

Elementary Monotheism I
Exposure, Limitation,
and Need

Andrew P. Porter

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Abbreviations

Works by John Courtney Murray:

PG: *The Problem of God*

Works by H. Richard Niebuhr:

RMWC: *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*

MR: *The Meaning of Revelation*

Other Abbreviations:

SZ: The German pagination of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, indicated in the margins of the English translation.

OTEC: *The Old Testament in Early Christianity*, by E. Earle Ellis.

GGD: *God, Guilt, and Death*, by Merold Westphal.

ST: The *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas.

OT, TNK: the Old Testament; Torah, Neviim, Ketuvim: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Usually these documents will be called simply the Common Documents instead of the Hebrew Bible. They are, after all, the common documents of the Jewish and Christian bibles, and it seems better to call them that in order to avoid potentially Marcionite implications of the common term "Hebrew Bible."

ALHR: *Action and Language in Historical Religion*, the second volume of this work.

Acknowledgments

Those who know Edward Hobbs's teaching will recognize his influence on every page, even on the few where he would disagree with me (and there are some), though that does not diminish my gratitude for his help. They will hear his words especially through most of Part I. His own published version of the idea that monotheists embrace exposure, limitation and need is limited to an article in a book on the theological prospects of the family in 1970, but he has presented the same material also in the Dillenberger Lecture of 1981, which hopefully will see publication someday. Without that insight, this project would not have happened at all. So the reader is encouraged, if he likes what he sees here (especially in Part I), to credit Edward Hobbs. If not, it is my responsibility. Outside Part I, the organization and most of the reasoning are mine, but the reader who follows the logic will see the debt to Hobbs in Part I underlying the logic of everything that follows.

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Introduction

One day in an introductory class on historical-critical tools for the study of the Bible, someone asked the inevitable question: “But what about miracles?” Edward Hobbs, who was teaching that day, replied that to the extent that any cultures in the ancient world believed in “miracles,” they all did. Israelite religion was quite typical. It was not true that Israelite religion produced genuine miracles where her neighbors produced frauds or no miracles at all.

The difference was real, but it lay elsewhere. The presupposition of Canaanite, Mesopotamian and Egyptian religion was that the gods are supposed to bring you the good things of life, and pains are not among the good things of life. When pain comes, your gods are broken, and you should get them fixed or trade them in. For Israelite religion, by contrast, the God brings good in all of life, hard and painful parts included. All of life is good, even the disappointments. The statement of this commitment can be simple, but living it will not always be easy. This book is a philosopher’s exploration of the central commitments of this kind of life.

The questions come in an order that is perhaps unusual for philosophy of religion today. The first issue is what to do about the pains of life, and the second addresses the question of whether human life is just part of nature, without history, or whether human life is essentially historical. This choice will undermine some problems and solve others naturally in ways that many common approaches to philosophy of religion do not.

Basic life orientation is the term I would like to use for whatever gives human life coherence. The term *religion* I would like to use as a near-synonym for basic life orientation, differing, when it does, only in that it adds recognition and intention to basic life orientation. I tend to be sloppy in terminology at this point, confident that every life has a basic orientation and that it could be spelled out if need be, thereby adding recognition and intention to it.

The critical choices appear with the pains of life. Sooner or later, any basic life orientation has to deal with them. Basic life orientations can be characterized by how they understand human life and by the remedies they propose for its pains.

The notion of “God” has become problematic, variously meaningful for small communities, but without a single clear meaning for the culture as a whole. That is old news in the theology of the twentieth century. To speak of “God” without careful preparation is to invoke a constellation of discursive practices that have limited prospects in my estimation. By contrast, the pains of life are plain enough, and biblical religion has its own characteristic way of meeting them. The first of two starting points for this book, then, is the affirmative stance that biblical religion takes toward life in this world. H. Richard Niebuhr made it the center of his own theology. That affirmation may seem disputable, and it has often been subverted in biblical religion, but it is well attested and undeniable. The second of the two starting points is that biblical religion is radically historical, again following in Niebuhr’s footsteps. This book is an exploration of what it might mean to affirm human life in history. It is not a thorough exploration, and the perceptive reader will find many questions that are not even asked.

There is a rule of thumb in the construction of explanations that it is usually a good idea to start from the simple and obvious and work toward the subtle and not-so-obvious. When the not-obvious (namely, God) is supposed to be a mystery anyway, it might work better to start from the affirmation of life in this historical world, in full view of its pains, rather than with God himself. Affirmation of life in history can be seen and inspected and criticized. But we are not bereft; God will be present from the beginning, though named and thematic only at the end.

The argument proceeds in four steps, only two of which are in this volume. The last two will appear in *Action and Language in Historical Religion*, the sequel and companion volume. In the first place, exposure, limitation, and need are taken as exemplary of the pains of life, and then we can see the response of faith that transforms them into blessings. Then, secondly, the dimension of historical living is added to the original affirmation of human life in this world.

In the sequel volume, we come to what may broadly be called an approach to transcendence, coming by stages to divinity. The third part of the inquiry begins the second volume, and there knowledge of God becomes a matter of human action (“walking in the way of the Lord”) more than of acquiring or testing propositions or theory. In the fourth and final place, in the second part of the second volume, we shall see how language both informs and constitutes such a way of living. Only at the

end, with language, will the notion of God become thematic.

There are more consequences to such an approach than could possibly be included, even in these two volumes. It is worthwhile to note some of them here, if only to see what the argument of this book lays the groundwork for. A host of theological problems will evaporate. Conflicts between science and religion are large among them, but will not get much treatment here. Critical history is built in, and is not a problem or a threat to latter-day biblical religion. The so-called “problem of evil” will be recast in a way that loses its intractability, without thereby defaulting into bad faith or denying the pains of life. Many problems of speaking about God will go away, notably those that locate God within time. Problems between Christianity and Judaism will appear in an entirely new light. Beyond biblical religion, questions about other religions will become much more tractable. Other religions can be met cordially without thereby selling out biblical religion.

In effect, we start with providence, not with the provider. The method is, in the technical language of theologians, economic rather than immanent. God appears explicitly and thematically only late. The mystery of God is thereby safeguarded. The metaphysical commitments with which one might realize such a basic life orientation are left open. (Platonisms are optional, but not required, and so it is possible to see Christianity outside of its habitual marriage to Platonism.)

Theology will become able to explain life, rather than itself be in need of explanation. (It is supposed to function like street signs, telling you where you are, but if the street signs are themselves in a foreign language, they are not much help.) Both science and critical history, the shapers of the modern world, can be welcomed and embraced. Practical consequences follow straightforwardly from simple explanations.

The starting point is the pains of life. The main title, *Exposure, Limitation, and Need*, opens the way to the central thesis: the disappointments of life bear blessings. Exposure met with honesty brings freedom. Limitation met with innovation brings creativity. Need met with open eyes, hands, and heart, brings fellowship and community.

The outline of the present volume may briefly be sketched. There are some necessary preliminaries in the first two chapters, but the reader who is willing to pick up presuppositions along the way may move directly to Chapter 3, which is the simple statement of the thesis. For all that comes after, Chapter 3 is nevertheless the heart of the book. Chapter 4 presents mere cautions and necessary warnings.

Part 2 moves to deepen the concept of radical monotheism to its historical roots and to show how essential history is to the constitution of monotheism. Chapter 5 opens the way to history, and Chapter 6

exhibits historical religion among its alternatives. Chapter 7 shows some of the logic of a historical religion from the point of view of the believer. Chapter 8 works through the most conspicuous failed engagement with history in the life of Christianity, namely, anti-Jewish theology and the roots of anti-semitism. Chapter 9 returns to the logic of history as the historically conscious theologian and philosopher encounters it. At that point, we will be able to confront the challenge of history as it comes to the theologian in the form of critical history, cognitive relativity, and religious or cultural pluralism. That seems like a good place to stop.

Part I

Present or Absent?

Chapter 1

Starting Points

1.1 Disappointment and Monotheism

Disappointment comes in many ways, and no doubt mostly we think we can avoid it, or avoid enough of it to make the rest of life acceptable, compromised though life may then be. Some people avoid most disappointments and live lives that appear happy and graceful. Yet sooner or later, we all die. Everything a man works for is eventually forgotten, and it may even work in ways quite other than he intended. A woman's children, if she has any, though arguably of greater value than any man's work, eventually die just as she will. We and all our children and all our works are destroyed. Yet for some people, everything that is, is good, even the parts of life that bear pain and suffering. How can this be? It must seem questionable, indeed highly dubious, whether there can ever be any lasting good in life, or whether life is flawed beyond hope of salvage. Yet there is satisfaction and gratification enough so that we are tempted to bargain with life—to seek to maximize pleasure and cut off from ourselves the painful parts of life. Mostly, we deny the pain and pretend there is enough satisfaction in life. Death is simply ignored.

What is at stake in the disappointments and gratifications of life is called *providence* in Christian theology. I take that doctrine broadly, to refer to the end-product of the goodness of life, rather than to any mechanisms for producing it, or explanations of *who* has produced it. That doctrine has been shaped quite variously for different times and occasions, and shaped also by conversation with different theological and metaphysical issues. I would consider it as distinguished for the moment from explanations of the God who provides. It is possible to

ask whether someone will be provided for without in any way suggesting how that provision may come about. The language of providence, taken this way, makes sense in common usage.

That doctrine may be stated simply: all of life is good, including even its disappointments, its hard and painful parts. Belief that all of life is good must seem utterly inconsistent with the disappointments of life. Yet this positive view of life is characteristic of *monotheism*. The opposite view, that life is contaminated by its disappointments, and so defective, is characteristic of the alternatives to monotheism. Providence, if there is any, must bring good out of the pain and wrong-doing of life. One who believes in providence then will experience a profoundly transformational character in life. The “bad” is transformed into good, “No” into “Yes.”

Belief in *providence* is characteristic of monotheism, and this book is about monotheism as much as it is about providence.¹ To believe that life is good, one must find the good in particular circumstances; this is a matter of *interpretation*, which may be responsible or not. To be a monotheist is to shape one’s life as a whole in openness to providence. This is a matter of *knowledge* and *action*. Lastly, the action that shapes a life is also interpretation, in *language*: acts are in a sense what we say they are. So we inquire into four things: providence, its responsible interpretation, reflected in knowledge and action, and articulated in language. Taken together, they will give an account of monotheism.

Disappointing events bring blessings in them. I learned from Edward Hobbs to sort disappointment into three kinds: exposure (getting caught red-handed); limitation (being up against the facts of life); and other people’s need (when I had other plans for my time and resources). Meeting exposure with honesty leads to freedom from the past; meeting limitation with gratitude and innovation leads to creativity; meeting need with open hearts leads to fellowship and community. Hobbs credited H. Richard Niebuhr as his principal source (after the Bible). Niebuhr claims in as many words, “The causes for which we live all die.” He goes on to say that “we have been enabled to say of this last power in which we live and move and have our being, ‘Though it slay us, yet will we trust it.’” Niebuhr’s text occurs in a short essay entitled “Faith in Gods and in God.”² The present book is in a sense a meditation on the text surrounding those two sentences. To put it another way, God addresses a “Yes” and a “No” to man: underneath it all, the “No” is really a “Yes.”

¹ Actually, when the context of providence is history, it could better be called covenant. We shall come to this in Part II.

² H. Richard Niebuhr, “Faith in Gods and in God,” reprinted in *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960); cf. p. 122. Hereafter, RMWC.

(This is Barth's phrasing, in his commentary on Romans.) For me the entry to the problem was through Niebuhr's writing, so he will serve as the common thread in this account. Discussion of the problem has moved some since Niebuhr, but his synthesis remains pertinent. He connected what would otherwise seem disconnected problems in one problematic of monotheism.

The biblical story is a narrative of how Israel came more and more to be able to find good and blessings in all of life, even its disappointments. At the Exodus, the challenge was in the Testing, the time in the wilderness, when the people asked Moses, "Were there no graves in Egypt, that you must lead us out to die in the wilderness?" (Exodus 14.11). At the Exile the people had lost all they thought essential to their covenant—namely, the land, the monarchy, the Temple, and its sacrifices. They were driven out in a world which believed that gods were local and powerless outside their own homelands. Yet at the Exile, Israel learned how much she had not lost. Again in the first century of the Common Era, the rabbis were to reconstitute Judaism on a basis able to travel, and to function after the second destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the Palestinian Jewish polity. Jesus's friends thought he had ended his life in disaster and defeat, but they learned how much they had been given in that disaster. By contrast, in Canaanite religion, when life brought disappointment or suffering, one knew that either the gods were angry (that is, malicious) and needed to be placated, or they were impotent to help (and the supplicant's prayers were better directed elsewhere). In any case, the disappointments were barren, without possibility of good. In Israelite experience, the Lord brings good in all of life, even its disappointments. "I make good fortune and create calamity" (Isaiah 45:7); "The evil that you planned to do me has by God's design been turned to good" (Genesis 50.20; Jerusalem Bible). The Bible makes no theory of how all of life is good, even its "bad" parts; rather it is merely narrative. Yet that narrative expresses such a view and is hardly consistent with any other. And the rabbis of the Talmud remove any lingering doubts:

What is meant by being bound to bless for the evil in the same way as for the good? Shall I say that, just as for the good one says the benediction, "Who is good and bestows good," so for the evil one should say the benediction, "Who is good and bestows good"?³

This is radically to transpose the problem of what biblical religion is and how it might be assessed, from the Enlightenment problem of

³Babylonian Talmud, Berakoth 60b. Soncino translation, p. 379 (London: Soncino Press, 1978). The Mishnah is 9.5.

miracles and the literal veracity of the Bible to a problem in theology and hermeneutics. It is no longer a problem that God is alleged to perform “miraculous” acts which we today know to be physically impossible. To the extent that any ancient religions believed in miracles, they all did, and they were all “wrong” or “right” together, Israelite as well as Canaanite, Babylonian and Egyptian. Whatever the Bible says about being human, if it is valid, its message must speak across the ages, even though speaking from its own time and place. Its message stands out prominently when one can see the contrast between biblical and pagan religion. For the Bible differs greatly from its surrounding religious traditions.

In the Enlightenment view, biblical religion is the belief that God provides blessings as exemptions from disappointment, not, among other places, in and through disappointment. Thus there is here a theological transformation as well as a philosophical one. The Enlightenment view has all too often slipped inconspicuously into the pagan theology that disappointments are barren, and that one can only be rescued from them, that they cannot bear any good or blessings. The Enlightenment critique, of course, is that such rescues do not happen, they are an alleged but unreal “supernatural,” and claims of such divine interference in the world are put to wicked uses by the church. Put a little differently, language of God acting in the world that is originally apophatic comes to be heard univocally, and so in effect God is treated as one more phenomenon within the world. Then to “disprove” God merely requires observing that there is no basis for believing God interferes causally in the world. But once the “problem” of miracles and their attendant supernatural metaphysics is refused, the problem of providence stands out in great clarity as *the* problem of God. The question is whether life can be good or not. If it cannot, then all consideration of God is moot; if it can, then it may be possible to make some sense of God.

The assumption that the faithful man embraces disappointments as fertile and not barren is in a sense an approach to (or around) the so-called “problem of evil.” That problem is a question: How can God be omniscient, omnipotent, benevolent, and there can still be evil in the world? But what is called *evil* is first simply pain, before it may be called evil. Evil is pain plus taking offense. Once offense has been taken, I do not think the problem of evil has a solution. The offense constitutes a latent rejection of God, and whether the patent rejection of God is made apparent in a derivation of five lines or of five hundred pages, it will inevitably appear in the end. If it does not—if the logic appears to vindicate God—it does so at great cost, for God has been made to appear as defendant in a human court, and though he has been acquitted, no defendant in a human court can be God. What professes to be faith in

God has covertly and functionally become faith in some lesser cause, and the denial of God has been concealed. Covered up, it festers.

The monotheist simply accepts life as good, pains included. He cannot defend God, and does not try to. He may complain, as the Psalms often do, but in the end, his complaint is *to* God, not against God to someone else. What, then, is this monotheism that takes all of life as good, as a blessing, a gift? We shall explore it in stages. First, the problem is advantageously broken up into four questions: (1) Where is God when I need him? (2) If he is here, what is he doing for us? (3) How do we know God? (4) How do we name God? Taken in this way, we shall see answers which may be put in brief: Faith looks for providence in all of life, including its disappointments; How providence appears is a matter of interpretation, which admits of a certain responsible liberty, but not of calculation; We know God as he is present to us in providence, yet transcendent to the world; Naming God reflects both this presence-in-absence and providence-in-disappointment; the names of God are both holy and ironic.

We shall see that one immediate consequence follows from the presence-in-absence of the God of monotheism. All talk of this God is *confessional*, as opposed to deductive or inductive. That is, one may confess monotheistic faith, challenge others to it, even persuade them. But it is not possible to *prove* that God is good. That faith only comes from history, and it comes “by grace,” not by any sort of proof or empirical testing.

One may reject the claim that all of life is good, pains included, and then take offense. In outrage, one may cry, in even greater offense, that it is all very easy to *say* “do not take offense at pain,” but hard not to *do* it. Obviously. The pain can be excruciating, and suffering can mount into affliction. But I do not say, in the imperative, “*Do* not take offense.” One can only invite—and challenge. As Joshua says in his farewell address, “choose this day, which gods you will serve.” (Cf. Joshua 24.15.) Nevertheless, there is judgement, even though one is not judged against a logical deduction of the “true faith.” Rather, if he should reject some disappointment as barren, he can only be compared with others who embraced it as fertile. The man who takes offense is visible beside the man who does not.

Some do not. H. Richard Niebuhr spoke for them in a few short remarks that may be taken as the premise and theme of the present inquiry. He calls it strange that humans should place their faith in the great void from which we come and to which we return, the “enemy of all our causes, . . . opponent of all our gods.” Not nearly so strange as it seems when readers finally catch on, finally realizing that he means what

he says! Niebuhr quotes Job in the passage that will be a refrain for us in this inquiry, "Though it slay us, yet will we trust it."

We have been allowed to attach our confidence to it, and put our reliance in it which is the one reality beyond all the many, which is the last power, the infinite source of all particular beings as well as their end. And insofar as our faith, our reliance for meaning and worth, has been attached to this source and enemy of all our gods, we have been enabled to call this reality God.⁴

Our task is to see what it means to do that.

⁴RMWC, p. 122.

Chapter 2

Assumptions of Method

2.1 Basic Questions

It may be that the problem of evil (how can God and “evil” coexist?) presupposes its own non-solution. But surely God is a problem, even for the faithful man. If God is good, and life is full of pain, then one may fairly ask, (1) Where is God when I need Him? The question is at the center, I think, of any doctrine of God. John Courtney Murray extends it in three more questions: (2) If He is here, what is He doing? (3) How do we know God? (4) How do we name God?¹

The brief answers to these questions are, (1) God is always here, even in the disappointments; (2) how God is here, what God is doing here, is (a) learned from history, and (b) a matter of interpretation which admits of a certain responsible liberty; (3) the monotheist knows God in loyalty to God, and this loyalty to a “cause” beyond the causes that all die, (to use Niebuhr’s phrase) is logically quite peculiar; and (4) talk of God is therefore reticent, ironic, and above all, historical. We shall sometimes blur the boundaries between these questions, but they are useful enough to shape the course of this investigation.

Murray’s questions may be turned to focus on God’s *providence*, rather than his *being*, for we experience God originally as provident (or not), and the question of the being of God comes later. This is worth some emphasis. The goods that are delivered in providence are accessible, as human faith as a human activity is accessible to criticism and inspection.

¹John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964). Hereafter, PG. Cf. p. 17 and passim.

The characterization of the goods of life *as* providence is not accessible objectively—it is a matter of faith. The fact that the name “God” appears frequently in an inquiry whose starting point is anthropological should not obscure the fact that God is not thematic in his own right until the end of the book. I would like to leave meditation on Murray’s four questions and their structure to his readers, and simply appropriate his questions for the structure of the present inquiry.

Another characterization of the question of providence (or of God, for that matter) comes in the structure of faith. Faith is sometimes taken as assent to propositions, acceptance of intuited or self-evident truths, or piety, or “religious” activity. Doubtless there are other meanings as well. For the present, we assume that faith is confidence, loyalty, and acknowledgment. Some definitions may help, and then we can get on with the labor of the book.

Begin with loyalty. To be human is to act, to act is to act for purposes, and to act for a purpose presupposes some estimate of the future: that the action might achieve the goal. Ask *why* someone acts, on this or that occasion, and you will get many answers. I did *A* to get to *B*, which will get to *C*, which hopefully will get to *D*. Eventually, the respondent gives no more answers; he doesn’t know, or has no more, or will not say. At this point, whether it can be articulated or not, the questioner has arrived at what the respondent is *loyal* to. It is also, as we can see, what he places his ultimate *confidence* in. This was Niebuhr’s definition of faith. It is more than loyalty and confidence, but it is at least these. As the presupposition of human action, faith is universal, it is constitutive of being human.

To be loyal to someone is necessarily also to have some confidence in that person, confidence that the other person will provide something in return. One trusts one’s very self to whatever is taken as the ultimate focus of meaning in life. In a smaller way, ordinary friendship can serve as a paradigm of the relations between confidence and loyalty. For friends value each other, and each trusts that he is valued by the other. More than that, each is then loyal to the other.²

When Niebuhr came to the cognitive aspect of faith, he was much more circumspect. It did not appear in *Radical Monotheism* in any distinct or thematic way. That there is a cognitive aspect to faith was clear from *Faith on Earth*.³ I would contend that the necessary cognitive aspect of faith can be found in *The Meaning of Revelation*.⁴ There, revelation

²Cf. RMWC, p. 16-17.

³H. Richard Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth; An Inquiry into the Structure of Faith*, edited by R. R. Niebuhr (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989)

⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan,

is defined as that history which one *acknowledges* as making sense of human life. Clearly, an act of faith is involved in that acknowledgment, but the word *faith* is seldom used in *The Meaning of Revelation*. Perhaps the two arguments are never joined because they came from different sources and were applied to different problems. The phenomenology of faith in *Radical Monotheism* came from Royce and Tolstoi and was directed to faith as such. The argument in *The Meaning of Revelation* is a distant reworking of Kantian concepts in order to make sense of history as revelation. Yet if Kant is most visible figure in that work, Troeltsch may be the deepest concern. Niebuhr avoids the cognitive side of faith in *Radical Monotheism* because for so much theology in the modern period, faith has been reduced to assent to propositions, with no intrinsic involvement of loyalty or confidence. Perhaps another way to say it would be that *ac*-knowledge comes before knowledge. The difference is that knowledge is too easily taken to be passive, where acknowledgment is active. And acknowledgment points to something that is not simply given in propositional form. Truth emerges from life and experience in ways that can be quite hard to pin down. This minimal stipulation will leave some room for mystery and for the enduring ineffability of ultimate truth.

One last sequence of definitions will be needed, for historical reasons. Niebuhr saw a typology of religions in *Radical Monotheism* that will be revised and extended in chapter 6, when we come to the religious typology of Merold Westphal. But some of its terminology has a lasting pertinence, not least because Westphal did not deal with all of the issues that Niebuhr raised.

Niebuhr saw three qualitatively different kinds of religion. In the first, polytheism, there are many centers of value, and the believer alternates among them. There is no sense of unity that could give coherence or order to them. Niebuhr did not trouble over the differences between polytheistic systems of hunter-gatherer societies, the first agrarian civilizations, or the cosmopolitan and pluralistic Hellenistic world. These differences would be significant for the history of religions, but they did not matter for the argument of *Radical Monotheism*.

In the second kind of faith, which Niebuhr calls *henotheism*, a somewhat strange term, there is only one center of confidence and loyalty. But it is something within this world—it is not the transcendent focus of radical monotheism. Henotheism is usually marked by a focus on the believing community, to the exclusion of outsiders. Some of Niebuhr's critics have called it simply "social faith," though its social substrate is not always essential. Still, henotheisms often become the self-worship of believing communities. (The alert reader will realize that Christianity

1941). Hereafter, MR.

has often become simply a henotheism of the Church.) For the record, the term *henotheism* is older than Niebuhr, and he gave it a meaning somewhat different from his predecessors. There are too many possible forms of henotheism for the category to be theoretically very useful for this study. Nevertheless, it has enormous practical usefulness simply because it is probably the commonest alternative that radical monotheism will degenerate into when monotheism loses its own compass.

From these Niebuhr distinguished radical monotheism as the belief in the goodness of all being, *qua* being. Such a faith has to rest in something transcendent. One may call it “The Way Things Are,” as I would, or just “Void,” as Niebuhr did. It is not really a being or thing outside the world, though it escapes the confines of any concept and is in that sense transcendent. Nor is it a being or a phenomenon within the world, though it shows itself everywhere within the world. What is radically peculiar about it is the human response in affirmation of all of life, most conspicuously including the pains of life.

One thing should be observed briefly but emphatically. It is not the cardinality of the pantheon (the number of the gods) that distinguishes between monotheism and other religions, for clearly henotheisms also have only one god, and some religions have no “gods” at all. The God of monotheism is peculiar in character, and it is that character that we are interested in.

Niebuhr was not shy about the historical roots of Christian faith, for they are the center of *The Meaning of Revelation*, but he did not make much of them in *Radical Monotheism*. The connections between his definitions in those two works will emerge here only in Part II. We shall revise Niebuhr’s typology in chapter 6, and there produce several new definitions for radical monotheism: “historical-covenantal” religion (Westphal’s term), or just “world-affirming historical religion,” my own functional definition. Westphal will extend Niebuhr’s typology significantly, as we shall see then.

2.2 A Confessional Approach

Niebuhr calls his theological method *confessional* early in his writing.⁵ It could seem from his stated reasons that the choice was merely one of convenience: attempts at proof have not worked particularly well, and so a confessional method might be tried instead. But on closer inspection, he himself names stronger reasons: theology of monotheism must work

⁵Cf. *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), p. 8 and passim.

within its limitations or else surreptitiously become a theology of some other god. Among those limitations is that we know God only as he is present to us, not as he is in himself.⁶ Put this way, the restriction runs through all of Niebuhr's writing. The reason is intrinsic to the nature of monotheism, but Niebuhr has understated it.

A theology that attempts to be more than confessional (e.g., by proving the goodness of God) inevitably skews the nature of the "God" it talks about in such a way that it no longer really talks about the God of monotheism. Such a god is indeed one, but more than mere oneness is required for monotheism. The "proofs" do not prove; they only confess, whether their confessional status is acknowledged or not. But in their attempt to get conceptual control over God, they imply a god over whom such control is possible, and a god who offers control over the good in life. And in pretending to proof, such a theology of control would relieve the believer of responsibility for his faith and excuse him from its risks. This is not monotheism.

To speak confessionally, i. e., to abandon attempts at proof, is not thereby to default into relativism, to suggest by one's confessional language that god-choices are at bottom only a matter of caprice, choices that have no basis in reality. A confession of faith in the God of monotheism inevitably puts a challenge to bystanders, a challenge to trust in God. And a theology that declines to make this challenge, but acquiesces in vicious relativism, is again a theology that has skewed the nature of its "God," one that has now become just one more god in a polytheistic god-market. The challenge implicit in the example of one's own stance is inherent, and any theology is confessional whether it acknowledges its challenge or not. If the challenge to monotheism is abandoned, it becomes instead a different sort of challenge: an invitation to pick and choose among the goods of life, rejecting other parts of life as evil. This is the essence of polytheism.

To speak confessionally then always involves a certain tension, but it is more than just a balance between saying too much and saying too little. Simultaneously, we know and do not know God. We claim and do not claim the sovereignty of God; God is sovereign, but loyalty to him does not make us his plenipotentiaries. The claim challenges others to trust, but it does not offer the sort of proof that would turn the trust of dependence into independence and control—the opposite of trust. We know God, but creatures do not comprehend God. Humility before God entails a humility before others, even before those who are not monotheists. The

⁶I don't think Niebuhr is even willing to entertain a notion of God "as he is in himself"; such would be human conceiving of whatever features of God are defined as not to be accessible to human conceiving.

creaturehood of human beings and the peculiarity of monotheism alike require such a stance.

This paradox, this peculiarity of monotheistic faith, appears in many ways, and it colors all of monotheistic life. It appears first in the question of knowledge of God. We may know *that* God is, but not *what* God is. John Courtney Murray quotes Saint Thomas, in the preamble to Question 3, in the beginning of the *Summa*:

Having answered the question, whether a thing is, the inquiry moves to the question, how the thing is; the purpose is to know what the thing is. In the case of God, however, we cannot know what he is; but we can know what he is not. Of him, therefore, we cannot ask the question, how he is; but we can ask the question, how he is not. Hence we shall inquire, first, how God is not; second, how he is known by us; third, how he is named.⁷

Murray continues his description of Thomas's approach, stepping carefully through questions that have perplexed the unwary since they were first asked. My students' ears are more acute than my own, and they confirm with emphasis what I barely noticed, that Murray is engaged in an apologetic campaign against Protestants and atheists that was characteristic of the 1950s. Murray wants to claim that God "exists," and that such existence is certain, open to human reason. And he, with Thomas, also wants to protect the mystery of that existence. It is then a commonplace among readers of St. Thomas that we can know *that* God is, but not *what* God is. "He states the truth so often and so uncompromisingly that some of his commentators have become a bit alarmed at the patent poverty of the knowledge of God he permits to man in this life."⁸ Alarm is not quite right, at least not in the present inquiry. Murray's (and Thomas's) claim strikes me as paradoxical: for on virtually every other occasion when I think I know that something exists, I also know at least something about what it is. Murray would like to sustain that paradox out of respect for the mystery that it enshrines. He sees this lack of knowledge of God to be balanced in tension with true and real knowledge. "We cannot positively understand the God whose existence we have affirmed. We cannot, as it were, crowd him into a concept; in his transcendence he escapes our concepts."⁹ I do not think that Murray entirely succeeds

⁷Murray, PG, p. 69. Murray's translation is not that of the English Dominican Fathers.

⁸PG, p. 70.

⁹Murray, PG, p. 70. I am not as optimistic as St. Thomas that we can know easily *that* God exists, without some confessional involvement in our knowledge.

in balancing knowledge and non-knowledge of God, and the respect for mystery that he seeks is too easily overwhelmed by positive knowledge of God, disclaimers notwithstanding.

Murray poses the problem as one of knowing God. But it appears more generally and has consequences for all of life and faith. Knowing in unknowing arises from a more original presence-in-absence. God (and providence) are interpreted yet always still open, both known and unknown, named but not—in Murray's word—"disponible," at our disposal.

A god that can be defined and delimited in a concept is necessarily a god of and for non-monotheists, for beyond the limits of the concept that defines the good such a god brings, there is (by definition) no good to be had. For a god who can be defined, there is providence not in *all* of life, but only in some defined part of it. Accordingly, there is a price one must pay to have good in *all* of life: surrender of any concept that would enable one to separate life into good and evil parts (cf. Genesis 3.5). Indeed, one must surrender any concept that would allow prediction of the good without surprise. If we know not what God is but what he is not, we know something about God's good, in the same way: it is not to be confined within the limits of human good, human desires for gratification.

A proof in the sense of being logically coercive would imply that providence, about which the proof proves, can be known beforehand with enough precision so that we are no longer speaking of the God of monotheism: *This* provable god is then present *simply*, rather than being present in absence. It and its goods can be interpreted without problem or ambiguity. And they can be known and named without problems, as finite beings are known and named.

The nature of proof itself can lead to trouble in yet another way.¹⁰ However exhortation in theology works, refusal to accept it is in part a move of the will, not just of the intellect. The pitfall to be avoided here arises from confusion of relation between intellect and will: proof attempts to make faith solely a matter of intellect at a place where the will is present also, and present in a crucial way. The goal seems to be to evade responsibility for a move of the will, the original choice whether to believe or not. But if all the work of faith is assigned to the intellect, then the will is relieved of responsibility. The human condition is otherwise:

Since we truly have a choice whether or not to believe (faith,

(Or even that "exists" is the proper way to pose the problem; but that is to get way ahead of the questions of this section.)

¹⁰A little reflection will show that the present criticisms all apply to *inductive* argument as much as to deductive proof; probable argument can no more be radically monotheistic than can claims of rigorous proof.

at least in the Roman Catholic tradition, is meritorious), there can be no evidence necessitating belief. In other words, we cannot have an immediate vision of the intrinsic truth of revelation. Revelation is not so much a self-justifying experience, but rather a call to *believe*, a call to the *obedience* of faith.¹¹

Where, by contrast, the burden of faith is put wholly on the will, with none carried by the intellect, a stance is possible that is called *fideism*: the demand for belief, without explanation or understanding or criticism or grounding in human life. Fideism naturally arises when the intellect is held to be incapable of sufficient understanding of God. Such an estimate of the intellect comes naturally from a strict separation of intellect and will such as one finds in Kant, Schleiermacher,¹² and much theology descended from them.¹³ Niebuhr, in many ways a Kantian to the core, revises Kant at this point: he sets out to rejoin the intellect and will in his earliest theological writing, *The Meaning of Revelation*. Whether his method is the best way of doing so is another matter.

Despite its absolute claims, fideism functions effectively as a form of relativism. It was in meeting the challenge of relativism that Niebuhr thought through these problems. For relativism, there cannot—*logically* cannot—be any comparison between or judgement of or responsibility for faith or religious commitments.¹⁴ The key word here is *responsibility*, and

¹¹Edward L. Krasevac, OP, "Revelation and Experience: An Analysis of the Theology of George Tyrrell, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Thomas Aquinas" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1986), p. 168.

¹²For Kant, the intellect and will were separated almost totally, as "pure" (i. e., speculative) and "practical" reason. This has rendered separate treatments somewhat easier, though in the present century I would say latter-day Kantians such as Heidegger and Gadamer have moved to rejoin them. He has colored most German Protestant theology, not least through Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* puts the origin of the term *fideism* with Sabatier and Ménégoz in the nineteenth century.

¹³A pragmatic fideism also arises even where fideism is repudiated, as when belief is demanded as submission to authority. M. D. Chenu remarks, "The believer who submits unreflectively to the opinion of a particular authority is in a somewhat unfortunate position. 'If he depends on authority alone,' says St Thomas, 'he may, indeed, attain the certitude of a good listener, but his mind is empty; he has no understanding.'" Cf. Chenu, *Faith and Theology*, translated by Denis Hickey (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 58.

¹⁴The words "relativity" and "relativism" are used sloppily, not least by Niebuhr himself. In this book, *relativity* denotes the grounding of belief and knowledge in history, without access to a-historical absolutes. *Relativism*, alas, is of two senses, even here. It denotes (1) the position that there are therefore no defensible positions in faith at all; not only it is not possible to reach a-historical absolutes,

that concept is always the companion to historical relativism in Niebuhr's thinking. Responsible theology is incapable of fideism, for responsibility is precisely the answering of the questions that fideist theology refuses to answer: what are faith and monotheism, and what is the God believed in, in terms of human life as everybody knows it. To be responsible is to tell candidly what one is doing, what one's starting point is, but not to offer proof or justification for it. Responsible theology is not defensive theology, and so avoids the pitfall of abandoning monotheism in the very act of defending it. Responsible theology does not claim absolute truth *independent* of history, but if real knowledge is possible by analogy with the historical present, it is possible to *transcend* history.

With the idea of responsibility, we are at the companion-concept of confessionality. Both understanding and misunderstanding responsibility appear in the several senses of the word 'apologetic.' Apologetic theology can mean to speak in one's own defense, or (more recently) simply to answer questions. Apologetic theology is designed, in Niebuhr's account, to *prove* (and so to defend) the existence and attributes of God. It is the sense of defensive theology that Niebuhr condemns. The God of monotheism is indefensible, in the literal sense: it is not possible to offer proof of his sovereignty or goodness. If non-monotheists take it in the common sense also, that God is *morally* indefensible, there is nothing that the monotheist can say in counter-argument. A defense is not needed; confession is sufficient. We shall see in ALHR, Part III that the challenge to *defend* the God of monotheism is a challenge to *abandon* monotheism, because a defense must be based on something other than monotheistic faith. But the non-monotheist may perfectly well ask for clarification, and in this sense, confessional theology will always be apologetic. Unfortunately, an answer intended to clarify can be taken as a defense, by either party. (We shall come to this in ALHR, chapter 13.)

The confessional grounding of monotheistic theology that shows itself in knowledge of providence (and of God) appears already in the phenomena known, in their interpretation, and later in their articulation in language.

