can* arise, that removes this final judgment. In that case, man is called to understand himself in this new, affirming judgment as in contradiction to the self-judgment of shame. He is called to adopt this judgment – of the gospel – into his self-judgment.

In the moment, when this happens: when the thus promised Christ-event takes its place in the consciousness of being approved, thus breaking through the consciousness of disapproval – in this moment the crucified shows himself to be alive, the resurrection witness of the disciples

to be true, the crucified to be God. For whence the self-contradiction of man is replaced with the “yes,” – that is truly man’s God.

These few remarks are an attempt in which the principle is more important than the particular application, which is surely in need of improvement. The principle consists in this: the soteriological assertions of the Christian faith are described as contact and engagement with the endangered self-awareness of man; this endangering is, on the one hand, interpreted, and on the other, overcome. The suggestion continues to consistently interpret the concept ‘God’ in each of these relations as something that correlates to the endangered (because externally induced) self-awareness of man. This self-awareness does not lie in the hand of the man; it depicts rather a consciousness of being seen. Where this being-seen acquires final and encompassing character – as in the moment of shame, as in the knowing oneself to be affirmed, that is presumed by the shame experience, as in the promise of unconditional affirmation. – There, what the term ‘God’ traditionally describes, and what cannot be put to words or interpreted with implicit or explicit recourse to this concept, is experienced.