God is present in an absence; he is not present simply, as some feature of physical reality that is everywhere, or absent simply, in negation of the same sense of presence. The good is unpredictable, undefinable in

it is not even possible *in any sense* to transcend one's historical relativity. It also denotes (2) the recognition of historical relativity, without thereby asserting relativism in sense (1). If precision is necessary, sense (1) may be called nihilistic or vicious relativism and sense (2) historical relativism. But they can shade into one another.

advance; the monotheist is not in a position to say how it will appear, or what he will have to do to receive it as good. God's good is not a copy of man's, nor is the monotheist forced to the alternative that God is not good at all. For the non-monotheist, the good *can* be defined in advance, as can its lack. The monotheist finds security in the insecurity that is constitutive of being a created and mortal being; he is not caught between engulfment or abandonment by the God of monotheism.

Interpretation of providence is historically relative; that is, it is available only as part of history, and it is sufficient for the needs of its own time. It does not attempt to reach an absolute a-historical truth, and it is not for lack of absolute truth left without truth at all. It is, as I have tried to emphasize, responsible, willing to give an account of itself. The alternatives are to be mechanically auditable, to be deductive, or polemical, or to default into fideism, into nihilistic relativism, or an idealist subjectivism in religion. The interpretation of providence in life and history admits of a certain responsible liberty; it is not determined by the formulas of dogma, nor is it (at an opposed extreme) randomly indeterminate.

As I have said, knowledge of God is confessional, rather than deductive or relativist. Nor is it false consciousness, an ideological product of the imposition of power, for lack of any responsible cognitive basis at all. The theology that results is "economic," speaking of God as he is present to us, rather than "immanent," speaking of God as he is in himself. Knowledge comes in action (something Jews remember and Christians tend to forget), and action is always subject to original sin. Yet the faithful monotheist, though subject to original sin, is in faith freed *from* his sin, but not free *of* sin. It ought to go without saying, but does not, that original sin does not mean people are in a state of total depravity.

God and providence are named in language that is apophatic, speaking in negation as much as in assertion, unlike such intra-mundane engagements with life as can be described in simple assertions. Yet the language of faith can speak truth; it is not merely emotive or declarative of policies for action. The language of faith is polyvocal, not univocal; it speaks in irony and analogy. It is, as analogy, a species of equivocation, yet not equivocation that is finally powerless to speak truth. The language of faith discloses and conceals at the same time; it does not reveal simply, as univocal language in science does, nor is it useless, concealing without revealing, finally misleading.

Again and again, providence so delineated seems to have stepped outside the only possible alternatives for its being, interpreting, knowing, and articulation. This must seem confusing. It was a commonplace in the last decades of the twentieth century that we are in a time of confusion, loss of certainty about God. In a street phrase, we are "not

too clear on the concept” of monotheism. Yet we have no sense of confusion, for we think that merely by having only *one* god, we are thereby monotheists. But the oneness of God is the least helpful clue to the nature of monotheism. By itself, it does not make faith monotheistic at all. Given the loss of a sense of the peculiarity of monotheism, the loss of a tension between the pains of life and their redemption—even the loss of a simple recognition that monotheism is a commitment to embrace *all* of life as good—it is no surprise that we should be unclear as to what monotheism is. Instead of the faith that looks for blessings where others find barrenness, we have come to expect the God of monotheism to provide blessings *simply*, without pain. The problems build up rapidly. Having lost a sense of history, we expect to escape its limitations, rather than let history enable us to live—*in* history. Having lost the tension between knowing and unknowing in favor of simple knowing, it quickly becomes dubious whether a God so conceived can be known at all. Or whether such “a” divine being could “exist” at all. Having lost the irony of the language of providence, we look for supernatural rescues that would enable us to evade disappointment, rather than find blessings *in* all of life, disappointing or not. (More recently, abandoning the supernatural, we seek to evade disappointments on our own, unaided.) In short, we have difficulty recognizing monotheism at all.

Chapter 3

Three Faces of Monotheism

3.1 Exposure, Limitation, and Need

If monotheism embraces all of life as good, including the disappointments that other faiths reject in distrust, what are those disappointing events? How might we characterize them? And how do they bear blessings? Let us divide them, to characterize them, into three sorts: exposure, limitation, and need. To be exposed is to “get caught red handed,” to be seen by others for the person one is. To face limitation is to be up against the “facts of life,” when life will not yield something desired of it. To meet others in need is to meet demands on my time and resources that compete for my own sustenance. This is not an arbitrary characterization, as we shall see.

These are a system, for each of exposure, limitation, and need is the general form of disappointment in one major area of life. The first is a matter of legitimacy and order; one’s legitimacy has been questioned and shown to be wanting. The second is a matter of action: action to realize one’s possibilities for being has been frustrated. The third is a matter of sustenance, of the sort that comes from companionship, fellowship with other people. And Niebuhr’s typology of faith follows just such an organization. For confidence is trust that the trusted god will provide sustenance; loyalty is action to serve that god; and acknowledgment is faith in the judgement of the god. And indeed, if one trusts¹ that one

¹For want of a verb to distinguish faith as a whole from belief, loyalty, and confidence, I use “trust”. It will inevitably be ambiguous, used to mean both faith and confidence.

can find legitimacy, success, and sustenance even in exposure, limitation, and need, then one trusts not in one of the gods of polytheism, but in the God of monotheism, the God whose status for the moment must remain hidden. All we see now is that the monotheist trusts that he will not be confounded even though he be disappointed. The non-monotheist options all assume that at least one of exposure, limitation, and need is barren and must be avoided utterly in order to find happiness.

This tripartite system does not occur in one place in Niebuhr, though all the parts can be found in his work. He seldom speaks of all three together, except in the rare places where he mentions the three Latin *fid*-words: *fides*, *fidelitas*, *fiducia*. Exposure, limitation, and need *taken as a system* are the insight of Edward Hobbs. He credits Niebuhr and Barth.² What blessings, then, does the monotheist expect to come with exposure, limitation, and need? Nothing less than the restoration of freedom, creativity, and community. Exposure heals falseness; limitation presents opportunities, even if not the ones sought; and need offers fellowship.

The responses and relationships to these encounters or situations were: (1) in the face of the situation which *exposed or revealed the discrepancy* between one's pretensions and one's actual life-as-lived, one responded with acknowledgment of the true situation and a "change of understanding" (Greek: *metanoia*, poorly translated "repentance"); (2) in the face of the situation which confronted one with the *contingency or limitation* of his existence, one responded with creative thankfulness for the new—albeit in many cases unwanted and limited—possibilities presented by the limiting situation itself; (3) in the face of the *encounter with others in their need for help*, one responded with action directed to the benefit or good of those others.³

Hobbs's two-part response to each disappointment may be expanded into four parts, if the life of the emotions is included; then it shows a transformation from the initial disappointment to the final celebration. But Hobbs has shown the essential active response of the will. When exposure is embraced, the initial reaction is remorse; then one responds with acknowledgment and repentance, and gains real freedom. The natural

²But the system does not appear *as* a system in either Niebuhr or Barth; that recognition is original with Edward Hobbs.

³Edward C. Hobbs, "An Alternate Model From a Theological Perspective," in H. A. Otto, ed., *The Family in Search of a Future* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp. 32–33. Cf. also his Dillenberger Lecture, Berkeley CA, the Graduate Theological Union, 1981 December 18.

response to limitation is grief, but that is followed by innovation, and then initiative, turning to gratitude. And to others in need one responds with open heart, open eyes, and open hands, and ends in celebration of fellowship. In each case, the first response is a passive and negative response of the emotions. The first action is cognitive in some way: acknowledgment, innovation, and open eyes re-cognize the exposure, limitation and need, and in so doing, re-appropriate it *as* bearing blessing. Then comes the commitment of actually doing something: repentance, initiative, and help for the neighbor. Lastly, the transformation is consummated in a positive emotional response: freedom, creativity, and relatedness.

The monotheist meets God in situations of exposure, limitation, and need. What was rejected, not preferred, said "No!" to, is embraced, accepted, said "Yes!" to. It is the dynamic of this change which we explore. Response is with the intellect, the will, and the emotions.

Response of the intellect is simply to acknowledge the true state of affairs. The acknowledgment is objectified in language, by saying "I did it." The will responds in the changing of one's ways, repentance and amendment of life. Action is intended and, if possible, begun. The response of the emotions is first with remorse for one's sins, then with joy when one truly has seen them as sins and has been freed from them. They are now seen as sins by the whole man, and the original demands made on life are transformed. The goods that were desired out of order may still be desired, but no longer are they absolutized. The pattern and sequence of response of the cognitive, active, and emotional faculties seems to be temporal in order as well as logical. Repentance is impossible until after confession, and the emotions seem to have a life of their own, which requires that they be preceded by action.

Encounter with limitation or contingency engages first the intellect, in innovation. One abandons presuppositions which are not working and finds a new way to deal with the situation within the limitations that one faces. Those limitations are, of course, not always known precisely, and sometimes one can trade one limitation against another. The will responds in seizing the initiative, putting into action measures conceived by innovation. Lastly, the emotions are transformed from grief to gratitude in and for the situation formerly conceived as limiting but now seen to offer opportunity.

Need can be another's or one's own; the two cases are complementary. First one opens one's eyes to the other person, and he is seen as neighbor. His need is recognized and he is acknowledged. Then one opens one's hands to the other person, in action to meet his need. And one opens one's heart, in fellowship. Alone, there was only pity, but together, there is celebration. Once again, it seems that response of action must follow

a cognitive response and precede the emotional transformation. In the response of the emotions, an initial negative response (remorse, grief, pity) is transformed into a positive one (joy, gratitude, celebration). This transformation is characteristic of radical monotheism. It is noteworthy that the initial member of the transformation (remorse, grief, pity) is already a response of faith; this is not the transformation from sin *to* faith, but comes after it.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is as much about receiving as giving help. Inasmuch as Samaritans were not well liked by Jews, the story asks two questions. It is as if the man beaten and left for dead by robbers were passed by in Central Park by a priest and a policeman, and then rescued by a drug-pusher. Not only does the story challenge people to help others in need, it also asks, "Are you willing to accept help from someone you despise?" It is in this sense that the response to need is complementary from both sides. Real fellowship comes only when the help is given and received in such a way that neither party seeks to dominate the other, whether by controlling the relationship through monopoly of need or monopoly of means to meet the need.

Encounter with disappointment need not be embraced, it can be refused. A policy of refusal is the path of un-faith, away from monotheism. When refusal is blindness, relevant information about one's own actions is ignored or suppressed. In stubbornness, one refuses to bend in the face of limitation; and with hard-heartedness, one refuses to meet one's neighbor in need. These are the characteristics coloring particular acts of unfaith. The goal to which they are directed is a position of security: secure legitimacy, secure power, secure self-sufficiency. This natural craving is just the condition of original sin. It is not so much legitimacy, power, and self-sufficiency themselves which are wrong, as the security in control of them which is sought.

If positive response is given to exposure, limitation, and need, there results a condition of redemption in which original righteousness is at least partially restored. Remorse gives way, after repentance, to a joy in a new life of grace and freedom from the past and from sin. Then one is not bound to the past or to a version of the past; it is acknowledged for what it is, and even its sin is capable of being redeemed.

On embracing limitation, after innovation, initiative, and gratitude, man is in a state of both creativity and humility. One can work with the present.

On embracing need, people find fellowship and relatedness. Somewhat arbitrarily, I take freedom, creativity, and relatedness to describe original righteousness, and gracefulness, humility, and fellowship, the

redeemed state that comes with faith.⁴

In each of the three cases, there is salvation. In the first, exposure is judgement, and judgement *is* redemption. The new knowledge itself is a means of restored freedom. In the second, salvation comes through weakness, and creativity through contingency. What we admire in an artist is the ability to “do so much with so little,” to press materials to their limits, yet respect those limits. In the third, there is self-fulfillment through self-offering, receiving through giving.

It could seem that only in the third case, encounter with need, is there encounter with other people. But limitation is met first in other people, in the experience that, quite apart from others’ needs, one’s own being is an issue for other people, as in the original socialization which makes one a person at all. This continues in all the secondary socializations that one undergoes at various stages in life; other people have plans for me, they want me to be one sort of person and not another. It is within (or in overcoming) those limitations imposed by other people that I can become a person, before and more importantly than in dealing with the limitations imposed by nature.

In the same way, the knowledge that comes from exposure is self-knowledge, and it would be tempting to think that this can be had without actual exposure to *other* people. This is the way of Gnosticism: self-knowledge gained through voluntary techniques that do not involve real self-exposure. For the monotheist, the exposure in question is involuntary, and always involves other people at some level. He can try to anticipate it, as in the confessional, but he does so to cultivate a general openness which makes the acceptance of exposure instinctive, a way of life.⁵

Exposure to other people can destroy, and there is no guarantee that with it will be offered the grace necessary to accept the unpleasant truth that exposure insists upon. Albert Camus tells a terrifying tale of exposure that destroys those it exposes.⁶ It is about a family, originally both parents and two children. The father has died. The mother and her daughter are innkeepers in a remote and mountainous country. The son saw that he was just a useless extra mouth to feed and left in boyhood to make his fortune. He returns, full-grown, as a guest to the inn, incognito. He has grown a beard, and they do not recognize him. He plans to surprise his

⁴I am indebted to Edward Hobbs especially for the series freedom, creativity, and relatedness; it appears in unpublished instructional materials.

⁵Cf. for an extended treatment, Adrienne von Speyr, *Confession* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985).

⁶Cf. *The Stranger* (New York: Random House, 1946), pp. 99 ff. Cf. also “The Misunderstanding,” in *Caligula and Three Other Plays* (New York: Random House, 1958).

mother and sister in the morning. As it happens, they are in the habit of murdering guests who are single and look unlikely to be missed. They do as they usually do, and then find in his luggage the gold he intended for them, as well as tattered photographs of themselves that he has clearly treasured for years. The exposure which poses a real challenge to faith is not the exposure which comes in the security of introspection, but in encounter with other people. Then, if exposure is good, bringing truth, it is not obvious that it is powerful, enabling the acceptance of the truth. Does it offer any blessing?

To promise to find good in the unknown future can seem very foolhardy, especially when one never knows what it will bring. People can rightly say, “He doesn’t know what he’s talking about,” and “He’s just showing off, shooting his mouth off.” The first is necessarily true, but the second need not be, especially if he can remember that he does not know what the future will bring.

But another person presents a very different moral problem. It is all very well to call one’s own encounter with limitation and contingency an occasion of grace and an opportunity, but it is quite another matter to declare the same on behalf of another person. Yet it happens; parents do it in raising children, and children are fortunate (and sometimes grateful) that they do. In inviting another to find good in his “bad,” one is committing oneself to find the same good in that same situation perceived as “bad,” and to be willing to share in it with the other person. What is for the other person limitation, his need, is for me exposure, for it is a test of my willingness to find good in the other person’s situation. The monotheist’s advertised faith is exposed for all to see in the encounter with another’s limitation. If one is to proclaim limitation as an occasion of opportunity, one must, to be consistent, abandon all pretensions of secure moral legitimacy.

3.2 Tripartite Thinking

Several three-part conceptual organizations have appeared in the analysis so far, and it is time to look at the origins and structure of the one I have called *tripartite*. This is something different from Niebuhr’s *triadic* thinking, in which any concern presents itself in a matrix of individual, community, and things in the world. We shall return to that series in its most prominent instance in the Common Documents; its logic is not intrinsically of three parts, but rather of a motion between the human heart and the cosmos, a motion marked in Niebuhr’s examples by three stages (among possibly more). Tripartite thinking really is a matter of

three reciprocally related principles or functions.

The several three-part series are acknowledgment, loyalty, and confidence; fides, fidelitas, and fiducia; exposure, limitation, and need. They are all instances of a peculiar conceptual way of organizing human experience. There are in each series three departments or functions in human life. The first function has to do with order and legitimacy, the second function with action, and the third function with nourishment and sustenance. (This three-fold characterization of life seems to travel with Indo-European culture, as we shall see in a moment.) These generalizations are rough, but not thereby imprecise: they are a scheme of analogies, not a systematic “calculus” in anthropology. Precision derives not from some deterministic definition which can be applied in a mechanical way to the history of ideas but from the contrast of this system with other conceptual organizations of human experience. My purpose here is to delineate this particular three-part conceptuality, so that we may see it as it appears in the development of Christian monotheism. Tripartite thinking appears first in polytheistic religion, though it is not itself intrinsically polytheistic. It is a way of viewing human existence, human society, and cosmic order. It is obviously not the only way that monotheistic religion has understood human life. My purpose is to recognize it, so that tripartite thinking and other conceptualities may stand out clearly, as they appear in both monotheistic and non-monotheistic examples.

Each of the three functions in the tripartite scheme collects to itself other concepts that are closely allied with it. What I have called simply order involves also legitimacy; cosmic order and moral legitimacy belong together. Cognitive functions belong here: knowing what is goes with knowing what ought to be. Moral order in human communities reflects the transcendent order of the cosmos. Action comprises administration, the military, and in politics, the executive functions. With sustenance one finds also nutrition, the emotions, fertility, and sustaining human relationships.

Monotheism lives only in particular historical forms, not in some state of abstract purity. In particular, it occurs in concrete cultures, and those cultures contribute much to the way it expresses itself. Both the worldview and the non-monotheist background to monotheism come from culture, and where they are recognized, monotheism as it occurs in its concrete particularity is in that measure better understood. This tripartite way of thinking has a historical origin, and it shows itself first in polytheism. It is not itself the essence of monotheism, and people who do not think this way in their pre-monotheistic religion will experience the God of monotheism differently. With these cautions—that tripartite thinking is culturally relative and that it occurs also in polytheism—let

us look at its origins and structure. Monotheism in its Christian form is heavily tripartite in its experience of God.

A hundred years ago, it would have been barely possible to call attention to the three functions of this system *as* a coordinated series, and then only as traditional and taken for granted, not with any clear origin. Indeed, until the early part of the twentieth century, comparative Indo-European studies focused on other conceptual schemes, and this one emerged only when other hypotheses failed. This tripartite system came from comparative linguistics and comparative mythology. It is only a phenomenology, without (to my knowledge) suggestion of anything that could be identified as a “cause.” It is peculiar to Indo-European cultures and Indo-European languages. This is of great consequence for the history of monotheism, both as explanation of its development in Indo-European cultures and of the differences between it and the history of non-Indo-European monotheisms.

Georges Dumézil was the author and discoverer of the thesis of tripartition.⁷ The sources are mythological and sociological evidence from the ancient world. Tripartite ideology survives in the modern world, though we do not think of our personal or social lives as reflecting it prominently. But when it is recognized, it can be seen permeating much of modern life.

Dumézil does not say whether the connection between tripartite thinking and Indo-European language is accidental or intrinsic to the structures of the Indo-European languages. It is not clear whether tripartite thinking is caused by language, carried by demographic migrations, or simply was a matter of cultural diffusion. Dumézil contents himself with the prior task of merely substantiating the claim that tripartite ideology is in fact to be found peculiarly in ancient Indo-European cultures. If the tripartition hypothesis is accepted, it seems to me that further work is necessary in linguistics and allied disciplines before one can hope to explain *why* the tripartite ideology is carried (for the most part) with and originally only with Indo-European languages. The subject is inadequately defined in terms of *what* is the phenomenon to be explained.

The tripartition hypothesis emerged only from the perplexities and impasses of earlier theories. Dumézil inherited the inconclusive work of late nineteenth-century researchers in anthropology and comparative mythology.⁸ The search for the origins of myth turned to natural phe-

⁷A retrospective guide to Dumézil’s work may be found in C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology: an Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil*, third ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

⁸Cf. Littleton, ch. 2, “Comparative Mythology, Frazerian Anthropology, and

nomena and other causes, but not language or social structure. But with Durkheim came the clue that myth may be a reflection of social structure, which is the first prerequisite for Dumézil's thesis. With comparative structural analysis of myths came the second prerequisite for the tripartition hypothesis. Dumézil eventually turned to the parallel between social structure and mythological systems. He came first, and in a rudimentary form, to Iranian culture, with connections to India.

Since our purposes do not include a detailed assessment of Dumézil's work, it is simplest to summarize the structure of the system and to note two prominent ancient polytheistic instances of it, India and Rome. In the Indo-European anthropology, society is divided into three parts or *functions*. Littleton names them *sovereignty*, *force*, and *nourishment*.⁹ "Function" refers not so much to social strata or to a class of divinities (but these are the clearest surface manifestations of functionality) as to the principles operating in this scheme of analysis. It is true, nonetheless, that the three functions together analyze what is an underlying unity, whether it is the life of an individual, of society, of the pantheon, or life in some other context. While no single three words capture the principles of the three functions, *cognition*, *action*, and *emotion* serve reasonably well at the level of individual life, and *order*, *action*, and *sustenance* will do at a more general level. The ideology extends from triads of classes, castes, orders, and their collective representations, to triads of calamities, colors, talismans, cures, even celestial and geographical regions. The ideology forms the core of its culture: "it provides the basic framework in terms of which phenomena are categorized and thus rendered meaningful. It is in terms of its ideology that a society structures its religious beliefs, validates its social organization, and generally conceives its relation to the phenomena around it."¹⁰

The tripartite social organization is manifested in a system of three social strata: priests, warriors, and herder/cultivators. The king comes from the second stratum. A thoroughly secular monarchy is a uniquely Indo-European institution. There are no parallels in the ancient Near East, the Nile civilizations, China or India, before Indo-European migrations into those areas. The Indo-European gods of the first function regulate magico-religious and juridical or legal legitimacy and order. These gods are sovereign in the system. Generally the numinous and legal aspects of order are supervised by different gods, as in the Roman case. The second-function gods endow physical prowess, and those of the third function, sustenance, well-being, and fertility.

Durkheimian Sociology."

⁹Littleton, p. 5. This terminology will be revised slightly; see below.

¹⁰Littleton, p. 227.

The Indian and Iranian cases were worked out first and provided the basis for generalization to other Indo-European mythological systems.¹¹ There are in the Indian case four social classes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Sudras. The last do not belong to any of the three functions, but serve the first three; they were probably a conquered indigenous people, surviving as outcasts in the later caste system.¹² Brahmins are the priest class, Kshatriyas the warrior class, and Vaishyas the economic class. The first three classes are *Arya*, a word root originally meaning simply people. The tripartite ideology appears in the *Rig Veda*, the oldest literature of the civilization. The first-function gods are *Mitra* and *Varuna*. *Mitra* presides over rational and legal aspects of sovereignty, and is in effect contract personified. *Varuna* is magico-religious, awesome and terrible, presiding over the numinous. *Indra* presides over the second-function gods, e. g., the *Maruts*. He fights monsters and so represents power and prowess. The third function in India as elsewhere is represented by several gods, here the *Asvins* and *Sarasvati*. Fertility, harvests, comfort, health, and well-being are all bestowed by the third-function deities.

The three functions are reflected in the early Roman pantheon, where each of the functions is headed by one or two gods and there is a sense of distinctness of the functions. In later Roman mythology, the symmetry of the three functions is distorted, broken, and obscured. At the beginning, *Jupiter* and *Dius Fidius* head the first function. Later, *Dius Fidius* recedes and is forgotten. Together, they are the gods of mystery, or the numinous, and contract, or the honoring of promise, the two components of the first function. *Mars* is the god of war and physical prowess. The third function is headed by *Quirinus* and *Ops*. From *Ops* we get the word “opulent,” and the stem of *Quirinus* supplies also the verb *curo*, *curare*, care for, pay attention to, trouble about. Social classes in Rome follow the Indian pattern. To the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas correspond the Roman *Flamines*, *Milites*, and *Quirites*.¹³ Both Rome and India have historicized or legendary versions of the divine or mythical representatives of the three functions.¹⁴ Both kings and gods can be found to correspond to members of the Indian pantheon. Of the early kings, *Romulus* and *Numa* correspond to *Varuna* and *Mitra*, *Tullus Hostilius* to *Indra*. The third function is not clear, though *Dumézil* feels that the *Sabine War* represents Indo-European myth, in which the classes of the first and second function

¹¹Littleton, pp. 49–53.

¹²The outcasts are function-neutral, and so do not compromise the symmetry of the three-function system.

¹³Cf. Littleton, p. 70–71.

¹⁴Cf. Littleton, p. 70; pp. 108–122.

defeat and integrate the third function.¹⁵ The pre-Capitoline triad of Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus presides over the gods; *Dius Fidius* and *Ops* are added in the first and third functions.¹⁶

The system appears more clearly around the edges of the Indo-European world than in the center, where advanced civilizations existed prior to the Indo-European immigration, with myths and cosmology conceptually vital enough to survive in the resulting mixtures. Here problems, distortions, and broken symmetries surface, with confusion of functions, especially of the first and second. Greek culture offers an example of just such blurring of Indo-European thinking by an older culture. It was not originally Indo-European, and its later Indo-European development reflects only broken symmetry and modified features of the tripartite system. Zeus enjoys both first- and second-function attributes, cf. Mithra in the pre-Zoroastrian Iranian mythology. The breaking of symmetry and blurring of functions within a system that is nevertheless tripartite appears in the story of the judgement of Paris. Paris is asked to choose between regal Hera, warlike Athene, and voluptuous Aphrodite. To his sorrow, he chooses the third function when he should have chosen the first. But even in this story, Hera offers sovereignty and wealth, Athene victory, handsomeness, and wisdom, combining two or even three of the functions.¹⁷

Littleton speaks of sovereignty in the first function, instead of legitimacy and order.¹⁸ The reasons for speaking not of sovereignty but of legitimacy in the first function are simple. Sovereignty can vest in any or all of the social strata representing the three functions. I would modify Littleton's designations for the functions in order to separate the issue of sovereignty from the question of the proper business of the first function. Without such a distinction, it would not be possible to understand historical conflicts over sovereignty *between* the first and second functions. While history exhibits the first function as sovereign in the early, pure examples, it takes little reflection to see that this need not be the case. Comparative anthropology is necessarily concerned with the particulars of actual history, but systematic (and even historical) theology have to focus on the nature of the functions in the broader range of their possible relations. To put it another way, the sovereignty of the first function is a contingent historical fact, not something inherent in the logic of the functions. I shall speak not of sovereignty in the first function

¹⁵Cf. Littleton, p. 71.

¹⁶Littleton, p. 68-69.

¹⁷Cf. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), vol. 2, p. 268.

¹⁸Littleton, p. 5.

but of legitimacy and order, in the sense which Dumézil elaborates in *Mitra-Varuna*, where the first function is presided over by two coordinate deities, one in charge of cosmic order, and the other in charge of enforcement of contracts. In the Roman case, they are Jupiter and *Dius Fidius*.¹⁹ If the principle of the first function is identified as legitimacy and order, rather than sovereignty, it will be possible to understand power struggles between the first and second functions, and to understand the principles of the functions in a way that does not apriori subordinate one to another.

The second function as a distinct conception is peculiarly Indo-European. It is not that war and administration are peculiarly Indo-European, but that division of labor and specialization exclusively for them are. Corresponding to this is the distinction of king from priest, and the secularity of the monarchy. It was not so in Egypt, Sumer, or Akkad. The ruler was both king and priest, and often a god, too.

The Hebrews make the distinction poorly, if at all, and then only after contact with the Hittites. "An Amorite was your father and a Hittite your mother." (Ezekiel 16.3) The story of Samuel and Saul in I Samuel 13, where Saul usurps Samuel's role of presiding at the sacrifice and pays with his crown and his life, is typical of the Indo-European theme of conflict of first and second functions. (Saul's role is in the second function, newly defined in Israel, and Samuel's is first function, or perhaps first and third function.) The Indo-European remedy is to separate the functions. The earlier period, of the judges, saw combined leadership in the first and second functions, the more typical Near Eastern pattern before Indo-European influences. Here, the second-function leadership is provided in an almost amateur sense, part-time. But Israel never really adopts the tripartite system, and the Common Documents show it only rarely and fragmentarily at best. The dominant Hebrew pattern appears in crucial contrast to the Indo-European system in a pivotal passage. We shall come to it in some detail below, but it is relevant at this point, and so I mention it briefly here. The Shema is familiar enough, the command to love the Lord your God "with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength." This seems to me a dubious translation of the Hebrew series *lev, nephesh, me'od*, forcing it partly into Indo-European terms. The Hebrew is closer to Niebuhr's inquiry along the lines of self, others, thing of concern. *Lev, nephesh, me'od* can be approximated by "inner man, whole man, man in his muchness." *Me'od* is particularly hard to translate. Such a progression is quite alien to any tripartite series, and its meaning is severely distorted by being forced into the terms of a tripartite

¹⁹*Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty*, translated by Derek Coltman (New York: Zone Books, 1988). See esp. pp. 74–80. *Dius Fidius* is guarantor of oaths, p. 78.

series. We shall return to it in some detail in section 3.4.

The contrast between Indo-European and other conceptualities can be drawn in another way, in terms of the mode of the distinction of the three functions. Each of the functions presupposes the others, and together they form an integrated whole. But the term *function* “refers neither to the social strata, the behavior of their occupants, nor their divine representations. Rather it refers to the principles in terms of which these phenomena are defined.”²⁰ It is those principles which are not found *as a coordinate series* in non-Indo-European societies, and in place of which *other* principles operate in those societies. This is true despite the contamination of the evidence by cultural diffusion between Indo-European and other cultures.

The question for a theologian is framed a little differently from its form for anthropologists. For anthropology, comparative mythology and folklore, it is a matter of some narrative and exegetical precision, focused on the content of specific folktales: painstaking comparison of myriad events, taken from the dossiers of dozens of mythical figures. For theology, rigor appears as philosophical rather than exegetical precision, i. e., in making clear the principles of the tripartite system, independent of particular exemplifications of it. The tripartite system is a way of asking questions, not a fixed schedule of answers. The difference between the tripartite system and other conceptualities is more like the difference between a limerick and a sonnet: one of form, not content. One can recognize the forms apart from content, and one can even recognize a poem that nearly but not quite exactly fits into a well-defined literary form. To put it another way, when someone approaches an issue in a tripartite frame of mind, it is not predictable in advance how the matter will show itself, but only that it will show itself in three parts, related in some way to each other as order, action, and sustenance. The possibilities for such an approach are still enormously varied, even though it is utterly different from an American Indian quadripartite understanding. And it is different from a Jewish approach, function-neutral, but always conscious of the presence of and motion toward the surrounding critical community. One can combine several types of thinking, as Niebuhr does in analyzing faith, presenting both a tripartite and pragmatist triadic appraisal of it.

Any inquiry into ethnically correlated conceptual systems runs the risk that its results will be put to other than scientific uses, to promote the glory or turpitude of one or another ethnic group. Dumézil already attracted suspicions of such motives, of which, so far as I am aware, he

²⁰Cf. Littleton, pp. 5 and 270. Cf. also John E. Tashjean, “Indo-European Studies and the Sciences of Man,” *History of Political Thought* II no. 3 (1981 Winter) 447-467; p. 453.

was innocent. When he was asked whether he *liked* the Indo-European system that he had labored so long to document, his sentiments were quite surprising. An interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur* records this reply:

Qu'est-ce que c'est l'"âme" d'un peuple . . . et l'"âme indo-européenne"? Tout ce que je peux vous dire, c'est que ce que j'entrevois du monde indo-européen m'aurait fait horreur. Je n'aurais pas aimé vivre dans une société où il y avait un *Männerbund* . . . ou des druides. Autant qu'on peut les imaginer à travers leurs héritiers, les Indo-Européens ne devaient pas être drôles à fréquenter. Vivre dans un système trifonctionnel me donnerait l'impression d'une prison. J'étudie donc les trois fonctions, j'explore cette prison, mais je n'aurais pas voulu y vivre. Si j'allais chez les anthropophages, je tâcherais d'en savoir le plus possible sur eux mais je resterais loin de la marmite.²¹

He liked the Greeks, because they were patient enough to listen and see phenomena that did not exactly fit the Indo-European scheme. Ethnic questions are often an occasion for a scholarly stoning, and the only question is which culture is going to be stoned. Every new piece of evidence is treated like goods from the street vendor selling stones in Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*. Scholars shopping for new evidence can then become like the tourists on the way to the stoning, who say, "I'll take two rounds, two flats, and a packet of gravel." Some things that ought to go without saying do not: I cannot stop others from peddling an Indo-European chauvinism, in which the tripartite ideology is superior to the thinking of other cultures, better able to grasp ultimate reality. Nor can I stop others who would undermine Christianity or the doctrine of the Trinity in a reverse chauvinism, condemning Christianity for its cultural relativity. My own project is merely to explore the conceptual system in which Christian monotheism has usually understood itself. It should then be possible to understand both the tripartite and other conceptual systems better. And it should be easier to explore how monotheism can express itself in non-Indo-European conceptual worlds.

²¹ Georges Dumézil, interview with Maurice Olender. *Le Nouvel Observateur* 1983/01/14, pp. 50–54; p. 53. "What would the 'soul' of a people be? . . . 'The Indo-European soul'? All I can tell you is that what I found of the Indo-European world gave me horror. I would not have liked to live in a society where there was a *Männerbund* . . . or Druids. Insofar as one can imagine them from their heirs, the Indo-Europeans would not have been droll to visit. To live in a tri-functional system gives me the impression of a prison. I study the three functions, I explore that prison, but I wouldn't want to live there. If I were to visit cannibals, I would take good notes, but would stay out of the kitchen."

To return to the point at which we started, we have here an outline of the tripartite conceptual system, and our inquiry may proceed to ask how that system shows itself in monotheism. The series exposure, limitation, and need names disappointment in each of the three functions. Where the polytheistic gods brought blessing only in satisfaction in each function, the God of monotheism brings blessing not only in satisfactions but also in the disappointments. When disappointment is conceived in tripartite terms, what results is something like the series exposure, limitation, and need.

In the next section, we examine the doctrine of the Trinity as an instance of tripartite conceptuality.

3.3 Tripartition and Trinity

One ought to suspect at this point that the tripartite system of the Indo-Europeans has a connection to the doctrine of the Trinity.²² It would be natural to find that when monotheism moves into an Indo-European culture, it thinks in Indo-European terms. If the monotheist is defined by his expectation of blessings even in disappointments, and if he thinks in tripartite terms, he can think of the disappointments as exposure, limitation, and need. How does he respond? Edward Hobbs's answer is Trinitarian:

(1) *[T]he exposure of inauthenticity* ("Judge") was responded to as healing ("Savior"), or liberating from bondage to the past ("sin"); the one who brought about judgement and salvation in the ancient Hebrew world was oiled or anointed, hence known as "the oiled one," (Hebrew: *Messiah*; Greek: *Christ*);

(2) *the limiting situation or encounter* (discovering one's "creatureliness," or meeting the "Creator") was responded to as possibility-offering, as new-good-bringing (as a "Father" treats his children), as to a loving Father whose gifts are not always what was desired or even understood, but as presenting possibilities nonetheless; . . . and

(3) *the situation of encounter with others in their need* was responded to as relationship-offering, or community-creating;

²²Virtually all of this chapter has appeared in a somewhat different form in Andrew P. Porter and Edward C. Hobbs, "The Trinity and the Indo-European Tripartite Worldview," *Budhi* III nos. 2-3 (1999) 1-28; revised and reprinted here with permission.

the other becomes one's brother through the act of "loving" him, i. e., ministering to his need. (This was the "Life-breath"—*spiritus* in Latin—of the "body" or community of men; such usage survives in the French *esprit de corps*, literally "spirit of the body.")²³

Several things call for remark. In the first place, the order of the Persons and functions is different: the first function appears in the second Person, the Son; the second function appears in the first Person, the Father. In the second place, this is not obviously the traditional account of the Trinity; the tradition is something closer to meeting God in transcendence (the Father), in history (the Son), and immanent in the present (the Holy Spirit). (But the series redemption, creation, and sanctification is an Indo-European tripartite series.) So the immediate conjecture has to be that the Christian appropriation of the tripartite ideology was highly critical. (It was at the same time unconscious of it as a cultural system; that awareness is quite original with Georges Dumézil and Emile Benveniste.) Patristic history indicates that the appropriation was forged through a slow debate.

The history of that long process of reflection exemplifies quite nicely a conjecture as to how tripartite ideology operates. It stumbles on a phenomenon, and then, when it discovers a second aspect of it, one that is assigned to a function different from the initial manifestation of the phenomenon, it suspects that a tripartite analysis is possible. The search for a third aspect of the phenomenon, completing the tripartite analysis, is usually brief. In the case of the Trinity, the first two functions were present in the issue of christology: how to relate God "in heaven" to the events of Jesus, present in history. That question turned on somewhat technical considerations, but it effectively raises two issues in a new, non-Hebrew (or Aramaic) speaking form: Whether God acts in history at all, and whether history can bring redemption by its exposure of sin. (For Jewish monotheism, both questions had of course been answered in the affirmative, but they were not framed in terms of an Indo-European tripartite functional analysis.) The exploration of a phenomenon would naturally spend most of its effort on the first two functions discovered and on their relationship; the last function will show itself easily when the relationship of the first two has been clarified as part of a tripartite system. Accordingly, when the christological questions were settled, it was natural to integrate the Holy Spirit on equal terms into a completed Trinity.

²³Edward C. Hobbs, "An Alternate Model From a Theological Perspective," in H. A. Otto, ed., *The Family in Search of a Future* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), pp. 32–33. Italics in the original.

The beginning of that conceptual evolution is simple enough; Trinitarian formulas occur rarely in the New Testament, and Trinitarian arguments not at all. The early formula of greeting in the Epistles does not even have three parts: “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians opens this way, and it is interesting that the Holy Spirit is mentioned—alone—a few verses later. Late in the tradition of the New Testament, the great commission in the end of Matthew has the formula that later became standard,

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, . . . (Matthew 28.19)

If Edward Hobbs is correct, and it seems to me that he is, this is an Indo-European tripartite invocation, but with the functions in the order 2-1-3.

As the doxology appears late, in Matthew, it is a mere formula, whose content is assumed to be known to the reader. One of the earliest blessings in the New Testament is not only tripartite, but the functions are named in the original Indo-European order, in the farewell blessing in 2 Corinthians 13.14:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Here the Persons are named with some indication of function. If we take it that the Persons in order 1-2-3 bring redemption from sin, contingency, and need, the formula makes sense: It is the grace of faith in the Lord Jesus which gives freedom from sin, the love of God which is manifested in contingency, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit which grows in shared need met in community.

The formula of later tradition names the Persons in the functional order 2-1-3: The Father is God in the second function, offering blessing in limitation (i. e., redemption from frustration of action), and the Son is God in the first function, offering redemption from sin (i. e., from defects of moral order).²⁴ It is the Son who works redemption from sin, by exposure, and so manifests the first function. The Father works in contingency, or brings blessing in the limits and opportunities for action, the second function. The Holy Spirit works in encounter with others in need, in the human community that sustains faith: the third function. The change of order between Persons and functions represents the major adjustment which the originally symmetric tripartite conceptuality makes in accommodation to the legacy of the Common Documents.

²⁴Cf. “An Alternate Model From a Theological Perspective,” pp. 32–33.

Tripartite thinking shows itself in the New Testament not just in a few conspicuous formulas, but also in the rhetorical structure of some of its arguments.

The “miracles,” narratives which witness to God’s providence in action, are, with few exceptions, of three sorts: cleansings, raisings, and feedings.²⁵ The rhetorical thrust of these pericopes, taken together, is that Jesus cleanses, raises, and feeds Israel. Some of the healings are cleansings, some are raisings; the corresponding verbs appear, not always, but often: *katharizo* in the cleansings, *egeiro* in the raisings. Sometimes, as in reports of general and multiple healings, rather than individual cases, only the verb *therapeuo* appears. But sometimes *egeiro* appears in ways that are awkward enough to suggest deliberate emphasis.

In the raisings, the English often does not reflect the prominence of the Greek verb *egeiro*, to raise, but it is present almost as a label, even when it is awkward. (For all I know, it is awkward in the Greek, and the translators could not believe the awkwardness should be translated.) The man with the withered hand is commanded to “raise yourself up in the center” (Mark 3.3). The Jerusalem Bible has “stand up out in the middle”; the RSV has just “come here”; the French Jerusalem Bible has something like the Greek, “Lève-toi là, au milieu!” but only because an idiom was ready-to-hand for the translators. The original emphasis on a *raising* is obscured in translation.

The teaching of Jesus presents a similar picture: materials for a tripartite system, but not the organization. It can be organized under three heads:²⁶

(1) repent! the kingdom of God is upon you; (2) stop making
invidious comparisons between yourself and your neighbor,
and accept life with gratitude and joy; (3) love (that is, help)
your neighbor.

The sense of “the kingdom of God is upon you” seems to be “the jig is up”; it’s time to repent. Certainly history bore out such a warning; in the disaster of 67-73 of the Common Era, only the two Jewish constituencies able to find good in the catastrophe were able to survive. Both were of the party of the Pharisees: the early Christian church, and the teachers who continued Judaism on a rabbinic basis. The Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots all were swept away.

The final outcome of the Trinitarian debates was highly structured and somewhat complex. The technical concepts for the unitary and three-part features of God are phrased in different language in the East

²⁵I am indebted to Edward Hobbs for these observations.

²⁶Edward Hobbs, unpublished instructional materials.

and the West.²⁷ The post-patristic history is at least as differentiated as the original patristic delineation of the terms and issues.²⁸ Rather than attempt to repeat that history of doctrinal development, it seems to me more useful to focus on a few aspects of the problem. That will advance the present exploration of radical monotheism.

The first shows itself in the constraints developed in response to what goes by the name of *modalism*. There seem, in history, to be three different sorts of ways to corrupt the doctrine of the Trinity, and a fourth that I shall add as a general precaution. The first is called modalism and is associated with the name of Sabellius; he collapses the three-ness of God, so that only a one-ness is really left. The three Persons are merely the modes of one God, where “mode” does not convey any significant import for the resulting three-ness in God. The second error occurs when one of those modes is elevated above the others; usually the Father. Arianism is an obvious example of this error, but not necessarily the only one. Lastly, it is possible to emphasize the three-ness of God at the expense of the one-ness, resulting, in the limiting case, in tri-theism. In effect, a proper account of the Trinity must preserve the symmetry of the Persons and give proper weight to both the three-ness and the one-ness of God. Of these, the first error seems to me to be the least risky, provided that the explanation is a parallel modalism rather than a serial modalism. In a serial modalism, the God is present in one mode at a time, and not all three Persons are really present to the believer. I suppose it would entail that the believer need embrace only one of exposure, limitation, and need, but not all three together. This is a real loss. When all three Persons are coequally present (parallel modalism), the worst that can happen to an explanation is that it is incomplete as to how they are related to one another in their three-ness and their one-ness. It does not seem to me reasonable to charge an explanation of God with being modalist in a pejorative sense merely because it focuses on the oneness of God.

I would add, as a general observation, that explanations go seriously wrong when in some way they compromise the goodness of God. When the symmetry of Persons (or functions) is broken, one or two Persons are degraded, as not really bringing good in the parts of life that are most

²⁷ Augustine already notes this; cf. *De Trinitate*, Bk. 7, Ch. 3, par. 7. Translated by Edmund Hill, OP, as *The Trinity* (New York: New City Press, 1991). Accounts of the history can be found in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), ch. 10; and Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972). See also Bertrand de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History* (Still River, MA: St. Bede's Publications, 1982), p. 128.

²⁸ In addition to de Margerie, see also William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God* (Washington DC: Catholic University Press, 1982).

prominently in their care. The problem is worse than it might seem, for if the working of the three functions is understood successfully, one cannot truly embrace good in the disappointments of one function and reject the disappointments of another as barren. They are truly aspects of a unity; to undermine the providence of God in one function is fatally—but tacitly—to compromise it in the others.

H. Richard Niebuhr considered the problem of the unity of the three Persons in “The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church.”²⁹ His approach is historical rather than systematic, but it is quite sufficient to display the issues raised by unitarianisms. The question before which men turn to unitarianisms is the three-fold question whether God is good, whether God is powerful, and whether, among all the spirits at work in human communities, any are ultimately trustworthy. In the unitarianism of the Father, the god is the god of nature and of power, but the Son is not really divine. In the unitarianism of the Son, the god is Jesus alone, and the god of power is assigned to the Old Testament and then rejected. In the unitarianisms of the Spirit, the emphasis is put on inner or spiritual life (sometimes as experienced in community), at the expense of history and nature. Let me restate Niebuhr’s criticism, in a form closer to the problematic of the three functions: In the unitarianism of the Father, what is shaded is first the importance of and need for redemption from sin. But concealed in this is also a compromised way of handling the problem of power, and all second-function issues: this god is a god of action, but when human action is frustrated, this god is not really there to help. The unitarian tacitly trusts that human action will not be frustrated. In the unitarianism of the Son, the god is nominally good and provides a definition of good in human life, but he is powerless to do anything to enforce the good. On closer look, this god, supposedly the god of the first function alone, is not really capable of handling disappointment in his own department, the redemption of sin. His ways are our ways, his good is our good, and when our goods are exposed as less than Good, he is not capable of bringing grace. In the unitarianism of the Spirit, the community has retreated to within itself, abandoning the realms of nature and history as unredeemable. But this retreat inevitably turns the community’s faith into a henotheistic commitment to its own interests, in denial of the common need of all creation.

To ask in a general way how the three functions are interrelated is a philosophical problem: How are order, action, and sustenance interrelated as those concepts generalize and show themselves in all of life? I do not attempt to solve that problem; it would be a major conceptual and

²⁹H. Richard Niebuhr, “The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church,” *Theology Today* 3 (1946) 371-384.

metaphysical task in its own right. Littleton and Dumézil pass by the question of the principles of the three functions with minimal interest in its phenomenology and no interest in its metaphysical aspects.³⁰

In a sense, then, from a contemporary perspective, the patristic settlement leaves us with a set of grammatical rules, the definition of a genre of God-explanation.³¹ It is possible to determine whether a particular explanation of God is in the tripartite genre or Trinitarian sub-genre, but the genre-rules alone will not determine the contents of all explanations in one of these genres. The tripartite genre consists in thinking in terms of the three functions, but it allows subordination, vesting sovereignty in only one of the three, and it allows some separation of the co-ordinate concepts in each of the three functions. The trinitarian sub-genre allows none of these: in effect, it rejects “hellenization” of dogma (the asymmetries, subordinations, separations of the three functions that were common in Hellenistic non-monotheistic religion) at the same time as it accepts the Indo-European conceptualities of the Hellenistic world, because it could hardly do otherwise—the three functions were presupposed at so deep and so tacit a level that no other conceptualities were available or thinkable.

As I have said, when the tripartite mind comes upon something and suspects that it may be a phenomenon of interest, complex enough to merit a structural analysis, it looks for features of the phenomenon from each function. What an individual author will find in each function is in general quite unpredictable. It is as if the tripartite mind calls to the phenomenon, to show itself in each function. What features of the phenomenon will show themselves is a matter of hermeneutics and the mystery of Being. They cannot be determined in advance by any sort of calculus; this is more a work for poets. There is also no guarantee that what shows itself in one of the three functions will successfully represent the function itself, all that *could* appear under that function. Exploring the network of relationships of differentiation, mutual presupposition, and underlying unity of the three functional principles would be a major work of metaphysics. It would be an inquiry into the nature of the categories of order, action, and sustenance, as they function in all Being.

³⁰Littleton, pp. 4-5, gives it a few paragraphs. *L'idéologie tripartite des Indo-Européens* occupies a small part of Dumézil's work.

³¹But Edmund Hill, in his Foreword to Books 5, 6 and 7 of Augustine's *The Trinity* (Brooklyn, New City Press, 1991; p. 186), says that Augustine is not so much talking about the Trinity as talking about how to talk about the Trinity. So the distinction appears already in patristic literature, well before the modern interest in language philosophy.

One of the tasks of such a metaphysical inquiry would be to shed light on the relations of mutual interdependence of the three functions and the underlying unity presupposed in them. In effect, to speak of one is to speak of them all, though only one be manifest for the interests of some particular explanation. Augustine struggles with the problem in *De Trinitate*, Books 6 and 7, but formulates it only in concrete analogies, not in abstract terms. When Aquinas deals with the problem, he introduces the term *appropriation*, meaning that some things are common to the three Persons, “but for greater clarity are attributed to one person.”³² Thomas’s definitions appear in Articles 7 and 8 of Question 39, devoted to this problem.

I answer that, For the manifestation of our faith, it is fitting that the essential attributes should be appropriated to the persons (Art. 7).

...

I answer that, Our intellect, which is led to the knowledge of God from creatures, must consider God according to the mode derived from creatures. (Art. 8).

He continues in Article 7, to note that “[t]he essential attributes are not appropriated to the persons as if they exclusively belonged to them; but in order to make the persons manifest . . .” (Ad 1). This is an almost candid explanation of how tripartite thinking works: a unified phenomenon is understood under the rubrics of the three functions, and this could implicitly be done in more than one way.

As the Trinity was conceptually assembled, the three Persons came from diverse origins: God the Father came from previous conception of a transcendent God, God the Son came from experience in history, and God the Holy Spirit was a Jewish notion before (and after) the New Testament. Having diverse sources, the three Persons could be conceptually broken loose from their original function-roles, and each come to manifest all three functions. There are accordingly nine possible manifestations of the three functions—three for each Person. In the simplest understanding, only three of these appear. It is as if God has been tripartitely analyzed twice, in different ways, and only three of the resulting possibilities have been emphasized. One tripartition is according to the functions, the other is according to the sequence history, transcendence, immanence. The appropriation that we see is a matrix of possibilities, as in Table 1. Claude Welch and David Brown take such

³²Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Trinity and God the Creator* (St. Louis: Herder, 1952), p. 274, commenting on Q. 39, art. 7 of the *Summa*.

Table 1: The common experience of the Trinity

	history	transcendence	immanence
first function	Son redemption		
second function		Father creation	
third function			Holy Spirit sanctification.

Table 2: The Trinity in all its possibilities

	Son	Father	Spirit
first func.	Son / 1f.	Father / 1f.	Spirit / 1f.
second func.	Son / 2f.	Father / 2f.	Spirit / 2f.
third func.	Son / 3f.	Father / 3f.	Spirit / 3f.

an approach.³³ The appropriation matrix need not be diagonalized; in principle, all nine matrix elements could be manifest, as in Table 2. In effect, it is possible to make the Trinity as simple or as complicated as one wishes: but when the explanation is done by recursive elaboration of tripartite distinctions, in which the members are related to one another as the three functions of the Indo-European system, the doctrine reflects that system.

Usually, the appropriation matrix is not completely diagonalized. The function of order may be assigned in different respects to Father and Son: moral *law*, statute, is defined by the Father's will. As will, it is a form

³³Claude Welch, *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Thought* (New York: Scribners, 1952), and David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (Chicago: Open Court, 1985).

Table 3: The Trinity in a second appropriation

	Son	Father	Spirit
history 1st f.	juridical action (redemption)	juridical order (the law)	
trans- cendence 2nd f.	cosmic order (logos)	cosmic action (creation)	
immanence 3rd f.			spiritual sustenance (sanctification)

of contingency or limitation. Moral *action*, as exposure, is performed by the Son, in the Passion and redemption. Correspondingly, cosmic action, creation, in its contingency, is an act of the Father. The intelligibility of the cosmos is assigned to the Son, the Logos, a first-function aspect of God, and early taken to be present at the beginning of creation. In effect, deity has been analyzed into three functions twice, in different ways. An appropriation matrix to describe this could be devised in several ways, each growing from a different selection of “axes” on which to plot the appropriations, as in Table 3, or, if different reference-concepts are chosen, as in Table 4.

It is a fact of tripartite analysis of a unitary phenomenon that features manifested in it can be appropriated on different occasions to different functions. This is perhaps an essential speciation on the way from the generic (and traditional) Indo-European polytheist tripartition to tripartition as we have it in the Trinity. Thus cosmic and juridical order can each be taken in the first or second function. Juridical order, appropriated to the Father, as contingent, is assigned to the second function. As order (and as arising in history, which provides moral order in the present), it is assigned to the first function. Cosmic order, appropriated to the Son, as order, is assigned to the first function, but as contingent, it is assigned to transcendence and the second function. The relation of the intellect and the will (the first and second functions in a tripartite anthropology) will be an intimate one: they can be distinguished, but not separated. And order for Trinitarian Christianity will always be a

Table 4: The Trinity in a third appropriation

	history	transcendence	immanence
first function	Son juridical action	Son cosmic order	
second function	Father juridical order	Father cosmic action	
third function			Spirit.

contingent order.³⁴ I suspect that this transformation has its origin in the Jewish roots of Christian monotheism, where the first two functions are not distinguished in a systematic way at all. The attempt to express that Jewish (and un-Indo-European) commitment in tripartite and Indo-European terms inevitably calls for a theory of appropriations. It is by means of concepts such as appropriation that a creative theologian has endless possibilities in unfolding the doctrine of the Trinity. Indeed, it is by means of appropriations, which may be elaborated as necessary to describe a phenomenon of interest, that Christian theologians, like the Greeks before them, could look at the world with new eyes, with criticism and observation, rather than forcing it into a pre-established pattern—yet still work with a pre-established set of concepts.

It is possible for an appropriation to become so scrambled that it is no longer recognizably either monotheistic or tripartite, in spite of purporting to be Trinitarian. The Trinity is sometimes explained in terms of omnipotence (the Father), goodness (the Son), and sanctification (the Spirit). Only the third function has survived intact. The trouble is that the monotheistic transformation in the second function, the work of God the Father, has been lost, and omnipotence, while correctly ascribed to the second function, no longer is marked with the function of transforming limitation into blessing. To compensate, goodness is assigned to the Son, but as this sort of once-monotheistic thinking evolves in practice, it would appear to be goodness which *exempts* from limitation, rather than redeems it. As such, the Son has been put to work in the second

³⁴I have in mind Thomas F. Torrance's *Divine and Contingent Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) at this point, though other works could doubtless be cited as well.

function. Redemption from sin, the transformation of exposure, is quietly forgotten, and with it, the first function.

It is possible to refer some feature of life on different occasions to different functions. Indeed, knowledge is usually taken in a first-function sense, showing cosmic and moral order within the created universe. In ALHR, Part III, I shall look at knowledge *of God* in a second-function sense, where it is tied to the action of the faithful man. Action, of course, is usually taken in a second-function sense, but one could search for it in the other functions as well. In the end, it is necessary to remember that in the mystery of Being, when the interpreter calls to a phenomenon, asking that it show itself in three functions, it *can* show many things; it *will* show only one from each function. And the showing, a revealing, is then also a concealing. A community of interpretation has an inevitable temptation to regulate its interpretations in such a way that conceptual order is achieved. This has the incidental effect of appearing to give it power and control over the mysteries of Being and God. But where a revealing is also a concealing, there is a liberty of interpretation, and that liberty is subject to criticism as responsible (or not), but it is not to be tested for correctness by way of some calculus. (This is the problem of Part II.) The proper remedies are not in ever more precise regulation of theological language, to the point that theology appears to be totally determined, as if all of theology could be derived from the basic monotheistic commitment to the universal providence of God and a little logic. Instead, proper respect should be shown to the God-given “dependent independence” of creatures, to use Thomas Torrance’s phrase. And genre rules should cultivate the sense of contradiction and reversal in monotheistic faith, and so always be hospitable to irony and rhetoric. (This is the problem of ALHR, Part IV.)

3.4 Monotheism Beyond Tripartition

Let it not seem that we are interested in monotheism only in its tripartite form, for tripartition is a cultural heritage that is separable from radical monotheism, and the central affirmations of monotheism are quite portable beyond the realm of tripartition. The tripartite ideology in Christian hands is one way of expressing radically monotheistic commitments, but there are certainly others. The Christian expression of tripartition in the doctrine of the Trinity is also usually integrated tightly with the incarnation, God in the first function acting in history in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. This too is distinguishable from the other component ideas in Christianity and other incarnations of monotheism. Our interest

in this book is in the logic of monotheism for its own sake more than in its specifically Christian instances, though most of the examples will relate in one way or another to Christian concerns. The best way to begin is simply with examples, from within and outside of the ambit of monotheism, and later to reflect on the role of tripartition in shaping monotheism where it is the dominant conceptuality.

Return to the Shema again. We saw it briefly in section 3.2. As I remarked there, the series *lev*, *nephesh*, *me'od* appears very poorly translated in the Septuagint and the quotations in the Gospels.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone; and
you shall love the LORD your God with all your *levav*, with
all your *nephesh*, and with all your *me'od* (Deuteronomy
6.4-5, JPS Tanakh).

The JPS translates *levav*, *nephesh*, and *me'od* as heart, soul, and might, not yet exactly an Indo-European triad, but a translation which follows the Septuagint, which has *kardia*, *psuche*, and *dunamis*. The Gospels quote the passage, but they have changed it. Other English translations (the RSV, for example) do very much the same. *Kardia* remains, but *psuche* has been supplemented by *dianoia*, mind. In Mark and Luke, *dunamis* has become *ischuos*, a synonym for strength. The result is to force the Shema toward Indo-European categories, whereby the first and second functions are displayed unambiguously. The original sense of the series *levav*–*nephesh*–*me'od* might have been preserved in translation, but as we have it, it was not. *Me'od* has been treated the worst in the New Testament translation; lost in Matthew, it appears as “strength” in Mark and Luke, but strength is not really its central meaning. Examination of the usage of these words in the translated Old Testament and of the comments in a lexicon amply confirms the suspicion that in translation they are often forced to become Indo-European function-specific.

Translations into one or another Indo-European language may differ, but the closest example (English) will exhibit the problems of translation well enough. Concordances and the Brown–Driver–Briggs–Gesenius lexicon illustrate the function-neutrality of these words.³⁵

Lev, the root of *levav*, the first term in the series in the Shema, would seem to defy its translations, for it is translated in so many ways, though in the overwhelming majority of cases it appears as “heart.” Also as mind, understanding, wisdom, and significantly, midst, and even once, consent. It is the inside as opposed to the externals, occasionally even of things

³⁵Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown–Driver–Briggs–Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers, 1978).

(the midst of the sea). It is the seat of will and the emotions: passions, appetites, trouble, courage, sorrow and joy, not just the intellectual faculties. And it is the seat of moral character. Clearly, it cannot be assigned to any one of the three Indo-European functions, and the translation as “heart” is accordingly a reasonable one.

Nephesh, the second in the series, is usually translated as “soul,” and Gesenius even remarks that it is often assimilated to *lev*. But its other meanings are instructive, for its second meaning is life, and by extension, body, person, beast, man, mind, will, desire, self. It verges on being a substitute for pronouns—the essential features of the life of a person stand for the person himself. If *lev* is the inner man, *nephesh* is the inner part that stands for the whole. Like *lev*, *nephesh* does not fit into an Indo-European function, and “soul” preserves this neutrality, but the richness of its less frequent translations could easily be forgotten in its most common translation.

Me’od is the most surprising of the three. It appears as strength or might in the translations of the Shema, and this might seem to fit into the Indo-European second function. But far more common is its use as an adverb: “exceedingly,” “greatly,” and related ideas; the most frequent translation of all, outnumbering all others, is simply “very.” The root can mean “to add,” hence what one gets after addition—more, muchness. Some translations show it as money or property;³⁶ so it manifests neutral and possibly third-function meanings, but not really a second-function meaning of force, contrary to what appears in the translations. Even a meaning of money or property is more an example of its sense indicating the person and everything remotely connected to him; since these translations all occur from a Semitic language, a function-specific intention of the third function is dubious.

The three words *lev*, *nephesh*, and *me’od*, taken in a series, constitute a progression from the inner man to his outermost involvements. This is utterly different from the Indo-European way of analyzing phenomena, and it should not be forced into or even toward Indo-European categories, as it is in the Gospels, where mind, strength, and heart would appear to represent the three Indo-European functions.

It is as if one were to plot phenomena in a space of several dimensions: three, for example. Then to use Indo-European categories is to take the three Indo-European functions as three Cartesian axes on which to plot the phenomena of interest. But the terms of the Shema are more like thinking in terms of *spherical* coordinates: radius, latitude, and longitude. Only radius is named, the angular coordinates being assumed; *lev*, *nephesh*, and *me’od* are not different coordinates, but a progression along one,

³⁶See the *Anchor Bible* Deuteronomy.

the radial. One could of course complain at this point, when the Shema leaves out the “angular coordinates,” because they give the functional differentiation so interesting to the Indo-European mind. But one could just as well complain that the Indo-European scheme de-emphasizes the “radial” coordinate, progression from the inner man to man in community.

Now it is possible to understand some of the misunderstandings and disputes in the theological history. If Hebrew and Indo-European conceptualities are as different as one can suspect at this point, It is not surprising that Rabbinic Judaism does not lean heavily on Philo of Alexandria; even less could it make much sense of the Trinity. But *within* the Indo-European tradition, disputes begin to make sense: if an analysis of a phenomenon in an Indo-European language, in terms of the conceptual coordinates that are inevitable in an Indo-European language, fails to preserve the symmetry and equivalence of the three functions, it will eventually fall short of a true account of the thing. If the issue is providence at its hardest, the bringing of blessings in disappointments, and if the three functions are of equal importance, and if they are each dependent upon the other two, then rejection of any one of exposure, limitation, and need will eventually result in rejection of the others.

It is interesting at this point to look at an example of a monotheism which is tripartite but does not embody a doctrine of the Incarnation as we have it in Christianity. Such would confirm the conjecture that tripartition in monotheism (and therefore Trinity) can be distinguished from the Incarnation. The history of controversy over the Incarnation by which the Trinitarian settlement was reached would then appear to be a contingent path to a tripartite conclusion. The place to look for non-Christian but monotheist and tripartite thinking would be in a figure such as Philo, a Jew writing in Alexandria in an Indo-European language, in conversation with Greek philosophy. If the conjecture is correct that Indo-European culture supplies the conceptual structures in which its members think, Philo ought to exhibit tripartite structures at least occasionally, and in ways that Rabbinic Judaism does not naturally do. Indeed, Philo foreshadows many of the moves the patristic writers will later make in transposing Jewish monotheism to a Hellenistic and philosophical (and incidentally Indo-European) world, with the obvious exceptions about Jesus. (For example, philosophy is to be harmonized with Scripture where possible, corrected if necessary.) The most casual search of the article “Philo” in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*³⁷ turns up one clear example of just exactly what one would expect: a Hebrew term that is not assigned to one of the Indo-European functions in its original usage

³⁷Harry A. Wolfson, “Philo,” *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 6, p. 152.

requires translation by at least three different terms in Greek, and the Greek terms *are* function-specific, because the Greek-speaking mind finds it difficult *not* to think in function-specific terms. The term is *tsedeqah*, usually just translated as righteousness. For Philo it is necessary to find three virtues in Greek to represent the original Hebrew concept; two of them appear already in the Septuagint: *dikaiousune*, justice, and *eleemosune*, mercy. Because concepts tend to be forced into one or another of the functions, justice is appropriated to right action, a second-function concept. Mercy in Philo appears as *philanthropia*, humanity, giving help to those in need of it. At this point, we have the second and third functions, lacking only the first. Philo completes the triad of virtues with *metanoia*, repentance, the missing first-function translation of the concept of *tsedeqah*. And repentance is just exactly the response to exposure which we have posited above. Interestingly also, *metanoia* was considered a vice in Greek philosophy, but a virtue for Philo Judaeus and later for Christians. Thus we have here both a full tripartite analysis of the virtue of *tsedeqah* and also the peculiarly monotheistic insistence on embracing the disappointments that come in each function, because they are not barren, but bear blessings.

Some further examples may help, all from outside the Indo-European world, some monotheistic, some not. In the first place, the series *lev*, *nephesh*, *me'od* is not to my knowledge typical of any common series of ideas in Judaism. Much more common are series of number $3n + 1$: 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, . . . , 22.³⁸ One familiar with Jewish ideas can easily enough fill in examples. Among the most prominent is the number 13, for there are supposedly twelve tribes, but Joseph gets counted twice, once as Ephraim, once as Manasseh, and the number 13 has come to symbolize Israel in many places. That number even appears as a symbol of Israel in the Gospels, but to follow it there would take us too far afield. In the experience of God, the ten *Sefirot* will do as an example, one well known for many centuries. David Blumenthal has even compared that way of understanding God in the world with the Trinitarian conceptuality.³⁹

There are other than Indo-European conceptualities about which a little is known, and the Uto-Aztecan language family of Mexico and Central America can serve as an example. For the dominant image is one of the four points of the compass, and series tend accordingly to have four

³⁸I am indebted for this observation to David Aaron in conversation with Edward Hobbs.

³⁹David Blumenthal, "Three is Not Enough: Jewish Reflections on Trinitarian Thinking" (paper read at the American Academy of Religion meeting, November 1997).

members.⁴⁰ Sometimes the center is added, less often zenith and nadir, but the commonest reflections of this idea appear with four parts. This culture does not display the transformation of disappointment into blessings in quite the way that is characteristic of historical monotheism, but it certainly does afford an example of a developed and thematic conceptual-ity very different from that of the Indo-Europeans. This is true of even the few documents that remain from before the Spanish conquest; most of its literature was lost. The forces and rhythms of nature all have a four-part organization, and human participation in nature is designed to reinforce those rhythms in an orderly way. If one were to introduce the monotheistic transformation of disappointment into blessing into such a way of thinking, one would look for a way to characterize the disappointments at each point of the compass, and see how each one in turn bears a blessing. That is not how Christianity in Mexico in its official form developed, so far as I am aware. Whether enough native culture survived to produce unofficial quadripartite themes in popular Catholicism in Mexico would be an interesting research question.

It was Scott Littleton's brief note that led me to Henry Nicholson's work. Littleton also speculated that there are characteristic themes in the Bantu language family spanning many cultures in Africa, but without details, and without any leads that I could follow. That, too, would be an interesting research program. In general, in the light of the Indo-European series recently discovered, it is clear that it is possible for a culture or a family of cultures to have recurrent concepts and ideological habits that are identifiable and interesting. Other cultures provide some relief from the Indo-European world and its ideas. Independently of Littleton, it was observed in one or another introduction to the *Tao Te Ching* that there are more than seventy sets of paired opposites in that short collection of eighty poems. Lao Tzu usually prefers one member of each pair to the other, but he also is aware that, like yin and yang, the members of each pair tend to be transformed into each other. In its original form, this was probably a way of affirming human life despite its disappointments in the world of nature, or in the human world understood as an extension of nature. What it would become if those transformations were pursued one can only speculate. There is potential material here for radical monotheism, and also a very non-Indo-European context to work in.

When Christianity came to East Asia, with Trinity in hand, the Trinity

⁴⁰Cf. Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology*, p. 273, and Henry B. Nicholson, "Religion in Pre-Hispanic Central Mexico," in George F. Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal, eds., *Handbook of Middle-American Indians*, vol. 10 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), pp. 395–446.

that was originally an instance of the tripartite ideology often got understood in quite other terms. In Korea, the Trinity appears as an instance of the Confucian anthropology of the family: father, mother, son, instead of the three functions from the Indo-European world.⁴¹ The symbols of yin and yang appear, with heaven as father, earth as mother, and humans as children. Earth is feminine and is sometimes assimilated to the Holy Spirit, also feminine. There is a detailed connection with the I Ching and the eight basic trigrams. There is also a serious historical connection with neo-Confucian thought, in the tenth to twelfth centuries CE. Another exploration waiting for more work.

I have likened the choice of the tripartite ideology to a choice among coordinate systems. That analogy, frail as it is, actually will go farther than one might think. In the first place, for those of trinitarian disposition, look at the notion of a point in three-dimensional space. It is truly only one point, and it truly has three coordinates. Neither the oneness nor the threeness can be dismissed as an artifact of the imagination, and there is no opening to the serial modalism of Sabellius. So the analogy can be likened to at least some of the criteria for orthodoxy in the late patristic disputes on the correct way to express the doctrine.

But, one who is familiar with analytic geometry may object, there is also an essential assumption of threeness carried in the dimensionality of the space itself, regardless of whether the coordinate system is Cartesian or spherical (or any other). To be sure. And other cultures live in conceptual worlds in which there are not only not three coordinated basic ideas, but not always even a single series of basic functions. So how can one transform from a coordinate system in a three-dimensional space to one in some other number of dimensions? This is possible—though engineers usually don't find it useful—for it is easy to construct a one-to-one transformation from a space of *any* number of dimensions to a space of any other number of dimensions. I will spare the reader the hideous details and only say that such transformations are not continuous: that is, neighboring points in one system are not transformed into neighboring points in another. And so here, a mathematical analogy for cultural diversity that seemed at its limits in fact reaches quite well to point to features of cultural diversity that seemed beyond its reach. It is precisely because “neighboring” ideas in one culture are not neighboring in another that different cultures can have such a hard time understanding each other.

One may then ask about the role of the title series in this book, exposure, limitation, and need. It is an instance of the tripartite ideology, and it is an instance of Trinitarian thinking. It is also a choice like a choice

⁴¹Jung Young Lee, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

of coordinate system. Lacking a “coordinate-system”-independent way of thinking about life and culture, some choice of coordinate system is necessary. Not being able to think like a native outside of my own mother-culture, I thought it prudent to work with the conceptual categories that I know best. Most readers will be in the same position, at least those thinking in the English language. The choice to work in familiar conceptualities is not just one of convenience or even necessity. To attempt to work in some other conceptuality while still writing and thinking in an Indo-European language runs great risks. For any thinking in an Indo-European language will tend to introduce the tripartite categories. And if some other conceptual system is mixed with the tripartite ideology, the risk is that some part of the tripartite ideology will be neglected, and that neglect will in the end take over and subvert the very monotheistic transformations of disappointment that one sought to support. (It is not, by the way, as if monotheism has not been subverted from time to time in its Christian career. We shall see as much in Part II.)

Several things should be clear at this point. The tripartite conceptual system is culturally relative. In no way am I advancing it as an absolute ontology. The implications of this cultural relativity cannot really be well explored until other cultures are better known than they are now.

What is not obvious yet from this presentation is that the tripartite system has some real difficulties. It tends to artificially separate the three functions in human phenomena that are originally organic unities. In particular, it tends to separate the first and second functions (and often neglect the third). Intellect and will, cognition and action, are seen as not just distinguishable but radically different “all the way down.” In fact, for many human purposes, if one looks closely enough, they are originally intimate with one another, and come to be distinguished only late. Much of the labor of ALHR, Part III will be in aid of reestablishing that original intimacy, of finding the roots of cognition in active choices. Now the inveterate Indo-European mind, of course, has ways of dealing with such things within the tripartite system. We saw examples in the appropriation matrices for the Trinity. A phenomenon that does not fit cleanly into a tripartite categorization simply gets tripartitioned recursively, until a fine enough approximation is reached to handle the problems. That is not the strategy that I shall follow in ALHR, Part III, preferring instead a simpler approach. With these cautions, the series exposure, limitation, and need will serve well enough as a tool to explore the ways in which radical monotheism transforms the disappointments of life into blessings in order to affirm all of life.

Chapter 4

The Labor of Faith

4.1 Mistakes for Monotheists

The monotheist's core belief, that all of life, disappointing events included, brings blessing, fairly begs to be twisted. "Sin the more, that grace may abound" is not the last example of such an interpretation. For example, one could conclude from the commitment to embrace exposure that people should be allowed no privacy. Or one could mislocate the good in the disappointing events in their disappointing character, rather than finding the aspect which actually bears the blessing. The general injunction to find good in the disappointing events can be twisted to give license to envy, the vice that seeks equality not by increasing its own good but by decreasing another's—it can invoke the language of monotheism to gratuitously expose, frustrate, and dominate others. And there are yet subtler ways to pervert the monotheist's commitment to embracing all of life, so that it provides a shield for covertly rejecting some engagements with life. In effect, the monotheist's commitment can be not just misunderstood or occasionally twisted, it can degenerate, as a program, into something different from monotheism.

In the first example of the chapter, it could seem from the prescription that monotheism is open to blessings in the disappointments of life, that the monotheist just accepts whatever comes, passively: that he is apathetic, incapable of serious struggle for any goal or purpose in life. This would be a serious misunderstanding of monotheism, and of providence and a covenantal attitude toward history. The faithful man works with whatever possibilities are presented to him. He seeks good in them, if necessary, at the cost of great effort. The question *of* monotheism is *whether*

there is any possibility for good in the limitations one is up against. The question *for* the monotheist is to find *how* there is a possibility for good in the limitations he is up against.

We are on the threshold of the problems of Part II. But before we cross into Part II, the problem of interpretation (*how* the monotheist finds blessing in limitation), it is time to clear up several kindred misunderstandings. The later parts of the book will encounter problems specific to interpreting, knowing and naming God's providence. But there are ways in which trouble can arise that are visible already at the preliminary level of construing monotheism as the embracing of all of life as good, disappointments included. In each of them, the monotheist can go wrong in the very act of trying to live his monotheism. In a way, it seems the monotheist has avoided one rejection of disappointment only to fall into another, and opposed, rejection of the opportunity-bearing disappointment in the same situation. Usually, the problem is covered up in the language that is used, and that kind of pathology will have to wait until ALHR, Part IV for exploration. For the present, the examples themselves will suffice to illustrate what is involved.

One can accept limitation in resignation, collusion, and collaborative surrender, or take it as an opening to change for the better, albeit at cost of struggle. A different sort of problem arises with exposure. With exposure, for example, one could conclude that because exposure brings a blessing, therefore no one ought to be allowed any privacy. And in the case of need, that the one helping may rush in and help an other in need without troubling to listen to or respect the other person in his own desires and right to act on his own initiative. Yet another way of going wrong arises in some defenses of monotheism, wherein the very structure of religious speech acts undermines what they apparently affirm.

Trouble arises in the way that the monotheistic reappropriation of disappointment as blessing is implemented. In the move to embrace the disappointment as bearing blessing in one way, the possibility of a blessing in another way is overlooked. The one confronted with another in need rushes in to help—but ends by taking control, and so strictly limits the other's claims. The one bent on accepting a limitation—in the name of monotheism—uses that acceptance as a cover for not working with its opportunities. The one who has seen a hint of his sins, eager to be rid of them, takes offense because the exposure and amendment of life cannot be consummated instantly. He has been made to wait. Because these rejections of disappointment as barren in one way arise insidiously in the act of trying to embrace them as fertile in another way, they can arise at all only as sins in the labor of faith of a monotheist. One who is not a monotheist can reject the same disappointments as barren, but he

does not come at them in quite the same way: his rejection is simple and direct, not the corruption of an attempt to find the blessings in them.

What is at stake in one way or another in each example that we shall come to is an issue of *how* to find blessing in the possibly disappointing circumstances one is thrown into. Without exploring the issue of the “how” of faith for its own sake, it is possible to make some generalizations. The examples that follow in this chapter occur often enough that they can serve as prototypes of the hazards intrinsic to faith’s encounter with exposure, limitation, and need.

In the rest of the chapter I collect a miscellany of common ways the monotheist can go wrong. There is not a unifying theme in them beyond the fact that they are common and that they have acquired a characteristic monotheist’s gait in stumbling. In meeting limitation, as has already been suggested, there arise two despairs: one may (in apathy) not work to turn limitation into opportunity, or one may (defiantly) refuse to submit to the real limitations of the situation. When one meets an *other* person in disappointment, and if one believes that the disappointing situations bring blessing of some sort, then one is willing to share in those disappointments. A certain consistency is called for, and something is wrong when it is missing. The test of belief in providence is at once a willingness to share in other people’s disappointments (disappointments that one hopes bear good for them), and also the respect that will give the other room to handle his situation in his own integrity. When the monotheist is called upon to give an account of his faith, there are hazards in answering: if he defends what should not be defended, but only confessed, he has tacitly rendered his stated loyalty secondary to some other, possibly still unstated center of value, but one different from the God of monotheism.

4.2 Faith and Struggle

To refuse the limitations one is thrown into is an act of despair, to treat them as barren, to give up hope. To put it positively, meeting life in faith usually requires an active response, not one of passive acceptance, especially when life brings a disappointment; limitation, for example. But limitation is also opportunity: to live is to be thrown into a situation and forced to do something with it. The opportunity is a chance to make something of limitations, by work, and possibly by struggle. It is impossible to see with certainty what possibilities are contained in the limitations we are up against. But one must struggle anyway. Often, as it turns out, the possibilities imagined and hoped for were not really there,

yet were not known to be impossible. To be a monotheist is then to risk oneself in the possibilities that are offered, unknown though they be.

Niebuhr claimed that “the causes for which we live all die,” but it does not follow that the causes for which we live are worthless, not good causes. Niebuhr, as I read him, is arguing instead for a perspective that keeps the goods of life in order, and ordered by the ultimate perspective that in the end, they fail and we die. They are nonetheless goods, and goods *of life*. John Silber puts it this way, in reflecting on the goals of a liberal arts education:

The humanities succeed, when, confronting man with his approaching death and eliciting that dread appropriate to this thought, they encourage him—in celebration of life—to invest with passionate seriousness in enterprises and in an existence that will not endure. Mankind and the humanities will flourish in no other way. This is their purpose, their relevance, their necessity.¹

The most prominent alternatives are an apathy that does not invest at all (because one will not live to see the returns on the investment), or a lifestyle of self-assertion of oneself that is nevertheless a defiance of the very conditions for being what one is. It is a refusal to live in respect of one’s own situatedness in an existence that will not endure. Despair manifests itself in that the defiant one asserts himself, but will not work to pass on as a gift to others what will eventually be taken away from him: life.

Yet the mere fact of struggle does not insure that the one struggling is in faith. Defiance of limitations can be an act of faith, faith that they can be overcome, or it can be simply refusal to accept the situation and the self one can be in it. In *The Sickness Unto Death*,² Kierkegaard focuses on despair, and he argued that there are two forms of it: the despair of defiance and the despair of weakness. What is at stake is the human self, and to be a self before God is a “tremendous exertion,” (as opposed to weakness, I presume), and a “tremendous responsibility” (as opposed to defiance).³

Kierkegaard locates the virtue of faith between paired and opposed vices. In this insight, he is not the first. It appears in the ethics of

¹John Silber, “The Alienation of the Humanities,” *Academic Questions* 2 no. 3 (1989 Summer) 11.

²Søren A. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death; A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1980).

³*Sickness Unto Death*, the preface.

virtue, where a virtue is usually opposed by two vices; both cowardice and foolhardiness are opposed to courage. Obviously, when a virtue is to be found between opposed vices, sometimes seen as a mean between extremes, it is easy to shift the assessment of the actions so that the virtue (if it is being opposed) can be made to appear as either vice, or one of the vices (if it is being promoted) can be made to appear as the virtue. (Contemporary American political commentators call this “spin control.”) The two vices exhibit the two forms of despair. In both of them, one refuses to be the self one is; in one form, apparently manifesting no attempt to be anything at all, and in the other, attempting defiantly to be something else. But apathy is in fact a form of refusal: refusal to be the self-in-struggle that one is called to be in the world one has been thrown into. And foolhardiness is a refusal to respect the possibilities and limitations present in one’s life-situation.

Sometimes, the limitation one faces is constituted by wrongdoing. It may be individual or collective, it can be the wrong of actions or of institutional structures. It is not only right, but even necessary, to oppose that wrongdoing, to persuade people to cease, by force, if necessary. Sometimes, the limitation is natural, not a result of human actions, but just a fact of life. The temptation is surrender, resignation, even masochism (I come to this in a moment); in the end, collusion and collaboration. This instinct has acquired a name, “quietism,” and when it is advocated, it minimizes human activity and responsibility, promoting instead complete passivity and annihilation of the will.⁴ In an age such as the present one, which values action and overcoming limitation above all, it seems amazing that anyone could approve a condition in which one abandons oneself, and cares neither for heaven nor hell. When consciously pursued, this path is one of meditation in which one simply rests in the presence of God. This is not wrong: at least in the Benedictine tradition, the monotheist may legitimately pursue a contemplative life, though not to the exclusion of active work, and not without support for the active work of others against pain and wrong. More informally and in a casual way, and without the self-parody of quietism, one simply gives up in the face of limitation or moral ambiguity.

One who is stuck in pain can perversely declare the good to be in the pain itself, for its own sake, rather than in the situation bearing pain, and the unseen opportunity that is the right focus of hope. This is masochism. Peter L. Berger, in *The Sacred Canopy*, discusses masochism as a religious and sociological category, rather than a psychological one.⁵ It appears in

⁴*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, “quietism.”

⁵Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), ch. 3, “The Problem of Theodicy.”

many religious attitudes, some quite at odds with monotheism, but it can infect and corrupt monotheism as well. Where there is pain, a *theodicy* of some sort is needed, to make sense of the pain. The defense of God can be turned to a legitimation of society, of its institutions, and a defense of the price in pain and unfairness of supporting that society. The individual is enjoined to submit to the pains. Even a society that encourages individuals to explore the possibilities of life will nevertheless ask of them a certain denial of the self, its needs, anxieties, and problems. The denial is more acute in less just societies. The attitude of submission becomes easier when the cosmic order requires it. This attitude can be intensified, reducing the self to a thing-like existence, passive before neighbors, society, and gods. Such a stance is internally self-contradictory, inasmuch as human beings are inherently active, constituted as dynamically related to their own possibilities, rather than as passively accepting them. A masochistic stance is also precarious, and the one taking it is accordingly vulnerable, inasmuch as he can be exposed in his masochism.⁶

The way of hope, threading one's actions between defiance and despair, is fraught with paradox, because one who invests in the causes of life ought to know that they will eventually die. If he thinks they will not die, as in, "The causes for which we die live on," he is enmeshed in a henotheism, and his unifying cause has been erected as a center of value beyond which there are no others. It is not easy to work for a cause, knowing that it will die, and *then* rest content in the presence of God when that presence is manifest in and after the failure of human efforts, not in renouncing efforts from the start.

There is a prayer attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr and so widely retold that tracing it to a citation is not easy:

Lord, give me the courage to change the things that can be changed, and the serenity to accept the things that can't be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference.

The task is clear enough, and the difficulty: the wisdom to know the difference, and to see what change is needed, and how it may be effected. The difference from masochism is that monotheism is not simple *submission* to the one God, but takes its name from Jacob, the one who is renamed after the struggle at the ford of the Jabbok: "Your name shall no

Cf. esp. p. 55.

⁶Berger credits Sartre for the concept of masochism, but Berger's appropriation for purposes of sociology seems to me to be more helpful. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, translated by Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), part 3, chapter 3/I, pp. 491–493.

longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have been strong against God,” (Genesis 32.28).⁷

The despair of defiance is sin and vice. If the monotheist’s faith can degenerate insidiously into henotheism or polytheism, it is also true that sometimes the vices can be converted gradually into the virtues. Defiance is often expressed at the same time that one takes action to deal with the limitations of a situation; and in taking action, and so finding the good there present, he has in his actions contradicted the words that take offense at limitation. Having taken action, and realized the opportunity, the offended words can later be forgotten. There is a parallel with apathy and the contemplative life: one can slide into the other, but the traffic can go both ways. It just seems that distressingly often, it is in the wrong direction.

The common theme that runs through these things is offense: the various ways of rejecting a situation or engagement with life as barren. The roots of “offense” seem to mean kick at, stumble, cause to stumble, and only derivatively, wrong-doing. To *take* offense is to reject something as barren. The line between this and merely expressing appropriate grief or outrage at pain and wrongdoing is easily clouded.

4.3 Consistency and Respect

If the monotheist believes that the pains of life bear good, he believes that other people’s pains also bear good, and *if he is consistent*, he is willing to share in that pain in order to share in that good. Because the other’s lot is good, he is willing to share in it. Because of his own commitment to take it as good, he is willing to share in it. He acknowledges a common humanity in the other’s exposure: compassion, recognition that he too is subject to be exposed. He will help the other in need, and share in the other’s limitation. The ultimate seal of consistency lies, for monotheists of the Christian sort, in the Incarnation: when God himself shares in the painful goods of the human life that he creates. I shall return to this in the next section and in Part II.

To share in the other’s limitation “to some extent”: it is not appropriate to drown with a drowning man, but it is appropriate to attempt to save him, at some risk of drowning oneself. It may be possible to generalize as to how one ought share in another’s misfortunes, rather than assigning

⁷Interestingly, Gerhard Von Rad comments that the original meaning of “Israel” is “may God rule;” the grammatical sense of “God” (*El*) has been turned from subjective to objective. Cf. *Genesis: A Commentary*, translated by John H. Marks, revised edn. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 322.

all judgement to “context,” but I don’t know how to do so. That most mysterious of the Stoic cardinal virtues, justice, right action, hides the problem rather than solves it. What is right action is a complex matter of history and reason, not easily summarized in a few principles. But if the one who claims to be a monotheist is not willing to share in the other’s lot at all, we know he is inconsistent, and his profession of monotheism is in bad faith.

For the monotheist, all that *is* is good. But to say this is immediately to define a radical difference between right and wrong. For it is then wrong to reject some parts of life as bad if all parts are good. One cannot draw a distinction between one part of life and others and reject one part as bad, evil, barren of good. Just because all that *is* is good does not mean that all that is *done* is right. How something is good is open to interpretation, and inasmuch as the “whether” and the “how” of the good in events are inextricably intertwined, to dispute one can be a cover for disputing the other. When one’s environment is conditioned by the acts of others, those acts may, taken as givens, be regarded as part of the created world, and thus good, and *at the same time*, taken as human acts, be very wrong. This can hardly be easy. The monotheist is committed to opposing them, taken as human acts, and to working with them as part of the opportunities of a created world for good. His response may do both at the same time. But he does not take offense at them, in the sense of faulting *God* for creating a world in which free people sometimes turn to hideous wickedness. This touches the puzzles of the peculiar language game known as “theodicy,” defending God, which I defer to the next section.

Incomplete conversion can occur not only in these aspects of the monotheist’s life, but in yet others. Consider what can happen in the face of suffering. Søren Kierkegaard’s description applies to limitation as well as exposure, and as often as not, they are well and thoroughly intertwined. He calls it *poetizing*. The sufferer is stuck in some limitation, some torment.

So now he makes precisely this torment the object of all his passion, and finally it becomes a demonic rage. . . . Once he would gladly have given everything to be rid of this agony, but he was kept waiting; now it is too late, now he would rather rage against everything and be the wronged victim of the whole world and of all life, and it is of particular significance to him to make sure that he has his torment on hand and that no one takes it away from him—for then he would not be able to demonstrate and prove to himself that

he is right.⁸

Later, he recognizes the torment as to be given up, but instead of *doing* it, he “poetizes” about it. He relates to the good through the imagination, instead of existentially striving to be it. He has a conception of God—but such a convoluted and twisted one!

He loves God above all, God who is his only consolation in his secret anguish, and yet he loves the anguish and will not give it up. He would like so very much to be himself before God, but with the exclusion of the fixed point where the self suffers, there in despair he does not will to be himself. . . . He . . . dimly understands that he is required to give up this anguish—that is, in faith to humble himself under it and take it upon himself as a part of the self—for he wants to keep it apart from himself, and precisely in this way he holds on to it, although he no doubt believes this is supposed to result in parting from it as far as possible, giving it up to the greatest extent humanly possible (this, like every word from a person in despair, is inversely correct and consequently to be understood inversely).⁹

Obviously, this sort of offense and despair are possible only for the monotheist, for only the monotheist is attempting to embrace exposure and limitation as bearing blessing. The pagan does not sin in the same sense, for he does not sin “before God,” i. e., before the God of monotheism, the God who transforms disappointments into blessings.¹⁰

Consistency is at stake in some of these examples, thoroughness of conversion in others. Respect for other people can also be the pivot of error. Bonnell Spencer explains that at the root of the monastic virtue of chastity is simple respect for other people:

Chastity is reverence for the integrity of persons. Not only does it refrain from exploiting them or using them as things; it always seeks a person-to-person relationship as far as possible, one that respects to the full the personality of the other.

Accordingly, it never tries to do good to or for the other, to dominate, control, or manipulate him, even for his own advantage. Rather it so humbly serves the other as to help

⁸*The Sickness Unto Death*, Hong translation, p. 72.

⁹*The Sickness Unto Death*, pp. 77–78.

¹⁰*The Sickness Unto Death*, p. 81.

him find for himself and develop through himself his own potential.¹¹

Poverty is respect for the environment, and obedience is respect for oneself. Obviously, obedience is the subtlest and hardest to unpack. Less obviously, chastity is the one most commonly violated. We live in an age when abuse and domination of others disguised as “help” are common. A proverb captures it: one of the Three Great Lies is, “I’m from the government, and I’m here to help you.” Only a monotheist could disguise domination and abuse in such a manner, because only a monotheist is committed to helping the other in need in the first place. Appreciating and cultivating and enforcing respect for other people in a context of helping is a skill that this culture often lacks.

A little reflection will show that the pitfalls of help fallen into disrespect can come in two ways. When one body meets another, the other may be treated as so ordinary as not to merit any respect at all, or the other may be idolized, and so the appearance of respect conceals exactly its opposite. The other may be another in need, or the other before whom one is exposed, or the other by whose presence one is limited. For a monotheist who is specifically a Christian, it is interesting to note that the two ways of evading the other parallel the two major ways of compromising a christology. In one, Christ is taken as “merely” human, i. e. of no significance that would make any real demand, and in the other, as so wholly divine that the appearance of respect conceals an attitude that is quite opposite. The first mode of evading the other (simply refusing his demands utterly) is something that all are capable of, whether monotheistic or not. The second mode of evading the other (while pretending to meet him) is specifically a degenerate form of monotheism.

There are errors peculiar to meeting exposure. Where does one draw the line between exposure that frees from sin and exposure that intrudes destructively on legitimate and innocent privacy? Why are we not to conclude from the monotheist’s commitment to openness that nobody should have any privacy?

In the first place, when the monotheist meets contingency as exposure, limitation, and need, the situation characterized thus is involuntary; if it is chosen, the characterization is not really accurate. In other words, the monotheist meets the situation as it is, rather than ascribing to the world what are in fact his own choices. Self-exposure, particularly to the public, is not at all the same thing as involuntary exposure, and even involuntary exposure can confuse the exposure of wrongdoing and intrusion upon

¹¹Bonnell Spencer, OHC, “The Vows,” *Holy Cross Magazine*, 9 no. 3 (1970 Autumn) 7–8.

privacy. Without careful distinctions, confusion can lead to abuses of the monotheist's creed. If what is exposed is wrongdoing, the faithful monotheist responds with acknowledgment, repentance, amendment of life, feelings of remorse, and ultimately, freedom. This is exposure in the cultural idiom of the Indo-European first function: legitimacy is at stake. When there is no wrongdoing, but merely invasion of privacy, the exposure might almost as well be treated under the aspect of the second function, a limitation placed upon life. People in public life speak of this colloquially as living in a "goldfish bowl." Here we see again the nature of the Indo-European tripartite system as a constructed interpretation imposed upon life. In reality, the three functions are intertwined, and the first and second most intricately so. The clue is that when there is no wrong exposed, the exposure is to be embraced other than by repentance; it is treated as a limitation. As often is the case, the limitation is met by overcoming it; in this case, restoring some measure of privacy.

Some common-sense observations: Self-exposure in public is shamelessness; hence the secrecy of the confessional. Exposure of others, when gratuitous, is wrong; when undertaken in the service of combating wrong, it may be right. As Matthew has it (18.15-17), the offender is to be confronted first in private, and only if that does not work, later in public. Gratuitous forcible exposure of others' privacy is a form of disrespect for them, hence of unchastity. In extreme cases, whether or not it is physical, it is akin to rape.

There seem to be multiple senses of exposure, and accordingly, of the responses to it. The problems of illegitimate exposure seem to arise when what is exposed is private. Sissela Bok defines privacy as

the condition of being protected from unwanted access by others—either physical access, personal information, or attention. Claims to privacy are claims to control access to what one takes—however grandiosely—to be one's personal domain.¹²

Mere secrecy is intentional concealment, not exactly the same thing as privacy, though they often overlap.

A key to the problem seems to be the various meanings of the word *shame*, the natural response to both exposure and invasion of privacy. Carl Schneider explores this in *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy*.¹³ There

¹²Sissela Bok, *Secrets; On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), p. 10.

¹³Carl D. Schneider, *Shame, Exposure, and Privacy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977, 1992).

are other English words for concepts related to shame, but not the distinction provided in other European languages between the shame of privacy and the shame of disgrace. Hence for us there is some confusion. The recognition that there are two kinds of shame is the key to unraveling the problem. One can be rightfully ashamed of one's past; yet one can "have no shame" in the self-exposure of innocent behavior. What is common to exposure in both cases is the pain, and it is fear of contempt, abandonment, vulnerability, rejection, and, possibly, of disgrace. Discretion-shame is protective covering, like clothing. Obviously, as clothing can conceal stolen goods, it can conceal wrongdoing. Both reticence to intrude and forcible exposure can constitute respect for the other person, as appropriate to various occasions. The monotheist does not inflict pain on others gratuitously, not by exposure, nor limitation, nor by domination in the act of responding to need.

What are the limitations in a situation, and *what* is the import of exposure, are matters of interpretation, permitting a responsible liberty in meeting them. Weakness before the interpretative task—even in interpreting oneself—warrants the protections of privacy. Weakness before the power of others to *misinterpret* in a hostile way deserves protection.

It could seem that we have a vice-virtue-vice triad, in which the virtue is a mean between extremes: Modesty and chastity lie between shamelessness on one side and cover-up of sin on the other. This is even helpful, to the extent of reminding one what to check for in examining his conscience. But the mean is not a quantitative one—for the features of a situation that call for or against disclosure can be quite various. One must look for them, and listen, to let them show themselves. As usual with a vice-virtue-vice triad, it is possible to shift the scale of evaluation so that either vice may be made to appear as the virtue, or the virtue to appear as either vice.

Nevertheless, to be exposed can be received as gracious or as offensive. Nietzsche and Sartre reject it as offensive; Carl Schneider cites the Collect for Purity as capturing the rock of stumbling:

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known,
and from you no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our
hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may
perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name
....¹⁴

Sartre and Nietzsche are deeply affronted by the Other who is a subject incapable of being an object, yet before whom man can be an object. It

¹⁴The collect appears in the *Book of Common Prayer* at the start of the Eucharist; Schneider cites it at p. 132.

is this insecurity that the collect embraces; the petition for the help of the Holy Spirit is an expression of faith in *not* being abandoned, condemned, confounded, rejected, disgraced, permanently ignored, before either one's fellows or eternity. To pray this prayer is to be acutely aware of one's own vulnerability, and ought by implication to make one aware of others' vulnerability, and so of their need for respect.

4.4 Defending God

God is indefensible. Yet the unwary continue to defend Him, and, by presupposition, thereby open up their faith and even (by implication) God himself to legitimate attack. The very act of defending God and faith in God functions in a way that betrays faith; one can only confess faith, not defend it. It can be explained, to be sure, where it is misunderstood, and one who is responsible must be prepared to explain what he is doing with his life. But one can only reason from, not to, a starting point.

These questions, and talk about them, are not terribly old. They acquired a name only in the Baroque period: "theodicy," literally, defense or justification of God. The rubric of theodicy collects together many common ways for the monotheist to err; it is the last that I present at the close of Part I. There are both moral and logical dimensions to theodicy, as we shall see, and they bear connections to issues in social ethics: matters beyond simply justifying God. As the issue arises, it seems to come from two roots: doubt about the "existence" of God (coupled with confidence in the power of reason to resolve such doubts), and questioning in the face of the various kinds of pain and wrongdoing in society and the world. This is known as the "Problem of Evil." Stated succinctly, how is it possible that a God who is omniscient, omnipotent, and benevolent can create a world with so much evil in it? He is ignorant, incompetent, or malicious.

Every body, monotheist or not, faces pains in life, sometimes mounting to suffering and affliction. And everyone responds with grief. But the monotheist does not take *offense* at them, in the sense of faulting *God* for creating a world in which free people sometimes turn to hideous wickedness. He may indeed, and rightly, respond in outrage to others' wickedness. I am not making a conventional "free will defense" of God; this is not a *defense* of God at all. For a creature with free will to fault God for creating creatures with free will is to take offense at one's own being, to fault God for creating us as we are. Even to acquit God of malpractice in creating free creatures is, by presupposition, to admit the legitimacy of

the charge. The presupposition of admitting the charge is at least as bad as the overt response of an acquittal, an apparent un-offendedness, for it insinuates that the creature could legitimately take offense if it wanted to. The monotheist's not taking offense is not a matter of forensic logic at all, a logic of accusation and justification. Nor is it a matter of showing that a world of free creatures (though possibly flawed by its pains) is better than any other conceivable world. It is simply the world we have and the people we are. It is not as the *conclusion* of an argument that the monotheist declines to take offense at God for the abuses of human freedom,¹⁵ but as the *start* of religious faith. It is a confessional matter. Obviously, one can take offense at being thrown into life as the person one is, bound in some ways, free in others, and one can even take offense at one's own freedom. Many do. But the one who does, in that act of taking offense, is making of his life something different from monotheism.

The intertwining of the moral and logical or ontological issues in theodicy, when examined, resolves eventually into a priority of the moral. The moral issues present the evidence to decide the logical and ontological questions. For when theodacists and their debating partners discuss the possible "existence" of God, the evidence that might count for or against it always seems to turn on the question whether disappointing events can bear any good: the question of providence at its hardest. And the question of providence is rarely formulated among theodacists in terms which do not prejudice its answer.

When the pains and wrongdoing of life are characterized as "evil," it seems to me that offense has already been taken at them. Otherwise, what more does the word "evil" add *qualitatively* to the words "pain" and "wrongdoing"? There are degrees of pain, from inconvenience to suffering and affliction; and degrees of wrongdoing, from peccadillos to hideous wickedness. But apart from matters of degree, and apart from combining the disappointment of contingencies with the disappointment and disapproval of wrong human actions (at some possible loss of clarity), my suspicion is that what the word "evil" adds is *offense*: it is presupposed in the word "evil" that evil events are somehow unredeemable, barren of providence. In this word, the question whether they can bear any good has been raised, and presumptively answered in the negative. When the "problem of evil" is posed in this way, its answer—a guilty verdict—is presupposed in its formulation. If the reasoner is open, this presupposition will issue in a candid rejection of God. In some ways, this is the better outcome. In the other case, when the reasoning *appears* to end in an acquittal, in "faith" in God, the results are more disastrous because they

¹⁵To take offense at God for human wrongdoing should be a sign of a cover-up of the human wrongs, and also a sign that God is being invoked in that cover-up.

are concealed and insidious. Performatively, theodical discourse which appears to vindicate God, by reason of its admitting the legitimacy of the indictment against God, has embodied within itself a contradiction: The grounds for offense against God are tacitly present, but unacknowledged and covered up. The offense will appear in the living, and in the way discourse about God is then used on other occasions and to meet other issues. One cover-up leads to another, one covert taking of offense leads to more.

But this is not the only flaw of theodicy; for the very posing of the problem puts the creature in a position to sit in judgement of its creator. The term "God" is redefined, performatively, as less than divine, by the act of judgement of the creature. For the [G]od who is made to appear before the bar of human reason does so within a larger moral cosmos in which he is an actor, but not the creator. The moral limitations of life and the cosmos are then higher than God, not authored by God. The "God" that is spoken of is not really located *in* the contingencies and moral principles of life and the cosmos that truly cannot be changed (often cannot even be conceptually questioned), but are just "facts of life." This "God" is made subject to them in the act of bringing him to bar before them.

Job is the locus of this issue in the Bible; yet those who read Job so easily turn it into a treatise, rather than an existential (and possibly ironic) challenge. In so doing, they assimilate it to the very discourse which in its presuppositions sits in judgement of God. It is not true that the faithful creature may not *question* God, or *protest* to God; many post-exilic Psalms, undeterred by Job, are full of question and protest. One can even *accuse* God, but the accusation is also an appeal to God as the just One. What the Psalms do not do is turn away from God, taking offense at God.

But look further at the structure of theodical discourse, pathological though it is. It presupposes that one can move from self-evident propositions, accessible to reason alone, to God. One, but not the only, alternate assumption is that the believer makes a "leap" of faith that is utterly inaccessible to reason. This is called "fideism," and I come to it in a moment. First, look at "self-evident propositions": to claim a start from them is the essence of what is today called "foundationalism," the belief that it is possible to find absolute foundations for philosophy and religion and all that is built upon them. "Absolute" here means *not* relative to history, language, or community. This commitment to absolute reason is the motor of the Enlightenment.

It has become fairly clear when the Enlightenment's hermeneutic of suspicion has lately been turned back on its own projects, that the

project of an absolute reason was not at all reasonable, but covered up its own relativity to history, culture, and special interests. What has not received much comment is that biblical religion is perhaps the original anti-foundationalist movement: it is candidly historical in all its creeds. From the Short Historical Creed which Gerhard Von Rad has traced from the Exodus through the later stages of the Common Documents,¹⁶ to the creeds of the Christian church and the historical records of talmudic decisions, both Judaism and Christianity are historical to the core. To be grounded in history is to be grounded in a *confessional* stance; it is not something that could be justified or defended, even though the one taking it makes unconditional demands on others. Such demands are in the heart of the commitment to the goodness of all of life: the implication is unavoidable, that if all of life is good for the believer, it is so also for everyman. This implication is usually evident to the bystander, whether or not it is articulated (and he may respond accordingly with offense). And disputes over confessional commitments cannot be resolved by reason alone, but must be met in experience and living. Confessional commitments *can* be explained honestly. Thomas Aquinas meets the issue in the first Question of the *Summa Theologica*. As any science does not argue in proof of its first principles, but only argues from them, so Scripture, which here seems to sit above even metaphysics, can dispute only with an opponent who admits at least some of the principles contained within it. "If our opponent believes nothing of divine revelation, there is no longer any means of proving the articles of faith by reasoning, but only of answering his objections—if he has any—against faith."¹⁷

The objection is raised against a stance of this sort that it is "fideist," that is, that the resulting faith is not accessible to reason at all and must be accepted by the believer with a faith that does not ask to reason or understand. In fact, faith is obliged, as Thomas notes, to give a candid account of what it is doing. In that candor it achieves *responsibility*, a virtue that H. Richard Niebuhr especially prized. The questions it must ask, posed as often from without the community of faith as from within, are different in and since the Enlightenment. In its *critical* project, the hermeneutic of suspicion, the Enlightenment (and especially its latter-day children) seem to me to have made real and valuable contributions to the career of monotheism, even if the criticisms were originally raised in a hostile spirit. Grounding in history, community, language, and cultural structures has become evident in ways that were possible only when the prior claims of absoluteness in these respects were made at the start

¹⁶Cf. Gerhard Von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (London: SCM Press, 1966).

¹⁷ST, I, Q. 1, art. 8.

of the Enlightenment. ("Truth proceeds more readily from error than from confusion.") It is not possible to criticize or judge God, but it is completely possible to criticize and judge traditions, human institutions that embody monotheistic faith, and human explanations of faith. This is the essence of demanding and enforcing responsibility; or perennial reformation, in Niebuhr's terms.

What we have come to, or returned to, lying beneath the pathologies of theodicy, is the confessional nature of the faith that is at the basis of living. For the Enlightenment, this is a rock of stumbling so offensive that it is usually well covered up. When the Enlightenment makes confessional commitments, and it does, it demands assent to them in absolute terms ("self-evidence") so total as to conceal any relativity they may in fact contain. For only the most obvious example, the sciences, which the Enlightenment claims to represent and to generalize to the rest of life, are committed to an exposure to truth that is an ultimate scientific value. It is *always* better to face the truth than to evade it. This is axiomatic for science and for the Enlightenment. No justification is given for it; it is taken as "self-evident." This commitment comes from Western monotheism,¹⁸ and the debt is unacknowledged. Even though the "copyright" on the idea of embracing exposure is expired and institutional religion is no longer in a position to collect royalties on it, the origin is still covered up. If it were acknowledged, it would in principle undermine another commitment of the Enlightenment, the rejection of history. And once acknowledged, it could lead to the messiness of *how* the commitment to embracing exposure works out in practice, a very historically-relative matter.

Given the Enlightenment's dislike of history and historical relativity, how can it live with confessional commitments at all? It hides its own and takes the disclosure of another's confessional stance as definitive refutation of that stance. In a climate that demands reasoning to religious starting points from the "self-evident," the reaction to the Enlightenment could only disguise its confessional commitments as such reasoning. Thus was born biblical literalism. Taking the Bible "literally" enables the believer to present it as a record of events that exhibit in themselves *evidence* from which one could reason empirically. (This is a long way from a testimony that makes an existential appeal.) But if the logic of such "literalist" discourse is examined, it is in practice utterly invulnerable to empirical criticism (this, from its confessional nature), yet it appears to be empirical (thus putting the required face on its commitments). Confessional commitments have lately gotten some attention, but they

¹⁸This, and other commitments of science can be found in Niebuhr's *Radical Monotheism*, chapter VI.

are not yet well explored. In particular, philosophers are loth to conceive that they could embody *truth* about life or the universe. Such truth would be of a different constitution from the empirical questions that can be resolved by mere inspection of the relevant facts.

Lastly, theodicy, while appearing to be about God, can in fact be used to legitimate social institutions and the suffering that must be borne by their inhabitants to support them. Indeed, in the sociology of knowledge, the term is evidently taken to have this as its primary meaning, bracketing its religious sense entirely. Peter L. Berger sees theodicy as one of the essential tasks of a shared cosmic and social reality.¹⁹ If a society is to be maintained other than by continual violence (and it is not clear that something maintained by continual violence could even *be* a society), some sort of legitimation must be provided for it, and the conceptual structures of this legitimation are taken as reality. This reality is socially constructed, but it appears to work much better if that relativity is concealed. The inevitable pains of life, natural and man-made, have to be given at least meaning, whether or not they can be ended; else social order topples before the resulting chaos.

The machinery of legitimation can be used to defend unjust social arrangements as easily as the just. In retracing the move from theodicy as theology to theodicy as social structure, the legitimation of a social structure can become the root image for a worldview and for an appropriation of the cosmos that embodies within itself all the ingredients of a response to the problem of disappointments: whether and how and where providence is to be found in life. Peter Berger, borrowing from Max Weber, sees a spectrum of broad types of social theodicy. (This is a sociologist's meaning of "theodicy," not that of the philosopher of religion.) In various ways, they all differ from the later monotheism of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, though most of them can be found within the Bible and subsequent Jewish and Christian history. Duplicating Berger's explanation will not be necessary. I merely note the items of his list as ways that monotheism can come to work unnoticed like something else.

For monotheism, all that *is* is good, even though the good is often not yet made patent. Mysticism can slide into taking all that is *done* as right, even as it slides past the agony of goods that are pathological because not yet consummated. This is the least rationalizing of the possible social theodicies.

The most rationalizing is the doctrine of karma: that every good and evil act is compensated, sooner or later, in this or subsequent lives. Other forms of compensation, this-worldly and other-worldly, are more common in the West. Compensation in the present in this world can be found

¹⁹Cf. *The Sacred Canopy*, chapter 3, "The Problem of Theodicy."

in Psalm 37. Compensation in the future can be found in the apocalyptic movements of inter-Testamental Judaism and subsequent Christianity. Compensation in the next world is familiar; it is the commonest degeneration of monotheism in America. (The Gospel, by contrast, offends this theodicy by promising that the undeserving will go to heaven, and nobody is forced to go to the other place; only those who choose to do so go there.)

A different strategy of social theodicy is taken by dualisms: the cosmos is the arena for a combat between good and evil, originally coordinate and opposed powers. The world is *not* originally all good. The cosmic powers of light and powers of darkness are reflected in the mundane world.

What Berger calls “radical monotheism,” appearing in Job, is a turning of the blame for evil from God to man. Berger’s understanding of radical monotheism may be adequate for purposes of sociology, but it seems dubious as a reading of Niebuhr, who originated the term. Nonetheless, Berger does see that radical monotheism simply renounces blame of God.

It can turn into a simple *submission* to the will of God, and we have noted already that this is an alternative to the confident struggle with life and with God that earned the name “Israel.”

Berger’s instinct is quite correct in locating the peculiarity of monotheism (at least for Christians) in christology: the Incarnation is the test of God’s consistency in creating a good world that is nevertheless full of pain, and in its freedom, the arena of much wrongdoing. God enters into the good world on its own terms, and the result is a blessing of the world. To say this is to confess a faith; it is not to cite the Incarnation as historical proof which would excuse one from faith at this point. (Confusion at this point so often leads to degeneration!)

Rabbinic Judaism achieves the same result by other means, or perhaps, in view of the risks of appearing to give reasons, by simply positing it confessionally as an article of faith, without visible means of support at all:

[Judaism’s] faith is suffused with optimism which derived not from extended national prosperity or political power or prolonged security—rare phenomena indeed in Jewish history, but from a rejection of all dualism and from an unshaken belief in a Guardian God of goodness and justice.²⁰

Whatever Rabbinic Judaism may say about the Incarnation or the theological significance of Jesus, it has embraced exposure, limitation, and

²⁰ Abba Hillel Silver, *Where Judaism Differs; An Inquiry Into the Distinctiveness of Judaism* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1956, 1989), p. 195.

need as bearing blessing, simply as part of God's created life (certainly not by virtue of their disappointing character). And it has done so as an expression of its central religious commitments. This is not to say that the trio of exposure, limitation, and need is a Jewish way of classifying the hard parts of life. Nevertheless, it has been because of Jewish embracing of these disappointments, when others around them (all too often Christian) would not, that Judaism has been a rock of offense to its neighbors.

Returning to the Christian account, the redemption of pain (limitation) appears in God's consistency, in entering into the world he creates, and sharing in its pain. Redemption of need appears in the faith, expressed in the Incarnation, that we are not alone. Redemption of wrong appears in that the Cross is exposure. Embracing exposure at this point is a renewed license (it appears already in prophecy in the Common Documents) for criticism of social institutions, not the legitimization of corrupt institutions. Far from being necessarily an agent of bad faith, religion can be quite opposed to it.

We have come, at the close of Part I, through an exposition of a rudimentary phenomenology of faith, the characteristic essentials of monotheistic faith, some of its more prominent features, and some ways it can go wrong. The next step, in Part II, is to look at the "how" of providence as it is humanly appropriated, a thing that is historical to the core.

Part II

How is God Present?

Chapter 5

Disclosure and History

5.1 Why History?

It could seem that, in the specification that the monotheist embraces all of life as good, we have a finished description of monotheism, leaving only details and applications yet to be supplied. But when one continues with John Courtney Murray's questions and asks *how* the various events of life could all be blessings, it becomes clear that the answers to his second question are not already contained in the first. The simple explanations of Part I lie on top of something that is more complex, harder to pin down, and above all, historical. We shall see basic religious options in a new light, for one who lives in history must then choose how to relate to history. Niebuhr's typology of religious options will be supplemented with one from Merold Westphal:¹ (1) One can relate positively to life, taking it as primarily history, with nature present secondarily (*historical-covenantal* religion). (2) One can relate to nature, omitting history, and in effect escaping from the hazards of history into a safety of nature (*mimetic* religion, seeking mimesis of nature). (3) Or one can seek escape from both, positing an ideal realm from which this world is an exile, and to which one seeks return (*exilic* religion).

We easily ask, "If God is present, how is he here? What is he doing now?" The question is one whose answers may be visible in the present, but they are about the future, and, for historical religion, they are seen in the light of history. What is possible, how things really are, what is

¹Merold Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). Hereafter GGD.

good, all these things show themselves in the world, and the responsible person is expected to take them into account. What does it mean to be in the world, then, in which the good shows itself?

Do things show themselves adequately, so that one can in fact see the possibilities for life? This is not obviously so—one could complain, and many do, that history is the realm of uncertainty, at best an unreliable guide. To depend on history is to depend on something that can be known only poorly and inaccurately when it can be known at all. Moreover, it can be known only by subjective biases that are so corrupting that one can hardly call what results “knowledge.” Yet on closer examination, and against such objections, the question of providence turns out to *presuppose* a historical approach, and the apparent impediments to knowledge turn out in reality to be the preconditions of knowledge. The idea of absolutely “objective” knowledge of history turns out to be a mirage. I shall try to illuminate how existence in history is presupposed in any approach to humanly significant matters. One could not prove this; to try to prove a presupposition would be circular.

Then, in the remainder of this chapter, we shall examine how history works as the light in human life, whereby one can take one’s bearings for action. *That* history functions this way is a confessional commitment; for many, history is irrelevant or worse, a source of darkness, not light. But this entire inquiry is an exposition of a confessional commitment. To see what is possible, what has happened and its influence on the present and future, what (and who) one has to work with, is necessary if one is to act. To believe that what happens in life is good is to focus on life as a story, a narrative. The experience of finding the good (or being found by it, more surprising) is the experience of God’s acts in history. The experience of learning how to find the good in life is revelation. The succeeding chapters will explore the world of life as history.

In chapter 6, I survey the alternatives to history-focused religion. These alternatives will appear in the subsequent discussion, and it will help to recognize them early. In real life, as distinct from clear pedagogical typologies, religions are usually more mixed in type than pure. What we learned from H. Richard Niebuhr to call radical monotheism will turn out to be religion focused on history, and affirming life in history, lived in a covenant. Religion focused on nature (rather than history) and affirming life as mimesis of nature will be called *mimetic* religion. Religion that considers life as defective in some way, an exile from some other and more desirable state, will be called *exilic* religion.

In chapter 7, two aspects of history and historical knowledge will show themselves: historical religion and historical knowledge are analogical, and they are confessional; these features are intimately related. What

results is that historical religion allows its partisans a certain freedom, a responsible liberty, in the conduct of their affairs, even in the conduct of their relations with God and providence.

In chapter 8, I look deeper into the relations between Christianity and Judaism, and at Christianity's compromises with exilic and henotheistic religion as they underly its attitude toward Judaism. Uncovered at this point will be issues of critical history, cultural relativity, and religious pluralism.

In chapter 9, I take a more general look at the relations of the believer to critical history, cultural relativity, and religious pluralism. The encounter with critical history will be the focus of these issues.

History is, at a minimum, the unnoticed background of human life. It turns out to be more than that, but we had best begin by pulling the thread that unravels the idea of timeless truths of reason, direct (and more importantly, timeless) revelation of God to man, and whatever other ways of forgetting or suppressing history have been devised by religious thinkers since the Baroque period. History may not seem like an important part of religion, and much of modern culture still gets away with ignoring history. (Even academic settings where religion is primarily a historical phenomenon sometimes do not notice that history is important in and of itself for some religions.) For popular Christianity, revelation and knowledge of God are a "deposit," whose material and factual circumstances are important only because, were they fictional, the deposit would then be untrue, neither binding nor of any help. The particulars of the revelatory events, their relation to a wider context in history, and the earlier inheritance of First and Second Temple Judaism are simply ignored. What was conveyed in revelation is something that can be separated from the events of its delivery; the events do no more than certify it, they are not actually part of the revelation itself. The history is forgotten as soon as the content of revelation is abstracted from it. A little more is claimed on behalf of the Atonement, but not much, and that only occasionally.

Yet we live in history. We think of the present and future in terms of the recent past, and here, we do remember a little history. We explain our problems by our past. When the problems are opaque, a little history will often clear up the puzzles. In fortunate times and places, people think of the future as change, and change for the better, and look back on a history they call "progress." In less fortunate circumstances, people inherit conditions of ethnic strife or subjugation to imperial powers that are geopolitically so thoroughly entrenched that the roots in history are lost and forgotten. Yet such conditions are inherited, not imposed by laws of nature; and that fact points to history.

When individuals try to make sense of their own lives, they tell stories. When they are in trouble and seek to change, they turn to biography as to the raw material that both illuminates the trouble and provides the means for change. Implicitly, their own stories are situated in history: marriages, jobs, wealth, poverty, and children are all set in the larger background of wars, vicissitudes of the economy, and changing social structure and fashions and movements. When people speak of “since The War,” “the Depression,” or even “since the interstate highway,” they touch both the contingency and the relative immutability of the historical givens within which life has to be lived. When people imagine what they can do with their lives (seeking “role models” is the current idiom in American culture), they turn to history, whether it is to personally known individuals or to personages that are known culture-wide. It is particularly easy to point these things out in America, which has had a relation to history that is, more often than not, optimistic; yet even in lands which have traditionally viewed history as the realm of the baffling, the cyclically frustrating, and the unchangeable, history in the twentieth century has intruded, sometimes even for the better, usually with changes that break the bounds of any cyclical view of perennial and unchangeable limits of human life.

The question raised is whether history, the background of human life, is the key to understanding life, or is instead an impediment, a source of obscurity and confusion. Can we reliably know enough of history to learn from it? Can we draw practical inferences from it to our own lives? And can we bridge the gap between present and former worldviews, a gap whose dimensions can stretch to a chasm?

This chapter then proceeds in three stages. The first (sections 5.2 and 5.3) will bring detail and organization to the observations of the role and place of history in human life. In the second (section 5.4), we shall see history under the aspect of its disappointments and perceived threat to religion. In the third (section 5.5), it will be possible to see how history can be gracious. The guide for the first stage will be the first parts of Heidegger’s way to a phenomenology of human being: what he calls being-in-the-world. For the second stage, we shall move from Heidegger to Ernst Troeltsch. And for the third stage, the grace of history, the guide will be H. Richard Niebuhr’s *The Meaning of Revelation*. Hopefully it will be possible to thread economically through the sometimes dense arguments of these thinkers, and yet retrieve a solid enough understanding to give a usable idea of what historical religion is about.

We come to the relation of the believer to history, and focus on history as it is visible and tangible. There are nevertheless features of the believer’s stance that transcend its visible and finite dimensions, and so

constitute his stance as something with an eschatological reference. The concrete can be seen; the eschatological cannot. The sense of the transcendent that is missing in the early Heidegger is present in Niebuhr's account of history, but tacitly so. What is tacit in Part II of this book, focused on history, will eventually become focal in ALHR, Part III, examining human knowledge and action. The problem of transcendence arises in looking at human action and the contexts within which it is conceived, contexts eventually wider than concretely visible history. The challenge is to evoke the transcendent without drawing it into the intramundane on a level with other intramundane phenomena. But first, the context in history.

5.2 Being in the World

Martin Heidegger's work in the 1920s re-envisioned what it is to be human in ways that have an enduring capacity to illuminate. Yet this was not his overriding aim: his goal was to understand Being, and human being was to be only a station on the way to that goal. The larger project, a fundamental ontology, would have characterized the being of every being (and would incidentally have afforded man some measure of conceptual control over the resulting world). Because it resolved itself into a project of control, Heidegger later declared it to be misguided. But out of the larger ambitions there survives a partial phenomenology of human existence. That partial phenomenology of human being brings to light some of the relations between human being and truth.²

The posing of the problem, the way to a phenomenology of human being, human existence, can be recounted easily enough.³ "Being" has many senses; this insight is at least as old as Aristotle. He rejects the notions that Being is itself *a* being, or that it is a genus (presumably the highest and most inclusive genus).⁴ And he sidesteps others' temptation

²In treating Heidegger's inquiry after Being as an entry into the constitution of one sort of being, man, I perhaps exemplify the target of his argument, the tradition that sees beings and is oblivious to Being itself. To return, with Heidegger, to Being itself would take our focus from God's providence to God himself. One thing at a time; in this work, the primary focus is on providence and man's relations to it.

³A longer account, with background in Heidegger's situation in the 1920s, may be found in the Introduction to Heidegger's *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

⁴*Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962). The standard page numbers are of (I believe) the tenth German edition; here p. H-3 in Macquarrie and Robinson's margin. I shall

to close off an investigation of being by dismissing it as self-evident, thereby covering up the mystery it might hold. The challenge at this point is to carry out the inquiry without leading it off in directions that are arbitrary, but instead take it where being will show itself as it truly is. Whether or not he succeeded in that methodological goal, his strategy bears rich fruit for those interested in his observations on human nature. He turns the question about being back onto the questioner, man, for man already brings an understanding of being to every encounter with beings.⁵ It emerges in the course of the first Division of *Being and Time* that merely among beings, there are several radically different modes of being, modes that are at best obscured, more often just forgotten, in modern philosophy. The starting point, the focus of questioning, and the one who questions are *Dasein*, in literal translation, there-being. To be human is a species of “to-be-there,” and by presupposition to have a “there” in which to be; to be *Dasein*. *Dasein* shows itself first as the sort of being that questions and understands being. That it is *Da-sein*, there-being, asserts the presupposition that it and its “there” are co-original and are not separated but features of an original unity. Man and world occur together; unraveling them will disclose them in successively more original layers of features that Heidegger calls *existentialia*.

It would risk superficiality (and inevitable inaccuracy) to provide a micro-commentary on *Being and Time* here. It would also be unnecessary, as many excellent commentaries are available. I present only those features of Heidegger’s argument that will get us quickly to the relations between man and history.

The measure of Heidegger’s insight in turning the question of being back on the questioner can be seen already in asking what are everyday artifacts and implements. What is a hammer, what is paper, what is a chair? The hammer is Heidegger’s famous example.⁶ Asking about a hammer, one could reply, with the instincts of modern (i. e., eighteenth-century) philosophy, that it is two cylinders joined, one of wood, one of metal, such that the axis of the wood cylinder is fixed perpendicular to the axis of the metal cylinder, and the wood cylinder is of greater aspect ratio and lesser weight. Such a description presupposes that what constitutes the thing as what it is is exhausted in its being a solid body in a transparent fluid medium (air). Perhaps the location of the body in Cartesian three-space can be added, but that is its *where*, not its *what*. This is very nice, and even, with some further refinement, accurate. But

cite them in the form “SZ, p. 3,” meaning *Sein und Zeit*, p. 3.

⁵Heidegger cites Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-I, Q. 94, Art. 2, in this connection.

⁶It can be found in *Being and Time*, at SZ p. 84.

it might just as well be a description of an item of fuel used by aliens made of anti-matter in the matter-drive of their star-ships. It is not a description of what makes a hammer a hammer. A hammer is a hammer because it fits into a world of nails and two-by-fours and plywood and metallurgy and chemistry and housing. What lives in houses is man: a hammer is a hammer because it fits into a human world. Being a hammer is inseparable from its human involvements. The modern philosopher might acknowledge those involvements and even concede that they are inseparable; but he will not grant that they are essential, of the “essence,” and so of the *being* of the hammer. He may affix these involvements with metaphysical epoxy to the essence of the hammer, but he forbids them to participate in it. But on the contrary, when one intends a hammer, what one intends extends to all its involvements. Without those involvements, the thing would not *be* a hammer. This is what is meant by “essence.” Among the implications is that the being of the hammer is not entirely locatable in space and time, it cannot be confined within the bounding surface (the surface of its two conjoined cylinders) that defines its material extension.

Once one catches on how to do it, the involvements of any common object can be uncovered. Hubert Dreyfus has done it for the notion of a chair.⁷ The class of chairs resists definition in terms of the geometric properties of its members, for no properties are held in common by all the members. Any definition of a chair will not enable us to pick out chairs reliably. The key is the skills we have in dealing with chairs, as with any simple piece of everyday equipment. What makes an object a chair is its function (an intentional concept): its role as equipment for sitting, in a total and practical context. This presupposes many things about human beings, among which are fatigue, how the body bends, and a network of other culturally defined equipment; tables, floors, lamps, etc. And it presupposes skills: we understand how to sit in many different social situations. There are different chairs for each. One that he missed was the sort of chair that looks like a giant pretzeled paper-clip, made of steam-bent laminated wood, with two pads attached. If you didn’t know what it is, you would think it was another work of “art” perpetrated on an unsuspecting public by a modern abstract expressionist. It is supposedly for sitting at a computer. It doesn’t look like a “chair” at all, but it is sold as a chair, and it is undeniably equipment for sitting.

For another example, to look at “paper” and describe its essence as cellulose that has been flattened into thin sheets after some chemical

⁷His remarks can be found in *What Computers Still Can’t Do; A Critique of Artificial Reason* (New York: Harper and Row, 1992), p. 37. Dreyfus has in mind Wittgenstein as well as Heidegger; but they are quite congenial at this point.

processing is to miss the point. Its involvements can be hinted by noting the extended senses of the word “paper,” to which cellulose is incidental: the morning newspaper, an article in a technical journal, a student’s exercise, an articulation of official policy, and so on. And papers can be had on-line in full-text databases without the presence of any cellulose at all.

That the involvements of a piece of equipment are part of its essence and not accidental to it can be seen in colloquial (i. e., casual, non-philosophical) usage. Ask someone, about a strange piece of equipment, what it *is*, and the other will not consider that he has given an answer until he has intuited what it is *for*. Merely that it is made of wood (or whatever) and has a certain shape does not answer what it *is*. People are exquisitely sensitive to whether something is merely natural but inorganic, or biological, or an artifact. Ask what an artifact is, and the answer has to include what it is *for*. Asking further, *how* does it *be* what it is, one must answer with its human involvements. They are essential to its ontology. There is then an intimate union of subject and object, and it is prior to any distinction between them.

If one pulls at the thread that lies exposed in the human involvements of hammers and papers and chairs, it will lead in sequence to further human involvements, and eventually to human living itself. We have several quite different modes of being visible at this point. The hammer is an instance of the *ready-to-hand*, what is useful, as in tools. That mode of being can degenerate, by deprivation of its human involvements, into mere raw material: the *present-at-hand*. Human being is an instance of something different; *Dasein*, as Heidegger calls it. But there is more. The totality of involvements is a (or the) *world* of human being, and things are constituted as what they are within and with reference to such a world. A world has been quietly presupposed in the description of hammers and chairs. For the hammer is such only *in a world* of other equipment—nails, houses, etc. The worldhood of the world is a feature of human being, and being-in-the-world is accordingly the next stage of inquiry.

Human being, the being of the one who has involvements with equipment, is always being-in-the-world. “World” in this sense means the *human* world, but understood without consciousness attention to its ontological structures; it is the world that is quietly presupposed in human involvements and human living, whether one knows and says this or not. If “place” were not such a loaded word, entraining within itself a host of Cartesian assumptions, one could simply say that the world is the place where people live.⁸ To live in the world is an intentional structure, one

⁸To show that “place” should not entail the full apparatus of Cartesian coor-

that projects its own being, and projects it on both the world and itself. To be human is to imagine oneself and the world in their conjoined future (hints of temporality, still to come in our inquiry).

Human being is constituted as thus projecting the being of itself and the world. As such, it is a process of disclosure of itself, and with itself, an uncovering of the world.⁹ Heidegger's train of thought next encounters three coordinated features (*existentialia*) of Dasein: *state-of-mind*, *understanding*, and *discourse*. The German for "state-of-mind," *Befindlichkeit*, could be somewhat hazardously translated by parts as "finding-oneself-ness"; it carries overtones of finding (or losing) oneself in the world, and in so doing, projecting one's state of being and prospects. As Dasein finds itself, so also it understands the world. This is a pre-understanding that it brings to the world and entities within it, not something that is added to sensations or other "raw" knowledge. Pre-understanding¹⁰ yields, through testing and correcting, to a worked-out understanding much as the initial value in a mathematical iterative process is corrected to the final value, to which the mathematical approximation process converges.¹¹ One approaches things and affairs in the world always with an initial pre-understanding that they *are* things and affairs in the world, and as such have certain characteristics. The initial assumption can later be corrected in its details, if it is tested. But this aspect of human understanding of the world is "built-in," always present.

In parallel with state-of-mind and understanding, Heidegger names discourse, and this part of his exposition has not won universal acclaim from his readers. It does, however, I believe, belong here. Heidegger's exposition of discourse in *Being and Time* resorts too easily to the model of signs to explain language. Language is more primordial than that, and it creates man, rather than being created by man. The insight can

dinates, search a concordance of the Common Documents on the entry "where": most of its instances are quite indefinite as to the coordinates of the place intended, or even whether the place intended rightly has coordinates at all.

⁹One thinks of Kierkegaard's definition of the self as "a relation that relates itself to itself"; cf. *The Sickness Unto Death*, translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 13-14.

¹⁰The term is Bultmann's, not Heidegger's, though it is a trivial extension of Heidegger's terminology. Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 315 ff., and *Rudolf Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, ed. Roger A. Johnson (London: Collins, 1987), p. 141 ff.

¹¹Cf. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd. edition, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p. 190: "Fundamentally, understanding is always a movement in this kind of circle, which is why the repeated return from the whole to the parts, and vice versa, is essential."

be formulated as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann do, in *The Social Construction of Reality*, when, speaking of an infant's primary socialization, they say that the infant receives self, world, and language together in a package.¹² Their discussion provides many concrete examples of how the capacity for the process of acquiring self, world, and language is presupposed simply in being human, whereas the content and outcome of that process may vary wildly with different individuals and societies. Language is not just an index of human involvements, it conditions and enables those very involvements and projections. The ability to intend or project the future upon oneself and the world is immeasurably amplified by language, so much so that language is presupposed in what people do and are. Heidegger later says someplace that "language speaks us" in order to indicate the importance and originality of language in the constitution of human being. Inasmuch as human being is itself a species of disclosure, language is constitutive in the disclosure of selves and the world.

The self so disclosed is a reciprocal structure, a relation to itself, and what is primarily at stake is its being: what, how, and whether it will be. In crude terms, its mortality. Heidegger calls this level of the structure of human being *care*; it is, however, not the *feelings* that one associates with the word "care," but rather the ontological fact of being constituted as related to oneself in the way that feelings of care occasionally manifest. Rather than make the term "care" do double duty, Heidegger identifies the state-of-mind manifesting care as *anxiety*. Fear is directed to some particular imagined or projected future danger; anxiety, by contrast, is not about anything in particular, just about "being there."

Anxiety usually covers itself up. In its everyday mode of existence, human being is not consciously focused on its mortality. In fact, it can be characterized as lost, falling away from itself, thrown into a world that it did not create, and in which it covers up rather than discloses (whether to itself or any other) its true situation. As such, it is *inauthentic*; when Dasein is disclosing its true situation, it is *authentic*. I would not follow Heidegger further here, for he recommends a state of mind which he calls *resoluteness* as the alternative to and remedy for everydayness, as the way to authenticity. This is all too easily construed as a sort of human self-assertion. It was used in the 1930s in support of the Nazis, and it has been used since then by some who would interpret his work as promoting a new

¹²Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality; A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 133–137. This book seems to one who has read *Being and Time* to have a profound overlap with it, though Berger and Luckmann take figures in the sociology of knowledge rather than Heidegger as their point of departure.

sort of Gnosticism. Where Heidegger's resoluteness is to be achieved as an act of will, Rudolf Bultmann, who follows him at a short remove, at least had the good sense to recognize it as a gift of grace, something that is received, not achieved. Yet even in Bultmann's hands, Heidegger's distinctions have been open to criticism. In any case, the ways people honestly and responsibly, if tacitly, relate to their own mortality (or fail to do so) are more subtle and more complex than Heidegger's program of resoluteness.¹³

What is at stake in the characterization of human being as care is what appears in theology as the issue of *providence*: Will Dasein be *provided* for? I use the passive to mark the question as utterly neutral regarding the *who* that might provide; mere circumstances, happenings, what insurance companies call "acts of God" are at stake. Human being is constituted as care in virtue of its vulnerability to disappointments and eventual non-being: human being is constituted as a questioning whether and how such disappointments could bear any good.

Man is then one for whom the world and things in it are of interest, precisely because they are the place where his own being is of interest. As such, human being is the locus of the showing-themselves of things. This showing is silently presupposed in the traditional conception of truth, wherein human judgements may *correspond* to reality (or not). Correspondence presupposes that one can criticize the judgement against reality, and that requires the showing-itself of reality. The capacity to be the place of the showing-itself of things in the world is itself part of the constitution of Dasein, and it is bound up with Dasein's state of care in relation to itself. It is because Dasein's own being is in doubt that it can know things in the world; things make sense only as part of a world in which the knower's future is at stake. The uncovering of things and the disclosure of human being happen together.

5.3 Time and History

The last level of Dasein in Heidegger's account, and so more particularly of human being, is exposed when one notes that the human constitution as care is a *temporal* relation. At first we see that it is care about

¹³The distinctions of authenticity and inauthenticity strike me as having more merit. Authenticity might be clumsily understood as something like a state of being in which that being discloses itself clearly to itself. In this, what is at stake is not something said or thought, but something more primordial, a way of being toward oneself and the world: a comportment, not an assertion. Its full delineation occurs in Division II of *Being and Time*.

Dasein's being in the future, but that future is projected from the past, and the relating of them both is Dasein's present, its being-in-the-world. Temporality is both a precondition and a constitutive feature of human being; it is in a rough way the horizon in which man understands himself and the world. To understand anything at all—human or otherwise—is to understand it both as part of a world in which people live and thereby also as being in time, the time that is defined by human temporal expectations.

It is probably easier to turn first to concrete examples of how human being is a temporal affair than it is to move directly to even a brief summary of Heidegger's abstract account of the temporal constitution of human being. Heidegger's account is of something that lies below these visible phenomena and is required to support them. We not only understand the world in terms of time, we receive the categories for that understanding from society, human existence in time and history. We receive ideas of what is possible from the past and perhaps modify them on the way to the future. Projections onto the future simply do not happen with zero reference to the past. The possible future will be like, unlike, or different from the past, but always it is conceived, even if silently, in some relation to the past. History is constitutive in human nature and effective in all of life. The sociology of knowledge can afford some preliminary and concrete evidence of the relations between life and history.

The subdivision of sociology known as the sociology of knowledge studies how knowledge is produced, distributed, and used in society. Here knowledge is familiarity with the world, how to be human, how to act, what to do, what can be done; a matter of skills as much as something that can be articulated in verbal accounts.¹⁴ It is a matter of the limitations and opportunities of life, and it is passed on in *socializations*. Socializations, in which a person is introduced to some new aspect of life in society, afford a particularly clear view of history at work in human life. Whether the socialization is primary or secondary, it can be seen as the entry into a community that is defined in essential ways by its history: the individual is inducted into a history as much as he is into a community or an institution. To grow up in one context is to learn what it is to be a Hatfield or a McCoy, in another, a Jew, a Samaritan, or a Greek, or to be thrown into the conflict of Ulster Protestants and Catholics, or just rival gangs in East LA. One is born a Roman citizen, subject, or slave, born in the metropolis of civilization, on the periphery, or in the backwaters. In one civilization there is social mobility where another has none. If the origins of these conflicts, opportunities and limitations are lost, one will feel as if without freedom to act, but rather as fated, determined.

¹⁴The guides are Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, and Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*.

Where origins are known, there may be some freedom. Yet always, what is possible is determined from history, whether that history is known or not.

In socializations, one gains knowledge and skills necessary to perform the roles that are defined in institutions and social structures. History explains and legitimates the social structures into which the individual is inducted, and so history always works in the present to practical ends. What it is to live, to grow up, to meet the routine developmental challenges of life, are all given from history. Roles, institutions, skills, pre-given tasks, challenges and conflicts all originate in history. What are the limitations of life and what good they might bear or withhold are known only with reference to history, whether history is to be repeated or improved upon. The others with (or against) whom one lives are also given in history. (Here is the face of human need.) And history provides the legitimations by which people are instructed and enabled to bear various disappointments, even suffering that mounts to affliction.

Human action is always conceived with reference to a larger context, and it is that larger context that socialization inducts one into. The intentionally referential structure of action relates it to both past and future. One conceives actions as getting from a past to a future, and in so doing, the intentional structure of the self is constituted. The context is defined in concentric horizons centered on the person; from the paraphernalia of a house or workplace to raising a family or planning a business to the surrounding municipality and politics to a human lifespan in the world, even extending to the structure of the galaxy and beyond, the “place” in which one lives is in fact a temporal structure, a narrative. The narrative of one human life is situated in the larger narratives of history and the cosmos. This is a very rough approximation of human temporal structures, one which can be made more precise.

History functions, we shall see, as exposure. But here is the rub, if I may forecast. It is not clear that the constitution of human being as history (if Heidegger’s account is true) affords us the means to act happily or effectively. For history works to structure the present even when history is unknown, is falsified, or is transposed into legends, or worse, myth. One’s prospects are defined by an inheritance from the past, despite the fact that it may not be known with the precision that modern technical historiography would call “scientific history.” What good can history do us, if we do not know it accurately? Can we know it sufficiently? And even if we do understand history, is there any guarantee that it will bear good, show us how to live and act happily? The answers, in brief, arise in the constitution of human being as history. This is only to re-pose the challenge of the questionable goodness of human existence, not to

answer it. It cannot be answered from a merely philosophical analysis, but philosophy can put the question in such a state that its confessional answers can be understood readily.

The first Division of *Being and Time* was devoted to establishing the credibility of the concept of Dasein, all the structures of human being that lie above temporality. The second Division of *Being and Time* explored the temporal structures of human being in detail. To assume too quickly that time is to be understood as, at bottom, a linear sequence of nows, as the time of an independent variable in physics, is to cover up almost all the temporal structures that we are looking for. Heidegger's strategy combines elements taken from Husserl and Kierkegaard.¹⁵ Husserl contributes the notion of a temporal *horizon*, a background against which things and the human self are understood. Without horizons, there is no perspective, no sense of the relative importance of one thing or another, nor of their relationship to oneself. And Kierkegaard contributes the notion of an *ecstasis*, the standing apart from time that allows the human self to see things against a horizon and to come from that horizon back toward itself. "The horizon of temporality as a whole determines that whereupon factually existing entities are essentially disclosed."¹⁶ Neurological disorders in which memory is compromised can show how devastating is the loss of the ability of human intentionality to stand outside of time, clearly presupposed in seeing one's past and future. Even the present requires this ecstasis, for it makes no sense *as* present except in relation to a past and future.

In ecstasis, standing away from time, it is as if one can "see" oneself from a standpoint outside of time. Standing in the horizon of the future, Dasein sees things for the sake of itself. In the horizon of the past, one sees the facticity of that past. And in the present, one stands alongside of oneself.¹⁷ Thus the past and future are present to the sort of being that man is. The present as it is in the constitution of human being is itself of some duration. To conceive it as the independent variable of physics, isomorphic to the real number line, is a notion derived from human time, not something that comes before human time. In the horizon of the past, we see not past events that are now long gone, but the *presence* of what "has been." In the present (or ecstatic) light of the future, we draw from

¹⁵Peter B. Manchester's "The Doctrine of the Trinity in Temporal Interpretation" (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1972) has been particularly helpful to me as a guide through the central arguments of Division II. See his chapter 2. *Being and Time*, section 65 (SZ, p. 323 ff.), concentrates most of this material.

¹⁶*Being and Time*, p. 416; SZ 365.

¹⁷Manchester, p. 127 and passim.

the past the possibilities for human living. To be human is to be able to survey one's life as a whole, albeit proleptically for its future. It is in this sense that one stands outside of the moving now of the time of physics; the future, having been, and the present are the *ecstases* of temporality. To each ecstasis belongs a horizon. In that of the future is disclosed one's potentiality for Being; in that of having been is disclosed one's Being-already; in that of the present are disclosed those things with which one is concerned.¹⁸

The import of Heidegger's observations is that human being is itself constituted by its temporal relations. As with the world, the "there," the "Da" of Dasein, so it is also with temporality. Whatever may be said about the being of things merely present at hand, inanimate objects that do not play in human life, *human* being cannot be understood by starting from the present at hand and deriving the human features of that biological matter which turns out to be human.¹⁹ Human being and the world are not originally separate and then joined; they are originally correlated, and then differentiated out of a primordial unity.²⁰ Likewise, human being is not originally something *in* time in the way that the trajectory of a rock can be located in time; time is a part of human being. Our next task is to return to the working of history in the present, showing what is possible, showing how human being can be in the future as a continuation of its past. I turn to one of Heidegger's students.

Hans-Georg Gadamer set out to rehabilitate the human sciences in the face of their radical devaluation by comparison to the natural sciences at the hands of philosophy in and since the Enlightenment.²¹ His problem is to show how the human sciences (history, for a start) can reach results that one can call knowledge, as opposed to mere opinion, prejudice, propaganda or illusion. The hurdles are the inaccuracy of historical knowledge and the apparent separation between the knower and the past that is to be known. The starting point on the road to recovery of the human sciences is Heidegger's exploration of the constitution of human being as understanding and of the working of history in the present.

Understanding, as we saw in the last section, starts as a *pre*-understanding of one's situation, of the inheritance of the past and the

¹⁸Cf. *Being and Time*, p. 416 (SZ 365).

¹⁹Heidegger was at some pains to show that the everyday and physical notions of space and time can be derived from the constitution of Dasein, but that the reverse is not possible; we need not follow him in that argument in order to see the unity of human being, time, and history.

²⁰So Daniel Guerrière, in the introduction to *The Phenomenology of the Truth Proper to Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

²¹Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

possibilities for the future. To allow a pre-understanding is to reason in a circular manner, as Heidegger noted, yet the circular reasoning is not vicious.²² The “hermeneutical circle” differs from logically fallacious reasoning in that as one thinks one’s way around the circle, the initial pre-understanding is to be corrected. The process, as noted in the last section, far from being a fallacy, is analogous to the mathematical process in which equations that cannot be solved in closed form are approximated in iterations which yield successively better solutions, starting from an initial guess that is in some ways arbitrary. Gadamer, without the slightest hint of the mathematical analog, nevertheless describes the hermeneutical circle in terms whose analogy to iterative approximations is quite striking.²³ The analogy should be placed within the larger dissimilarities between analytical and hermeneutical iterative processes: Hermeneutics does not define a quantifiable metric as the basis of measuring convergence, and the horizon of the hermeneutical interest expands, where the mathematical horizon of interest narrows as it approaches the solution of an equation.²⁴ These differences aside, I claim one similarity: it is possible to reach *responsible* interpretations of texts, acts, and history. The pre-understanding, the entry point into the hermeneutical iteration, begins, say, as an assumption about the genre of the text being interpreted, and the parts are then interpreted in light of the assumption about the whole. One may then return from the parts to the whole, and if the whole implied from the parts is consistent with the starting point, then the hermeneutical circle has converged. If convergence has not yet been achieved, one can iterate around the hermeneutical circle, from parts to whole and back again, until convergence is achieved or declared to be hopeless. The interpretative process takes place within ever widening contextual horizons, but the horizon that is applicable for any particular interpreter is sufficiently well defined at any given time. One only has to solve today’s problems today. Possible error does not consist in being circular, it consists in *failure* to make it all the way around the circle sufficiently many times to assure convergence. The task is to get one’s pre-understanding out into the open wherever it is relevant to do so, in order to test and, if necessary, to correct it.²⁵

²²Cf. *Being and Time*, section 32, esp. p. 194 (SZ 152); and section 63, esp. p. 362–363 (SZ 314–315).

²³Gadamer’s descriptions are scattered in Part II of *Truth and Method*, but particularly clear examples can be found on pp. 190 and 291.

²⁴But even in mathematics, the horizon must be widened sufficiently to determine that one has converged to the desired root of the equation, and not to some other.

²⁵The actuality of doing this is a matter of some critical work, whereas its possibility is an ontological pre-condition of interpretation at all; cf. *Truth and*

Another word for pre-understanding is *prejudice*, and in this term we see the Enlightenment's campaign against tradition and authority. The negative connotations of "prejudice" are themselves the Enlightenment prejudice against prejudice. But if Heidegger and Gadamer are right, one cannot interpret anything at all without the hermeneutical circle. The pre-condition of all understanding is that the interpreter belong to a tradition of interpretation. This is not to take sides for or against any particular tradition or its reform, overthrow, or simple continuation. The Enlightenment and, after it, Romantic hermeneutics took temporal distance between the interpreter and the texts or events to be interpreted as a chasm to be bridged, and that bridging operation as dubiously hopeful of success. (We shall see this in more detail in the next section.) To the contrary, the distance of time brings the perspective that affords sound judgement, and it is not a chasm, but is filled with the tradition that enables one to enter the hermeneutical circle in a responsible way, rather than with the prejudices of temporally close events, prejudices that are too pervasive even to be seen, much less to be tested and corrected. To be too close is not to have any perspective; to be distant is to be able to place events within a larger horizon. The long-term significance of an event can be known only at the remove of a long-term perspective. This is to look at the end of a transformation in the understanding of history. In the next section we look at the steps on the way to Heidegger, and in the section after that, look at a view of history with distant affinities to Heidegger's, as it appears in Niebuhr's *The Meaning of Revelation*.

5.4 History and Faith

The import of Heidegger's critique of human existence is that man is at bottom historical, because time and temporality are central to his constitution. Being in the world and being in time are the same thing; and the world, time, and human being are together parts of a primordial structure, and it is this structure that enables interpretation and understanding. Man and history are not originally separated, needful of being joined; they are originally parts of a unity, and we only need inquire into how man can know his history. For to know his history is in some senses to know himself; admittedly a precarious project at times, but not fundamentally impossible. This is to look at the end of the transformations in the understanding of history that have taken place since the Enlightenment. To see the magnitude of the changes, return to the beginning and see the

Method, p. 295.

problem which has to be transformed before Heidegger's solution makes sense.

A Heideggerian notion that time and the perspective it affords can enable rather than obscure understanding has seemed strange since the Baroque period. Objectors took fright at historical distance rather than recognizing the perspective of distance as the condition of any serious understanding at all. They complained that history cannot be known sufficiently to be a basis for faith; they were echoed at some remove by the orthodox faithful who feared that history could be known all too well, and would not confirm but undermine faith. These objections did not occur in an abstract vacuum. They appear with Lessing in the eighteenth century, in bafflement as to how timeless truths of reason could come from accidental truths of history.²⁶ Lessing's question (and its tacit presuppositions) survive in one form or another into the recent past, and probably will survive into the foreseeable future, though we have for some time now had reason to regard as dubious the *question*, and even more so its answers. Suspicion of history in the eighteenth century gave way in the nineteenth to the re-founding of history as a conceptual discipline, with critical methods that were not wholly new, but deployed on a scale and with a thoroughness that was quite unprecedented. With the new historiography came a self-conscious reflection on the work and methods and results of the historian. The major shift in hermeneutics (and with it metaphysics, in the colloquial sense of a pre-understanding of what sort of things happen and what sorts of things do not happen) was to interpret biblical texts by the same methods and with the same suspicions as one would apply to secular texts. Historical research on this basis gave successive revisions of the biblical story. In Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, one can follow successive iterations around the hermeneutical circle, each in the end failing to converge, but giving point of departure to the next iteration. Obviously, there is a chronic sense of loss and with it fear of more losses; popular and "orthodox" culture reviled New Testament criticism. The story of salvation history has become very vulnerable. It is feared that history is exposure, and as such is not at all gracious; there is a real sense of threat and of unlabeled anxiety arising simply from being in history. This is as would be expected from Heidegger; the root of anxiety is being itself, and being is at bottom

²⁶Actually, the problem as stated is incorrect: truths of religion *are* contingent truths of history, and the love and will of God are themselves highly contingent, and as such, gracious. Timeless truths of reason, such as that the square root of two is irrational, indeed cannot be proven from contingencies of history. But of what relevance is this? Lessing's challenge has to be restated so as to strengthen it, before it makes sense, as others have seen.

historical.

The complaints appeared a hundred years before, in the question of Lessing's "ugly ditch": How can timeless truths of reason come from contingent facts of history? Two hundred years of historical research have not entirely allayed Lessing's anxiety, and indeed, for many, have aggravated it. Gordon Michalson Jr. quotes the famous challenge:

If no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths. That is: Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason . . . That, then, is the ugly, broad ditch which I cannot get across, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make the leap.²⁷

In Michalson's analysis, Lessing faces three ditches, not one: (1) the temporal ditch—ascertaining historical facts reliably; (2) the metaphysical ditch—getting from facts to theological significance; and (3) the existential ditch—bridging the culture gap between the biblical world and ours. Lessing and many after him concentrate on the first and do not see the second or third. And his approach to the first is at bottom empiricist: it looks for evidence, visible to "impartial" observers, testable evidence that can lead to certain conclusions. It assumes unnoticed that historical evidence, were it solid, would lead also to theological conclusions, and so tacitly also assumes that the theological significance of history may be located in its empirically accessible aspect.²⁸ The culture gap is not seen even remotely.

One landmark thinker, Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), will occupy much of our work in Part II. Troeltsch is not much known outside of seminaries, and even there, only in somewhat restricted theological circles. He began his career in theology, as a student of Albrecht Ritschl in the 1880s, the dean of German Liberal Protestant theology at the end of the century. He ended his career as a professor of philosophy in Berlin, where he died in 1923. It is his formulation of the challenge posed by critical history for modern Christianity that has attracted notoriety,

²⁷Gordon E. Michalson, Jr., *Lessing's "Ugly Ditch": A Study of Theology and History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), p. 1. He cites Lessing, "On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power," in Lessing's *Theological Writings*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Stanford University Press, 1956), pp. 53, 55. The preliminary analysis of Lessing's problem occupies Michalson's first chapter.

²⁸Lessing does not suspect how much he assumes, with the prevailing eighteenth-century view, that miracles (silently taken as objectively visible) are "appropriate and unambiguous evidence for the truth of Christianity"; *Lessing's "Ugly Ditch"*, p. 27.

and Troeltsch accordingly may stand as the exemplar of that challenge. Claude Welch has appraised him as the thinker in whom the concerns of the nineteenth century come together and are passed on to the twentieth.²⁹ His challenges may not be bypassed, and the twentieth century has not been notably eager to respond to them.

Ernst Troeltsch charts the crossing of the first of two watersheds in the understanding of history, the changed structure of historical research; the second will be the changed understanding of human living in history. The peculiar quality of being in history, when it is explored, reflects light back upon the structure of faith. The understanding of faith that one would reach from a meditation on Niebuhr and Heidegger such as this one is itself hardly more than a beginning, and to many audiences it still seems so strange as to be bizarre. But one thing at a time. Troeltsch articulates the methodological commitments of the historian, and presupposed in those commitments are a metaphysics and a hermeneutic to go with them. The historian's method and results are characterized in the terms *criticism*, *analogy*, and *correlation*.³⁰ Troeltsch's understanding of history remains within the problematic of the first of Lessing's ditches, the question of ascertaining with confidence "what happened." For some indispensable purposes, this is as it should be, and Troeltsch's statement of the problem of history is classic in the sense of consolidating the harvest of the nineteenth century in a form that has every prospect of lasting as far as historical research is foreseeable.

Michalson is at some pains to emphasize that Troeltsch's problematic is posed at the level of presuppositions of historical research, rather than issues taken over any particular historical facts, and that the historian's presuppositions are incompatible with the believer's faith. But much is left unsaid at this point. What really are the believer's presuppositions? And for which believer? Michalson's account implies a variety of believers, and a variety of problems with historical method. One can easily enough find literalist believers, partisans of the so-called traditional orthodoxy, for whom any uncertainty in historical accounts is unacceptable. Michalson does not delineate their views in any detail, but they seem to be the primary target. The assumption is silently made that this "tradition" goes back as far as one could search, whereas I suspect its real origins

²⁹Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Yale University Press, 1985), vol. 2, p. 266-267.

³⁰*Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II, pp. 729-753, translated as "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology," in *Religion in History*, ed. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), contains Troeltsch's own exposition of the play of criticism, analogy, and correlation in the thought of the historian.

as an explicit doctrine are Baroque. Michalson's next target are those among the neo-orthodox who see the uncertainties of history, but would like to protect faith in a realm secure against those uncertainties. This is to see exposure and seek to evade it. The presuppositions of history are criticism, analogy, and correlation. In what follows, I shall argue that they are based on radically monotheistic faith, not in conflict with it.

If a believer's faith is incompatible with critical history, I contend that such a believer has degenerated into one or another of the modern alternatives to monotheism. Underneath the "traditional orthodox" (i. e., baroque) fear of history is a demand for a-historical absolutes.³¹ This fear has not everywhere been banished among the neo-orthodox. The essence of searching for a religion independent of the ravages of history is a turn from history to nature, where the conception of nature is determined by the locus in which such absolutes are sought. (One sees this in analytic philosophy as much as in explicit resort to "nature.") The demand for absoluteness and the rejection of historical relativity embody already within themselves the negative evaluation of history that is at the heart of nature religion—what we shall understand as mimetic religion when we come to the work of Merold Westphal. Of course critical history and its presuppositions are incompatible with nature religion, but so what? We are interested in radical monotheism, historical-covenantal religion. Niebuhr's intent was to embrace critical history, as is clear from *The Meaning of Revelation*. This is in contrast to both the pre-critical "traditional" orthodox and those among the neo-orthodox who sought a safe refuge from critical scholarship. Niebuhr has made this abundantly clear in his almost antiphonal refrain that radical faith is open to the necessity for permanent metanoia.

To take the presuppositions of historical research one at a time, the first is *analogy*. What happened in the past is assumed to have some intelligible continuity with present experience. The present need not be an exact repetition in order to certify the past as credible (how could it be?), but a responsible analogy does have to be shown. The analogy can be drawn in many stages, it may be complex, but it must be there. This methodological canon applies alike in human history and the natural-historical sciences of geology, evolution, and astrophysical cosmology, despite the differences of method in proportion to differences of subject matter. There is simply no other way of conducting science or history responsibly (a sentiment that Niebuhr could have expressed in almost those very words).

³¹I capitalize "Baroque" when its reference is solely to a period, and lower-case it when it refers to a frame of mind that continues well beyond 1750, and is indeed very much alive today.

The term *correlation* denotes the faith that past events are to be explained with reference to their neighboring events; one is not allowed to invoke otherwise inexplicable intrusions into history from outside, whether those intrusions are divine or not. One need not (and cannot) show that historical events are caused in a deterministically exhaustive way, as events in classical physics are, or as events in geology are (modulo initial conditions given by random forces). History is the realm of the individual, and above all, the realm of freedom. But the freedom of a free act is always correlated to events neighboring it in time and place. Free acts are a species of contingency in history, a class of events which includes natural conditions and events as well. The principle of correlation must admit of contingency, but disallow intrusion into the fabric of historical causality from any sort of supernatural or extra-historical principles. Once again, it is impossible to do science or history on any other basis.

Perhaps the hardest of Troeltsch's methodological canons was *criticism*. For human faith in its natural instincts wants to protect some realm of its life as immune and invulnerable to criticism. But the historian is entitled to be critical of all the evidence that comes within his view. As R. G. Collingwood has also said, the historian does not just reproduce the accounts of history that he receives from diverse sources, but tests and sifts them with a discerning suspicion. He makes them answer questions of his own devising, not just questions that may seem to rise from the texts. The principle of criticism yields consequences with heavy import for the "traditional" understanding of faith and history (i. e., the continuation of the Baroque). First, and flowing directly from the critical charter of the historian, his conclusions are always subject to possible revision; merely probable, never certain, even if, as happens in regard to many events, there is no reasonable or responsible doubt as to what happened. Second, and coming naturally with the principle of criticism, sacred texts from the past are accessible to interpretation by the same methods as those used for secular texts. (This, because when critical questions are asked of sacred texts in the same way as they are asked of other texts, answers show themselves from the texts in the same way.) And third, the believer is always left "holding the bag." The one who answers the question "Who do you say that I am?" is responsible for his own confessional stance. For when sacred texts are subjected to the same scrutiny that secular texts receive, the interpreter is then no longer bound to regard them as sacred. I'm not sure that Troeltsch focused much attention on this last consequence of the historical method. What he himself did regard as beyond question is an openness to the truth as it shows itself in the changeable results of continuing historical research. His essay "Historical and Dogmatic

Method in Theology” is a passionate argument for a theological method open to history and against the received dogmatic method. That received method was fundamentally evasive of the light of historical research. It would rather settle historical questions from a “revelation” that is given apart from history and whose historical roots are ironically forgotten.

Troeltsch’s own constructive theology is not entirely pertinent to the inquiry of this book. At its most attractive, it is exemplary of one strand of late nineteenth-century Liberal theology. But Christianity for Troeltsch is intimately and essentially European, and its values can appear as European culture at its most attractive. I am hesitant to bring charges of henotheism, but the issue arises even for other critics, however qualified it may be. Robert Morgan touches this aspect of Troeltsch’s thought:

His real norm is the idea of Europeanism, and on his presuppositions the transition from theology to a philosophy of culture, from Christianity to Europeanism was fully justified—however terrifying the prospect might be for theology and Christianity.³²

The contrast is remarkable, between his critical rigor and his much more cautious synthetic and constructive position. He was passionate in his devotion to embracing the exposure encountered in critical history, but as far as I am aware, never able to see the challenge of critical history as itself a disclosure of and encounter with God, as itself resting on any implicit confessional commitments.³³ When he had to articulate positive theological commitments, they are much less confident, more exploratory, and often an assortment of values taken from European culture, together with a conviction that the moral superiority of European culture is sufficient basis for a religion. His thought never really escaped culture as a basis for religion, nor was he able to leave behind the effort to resolve questions of comparative worth of different religions by means of some process of justifying reason. In the course of such reasoning, Christianity becomes “the focal synthesis of all religious tendencies.”³⁴ This is to return to the problematic of justification of Christianity, something which

³²Robert Morgan, “Troeltsch and the Dialectical Theology,” in John Powell Clayton, ed., *Ernst Troeltsch and the Future of Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 45.

³³Cf. “Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology,” cited above, and the end of “The Dogmatics of the ‘Religionsgeschichtliche Schule,’” also translated in *Religion in History*.

³⁴Cf. *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions* (1901, rev. 1929, and translated by David Reid; Richmond: John Knox Press, 1971), p. 114.

I contend is incompatible with a confessional stance. Troeltsch was far too subtle a thinker to advocate a henotheism of European culture *simply*, but his thought circles around such a center, unable to break free.

The places where he entertains a confessional stance remain exceptional to the major thrust of his thought, and they never open a way out of his problematic of justification of religion.³⁵ He was unable to see that in his commitment to critical honesty, he had something of lasting value that transcended his local culture. His perception of Christianity as a cultural phenomenon blinded him to the possibility of articulating it as the source of the critical integrity that he so rightly prized, or of embracing it on a confessional basis.

The attempt to find some basis on which to justify Christianity tacitly accepts a pivotal assumption from the Baroque period: that Christianity is to be justified at all. At this point, one in the spirit of Niebuhr would have to distinguish Troeltsch's constructive and justificatory project from his analytic and critical historical project. I part company with the constructive project, too vulnerable to henotheistic interpretations, but embrace the critical project. Troeltsch had chronic difficulties in articulating strong confessional commitments. In part, this was a temperamental thing: he was evidently given to caution, nuance, and sensitivity to qualification. Also, his method and assumptions apparently did not give him the means to articulate confessional commitments without interfering with his critical thought. He was not able to discern or articulate the confessional stance implicit in his commitment to openness to critical history. It seems to me that he too naively accepted the religious problematic that is handed down from the Baroque and the Enlightenment: the problem of the justification of religious faith. It is a faulty posing of the problem, for it demands justification for a religious starting point. One cannot reason to a starting point, but only from it. Aquinas knew better, and his successors ought to have known better.

Niebuhr is very gentle when he addresses this side of Troeltsch's work; in *The Meaning of Revelation*, when he takes stock of the strengths and weaknesses of those he feels indebted to, he characterizes his own method as following the critical thought of Ernst Troeltsch and the constructive thought of Karl Barth.³⁶ I would generalize this to the critical thought of the Enlightenment and the constructive thought of the pre-Enlightenment confessional traditions. Troeltsch's own programmatic sentiments can be found in the article "The Dogmatics of the 'Religionsgeschichtliche Schule' " in 1913.³⁷ After all the qualifications and exposition of the tasks

³⁵Cf. e. g., remarks on pp. 107–108 of *The Absoluteness of Christianity*.

³⁶MR, p. x.

³⁷The article appeared in the *American Journal of Theology*, 17 (1913) 1. It is

of dogmatic theology, he ends with an impassioned plea for a theology which could live with the uncertainties of history, without dogmatic insistence on particular historical results, yet still have the immediate “central religious certainty” that “forms itself for us out of the world of Christian life”.³⁸ This he failed to achieve, but not for lack of effort or worthiness of the project. He had scant hope that others would even attempt it, and he watched the greater part of his contemporaries turn away from the challenge. It is easy to turn away from history and historical religion altogether. It is relatively easy to participate in a historical religion if the questions of critical thought are not seen. The challenge is to combine an orientation of faith to history with an embracing of critical methods in history.

At one level, this challenge is simply to accept exposure as gracious: part of the general commitment that we have seen in Part I, to embrace the disappointments of life as bringing blessings, specifically in that part of life we call learning history. This means, in particular, that when history is revised, the self-understanding of faith also has to be revised. We have seen revisions of the history and corresponding revisions of theology many times in the last two centuries, as any history of biblical research will tell. For one committed to embracing exposure, this is a feature, and not a bug, of living in history. Who in a historical religion would not want his articulation of faith to be in accord with the best and most probable understanding of the history that it is based on? Such revisions are sometimes not fun, but who would say that they should not have been made? Who would say that faith should interpret its history and its relation to its history in terms of a historical method that, in a secular context, would be called irresponsible, sloppy, or just shabby? And so, at a deeper level, the challenge is to combine the critical and confessional moments of theology in a way that fulfills both and compromises neither of them.

In a way, Troeltsch’s difficulty arises in the performative aspect of his language: he does not know when to stop asking for (or giving) reasons. When there are no more reasons, we have arrived at a confessional commitment. “The Dogmatics of the ‘Religionsgeschichtliche Schule’ ” as it is translated from the *Gesammelte Schriften* contains such a powerful

reprinted, with significant additions at its conclusion, in Ernst Troeltsch, *Religion in History*.

³⁸*Religion in History*, p. 107. We need not tarry over Troeltsch’s characterization of the central question for theology, how are soul and love to be found; this is the instinct of Liberal theology. He rejects as cold and strange the quest for a gracious God; others might not. On his own terms, he never really reached a satisfactory explanation of the confessional commitments even of Liberal theology.

confessional statement in its closing; for unknown reasons, he did not feel able to say these things in the original text as it was published in the *American Journal of Theology*.

He wants to live without historical facts that are absolutely certain and unchanging, and *at the same time* take history as foundational, but he cannot show how to do so. He turns to an evolutionary history of religions, to show that Christianity is the most advanced, and so the best. The problem remains unsolved, the confessional moment of theology is never clearly articulated or candidly owned. In that confessional moment, the believer must eventually extrapolate beyond what can be known as fact, or transfer meaning from one region of life to another, inevitably in ways that are open to question by those who do not share his belief. When the character of that transfer of meaning is misunderstood and responsibility for the commitment is obscured, trouble is not far behind. Such transfer of meaning is traditionally called analogy, and one of the recurrent hobbles of the Enlightenment and its children is its disinclination to countenance any but univocal speech. Analogy and confessional discourse go hand in hand, as we shall see in chapter 7. For now, I simply assume that analogical language can both speak truth and remain confessional.

Troeltsch's complaints have returned more recently in Van Harvey's book, *The Historian and the Believer*.³⁹ Not a lot of progress has been made since Troeltsch. In many quarters, Christian theology remains as wedded as ever to claims of historical events that no historian can entertain, much less certify. Varieties of a "hard perspectival" theory of history are adduced to get around the difficulties of critical history, and Harvey's attitude toward them is justly one of scorn. His remedy is to turn to H. Richard Niebuhr (in which I concur), but his recapitulation of Niebuhr's position does not seem to me to capture its logic accurately enough. He characterizes Niebuhr's position as a "soft perspectivism." But the relationship between internal and external history in Harvey's account does not escape the dilemma in which one must choose between taking external history as in and of itself theologically significant, or severing internal history from its correlated description in external history. This is to miss Niebuhr's central distinctions. The Niebuhrian theology of permanent metanoia, as it was articulated in *Radical Monotheism* and present implicitly in *The Meaning of Revelation*, is also missing from Harvey's account. It can be asserted in a confessional stance that both arises in and from history and is also transcendent to history. The counter-demand of many still today is for something to stand on that is invulnerable to history. By this is implied, but not said, something that exempts the believer's social construction of a humanly meaningful world from the

³⁹Van Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

ravages of exposure at the hands of historical scholarship. (This demand usually also wants exemption from at least some limitations, and from meeting the needs of at least some other people.) Faithful monotheism offers no such ground. Nothing in human life is exempt from exposure. The desire to evade it arises from doubt that it can truly be gracious. The focus of exposure is here critical history, yet tradition can transcend history, even though it does not exempt one from it. They are analogous and confessional, they arise from within history and draw analogies by faith to the future. How they will play out cannot be foretold in advance. But they are directed to the past also, as familiarity with the three ecstases of time should tell us. We use the past to make sense of the present, and the past may, in the future, be changed underneath us.

Here we can see Troeltsch's strongest *performative* confessional commitment: to face exposure in history. This he did not recognize as more fundamental than his central Liberal commitments, but in this he is typical of liberal biblical criticism. No other science has faced the challenge to its very reason for being that Christian biblical scholars have had to face since the eighteenth century. The challenge from skeptics and atheists was quite credible and gave every appearance of utterly delegitimizing Christianity. (Judaism was for the most part able to ignore the challenge of critical history, though it too was implicated, at least in the understanding of that time.) By contrast, recent challenges to the natural sciences have not been credible. The "Creationist" challenges that Fundamentalists raise against evolutionary biology are simply preposterous, no matter how many believe them. None of the cognitive dissonance that was inevitable for biblical scholars in the nineteenth century is forced on biologists today. Eventually the Enlightenment challengers lost interest in refuting the Bible and went on to assert an atheism on dogmatic grounds, without reference to attacks on biblical veracity. (Why? for fear the Bible might say something other and truer than the message they had attributed to it in order to dismiss the Bible as source of any credible challenge?) But liberal biblical scholars continued the questioning, taking up for themselves and radicalizing the challenges that others had raised against the received biblical hermeneutic. Through all the abundant silliness that nineteenth century liberal biblical criticism produced (especially in its life-of-Jesus research), this heroism needs to be acknowledged: the biblical critics sought the truth even when it might undermine their entire religion. They embraced exposure as gracious, even when its results remained uncertain and appeared to be damning, when scholars as believers could only wait for a future historiography that they would not live to see, one that might resolve the problems they had opened up. Credit should be given where it is due.

The answer to the natural human craving for a solid unchanging place to stand on in history is that an *absolutely* unchanging standpoint is not necessary. The history of the past changes slowly enough that people can accommodate to it, and historical relativity is not the threat it is feared to be. Obviously, people will have to change as the interpretation of history changes; but this is hardly new in the modern age. In some quarters, the Christian story can already be told in ways that embrace rather than defy the challenges of modern critical hermeneutics. Usually, the story after it is told by critical hermeneutics makes a stronger and more solid challenge and invitation to faith than it did before, when it started from a literalist hermeneutic. Some parts of the past can be redeemed only at cost of repentance from them: e. g., Christian anti-semitism. Others will be vindicated in the same moment in which they are relativized. The question is whether one believes that the future, over which one has little control, will bring blessing when it brings exposure, limitation, and need to the activity of the social construction of reality, included in which is the telling of the central history of a historically religious people. For this we return to Niebuhr.

5.5 History and Grace

The Meaning of Revelation was a complex project, integrating several arguments to one end, which may be expressed as the faith that history, as exposure, is gracious, and as making gracious sense of life, is revelation. Some parts are at best unfinished projects, others are of lasting (and neglected) value. It is helpful to see them in their interrelationships before we abstract Niebuhr's confessional stance, that history is gracious, from his explanations in terms of neo-Kantian philosophy. It is not that I would reject that philosophy, but rather that the tradition issuing from the neo-Kantians of the turn of the century has flowed well beyond where it was when Niebuhr appropriated it. In its present stage, phenomenological philosophy, it is still in a very unfinished state. All conclusions rooted in it are grounded in something that is provisional and changing.

Niebuhr's dissertation was on Ernst Troeltsch. In addition to being a historian and sociologist, Troeltsch was a neo-Kantian, and that term distinguishes his entire generation in Germany from their British or American contemporaries, though its members were prodigiously varied in the ways they handled their Kantian inheritance. Whether from Troeltsch or other sources, Niebuhr adopted a neo-Kantian way of thinking. Like the German tradition, Niebuhr accepts from Kant as pivotal the distinction between speculative and practical reason, and also Kant's

search for the intimate interconnections between knowing subjects and known objects, interconnections that are prior to any distinction between them. Kant puts these ideas to work in an ontology; the neo-Kantians for the most part ignore Kant's ontological interests and turn his legacy into an epistemology. Heidegger was to restore the ontology, greatly transformed, and Niebuhr parallels Heidegger at some remove, with an abiding interest in being, but without any developed ontology. The focus of *The Meaning of Revelation* is epistemological, showing how history illuminates human life in the present. Ontology appears where Niebuhr makes distinctions, sometimes quite precise ones, as to what it is that is shown in the illumination of life by history.

Niebuhr's pivotal move is to rejoin speculative and practical reason and combine a critical idealism with a critical realism. Speculative reason shows itself in history as what Niebuhr calls "external history," the history of a community written by outsiders, or at least by insiders attempting to bracket their own insider involvement. Practical reason appears as "internal history," a community's history as told from the inside. These terms stand out; the connections with Kant are usually overlooked, though the Kantian terms are repeated often enough so that there can be no doubt of Niebuhr's starting point. The distinction between internal and external history has attracted the focus of attention; critics note that definitions of the two approaches to history do not work out as clearly as they would like.⁴⁰ The distinction is well illustrated in Niebuhr's example: the healing of a blind man, as told by himself in his own existential story (the internal history), and as told in clinical terms by his doctor (the external history).⁴¹ A Heideggerian would say that what Niebuhr calls internal history is prior to and presupposed by the supposedly "objective" external history, and not the other way around. Niebuhr merely insisted that internal history can stand on its own, without having to turn to external history to achieve real truth. In this, he is surely right. For the external and clinical history makes no sense except as presupposing that there *is* an internal and existential history, however imprecise the blind man's own account may be in reconstructing the scientific and medical particulars of the healing. Whatever correctives to internal histories are given from the testimony of outsiders, the truth that is sought, the truth that matters for historical selves, can be located only in internal history. When outsiders are heard as the voice of truth, the truth they tell is appropriated *as* internal history. This is in no way to suggest that internal history is to be exempted from responsibility, on a theory that internal history is a "perspective" that can make up facts as it goes along. But

⁴⁰E. g., Van Harvey's comments in *The Historian and the Believer*.

⁴¹Cf. MR, hardback, pp. 59–60; paperback, p. 44.

responsibility may be enforced in different ways in internal and external history. We shall return to the logic of *The Meaning of Revelation* in section 14.2.

The double structure of critical idealism and critical realism, applied to the distinction between internal and external history, is Niebuhr's appropriation of neo-Kantian explanations of history. Nothing is particularly wrong in it, yet it has not sold well, and it is difficult to say why. Problems aside, look at the conclusions Niebuhr draws, for they are more interesting than the neo-Kantian explanations for them. It is not really that Niebuhr derives conclusions from neo-Kantian premises, and so would forfeit the conclusions if the premises are shown to be false, but rather that he describes a human phenomenon that is given, in explanations constructed with a neo-Kantian conceptual machinery. Whatever the problems with the explanatory machinery, the human phenomenon is nevertheless real. Its proper description is critical, and its misdescription has profound consequences. If the life of selves is described in terms of nature or mechanistic explanations, what really matters in it is lost. We have seen some of what was lost restored in Heidegger's account of *Dasein*. Niebuhr's brief description of internal and external history shows affinities to Heidegger's structure of care and his understanding of human historicity.

For Niebuhr, human time is not to be confused with metric time, the time of physics. If we try to explain human life in terms of metric time, much of human life is obscured or distorted or misrepresented. This is again the choice between treating man as part of nature or as having a history that is essentially and qualitatively different from nature. Human time, the time of internal history, is inherited and present, the time of selves. (Compare Heidegger, for whom the past and future are not before and after the present, but equally and co-originally part of the constitution of human being. One is tempted to say that they are present in the human present.) The past is present in the memory of the community, and so is not subjective in the sense of being capricious or untestable or private; the community provides judgement and inter-subjective testing of memory and truth. Time is not originally the independent variable of mathematical physics, but a dimension of life; it is in us, more than we are in it.⁴² There is no historical or temporal ditch that has to be crossed; the past lives in the

⁴²MR, hardback, pp. 68–70; paperback, pp. 50–51. The connections to Kant and parallels to Heidegger are not labeled, but should be clear to one familiar with them. Though Niebuhr intended to draw on Kant, and says so, his parallels with Heidegger may not come from reading Heidegger at all, but rather from American philosophers, Mead and Santillana prominent among them. Nevertheless, at sufficiently many points he does agree with Heidegger.

present, it is here and now, and it need only be known in its presence here and now. This is to go further than Niebuhr, but it is amply warranted in Heidegger and Gadamer. The limitations and dangers and opportunities of knowing history are all limitations of knowing a past that is present in the present, and is so because it is the way to a future that is also here making sense of both present and past. (The role of the future Niebuhr did not see nearly as clearly as that of the past.)

Internal history is inherently confessional: it tells “what has happened to us in our community, how we came to believe, how we reason about things and what we see from our point of view.”⁴³ Such a story highlights those events that make sense of the rest of history. Such a people finds itself in a clearing of history constituted by certain events, the ones that do make sense of the rest of history. In his own words,

Revelation means for us that part of our inner life which illuminates the rest of it and which is itself intelligible. Sometimes when we read a difficult book, seeking to follow a complicated argument, we come across a luminous sentence from which we can go forward and backward and so attain some understanding of the whole.⁴⁴

Niebuhr’s primary example is the events of Jesus Christ. I shall contend below, if somewhat briefly, that even for Christians, the Exodus is also required, and is not just a dispensible introduction to the New Testament but is essentially presupposed by it. In this blindness to the Exodus, Niebuhr is probably typical of his time. For now, wherever Niebuhr cites Jesus as the center of history, the Jewish reader should simply substitute the Exodus. The Christian reader should at least add the Exodus, as the original antetype in terms of which the Church made sense of Jesus. As Niebuhr continues, he makes revelation to be not contrary to reason but the pattern and form and basis of reason. It grows out of community and history, and out of the lives and struggles of people who have a stake in their history. What follows, for his next fifteen pages, is a detailed correlation of these claims with the modified neo-Kantian structure of history and historical knowledge that he adduces to explain human life in history. Instead of going over that structure, note what has been said here. History is something reasoned from, not something reasoned to, and its import is existential rather than “objective.” His long explanation serves to illustrate how history works as making sense of life, and how alternatives to historical explanation are ultimately unsuccessful in making sense of human life.

⁴³MR, hardback, p. 41; paperback, p. 29.

⁴⁴MR, hardback, p. 93; paperback, p. 68.

I would like to return to remarks that apply to one problem, the misunderstandings that arise when revelation is located in external history.⁴⁵ Concretely and visibly, this appears in the question of “miracles.” Niebuhr follows Troeltsch well; he knows that miracles, conceived as “exceptions to laws of nature,” are utterly unintelligible, and require the intrusion of yet other miracles to validate the first miracles. (We have then violated the principles of both analogy and correlation at this point.) To locate the graciousness of an event in its external history is to miss the point. I think people value the New Testament “miracles” as exceptions to laws of nature because they seem to promise *exemption* from limitation, not blessing in it. The need for such miracles is a sign of a faith not wholly converted to monotheism. Consider an example: the story told by Albert Camus, of a mother and daughter who murder single guests, and are exposed to themselves after murdering their son and brother, seems a story of exposure which can only destroy.⁴⁶ It would have been hard in fiction to get them to repent; I believe one committed suicide and the other went mad. Yet people do embrace exposure: I watched a convicted murderer, interviewed on TV, as his execution approached. He was asked whether people should pity or pray for him. He answered, “No; pray for the people that I killed.”⁴⁷ These things do happen, and without invoking any violation of the principles of analogy or correlation, they are miraculous: they show forth the graciousness experienced upon embracing exposure. It is not a coincidence that usually, in the New Testament healing miracles, the healed one is first invited to repentance and forgiveness of sin.

Look at what Niebuhr does confessionally in applying the phenomenology of history that he has developed. It has become gracious; history functions above all to make possible reconciliation where before there was estrangement. The revelatory moment makes our past intelligible. With it return the forgotten and buried and embarrassing past. It functions as appropriation, enabling people entering a community to adopt its past as theirs.⁴⁸ This is the pivot of the book, it is where he announces that history as exposure is to be embraced as bringing good and freedom and new life, not condemnation and death.

⁴⁵MR, hardback, pp. 74–75; paperback pp. 54–55.

⁴⁶Cf. above, section 3.1.

⁴⁷David Mason, executed in the San Quentin gas chamber 1993/08/24, after he withdrew all appeals from the California and Federal courts. The particulars of the case are in the opinion of the California Supreme Court, “The People v. David Edwin Mason,” 52 Cal 3rd. 909; No. S004604, Crim. No. 23519, Jan 10, 1991. The victims were Joan Picard, Arthur Jennings, Antoinette Brown, Dorothy Lang, and Boyd Johnson.

⁴⁸Cf. MR, hardback, pp. 113–115; paperback, pp. 83–84.

The revelatory moment makes our past intelligible: the past that is lost and forgotten is recovered, remembered, and makes sense. When it is owned it is no longer alien, and the parts of ourselves represented in it are no longer alien. Niebuhr turns to the Exodus and Sinai:

When Israel focussed its varied and disordered recollections of a nomad past, of tribal bickerings and alien tyrannies in the revelatory event of its deliverance and choice to be a holy people, then it found there hitherto unguessed meaning and unity.⁴⁹

What gives order to that disordered past is a hope for the future, a hope that from the Exodus a living community might come together and continue in history. In the light of recent critical work, scholars know how varied were the origins of the tribes of Israel. The power of the Exodus texts to unify and illuminate Israelite history is amplified enormously, not undermined, when modern critical results are known. Richard Rubenstein, in an essay entitled “Covenant, Holocaust, and Intifada,”⁵⁰ has shown the transforming character of the Exodus not just within the limits of a critical worldview, but revealed and enhanced by the results of critical scholarship. The people who escaped from Egypt did not in fact have much in common, much less loyalty to each other or a sense of community, though the text reads later community back into the critical period of its formation. What was forged in the wilderness was the covenantal way of relating to history—the indispensable pivot of historical-covenantal religion. Covenant is trust in the historical future. Troeltsch someplace says that a past without a future makes no sense. This means a *good* future; a past headed only for disaster, barren of blessing, makes no sense. But the possibility of good is what makes sense of time and history. History redeems when a positive future has been imagined, trusted, hoped for.

In this sense, what Niebuhr’s account begins with (pp. 110–112) is history as it shows the opportunity in limitation. He continues with exposure. History as revelation resurrects the forgotten and buried and embarrassing past: sins, betrayals, denials, follies. The past can be buried, but it cannot be destroyed. “We carry it with us; its record is written deep in our lives.”⁵¹ An external history can see its visible embodiment, though it be suppressed in internal histories. To live in accordance with twisted internal history is to accept its notions of what can and cannot be

⁴⁹MR, hardback, pp. 110–111; paperback, p. 81. Niebuhr does not always overlook the Exodus.

⁵⁰In *After Auschwitz*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

⁵¹MR, hardback, p. 113; paperback, p. 83.

done (here again are the connections between exposure and limitation). Unburying the past is confession of sin and conversion of memory. The interrelationship of internal and external history and the possibility of reconciliation can both be illustrated in regional ethnic conflicts today. Writing and reading in a culture that is free of ethnic hatreds violent enough to lead to civil wars (that is to say, looking at them from the outside) it is difficult to see why such peoples fight among themselves. The possibility of reconciliation can be seen *from* external history, but it is not something that happens *in* external history. External history presupposes internal history in an asymmetric way here. Regional ethnic hatreds make little sense to Americans now, but there are enough of them in America's past, some quite effectively shielded from present scrutiny.

Niebuhr's third function of revelation is to enable diverse people to adopt its history as their own. His examples of diverse immigrant groups in America adopting its whole past as theirs, including even the torment and tragedy of the Civil War, go over familiar ground. We have seen history as revelation providing exposure and limitation. This is the face of need in revelation; for need is met in the creation of community, embracing each others' wants and sorrows in the heritage of the community as a whole, a precondition to any true sharing of each others' abundance and joys. He draws a further implication that is quite striking: the revelatory moment enables not only diverse groups *within* the monotheistic community to share each other's pasts, it enables the faithful to welcome as their own the past of all men. This inevitably will cause a tension of conflicting virtues—the covenant is to be open to all, and it is to be maintained in close visible faithfulness to its origins. It has appeared to many that Rabbinic Judaism has emphasized one virtue, and Christianity the other. Neither choice should delegitimize the other. The dilemma is that covenantal religion in its particularity has trouble giving visible expression to its universality; when it puts first its universality, it endangers its concreteness and courts loss of intensity.⁵² This dilemma has colored relations between Judaism and Christianity in ways that have largely been covered up and are indeed a candidate for just exactly the sort of exposure that Niebuhr contends history as revelation provides.

One central consequence of history as exposure is that a community's history is always open to criticism, and if that community really embraces history as exposure, it will be open to the changes in its life necessary to accommodate revisions in its history. The theme of permanent revolution of the mind and heart runs through most of Niebuhr's writing. There is a decisive finality to the events of revelation, yet each generation must learn for itself what those events mean, and the two—the events and their

⁵²Cf. RMWC, ch. 4, pp. 60–63.

meaning—cannot in the end be cleanly separated. As Gadamer well shows, the past is understood in terms of its applications in the present, and those inevitably change in the most unpredictable ways. It is not particularly fun or enjoyable to have one's history shown to be in part a cover-up, or to see that changes are necessary in response to exposure before it is at all clear what those changes would be, but the partisan of monotheistic religion is committed to such openness and change of heart. "The revelation which illuminates our sin prophesies our death" and the death of our communities; false prophets tell us we are immortal, but revelation shows the potential for catastrophe, and possibility of reborn community, remnant, resurrection.⁵³

In concluding this chapter, stop and review the problem of history as Ernst Troeltsch posed it: the principles of criticism, analogy, and correlation. Troeltsch wanted to integrate them with a confession of faith but could not see how to do so. This, I think, is because his Enlightenment passion for critical honesty was disastrously enmeshed in constructive metaphysical and hermeneutical assumptions also inherited from the Enlightenment. Nonetheless, with that passion, he was convinced that critical history should be embraced, not rejected. Unable to escape from a view of the world and God that runs from the Baroque period through the Enlightenment and is still with us in many quarters today, critical history could only appear as a threat to Christianity. How serious the problem was is reflected in how little Troeltsch is read today. I have labored his difficulties in the previous section. Those who share his trust in critical history have almost as much difficulty articulating that trust *as consistent with faith* as he did, and many still would rather evade the challenge of history. Van Harvey in 1968 surveyed a host of attempts to squirm out of Troeltsch's challenge. Gordon E. Michalson Jr.'s recent work (1985) is a masterful study of the problem of history for theology since Lessing. He argues that various assumptions made along the way from Lessing to Kierkegaard and Troeltsch are not quite so stark in their implications as they had seemed. Yet it would have been better to correct Troeltsch's position in order to strengthen its challenge, rather than to weaken it in order to seek relief from its challenge. Michalson evidently does not see how to embrace that challenge. In his estimate, following Troeltsch, the method of critical history is "based upon assumptions quite irreconcilable with traditional belief."⁵⁴ It is an index of the seriousness of our condition that historical-covenantal religion can have such troubles with critical history. The "tradition" that has these problems is no

⁵³MR, hardback, p. 130; paperback, p. 95.

⁵⁴Michalson, p. 94; he is quoting Van Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer*, p. 5, with approval.

longer faithful to its origins in biblical monotheism, nor to embracing the disappointments of life as bearing some good.

See, by contrast to the estimate that takes critical history as hostile, what becomes of criticism, analogy, and correlation when history, with Niebuhr, is seen as gracious.

Analogy was perhaps the most concrete challenge. It was feared because it said that “miracles” did not happen as recorded in the Bible. According to the fears, this deprives the Bible of both its power and its truthfulness; it cannot help (because the miracles didn’t happen), and it is not to be trusted (because it says they did happen, and it is wrong). Unseen are a host of hermeneutical assumptions as to how the miracle *texts* were meant and what they were meant to do. Recall from the last section Michalson’s dissection of Lessing’s ditch into not one but three ditches: (1) the temporal ditch (ascertaining historical facts reliably); (2) the metaphysical ditch (getting from facts to theological significance); and (3) the existential ditch (bridging the culture gap between the biblical world and ours).⁵⁵ What is not seen is that analogy is the bridge from the past to the present, it is the only way in which the past could be relevant to the present, the only way in which the graciousness and redeeming power of past events could have any import for the present. Analogy guarantees that God comes to you in the terms of your own time, even when he comes from the past, from history, and from a possibly strange culture. Analogy safeguards the immanence of God, the real presence of God acting in history. If the *texts* themselves can be heard to speak in analogous discourse, rather than literally, then they can say something about the wonderfulness of God’s providence, by analogy with the amazement we should feel in the presence of physically impossible but welcome good-bringing events. Obviously, we have a double sense of analogy here: the past is analogous to the present, and the texts from the past themselves speak in analogies. This second sense of analogy we shall return to in chapter 7.

Correlation seemed to say that God could *not* act in history, because it ruled out his *intervention* in history. In fact, correlation protects the transcendence of God and also insures that God’s acts in history are not confused with the acts of ordinary created beings. If they were, God would be drawn down to the level of intramundane beings, and whatever he might then be, he would not be the transcendent God of biblical religion. The graciousness of correlation must seem the hardest to understand, without more acquaintance with the problem of transcendence, the problem of explaining how God is different from the world yet still

⁵⁵The introduction to Lessing’s “*Ugly Ditch*” is an exposition of the temporal, metaphysical, and existential problems. They are defined on p. 8 of his book.

active in it.

Criticism has received the greatest attention, because it threatened the certainty that seemed necessary as a foundation for faith. The problem has been both overstated and understated. Some said that less than really absolutely total certainty would not suffice, and that therefore no events in history could ground faith. It sounds as if we might wake up any morning and find that we are not human at all, but are really descended from the garbage of a race of galactic transients made of ionized plasma who stopped for lunch in the Asteroid Belt, traveling through the Orion arm of the galaxy on their way to the Perseus arm. The fear is that we might turn out to be part of some *other* history, or of no history at all. In spite of how wrong we have been, and can be, about our own history, I think this fear is groundless. History is quite solid enough to base action on, and much of it can fairly be described as "reasonably certain," again, errors notwithstanding. The problem has been understated in another way, because in light of revisions in the biblical history that have happened over the last two hundred years, there is every prospect that such changes will continue for some time, and that future generations will accordingly have some adjustments to make in their (our) sacred history. The roles of aggadah (sacred history) and halakhah (sacred law) are approximately interchanged in Christianity and Judaism. Judaism feels it cannot change the law at all, where the Catholic Church amends the Code of Canon law once or twice every century. Christianity is deeply threatened if the sacred story has to be changed; Judaism usually takes it in stride rather easily. Aggadah is at stake, and Troeltsch's principle of criticism seems to portend periodic anguish without end. But look at what Niebuhr has made of this: in his call to permanent revolution, permanent readiness for metanoia, we see a positive attitude to the corrections required by the principle of criticism in historical scholarship. People try to prevent history from changing when it has been cemented into place as legitimation for social institutions that are placed beyond question. This is the way to a god controllable by men. A history that is open to correction shows people to be dependent on God, very much not in control.

A method based on criticism, analogy and correlation is the mark of integrity in history. Analogy bridges the cultural ditch, and correlation insures that the theological meaning of history is not distorted by reducing divine actions to the level of ordinary intramundane acts and events. Criticism shows what confidence there can be in assessing historical results, a confidence that is not absolute, but nevertheless quite sufficient to ground faith in history. Criticism, analogy, and correlation each focus the encounter with one of exposure, limitation, and need. Criticism is

the engagement with exposure, as is no surprise. Correlation is the mark of limitation, for it shows the limits of what is possible and enforces on the historian and believer alike the discipline of seeking the good within those limits. Analogy is the mirror image of need (my need for others' help, instead of the more usual others' need for mine), for it guarantees the relevance of the past to the present, sustenance of faith in the present. Others' need for the believers' help is, I suppose, implied in this mirror image.

Chapter 6

Basic Life Choices

6.1 Typologies of Religious Options

The large-scale categories for making sense of life and construing the world seem to coalesce around the possibilities of history and nature. Others are less prominent but no less real; among them we shall meet what Merold Westphal calls exilic religion, briefly noticed in section 5.1 above. The road to concreteness has been long and windy, and the path has not been entirely simple. Niebuhr's typological distinctions of polytheism, henotheism, monotheism in *Radical Monotheism* may not be widely known. We saw them only by name very briefly in chapter 2. There are precedents before Niebuhr for the insight that, in my own words, arithmetic, the cardinality of the pantheon, is not the original issue with monotheism. The precedents are not particularly recent. Van Der Leeuw cites a 1917 secondary account of the work of Christoph Meiners in 1806, in the words, "that a people is poly- or monotheistic, of itself, proves nothing: if one God is worshiped in the polytheistic way, the monotheism is not true and genuine."¹ To suspect that arithmetic is not the primary issue is to not find the questions that might show what are the real issues, and so not to get to the bottom of distinguishing various religious options. I do not know whether Niebuhr read Van Der Leeuw; phenomenology of religion by the 1920s and 1930s already had a long development, and there were doubtless hints other than this one that phenomenology ought to proceed on lines other than the baroque

¹G. Van Der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 691.

typology of religions.

Yet Niebuhr retains traces of the baroque assumption that arithmetic is the proper starting point, as in his categories of polytheism, henotheism, and monotheism. He is not as helpful as he might be with what he calls polytheism, though his category of henotheism reaches religious options that Merold Westphal can handle only at a stretch.² Niebuhr is so negative toward nihilism that he really does not see it except in his pejorative description, and so did not assimilate even the work that was then available on Gnosticism, one of the major ancient alternatives to biblical religion, and one inconspicuous until nineteenth and twentieth-century scholarship. Despite his deep and profound interest in history as a religious category, Niebuhr did not thoroughly explore the distinction that separates polytheism from biblical monotheism, namely, the question whether history is religiously significant, and if not, what is (nature). The religious texture of nature held some interest for Niebuhr; he was at occasional if conspicuous pains to make it clear that nature is sacred to the God that creates all being as good, but in his interests, nature was quite secondary to history. He knew that history was pivotal for biblical religion but did not entirely notice how anti-historical nature religions are.

On the other hand, Niebuhr's typology still handles the phenomenon of henotheism better than Westphal can. For Westphal, historical religion affirms all of history as governed by covenant. This need not be the case, as I shall point out; one can work in history and yet affirm only part of it, the history of one particular community, to the exclusion of other peoples and communities. This, I would guess, locates henotheism as a general type. The possibility of henotheism has significant implications for the actual historical development of radical monotheism, for one avenue to fully radical and universal historical-covenantal religion is from a henotheism that is much more limited.

Despite Westphal's improvements on Niebuhr's concrete accounts, Niebuhr's posing of the problem of faith is more general than Westphal's posing of the problem of religion. Their starting points have some considerable overlap. An existential or phenomenological anthropology exhibits man as the one concerned in various ways for his own being, and as such focused on guilt and death. Westphal adds the holy, both attractive and repellent, as the phenomenon which focuses the question of religion and its remedies for the problems of guilt and death. One might generalize guilt and death to disappointments in general, as they touch human existence. At a minimum, I would add chaos and loneliness to

²Merold Westphal, *God, Guilt, and Death* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

guilt and death, and I would question whether the holy is really a universal feature of the phenomenon that we are interested in. Westphal's choice of guilt and death follows the early Heidegger, for Division II of *Being and Time* is itself focused on guilt and death. It is surprising, in view of his interest in Heidegger, that Niebuhr did not make more of guilt and death; but his reading of Heidegger was critical and selective, as was his reading of most thinkers.

Niebuhr is less concerned with the holy than with how monotheism transforms it, as it transforms every aspect of life in its own characteristic ways. Westphal follows Rudolf Otto and major traditions in the phenomenology of religion in his interest in the holy.³ Scholars of religion have for two centuries or more sought to locate the defining marks which distinguish religion as a phenomenon among other human phenomena, and frequent choices have focused on the holy. (Some of the other choices are ritual and cult.) But anyone familiar with late twentieth-century America (Europe may be an even better example) knows that for many people now, there is neither holy nor ritual, and for these people, there is certainly no separation of the sacred and the profane, because there is no sacred. It is possible to live without any care for the holy, and phenomenologists of religion, I think, intended to study something more universal in human life than an optional activity. There *are* options at the center of life, but not to choose is not one of them. A better definition of religion is needed than that it is the phenomenon associated with comportment toward the holy or the sacred. Basic life orientation, basic life choices and commitments would work as windy circumlocutions.⁴ Ritual and attitude toward the holy are convenient clearings in which to see what a body intends to do with its life, but only when they are present; when they are not, or when they are misleading, the student must find other clearings. In any case, they should not, in and of themselves, be mistaken for the basic life orientation that they disclose. Niebuhr's phenomenological exposition of faith, in *Radical Monotheism* and its companion work *Faith on Earth*, remain, to my mind, unsurpassed. The holy may or may not be present, as "life after death," and even "God" may or may not be

³That it is both attractive and repellent is its most interesting feature. The proximity of the attractive and the repellent suggests just the possibility for transformation that is characteristic of monotheism.

⁴In my own usage, the terms "religion" and "basic life orientation" are usually synonymous; "religion" and "faith" have been generalized, as they are more convenient terms than "basic life orientation." When cult, ritual, or ecclesial community are meant exclusively, I use those terms instead of "religion." Westphal even uses the locution "basic attitudes toward human being in the world" (GGD, p. 251) for what varies among the different religious options; clearly it need not be "religious" as late twentieth-century Western culture understands that word.

present in answers to the question of faith. Certainly cult, ritual, and the need for religious specialists are highly variable across the spectrum of human cultures. Basic life orientation of some sort, on the other hand, is a constitutive part of human life as such. How a life is to become a whole (if indeed it is successfully integrated as a whole) is a dimension of inquiry into faith that I have postponed for ALHR, Part III. Even there, the answers will be only tentative and conjectural.

Westphal has no compelling reasons for his order of presentation of the three basic options, exile, nature, and history. In the following account of Westphal's argument, I take them instead in the order nature, exile, history. Nature, history, exile would be roughly their historical order of development. Covenantal religion predates exilic religion in the ancient world, and to all appearances, the ancient forms of exilic religion in the West die out before the Middle Ages. But in its later development, historical religion is intimately entangled with functional, if not candid, exilic religion, and Westphal is at some pains to take account of this. My solution to the problems of order is to take ancient exilic religion before covenantal religion and worry about the post-biblical mixtures of religious functionality after treating covenantal religion in its original forms. No order would be a progression to ever better religious options; contrary to any Hegelian implications in the order of presentation, I shall suggest that exilic religion, at least in the West, more commonly represents a degeneration of historical religion than an independent development in its own right. (In India, exilic religion clearly arose without any influence from historically oriented monotheism, and it has been more thoroughgoing than its Western counterparts.) This is a confessional position; I am not doing impartial phenomenology of religion in this move, though some bracketing is required: it is necessary to hear the challenge of the alternatives, and to hear it as a good listener, if one is honestly and in good faith to demur from it.

An incompletely differentiated form of Westphal's thesis can be found in Mircea Eliade's *Cosmos and History*.⁵ It was published at virtually the same time as his *Traité d'histoire des religions*, translated as *Patterns in Comparative Religion*.⁶ The thesis of *Cosmos and History* is that religion of nature seeks to fit into the patterns of nature; those patterns may be found concretely in the companion work. Nature, even in the second millennium BCE, long before science and the notion of laws of nature, is the realm of the recurrent, the rhythmic, the predictable.

⁵Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return; or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton University Press, 1965).

⁶Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958). A later edition was published by World in Cleveland, 1965.

It is not a place for human freedom or responsibility. This distinction is paralleled today in the sciences, which can explain nature and even make some limited comments on the material substrate necessary for human freedom. But they are powerless to comment on the exercise of human freedom in anything like the ways that poetry, literature, history, philosophy, or religion can.

The turn from nature to history is clear enough, on Eliade's distinctions. History is the problem that eventually emerges as unsolved in the religion of nature. The turn away from the world altogether, declaring the world to be an exile from some better condition, to which return is sought, is not clearly differentiated from religion of nature in Eliade. It is critical for us. We shall momentarily see a natural development from nature religion to both historical and exilic religion; the original place to begin is with nature. Into this sequence there will fit various henotheisms and mystery religions in a more or less convenient way. One can find modern religious examples illustrating Westphal's typology easily enough.

6.2 Religion of Nature

There are, I suppose, many ways to conceive of nature. The oldest are summarized in some of Mircea Eliade's chapter headings, in *Patterns in Comparative Religion*: the sky, the sun, moon, water, sacred stones, the earth, woman, fertility, vegetation, agriculture, sacred places, sacred time.⁷ To find happiness is simply to be a part of these phenomena, to fit in. It would be wrong to call this one's calling or destiny, for such terms already open the way to history. Maybe "fulfillment" is a sufficiently neutral word that we can say that human fulfillment is to be a part of nature. Presumably nothing more is required, for this sort of religion. Westphal selects the term *mimesis* to denote this "fitting in" in relating to the world as nature, because the means of integrating human life into nature is "ritualized imitative participation."⁸ Eliade had called this archaic religion, but the term seemed too pejorative for Westphal; it is also not sufficiently functional to be a useful descriptive term. "Mimesis" satisfies the requirements of being both functional and not flagrantly prejudiced. To be precise, mimesis was accompanied by *methexis*, participation, though mimesis usually stands for both of them.

The natural phenomena just listed from Eliade's chapter headings are all in one way or another either cyclical or the locus of cyclical

⁷Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958).

⁸GGD, pp. 195–196.

phenomena. One should not be surprised; for science today, nature is the realm of the repeatable. To fit into nature is to fit into its temporal cycles. This much remains constant in all the changes from ancient worldviews to modern science. Yet there are more possibilities than just this one for the human structure of time. At the risk of being prejudiced in spite of attempts to be neutral, Westphal is at pains to show how nature-focused religion regards the phenomena of history negatively. Eliade has less need to bracket his own confessional commitments to history. The two scholars approach time and the world from different evidence. Eliade worked from the structure of myths and legends in rustic parts of the world in modern times, and secondarily from research on ancient cultures. Westphal went directly to what is known of divine kingship and ritual in the first and second millennia BCE. I can only report the general outlines of their results and conclusions in appraisal of the character of mimetic religion. Westphal's sources are well documented and may be consulted for more detail. Yet from the complexity of Egyptian and Babylonian religion emerge themes that, while elusive, have some validity, especially in contrast to historical and exilic religion.

To call time cyclical is to understate the difference between mimetic and historical cultures. For a nature religion, events have being only insofar as they participate in archetypes. Eliade has found many examples of the morphing of individual and contingent details in accounts of real events until what is left is but another instance of an archetype. A knight is reported to be a dragon-slayer in legends two centuries after his death; documents of his own time know no such thing.⁹ Slaying a dragon is ontologically more real than the particular details of the third Grand Master of the Knights of St. John of Rhodes. Popular memory can hold particular facts only two or three hundred years; after that, it substitutes categories of acts for events, mythical archetypes for real figures. Eliade reports that Constantin Brailoiu even came upon such a transformation while one of the principals was still living, and the differences between the legend and the reality were very much what folklorists would expect.¹⁰ This phenomenon is less rare than one might think. One who sojourns among biblical scholars develops an interest in legends that have far outgrown their original factual basis. I can report a legend that in my senior year in high school, Scott Anderson and I built a working cyclotron. (It was an unfinished seismograph.¹¹) And my friends assure me that in my own memory of other events I am the

⁹*Cosmos and History*, p. 39.

¹⁰*Cosmos and History*, p. 44 f.

¹¹I am indebted to Peter Sherer for this story. Presumably, cyclotrons are more glamorous, being the paraphernalia of high-energy physics.

perpetrator of equally mythicizing transformations.

Eliade shows an archaic society with little ability to comprehend history, but its understanding of time accomplishes much more than this. It works actively to undermine and neutralize the contingencies of historical existence, and with them the hazards of human life in history. This happens by transforming human life into harmony with nature, and the means of enforcing this transformation upon events is the annual New Year's festival. New Year's festivals accordingly, with their focus on creation and the harmony of nature, provide the clearest window into the heart of mimetic religion. Events should fit into the cycles of nature, and to the extent that they do not do so obviously, they can be forced back into cyclical nature by annual festivals and observances. The festivals, in a performatively declarative way, restore events to harmony with nature—insofar as that is possible with recalcitrant events. Cyclical time abolishes the contingencies of time. In the language of Fourier analysis or orbital mechanics and perturbation theory, the secular terms in history are suppressed in favor of periodic terms; of long period, if necessary, short period if possible.¹² The hinted implication of this terminology lies in the opposition of the periodic to the secular: The periodic is for mimetic religion sacred; the truly secular (in the mathematical sense of that term) has the ontological status of chaos.

Evidence about New Year's festivals accessible to modern folklorists is evidently not so striking as even the meager documentary remains of ancient cultures, and Westphal extends Eliade's account here.¹³ The Memphite Theology, a document dating from the time of Menes, gives us the original Egyptian cosmology.¹⁴ The document as we have it is in badly damaged condition, but its outlines are nevertheless clear enough. It recounts the order of creation, first of the gods, then of the Egypt that results from their actions, and it culminates in the unified kingdom of Menes with its capital at Memphis. On this myth rested the political

¹²The notion of the Great Year, composed of cycles of many ordinary years, frequently cycles within cycles, embodies the longest period of return of the world to an earlier state. Cf. *Cosmos and History*, passim.

¹³Interestingly, the accounts we have are from cultures on the way from nature to history: Babylon, Egypt, Israel, Iran; probably the ability to create the documents that preserved creation festivals is also the ability to preserve in documents the history that is refractory to reintegration into nature in those same creation festivals. Cf. *Cosmos and History*, p. 74.

¹⁴Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods; a Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 24, n. 1. The text is preserved as a copy (on a granite block from the eighth century BCE) of a document from the First Dynasty. Westphal's treatment is at GGD, pp. 208–210 ff.

and social order of united Egypt, a society whose self-conception was focused chiefly on its relation to nature. The gods are part of nature, not transcendent to it. The creation story is not the *beginning* of a longer story, contingent in its later details, but instead, the *model* for everything that happens afterward. And creation does not focus its wonder on the existence of the world as such but on the emergence of order from chaos.¹⁵ The most prominent categories of existence are the sun (creation), cattle (procreation), and earth (resurrection).¹⁶

Egypt shows both similarities to and differences from Mesopotamia. The relation of the king to other men and to the gods is quite different in the two societies, but the relations of the whole society to nature (and silently to what we would call history) are similar enough. We shall note the differences momentarily. That the New Year is a *creation* festival is not really implicit in being a festival to mark the new year. Yet examples from Mesopotamia show the creation-focus of the New Year most clearly; in biblical religion, by contrast, all the annual festivals have taken on at least a partly historical character. Among documents of the Babylonian creation literature, the *Enuma Elish* is well known second only to *Gilgamesh*. It is recited during the New Year's festival, and it tells the original conflict between Marduk and Tiamat, interspersed with the dying and rising of the fertility god Tammuz. It is a tale of good and evil, mixed, contested, with good triumphant in the end. That triumph is to be recreated in the life of society annually. Frankfort summarizes the place of the New Year's festival in human life: harmony with nature is indispensable to fruitful social life, and the king's main role is the maintenance of that harmony, and periodic changes of human fortune are compensated by assimilating them to divine changes of fortune, and thus giving them meaning. The New Year's festival is the clearest expression of this.¹⁷ Creation is the victory of order over chaos, and its re-enactment restores that order annually.

The task of the creation festival in mimetic religion is to cast out evils and right wrongs.¹⁸ The rituals for restoration of innocence encompass most of the ways one finds in or around later monotheism.¹⁹ The essence of sin and evil, however, is not to be out of relation with a covenantal and

¹⁵Westphal draws these three contrasts, GGD, p. 197. I hesitate to impose *creatio ex nihilo* on the texts (though Westphal does), for that is a much later and philosophical interpretation of differences between mimetic religion and biblical creation that are present even when there is no speculative or abstract metaphysics.

¹⁶Frankfort, chapters 12–15.

¹⁷Cf. Frankfort, p. 313.

¹⁸Cf. *Cosmos and History*, p. 75.

¹⁹Cf. GGD, pp. 215–217.

historical God, but to be out of harmony with nature, and the restoration rituals are designed to restore that harmony. It is chiefly for this reason that the New Year's festival is timed to the annual renewal of nature in the agricultural cycle.

Babylonian and Egyptian religion show great contrasts, but their similarity stands out after all the differences. In Babylon, the king is, if not secular, an ordinary mortal who represents the people before the gods; in Egypt, pharaoh is one of the gods. In Babylon, after death there is only a shadowy existence, not really life; in Egypt, life after death is well developed and must be prepared for elaborately. Yet in both worlds, life is still oriented ultimately toward nature, even if there are different appraisals of what nature is. In Egypt, this life is a preliminary fitting into nature, followed by permanent integration into nature in after-life. It should be emphasized that nature needs bodies: mummification and burial with material provisions are utterly inconsistent with that other religion focused on after-life, Gnosticism; here lies the great divide between mimetic and exilic religion.

The difference between ritual and ordinary life is not clearly made; it is just that the clearings of life in which mimesis can be seen well are called rituals. Rituals are a time of focus of life, all of which is to be integrated harmoniously into nature. Nature and everyday life are not "secular" in the sense of being not-sacred; they are part of the sacred. For covenantal religion, by contrast, we shall see that nature is de-sacralized, and human life is to be integrated into history. What cannot be fitted successfully into nature is both contingency, with its attendant suffering, and, paradoxically, the geo-political successes of imperial regimes in the ancient Near East. Out of those successes, and the writing that enabled the record of them, history is born, and in consciousness of it, it becomes a problem. It eventually is transformed from the left-over, the surd after mimesis, to a focus of meaning in its own right.

6.3 Exilic Religion

One can respond to the problems left unsolved in a religion of nature by leaving a mimetic orientation of life, either to embrace or reject what it cannot handle. If the dissatisfaction is extended to the world as such, we are on the threshold of exilic religion. One declares life to be an exile from some ideal state of life, in view of its unsolved problems, and seeks to return to that ideal state.

It is almost arbitrary whether to take historical or exilic religion next; but while historical-covenantal religion is earlier in its own historical

development and survives longer than the conspicuous examples of exilic religion, exilic religion is necessary in order to understand Westphal's treatment of historical religion, and so I take it first, here. It could seem from the relatively short duration of Western examples of exilic religion that it is a mere digression in the history of religion. This is not so. It survives far beyond the examples in which it is candid in its appraisal of life and the world, and it does so as a functional tendency in religious traditions that are nominally committed to a positive evaluation of nature or history. Westphal describes three variants of exilic religion. The Orphic, Pythagorean, and Platonist tradition is moderate in its rejection of the world. Gnosticism is noticeably more rejecting of the world, but only Advaita Vedanta can be called thorough or consistent in its anti-worldly stance.

Homer is a fair example of mimetic religion, and he affirms life and the world easily enough. First appearances of exilic religion are earlier than Plato, possibly with Empedocles, a fifth-century philosopher. His view of life is hardly all black, and his paragraph of biography in Chambers Dictionary is a story of successes enough for his time and place. But in some places he can seem very pessimistic: in life, we are in "The joyless land, where are murder and wrath and the tribes of other dooms, and wasting diseases and corruptions and the works of dissolution wander over the meadow of disaster in the darkness."²⁰ This is the problem as it shows itself in the world.

The attitude which separates the world into good parts and bad parts, with conspicuous focus on the evil of the bad parts, next transfers its attention from the world to the human self. Human being is divided into good and bad parts. An older word, *psyche*, appears in Homer, but there it is an integral aspect of a unified self, not something separable from the body. With Orphic anthropology, it becomes one pole of a radical dualism, defining the divine and immortal within the human self: "I *am* a soul; I *have* a body." The body, by contrast, becomes the focus of rejection, the locus of evil in human being. One cannot really say the locus of evil in the human *self*, because the self is redefined to exclude its evil (bodily) parts.

Plato mainstreams these Orphic ideas into all later Western culture, and the body is ever after under a cloud compared to the soul, an invidious comparison created almost inevitably by the radical distinction and separability of body and soul. In the *Cratylus*, he puts in Socrates' mouth the view that the body (soma) is the grave (sema) of the soul, or a prison for

²⁰Cf. Westphal, p. 166. This is Fragment 121 of Empedocles, from Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 65.

the soul.²¹ The soul is the center of the self, it has acquired an existence apart from the body; the way to self-knowledge is through philosophy, which can then become the integrating center of life, something more than just a department of science or logic. Platonism and allied currents in philosophy may reject this world, but they do not reject the soul's or self's true home, which is spiritual and bodiless. They can be fairly characterized as deeply suspicious of this world, highly selective of what in it can be called good.

Gnosticism in the West deepens the rejection of the visible, tangible, material world. Borderline figures and groups associated or kin to it in spirit are Marcion, Manichaeism, the Neoplatonists, and much of Christianity. There is a common spirit, a mood seeking escape, in these religious phenomena, whether as separated groups or as tendencies within other groups. Anti-worldly themes feature salvation as escape or release from this world to a better one, with the world as a place of exile in which the soul or true self has no true home. These sentiments can be found in many places. Westphal finds them liberally in the Gnostic gospels and Nag Hammadi documents. Out of the Hellenistic world emerged both the Gnostics and also what became later orthodox Christianity.

Gnosticism rejects the world more radically than Platonism does; God is opposed to the world, but the soul is divine, allied with God against the world. The origin of the world becomes a terrible fall, and evil is the ruler of this world. This naturally raises questions about God, for if God is the creator of the world, how, then, can a good God create an evil world? In a word, which God? The answer is that the world is the creation of a malevolent inferior being, not the real God. For Valentinus, it is the work of an ignorant demon; for Marcion, the God of the Old Testament; for others, angels in revolt against God. Gnosticism is in revolt against the world, and against its god; Plotinus rejects this move, and he sides instead with "Providence and the Lord of Providence."²² This is of some interest, by the way, for it shows that Platonism, or at least Neoplatonism, is not really whole-heartedly Gnostic. Neoplatonism has had far more influence on subsequent Christian history than students today usually trouble to realize, and its ambiguity and ambivalence before the world, qualified approval of the world as creation, have been amply communicated to Christianity. It is also noteworthy that the goodness of the created world is framed in the concept of *providence*. Providence seems to be the Christian interpretation of the idea of covenant that was inherited from the Common Documents.

Gnostic loathing is shifted from the world as prison to imagined

²¹ *Cratylus*, 400c.

²² Westphal, p. 175.

guards—the “Archons”—often given the Hebrew names of God. And *Heimarmene*, fate, is taken over from astrology and given a Gnostic anti-cosmic spirit. The arch-devil or lord of darkness becomes, in Greek, *hyle*, matter, and fate is no longer impersonal or abstract. It has been personalized, given a mythological career, and then demonized. As for fate, so also for matter.²³ The creator is the worst figure in Gnostic thinking, and for Gnosticism, the mission of Jesus is to rescue us from the creator. Jesus is not his Son or envoy, and the creator is neither Jesus’s Father nor ours. The God who creates the evil world claims to be unique and all-powerful, but this is not so. “I am God, there is no other God beside me” is regarded as simply false. The command not to eat the apple is a deception; the serpent offers true knowledge and blends into the figure of Jesus. Jesus is Prometheus to Yahweh as Zeus, and the God of the Old Testament is demonized. It is fair in this context to call the Common Documents the “Old Testament,” even if the Gnostic attitude toward these documents is radically different from that of the official Church. “Old” here means outmoded, superseded, obsolete, repudiated. It represents the problem, something to be escaped from.

Westphal’s focus of inquiry is into how guilt and death are handled, and the degree of consistency and thoroughness of rejection of the world in the various Gnostic movements. The remedy for guilt (and with it, imprisonment in this world) is usually some form of knowledge, but it is usually not rational knowledge. Gnosis is rather magical (to outwit the Archons) or metaphysical (to know oneself truly). There are direct ways of dealing with the cosmic powers to get out of guilt that need not detain us here.²⁴ An alternative strategy, and in the end one more relied-upon, is Gnosticism’s soul-body dualism. This is a diverting of resentment from the soul (as self) to the body (as not-self), shifting the blame, a denial of responsibility. By placing the origin of evil outside themselves, those troubled by guilt can deny it and endure themselves. Gnosticism then passes the blame on to higher levels, inasmuch as the world is the work of an evil creator, but not one that is really divine. In Westphal’s estimation, only in Manichaeism did any form of Gnosticism reach widespread influence or effective organization. This was Gnosticism as a semi-successful religion.

The Western Gnostic attitude toward the self and the world exhibits unresolved ambiguities. It is not clear to Westphal whether Gnosticism is anti- or other-worldly.²⁵ Rejection of the body is a mark of all ancient Gnosticisms. What is less clear is the survival of the individual self,

²³Westphal, p. 176.

²⁴Cf. Westphal, p. 179, who supplies details.

²⁵Cf. GGD, pp. 177, 183.

to be sure without a body, but with some individuation. If the self is divine, self and God become one. More precision is required to focus the question: if the self and the divine have the same *nature*, there can be still individuation. If they are parts of *one whole*, then individuation makes no sense. This option occurs in the Western tradition, as “unity without form”—this is worldlessness, as it appears in the Nag Hammadi Library. But in the end, the Western Gnostic tradition is ambiguous. The ambiguity with respect to guilt and world in the West is resolved in Advaita Vedanta.

Shankara’s Advaita (non-dualist) Vedanta is Westphal’s most radical example of exilic religion. Shankara is consistent in his formulation of it, in contrast to its Western manifestations. Self-knowledge is salvation, and ignorance is the source of all evil and suffering. Morality and religion or ritual are in themselves ultimately useless, though of great use in the interim, for souls on the way. What is needed is knowledge of Brahman, the highest end of man. Optical illusions are the normative model for *all* perception and ordinary knowledge. He who sees that everything has its Self in Brahman sees that the phenomenal world is non-existent. Here, distinction of subject and object is illusory. What is significant, by contrast to the West, is that not only the physical world of space, time, and causality, but also the mental world of I-consciousness is ignorance and illusion. The self as agent is the presupposition of moral life, and the self as an I encountering a thou is the presupposition of religious life. For Advaita Vedanta, both are unreal, and the goal is to transcend the realm in which morality and religion make sense. Yet morality and religion are right for the un-illuminated, and Shankara himself participated in them, as his writings testify.²⁶ How does this worldview deal with guilt and death? The self to be left behind is under the illusion of guilt and death, whereas the true self is past guilt and death. Liberation takes one beyond good and evil.

One may raise questions beyond what Westphal tells us, into the origins of Gnosticism. There are fewer answers than questions, however. The origins are variously placed in Jewish or Christian communities, Oriental sources, or simply Greek philosophical circles. The literature is contested. To some extent, all these are probable. If Westphal’s central claim is correct, that exilic religion is one of the perennial options available for basic life orientation, then one would expect it to be ubiquitous.

Platonism and Gnosticism are of greater interest for Western religion of the historical variety, because they, and not Vedanta, appear in mixtures with covenantal religion. They are capable of versatile ambiguity; the consistent exilic religion of India appears to be much less ambiguous. In

²⁶Cf. Westphal, pp. 190–191.

the West, consistency is rare. Gnosticisms frequently demonize Judaism and its God, Yahweh, but retain much of the conceptual paraphernalia of biblical religion. This is more than a little ironic.

A word of ignorance with regard to Hinduism and Buddhism is appropriate in parting. From what little I have seen of the marvelous diversity of these two religions, Westphal's observation is entirely correct: they are mixtures. Exilic elements are tempered with mimetic themes, and in Buddhism, there is even a reverence for history, though to my knowledge without the explicit and thematic interest that one finds in the West.

6.4 History and Covenant

In Eliade's account, history is suffering, chance, and contingency. History is about the individual and non-recurrent, where nature is about the generic, orderly and predictable. History is about the uncertain and indeterminate, the unique. In history, one must face the incomprehensible, meaningless limitation. Meaningless, at least, in the worldview of mimetic religion, the religion of nature, for which meaning is constituted only by integration into nature. History is also largely invisible. Mimetic religion works best in cultures that do not have the ability to remember the details of history. They must, lacking capacity for the labor of detail, assimilate past events to archetypes, and where events resist, the assimilation is to be enforced with religious remedies. And in mimetic religion, individuality (i. e., history) cannot be fitted into archetypes, and not to fit into the archetypes of the cosmos is *the* form of sin for mimetic religion. I would conjecture that the inability to remember history is elementary and technological in its origins: lack of writing. Alphabetic writing in the Semitic world brings the possibility of historical thinking, and though that by itself is not covenantal religion, it opens the way to it.

As history for the Hebrews unfolded, history itself came to be seen as the locus of meaning, instead of the antithesis of meaning in human life. Human life in its individuality is conceived as history, and history then becomes covenant. It is exactly in the character of history that its own transformation from surd to epiphany should be an event whose individuality cannot be reduced to instances of general covering laws, archetypes, or other a-historical categories. It emerges in somewhat ambiguous ways from the prior life of the Hebrews as peoples of mimetic religion among others in the ancient Near East.

In this section, we examine the character of historical religion. Westphal's exposition not only lays out the peculiar features of covenantal religion, but is at some pains to show clearly where it differs from mimetic

and exilic religion, because confusion is easy, in spite of essential differences. We shall see the shift from nature to history, focused in the lessons of the Exodus. Covenant can degenerate back into mimesis or exilic living, and the form of sin in covenantal religion is ingratitude and forgetting history.

Look at the shift from nature to history. Israel looted her neighbors' cosmogonies and transformed them from myth into the prolog for her own history. Every aspect of the annual harvest festivals has been thoroughly historicized.²⁷ Ritual becomes the confessional recital of redemptive acts of God in particular history; history is the chief medium of revelation.

Creation and redemption are not to be separated; creation is just the first of many acts of God, and history is prior to nature. (Indeed, some centuries later, the rabbis who composed *Genesis Rabbah* almost explicitly said as much, for the things that are created before the creation of the world are the elements of life in history.) This is in contrast to mimesis, for which creation is paradigm, not prolog, and reality has meaning as imitative return to that moment. For Israel, creation is the beginning of the Exodus, and history continues the story of creation. Events are conceived so differently that one has to say they have different ontologies for mimetic and covenantal world-views. Modern philosophy (ontology) and science (cosmology) are speculative and contemplative in their focus, abstracted from practical human concerns. It was not so in the ancient Near East. Both the mimetic cosmogonies and the covenantal creation story were intended to guide human activity. Both celebrate creation and creator—but not in the same way. For mimesis, the practical consequence is integration into nature and nature's ways. For covenant, it is openness to meet God in new history, with all its unpredictable contingency and lack of control for the human actors in this drama. History replaces nature as the primary and essential characteristic of the world. Quite the opposite of the terror of history that Eliade describes, covenant is an embracing of history, even in its disappointments, confident that they will issue in blessings in the end. These moves from mimesis to covenant are an excellent example of what Niebuhr claimed in chapter IV of *Radical Monotheism*: similar human concerns appear everywhere, but radical monotheism transforms the way they are understood in life.

The extent and profundity of the shift from nature to history can be appreciated better if one looks at what Gerhard Von Rad has called the short historical creed, Deuteronomy 26.5-9:

A wandering Aramaean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there

²⁷Westphal, p. 231.

he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the LORD the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey (RSV).²⁸

Von Rad's central claim in his essay is that this creed is repeated in various forms in many other places in the Common Documents, and indeed, it shapes the entire view of life there, focusing its attention on history. For here, war and agriculture are no longer to be understood primarily through myth and mimesis but instead understood as essentially historical. Though this creed is preface to the annual offering of first-fruits of the harvest, thanks are not for the fruit of the natural process, but for the historical events that enable Israel to enjoy the land and in it that natural process. The natural is taken for granted, the historical is not. The divine is transferred from atemporal myth and relocated in historical events.²⁹ The mythical language of mimetic religion is kept, but it is transferred to history. This can be seen again in The Song of the Sea, Exodus 15.1–18. The sea is a neutral inanimate tool of God, not personified or hostile, as it is in mimetic religion.

The process of transformation from nature to history is concentrated in the events of the Exodus. The principal breaks with the mimetic past are evident here, and the roots of everything that follows can be discerned, if sometimes only in seed form. Richard Rubenstein's appreciation of the radical character of the changes in an essay entitled "Covenant, Holocaust, and Intifada"³⁰ amplifies Westphal's account, and I expand on it somewhat.

The people who went down into Egypt did so at various times, they were not clearly related by blood or clan, and they were lower-class transient laborers in socio-economic status. Riff-raffs, plural, of various ethnic origins, and with various gods. Some seven lessons (as I count them) were drawn by those riff-raffs as they became one people. Let me introduce them briefly and then make some comments going over them a second time.

²⁸Cf. "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (London: SCM, 1966), p. 3-4.

²⁹Westphal, p. 228.

³⁰In *After Auschwitz*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

(1) They had no use for governments that arrogated to themselves divine power, and this is the reason to desacralize all human institutions. This much is clear from their mistreatment at the hands of the Egyptian sacral kingship. Here is the root of civil and political freedom, for the move to desacralize human institutions at the same time was a move to hold governments responsible.

(2) They could not become one people if they were to retain their previous ethnic- and nature-based senses of identity and allegiance. The companion principle to the desacralizing of governments was a community of moral obligation which was in principle open to all and from which none could be excluded who wished to join. This is familiar in the commandment to love one's neighbor as one like oneself. The situation out of which this arises, ethnic plurality, did not become clear until biblical scholarship of the last century or so pieced it out of scattered hints in the texts. The unity that was forged out of this plurality was in fact a pluralistic unity, and we shall come to it again.

(3) If these peoples were to become one, they would have to surrender or at least relativize everything that separated them. The deities of nature lose their ultimate status at this point. History dethrones the gods in an event that is the beginning of the focus on history as something of interest in itself. To consummate such a move to history, the people who came together in the desert had to desacralize nature itself. What is kept from the world-affirming nature religions is the affirmation of this world, and of nature in it, even when nature is no longer sacred.

(4) Human life necessarily has some focus of loyalty, confidence, and meaning (at least it does if it is coherent), and that focus had to be placed outside of the forces and phenomena of nature and beyond human institutions: in something transcendent.³¹ I find the Shema implicitly present at this point, and the first commandments of the Decalog. The term that I invoke here, "transcendence," is of recent coinage,³² but the roots of the concept in human practices can be confidently located here in the Exodus and the texts that have come down to us from it.

(5) The believer is to welcome the transcendent holy into the world, rather than seeking escape to it from the world. This is a radical difference from exilic living, as Joseph Soloveitchik has emphasized at length.³³ It is

³¹The transcendent lies beyond history as much as beyond nature, but it shows itself fully only in history. For the present, it is not an issue, but we shall come to this in ALHR, chapter 15.

³²So William C. Placher, in *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

³³Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*. Translated by Lawrence Kaplan

the point at which the world is affirmed in all its pains as good, something to be consummated and perfected (the Hebrew word for this is *tikkun*), not to be abandoned or merely used.

(6) A project such as this one must in order to work have some kind of behavioral standards which inculturate these loyalties. These standards will be inculturated somewhat differently in different times and places.

(7) Last, but not least, there was to be continuing attention to past history in order to keep this confidence for future history in perspective, with its hazards, obligations, and promises. Other items could be added, but I think these are among the most important. The order among them is to some extent arbitrary.

Look at the inter-relationships between these seven features of the Exodus.

I have put first the relativizing of human governments and institutions because it grows most directly out of the Hebrews' experience of oppression at the hands of a government that absolutized itself. As the concepts grew, this one came to be dependent on the fourth, the turn to a transcendent Other: if human institutions are to be relativized, then they are made relative *to* something else. It was the prohibition on locating that other within the world of nature or human institutions that lies at the root of the later understanding of transcendence, though that understanding appears at the start in the prohibition on visual images.

The transcendent reality is then to be loved. "Love" is doubtless too weak a word for the human attitude toward a reality that is mysterious, both attractive and awesome, and in its awesomeness a little terrifying. One is dependent before this Reality, not a peer to it. But the Shema has "love," and sacred fear has to be understood as part of that love. If the ultimate reality is to be loved even when it bears disappointments—as is implicit in its superior power—it then becomes a focus of radical exposure, limitation, and need, and these are occasions of grace. Exposure really discloses truth in a way that transcends particular human knowing and acknowledgment of it. That truth is to be sought in getting a narrative right, whether personal narratives in local communities, or the story of the covenant people in history and the cosmos. Limitation and need are the stuff of that history, and they are to be taken as bearing the blessings that really matter, neither to be shucked on the way to something better, nor reduced to the terms of nature.

The second lesson, like the first, grows out of the immediate needs of the Hebrews in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. The believer is to love others as ones like himself, a common humanity, a community of moral obligation. All people are in this analogy children of one Father.

(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983).

As in human families, all are kin to one another, all have a common interest and not opposed and warring interests. This marks covenant off from all the other basic life options. In covenant, the community of moral obligation is open in principle to all, and the covenant community accepts some degree of obligation to and for all. (Abraham was to be a blessing to all peoples.) It is an attitude esteemed so highly that where there has been contact with covenantal religion, it is often borrowed and appears mixed with the other life options, even where the historicity of covenant is not seen or is discounted, and even where other obligations of covenantal living are discounted. Indeed, this attitude sometimes appears spontaneously in places outside of nominally historical religion.

The turn from nature to history enabled the Hebrews to look open-eyed at their changing human circumstances, with freedom to act appropriately in each new age. The turn from nature to history, is, by the way, the root of personal freedom, for the radical difference between history and nature is that the openness and indeterminateness of history affords a freedom that cannot be found in nature. Even indeterminateness in nature is not the same thing, for historical freedom is not consummated until its story is told, and that move to narrative escalates freedom in an ontological way. This move is not entirely obvious today, for many would precisely *re*-sacralize nature in order to protect it, a move which forgets that to desacralize nature is not thereby to trash it. For covenantal religion, nature is neither to be worshiped nor is it to be trashed.

Look again at the consequences of desacralizing human institutions. Human institutions all become finite in the sense of being subordinated to transcendent reality. While they have a delegated discretionary authority, that authority does not divinize them. This is a difference from henotheisms and from even some forms of mimesis, as Westphal's account of ancient Egyptian religion testifies. This would appear to be a charter of liberation, but it can be experienced as a burden at times as well.³⁴ The discretionary authority granted to human institutions means that fallible mortals bear an enormous responsibility, and indeed, responsibility is the functional pivot of de-sacralizing human institutions. They are obliged to answer to their members, to outsiders, to the world, to history, and in these, to God. They may not claim "God told us to do thus and so" to dodge responsibility for their decisions. This is true even in the declaring of a covenant: for the attribution of a covenant to the relationship between man and ultimate reality is a kind of analogy, and

³⁴It is in the desacralizing of human institutions, by the way, that the freedom of speech originates: for it is the essential freedom to criticize governing institutions. When freedom of speech is infringed, it is a symptom that covenant is yielding to the temptations of henotheism.

the human who engages in such analogical speech acts must take the responsibility for them. That the covenant is honored from the other side is not something under human control, not even conceptual control.

The fifth lesson, that the transcendent is to be welcomed into the world, and not fled to as a way to escape from the pains of the world, grows slowly out of subsequent experience. Yet its roots are here, in the turn to history and covenant. It is this life and not some other that is to be affirmed as good, in a good that transcends nature and human institutions. The complaint of the Hebrews in the desert, variously to God and to Moses, expresses a fear that God will *not* be with them in this life. There is no thought of escaping to another life, as appears later in Western Gnosticisms. The affirmation of this life as history is cautious (its pains are obvious), but it begins here. It may seem to us to be a radical innovation; we live with Gnostic temptations, recognized or not, and it is in light of Gnosticism that we would even ask about the direction of traffic with the transcendent. The affirmation of this life as history transforms the affirmation of this life as nature that is still to be found in truly mimetic religions everywhere. In Niebuhr's words, this is the affirmation of being, qua being, as good. In my words, it is the claim that all of life is good, pains included.

A word about inculturations of covenantal religion, the sixth lesson. The obvious examples would seem to be halakhah and Christian ethics, two traditions notable for misunderstanding each other. The moral codes of different covenantal communities can appear quite differently, even in form, but they must incarnate at least the other lessons of the Exodus that I have claimed here. There has to be some way of making the conduct of ordinary daily affairs covenantal in a concrete way. In the House of the Mishnah, halakhah does this work. In the orbit of the Great Thanksgiving, things are less clear, but Christians who pay attention to their Christian life are forever talking about God's "law." If moral law in Christianity is flexible, it should be noted that what is flexible is not fluid: the flexible bends but resists, and does not break. Christian ethics does the work of making covenantal living concrete. Actually, I would suspect that in Christianity, ethics does not play the central role in its inculturation that halakhah does in Rabbinic Judaism. Inculturation is instead focused on a particular historical figure, and the believer's relation to that figure. This would be the opening to a christology and its claim that the transcendent is present in the world in that particular individual.

Yet the sixth lesson is peculiar to radical monotheism in another important way that could be overlooked. In mimesis, the way to success in life is to fit into nature naturally, and nature is something pre-given before human choices. In exilic religion, the world is defective, and the

believer wants to get out of it. For covenant in history, the possibilities for life are not pre-given, they are open and to a large extent a matter of human choice. This comes from the difference between history and nature. From the community of moral obligation comes an obligation of regard for the other members. But since history does not regulate the relations between people as nature does (or is imagined to do), human relations will always to some extent be a matter of negotiation. One party will say to another, "You're stepping on my toes!" Human society as part of the created world is to be affirmed as good. Yet because it is in no sense sinless, it is also to be held responsible in covenant. "You're stepping on my toes" grows into a kind of discourse that regulates the life of a covenantal community. Because human society is affirmed as good, the responsibility that is necessary to guide a covenantal community in the freedom of history will become incarnated, concrete, and objectivated in institutions of responsibility. For the Synagogue, the rabbinate. For the Church, the bishops. For First Temple Judaism, the monarchy, the priests, and the prophets. The idea of having institutions of responsibility *at all* is rejected in one kind of Gnosticism, one that is libertarian in its character. It rejects any regulation of individual freedom because it does not trust human social institutions. At this point it rejects the created world as defective.

The seventh lesson, attention to history, may seem the most implausible. But if the way to win in life is to be a historical being, then the way to lose is to flunk history. To win one must study history. If, by contrast in exilic living, the way to true life is to perfect or complete one's metaphysics, then one must study metaphysics. There, one loses by flunking metaphysics. (I use the word "lose" instead of "go to hell" because it is a little more neutral.) The prophets emphasize the importance of attention to history, an emphasis that is usually missed in their focus on ethics. We shall come to it again. But Amos 2.6-11 may be mentioned here, before we come to it in section 14.1, or the symbol of the unfaithful wife in Hosea. They all reflect the theological purposes of the history in the Pentateuch. The injunction to study history is multiply attested, but no place more emphatically than the Shema. For it says, "Let these words which I urge on you be written on your heart." Despite the fact that many readers truncate "these words" to mean just statute (and some regard this as a bug, others as a feature), it is well within the meaning of the text to include the entire Mosaic discourse in Deuteronomy within their reference. For the next few verses rehearse the history and emphasize the close connection between history and ethics: If you remember, you will be grateful, and if you are grateful, you will live in accordance with the covenant. If you forget, you lose.

Covenantal living is an act of voluntary freedom on both sides, despite the unequal relationship of power. On the divine side, the sovereign freedom of God appears in the name that he gives to Moses in the interview conducted at the burning bush. It is often translated as “I am who am,” but this covers up a Hebrew ontology of event with a Greek ontology of being. I have already noted, early in Part I, John Courtney Murray’s turn to this passage and its translation.³⁵ God promises to be there, with his people, but in ways under his control, and not theirs. “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exodus 33.19, RSV). The deity promises presence but not consolation, and refuses what the human heart most naturally wants—a presence that it can in effect control. The name cannot be used to conjure, or summon, or command, or manipulate. That’s what it means to say that it is holy. Narcissists who expect to be pampered would do well to choose some other kind of religion.

How does the covenant come about? The Lord enters history as a warrior, “choosing for his human allies a people notable for their ability to complain.”³⁶ Why? To inaugurate the covenant, as in, “I will be your God, and you will be my people.” The word translated as covenant is *berith*, and it can also be translated as obligation, promise.³⁷ Some explanation of this experience was necessary, and just as Israel borrowed and transformed mimetic imagery for historical purposes, she also borrowed a diplomatic genre to explain the experience of covenant. Texts of Hittite suzerainty treaties survive that provide parallels to the covenants in the Common Documents.³⁸ “Such treaties typically have six parts: (1) a preamble introducing the sovereign lord, (2) a prolog giving the history of the relationship between the two parties, (3) the stipulations governing the relationship, (4) arrangements for preservation and public reading of the document recording the agreement, (5) a list of the gods who are witnesses to the oath, and (6) a list of blessings for keeping the oath and curses for breaking it.”³⁹ All of these elements can be found in the course of the Exodus narrative. What is radical is that the other party, the superior party in the covenant, is taken to be an invisible deity that transcends nature. The covenant is offered, not imposed by God; but

³⁵Cf. above, chapters 1 and 2, and *The Problem of God*, pp. 10–12. Cf. also Westphal, p. 238.

³⁶Westphal, p. 232.

³⁷Von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 199.

³⁸Examples may be found in Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

³⁹Westphal, p. 235.

also, in the earliest tradition, it is not negotiated.⁴⁰ Later theology sees on the human side a synthesis of obligation and freedom. On the divine side, sovereign freedom and power do not abrogate human freedom. We shall come to God's radical respect for human freedom in section 10.3.

That the covenant is taken up voluntarily by each Israelite is witnessed in a much later text, from the oral tradition, *Midrash Rabbah Songs*. The midrash is on *Songs* 1.2:

Another explanation: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." R. Johanan said: An angel carried the utterances [at Mount Sinai] from before the Holy One, blessed be He, each one in turn, and brought it to each of the Israelites and said to him, "Do you take upon yourself this commandment? So-and-so many rules are attached to it, so-and-so many penalties are attached to it, so-and-so many precautionary measures are attached to it, so many precepts and so many lenient and strict applications are attached to it; such-and-such a reward is attached to it." The Israelite would answer him, "Yes, yes." There-upon he kissed him on the mouth.⁴¹

An alternate rabbinical account has not the angel but the commandment itself kissing each Israelite on the mouth: "Straightway the commandment kissed him on the mouth . . . and taught him Torah." This is a love-affair, not, as some readers of Paul would have it, a burden. The Torah is instruction, both universal and particular, cultic law and social law, for the whole of life. It is to result in an attitude of love; but there is no split between inner and outer, or sacred and secular.⁴² The law is a promise of guidance through history, and for that reason it is a gift, not a burdensome obligation. It is universal in that it applies to all of life, and it is particular in that it is not addressed to everyone. This may come as a surprise, but even the Shema and the decalog are undertaken as voluntary, if solemn and irrevocably binding obligations by Israel. There *are* other gods, but they are forbidden. It is not as if other gods don't exist or would be philosophically confused. The appeal is to history in all its particularity. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt,

⁴⁰Westphal, p. 235–236.

⁴¹*Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs*, 3rd ed., p. 22. Translated by Maurice Simon (London and New York: Soncino Press, 1983).

⁴²I would add to Westphal's treatment notice of Joseph Soloveitchik's writing on the halakhic temperament, as sufficient witness that the Law is not legalistic nor manipulative of God. It will be appropriate to return to these works in more detail in later chapters, but mention needs to be made here, because of the perennial Christian tendency to dismiss the Torah as manipulative legalism.

the house of bondage; you shall have no other gods before me.”⁴³ The logic is not that covenanters should be faithful, but “I will be faithful to you,” a voluntary promise. We see once again the radically confessional character of historical-covenantal religion. It is not to be derived from logic or proven from self-evident premises.

The freedom implicit in covenant is attested on the human side in the variety of models for explaining it. They are all taken from everyday human relationships in which there is a certain asymmetry of obligation. Obligation rests on love and loyalty, not fear or rationality, or, indeed, manipulation. This difference between covenant and mimesis is important. Manipulation is quite characteristic of mimetic religion; both magic and engineering are appropriate ways to relate to nature, depending on one’s metaphysics of natural processes. They are not appropriate for relating to people one has any respect for.

There are three prototypical covenants in the Common Documents: Abraham (and the land), Moses (Exodus, freedom from sacral kingship of Egypt; and Sinai, the Law), and David (the monarchy). All are free promises to Israel, though that is not obvious to casual readers. Beginning students tend to read into the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12 something that is not there: assumption of an obligation on Abraham’s part. There is none; only promises from God. (1) God will be *with* Abraham; (2) Abraham will have children and land; (3) the Exodus is forecast as fulfillment of (1)-(2); (4) and Abraham is to become a blessing to *all* people. The covenant points beyond its human party to the whole world, the covenant with one people is for the sake of all peoples. The gift in the Law at Sinai we have seen in the Midrash, and the free contingency of the promise to the monarchy is clear enough.

Covenantal living can easily be confused with mimetic, exilic, or henotheistic religion, and it can also simply become these basic life orientations. The sources of confusion mark the stages by which originally mimetic, henotheistic, or even exilic living was transformed into covenantal religion.

It could seem that historical religion is as mimetic as nature-focused religion. Examples could be found in annual festival cycles or in the rite of the Eucharist. Indeed, the article on the Eucharist in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* uses many mimetic terms from Eliade unawares.⁴⁴ It speaks of repetition, re-enactment, representation, reliving, making present, and participation. Once again, as Niebuhr claims, radical monotheism has transformed human concerns as it found them. They have been histori-

⁴³Exodus 20.2–3; cf. Westphal, p. 234.

⁴⁴Cf. Westphal, pp. 219–220. He cites E. J. Kilmartin, “Eucharist (as sacrifice),” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.

cized. There was only one sacrifice, and the Eucharist is participation in it. This would be mimesis (i. e., nature-focused) but for the fact that it is about very particular real history. It is not about something outside of historical time, in myth or nature.⁴⁵ It is a historical covenant, and it looks forward to an eschatological fulfillment. Mimetic language and imagery continue, but the focus is radically shifted from nature to history.

If covenantal religion can be confused with mimetic religion on one hand, it can just as easily be confused with exilic religion on the other. For both exilic and historical-covenantal religion, the sacred is not immanent in nature as it is in mimetic religion; instead, it is transcendent.⁴⁶ Both make a sharp distinction between God and the world, but in antithetically different ways. Exilic religion seeks a way through the world to slip into other-worldly freedom, but historical-covenantal religion sees God enter the world not to save us *from* it, but to be with us *in* it. This rests on a second antithetical choice, whether God makes a world that he approves and cares for, or instead is hostile to the world, and is its alternative. Biblical faith is world-affirming in a way that sets its divine transcendence apart from exilic divine transcendence in three ways. (1) For the Bible, creation is good, without equivocation or qualification. One can see this particularly clearly in Genesis, Psalms and Isaiah, but it is presupposed everywhere, and never contradicted. The world is home for man. (2) There is no mind-body dualism. Instead, man is a psycho-physical unity. Sex is not found in God as it is in mimetic deities, and so sex is not part of covenantal rituals. Sex is God's blessing on human family life. (3) There is hope for Israel's future. This is part of the affirmation of this world, affirmation of creation and the body: though it appears late in Second Temple Judaism, resurrection of the body is handled in a way that is radically anti-exilic.

One can find texts enough from the New Testament that suggest that Christianity, at least, is exilic. Some even use these texts to separate Christianity from Judaism. He who loves the world does not love the Father; "My kingship is not of this world"; and in the Epistle to Diognetus, the idea that Christians live in but not of the world, as strangers, foreigners; "they pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven."⁴⁷ So one must seriously ask, is Christianity a world-deprecating exilic religion or a world-affirming historical-covenantal religion? Westphal looks at three distinctions and shows that in no case does Christianity draw them in a way consistent with exilic dualism or world-rejection. They are the contrasts between heaven and earth, spirit and flesh, church and world.

⁴⁵Westphal, p. 221.

⁴⁶Westphal, p. 222.

⁴⁷Westphal, p. 223–224.

Heaven and earth do not become paradise and hell, but a new heaven and a new earth; and the cosmos comes to be seen from within the perspective of history, rather than being the larger framework within which history is set. Spirit and flesh are not opposed as good essence and evil prison; salvation is not escape from the body but resurrection in the body. Jesus's resurrection is the model for every believer. Westphal quotes C. S. Lewis to the effect that resurrection is also of our "greater body", the general fabric of our earthly life, its affections and friendships.⁴⁸ This is to affirm the world in all its human and social senses, as well as its physical sense. One might remember in the Shema, that we are to love the Lord with all our *me'od*, for *me'od* is what Lewis unknowingly intends here. And resurrection affirms the incarnation: God becomes incarnate in order to sacralize bodily existence. And look at spirit and flesh in Paul. Only a selective reading of his letters would find sins of the flesh to be all physical; many are not directly physical at all. The list of sins includes immorality, impurity, licentiousness, drunkenness, carousing, enmity, strife jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party strife, and envy. And among the virtues, the spirit views the body as a temple, holy. Church and world are not opposed to one another as Gnostic elite and unsaved masses. The world is to be reconciled to God, not escaped from; the church, like Abraham before it, is supposed to be a blessing to all peoples. Sin is not equal to being in the world, nor is it intrinsic to the cosmos, even when the world refers to sinful humanity.⁴⁹ Rather, God loves *the world*, enough to give his Son for it to take away the sin of the world—"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."

Westphal returns, as he does for every basic life option, to ask how it looks at guilt and death. Not surprisingly, historical-covenantal religion has a covenantal understanding of guilt and death. From exilic and mimetic perspectives, historical existence itself is the root problem. For exilic life, history is "natural, embodied selfhood," and so bad. For mimetic life, history is "unique individuality rather than reiteration of archetypal form," and so a surd.⁵⁰ Covenantal religion borrows images from exilic and mimetic religions, but they are quite transformed. History and life in history are not the problem of human life. Quite the contrary, history and only history makes possible a solution. History is the place where the divine-human encounter occurs; history has meaning in proportion as it is the stage for this encounter. Guilt and death are then whatever threatens the covenantal meeting. This is to be expected from a historical understanding of the world and a covenantal understanding of

⁴⁸GGD, p. 224, n. 26, citing *The Four Loves* (1960) p. 187.

⁴⁹Westphal, p. 225.

⁵⁰Westphal, p. 243.

history. Sheol pales beside this world; God, not death, has the last word. The problem appears in late Second Temple Judaism in the apocalyptic literature. As it appears for Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity, even in death, the covenant people is not to be separated from God. These definitions of sin and guilt are quite peculiar to covenantal religion: they are whatever infringes the covenant or separates its parties from one another. “[S]in is the cause of, guilt the experience of, a breach in the covenantal bond.”⁵¹ Yet God’s will to covenant is enough to heal the breach. In the psalms that confess history (Pss. 78, 105, 106), one hears of Israel that they *forgot* God; “they exchanged the God who was their glory for the image of an ox that eats grass.” Compare exilic religion: forgetting is forgetting “that our true nature is divine, and that we have no business here in the world but to seek liberation and the return to our true, unworldly home.”⁵² For covenantal religion, it is forgetting the mighty acts of God in history, and forgetting is ingratitude, not bad metaphysics, and so it leads to distrust, disloyalty, and rebellion. Forgiveness is forgetting the break in order to restore the relationship. “God’s willingness to forgive is grounded in his steadfast love, *hesed*”;⁵³ punishment is here not an alternative to but a means of mercy and restoration. The law specifies rites of atonement and forgiveness, “God’s role is to demand repentance while offering reconciliation,” and “the human role is to acknowledge guilt while accepting forgiveness. The two agree to put the past aside, so as to resume their journey through historical existence together.”⁵⁴

6.5 Religious Options Today

Westphal’s typology of basic life orientations confined itself, with considerable restraint, to ancient examples. It is more concrete than Niebuhr’s and is sometimes more useful, even though Niebuhr’s abstractions are more broadly applicable. One would then naturally ask how to extend Westphal’s typology from ancient to modern examples. In reply, it is possible to make some plausible conjectures about the development of monotheism.

Israelite religion starts among people who were mimetic in their life orientation, as may be amply documented from the Bible and archaeology. They became conscious of history, they de-sacralized kingship and human government, and they came to see themselves as a covenant peo-

⁵¹Westphal, p. 247.

⁵²Westphal, p. 248.

⁵³Westphal, p. 250.

⁵⁴Westphal, p. 251.

ple.⁵⁵ This, too, is not in doubt, however much the historical particulars may yet be corrected. It comes from both reading the biblical accounts and contemporary cultural evidence. Consciousness of history together with at least selective affirmation of life leads merely to henotheism, not necessarily to monotheism. A covenant does not necessarily have any universal implications beyond the particular circumstances of the covenant people. In this case, it did go on, it was extended, even in the early vision of the Pentateuch. One surmises that consciousness of history comes with two cultural advances, the invention of writing and the technology of iron. Iron is the means of empire and, as a consequence, the means of extended imperial horizons.⁵⁶ Empires usually have histories, they are not part of nature. This took time, but the move at least to henotheism is not surprising. With the ever-present possibility of simply rejecting the world, however it is perceived, we have at this stage, at least potentially, all the elements of Niebuhr's and Westphal's typologies. They may be expanded and synthesized as the Cartesian product of the nature/history and affirm/select/reject distinctions. When human life is nature, it may be affirmed categorically in archaic religion, selectively in later mimesis, the mystery religions, and the casual Hellenistic piety that has returned in the modern world. When human life is historical, it may be affirmed categorically in covenantal religion, or selectively in ethnic henotheisms and in other human institutions that are made ultimate. When human life in this world is declared radically defective, Gnosticisms result, regardless of how the issues of nature and history are handled. Gnosticisms as rejection are not surprising; henotheisms as selective world-affirmation that is conscious of history were missed in Westphal's account. That mimetic religion should be divided into piety (casual) and the mysteries (intentional) grows out of the Hellenistic experience.

In the West the concrete particulars of mimetic religion are more differentiated than Babylon or Egypt, and with consequences that last into the present. Luther H. Martin's *Hellenistic Religions*⁵⁷ recounts a progression in the Hellenistic world from casual and informal piety without specialists or theory to the mystery religions to Gnosticisms. Hellenistic Judaism, Christianity, and various philosophical movements fit into this progression along the way. One can see the contemporary relevance of

⁵⁵Cf. Rubenstein, "Covenant, Holocaust, and Intifada," in *After Auschwitz*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

⁵⁶Some of this can be found in great detail in Robert Bellah, "Religious Evolution," *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964) 358-374; reprinted in William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt eds., *Reader in Comparative Religion, an Anthropological Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965) and later editions.

⁵⁷Luther H. Martin, *Hellenistic Religions* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

the Hellenistic world in Martin's description of its features and problems. The heritage of Hellenistic religion includes lapsed remnants of older religions; cosmopolitanism; material surplus, comfort and anxiety together; major cultural transformation; explosion of knowledge of physical world, leading to cosmological revolution; changing socio-political systems; encounters with once marginal and exotic cultures; religious reformations; strange new gods from the East; and individualism in the quest and search for meaning, rather than corporate or communal strategies for finding meaning in life. The first way of dealing with such a world is simple piety, without much need for religious specialists or organized systematic theory. Piety is reverence, esteem, honor, especially in social or legal relationships, right relations between mortals and immortals, local traditions, particular peoples, a self-evident order accessible to all. This is the end-state transformation of the older, largely Olympian, religion. When life becomes spiritually problematic, as it was in the Hellenistic world, the mysteries arise; order in the world is not self-evident, and one must find remedies. They take the form of the feminine goddesses: Demeter, Isis, Atargatis, Cybele, and some others. Initiation into their cults and devotion could provide an individual with meaning in a chaotic world. The problem is unpredictable contingency in life, and the savior is also personified as Tyche or Fortuna, influenceable and potentially benevolent. (Mithraism seems to be a masculine variant, but otherwise not radically different.) With Gnosis, another level of religiosity has been reached. The unpredictable in life has become not Fortune but *Heimarmene*, fate, whether deterministic or chaotic, and, again feminine. It is later rejected in favor of a masculine Gnostic redeemer. Here, salvation depends on knowledge, not ritual practices. (The focus on *Tyche* and *Heimarmene*, incidentally, reinforces my own instinct to replace Westphal's definition of the problem of life as guilt and death with simply the disappointments of life, to be specified and made concrete in a later move.)

There are striking modern analogs of this account. Thomas Luckmann has started a sociological inquiry into "secular" life as religion.⁵⁸ He laments the inability of sociological theory to see anything more than the "religious" features of life (Sunday School attendance, etc.) in its attempts to understand religion in the culture after World War II. His attempts to formulate a concept general and abstract enough to accommodate "religion" as one but not its only manifestation are preliminary, though there is much to build on in Durkheim and Weber. "Basic Life Orientation" is my own neologism; "over-arching meaning systems" or similar locutions are sometimes heard among sociologists. The themes

⁵⁸Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion; The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

of such an attitude are reminiscent of the Hellenistic world indeed: Individual autonomy, the inner man, its self-discovery, self-realization, geographical and social mobility, relaxation of norms for family and sexual conduct. This is the world of “lifestyles,” “secular” America.⁵⁹ In self-realization and self-discovery, we have also the soul’s quest for itself, a Gnostic move. New Age Mysticism hardly merits surprise as a modern counterpart of the Hellenistic mysteries.

Further contemporary parallels are easy to find. Modern religion of nature can focus on nature as ecology, in environmentalism, sometimes with a pronounced focus on the animal world as the context for human life. An only slightly different variant is the religion of Gaia and earth-mother revivals. These are feminist analogs of ancient mimetic religion, often consciously and intentionally so. These movements have matured enough to acquire a sense of community, organization, and theoretical rationale, as Margot Adler’s survey documents.⁶⁰ And Jerry Mander’s eloquent protest speaks for many who are disgusted with the exploitation of nature that has become pervasive in American culture.⁶¹ Mander would revive a mimetic appreciation of the sacred in nature as the remedy.

More surprising, at least against an ancient background, are the various scientific theories that now have religious significance, especially quantum mechanics and astrophysical cosmology. But evolutionary biology can just as easily be turned from an empirical science to become the center of a basic life orientation. Chemistry, notably, is missing as a source for theological reflection. This is not surprising. In my experience, the ethos of chemistry could be summarized as, “Abandon Theories of Everything, all ye who enter here.” Even mathematics holds some interest, as in chaos theory. Science fiction literature is sometimes exilic and escapist in its motives. Astrology is still alive and well, though not visibly an establishment cultural phenomenon. The religion of science is perhaps to be expected. Its instincts appear in different form in analytic philosophy, in constructing “proofs” for the existence of God. It utterly misses the confessional side of historical-covenantal religion, the tension between the voluntariness of the covenant and its binding status. Companion to this is “the problem of evil,” which by its very structure buys into the central assumption of exilic religion, that the pains of the world can simply be taken as evil.

⁵⁹Luckmann, p. 110.

⁶⁰Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979; 2nd ed., 1986).

⁶¹Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred: the Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991).

There are border-line phenomena, between the several types of life orientation. Scientism, science as a historical-salvific movement, is borderline even with covenantal religion. This tends to court strong temptations to henotheism,⁶² and we see this in the slogan, “science has replaced religion.” Philosophy as anthropology, the road to self-knowledge, lies between nature and exilic religion. Philosophy as denial of history abounds, in much of post-Cartesian Western philosophy, prominently in positivism. R. G. Collingwood lamented in *The Idea of History* that modern philosophy of history was perennially tempted to reduce history to nature, most commonly by way of psychology. Psychology can function as anthropology, and its religious implications can be both mimetic and exilic. Much interest in Carl Jung can only be described as religious, to note one of the most conspicuous recent psychological fashions. The theories of Spengler and Toynbee reproduce the cycles of history that Eliade found as the characteristic of mimetic religion. And A. G. Pacholczyk has shown how scientific cosmology usually embodies religious commitments wherever it goes beyond its empirical foundations.⁶³

Modern exilic religion abounds, though close parallels and revivals are still not very widespread. They do exist, however.⁶⁴ Sensing the affinities between present-day culture and the Hellenistic world, they find a revival of Alexandrian Gnosticism to be very apt for today’s problems. The world is flawed, made by a flawed being in his own flawed image. Human beings are ignorant of their true origin and destiny, and so long as they remain attached to earthly things, they will be reincarnated in perpetuity. With detachment from the flawed world, they can escape it at death and return to their true origin. This is very classical, and surprising only because we are surprised to see any group other than Jews or Christians (and doubtless Muslims) hold the past in enough esteem to appropriate it as a model.

More usually, exilic living appears in ways significantly transformed from its ancient instances. Eric Voegelin is hardly alone in spotting the parallels, but his exposition offers an interesting rationale for latter-day exilic tendencies. There are many ways to relate to being, some respecting its irreducible complexity, some ignoring it, some seeking to control or subjugate it. Gnosticisms are among the last, seeking control. It is characteristic of Gnosticism, but not of non-Gnostic philosophy, to build conceptual systems to capture and control all being. Can that work? Only if being really is within the grasp of human concepts. If it is reachable

⁶²Cf. RMWC, chapter VI, in remarks on dogmatic and reductive materialism.

⁶³A. G. Pacholczyk, *The Catastrophic Universe* (Tucson: Pachart Pub., 1984).

⁶⁴On the Internet, they can be found at <http://www.webcom.com/gnosis>, a general page leading to other resources (2001 May 21).

only by analogy, it lies outside that grasp. If any part of it is ineffable, it is beyond reach. As Voegelin says, such inconveniences are to be eliminated by reinterpreting being in such a way as to escape them.⁶⁵ The sources of modern problems lie in an original inner-Christian tension, manifest in Augustine, and leading to an effective re-divinization of politics, though not in the ways of the mimetic ancient world. Augustine makes the pivotal move, from cyclical to a linear and narrative history, but profane history waits for its end, without goal or hope of fulfillment, while only sacred history moves toward an eschatology. By the Middle Ages, Augustinian defeatism with respect to profane history is unbearable, leading to the pivotal move, a “fallacious immanentization of the Christian eschaton.” What do the Gnostic systems achieve? Certainty.

What specific uncertainty was so disturbing that it had to be overcome by the dubious means of fallacious immanentization? One does not have to look far afield for an answer. Uncertainty is the very essence of Christianity. The feeling of security in a “world full of gods” is lost with the gods themselves; when the world is de-divinized, communication with the word-transcendent God is reduced to the tenuous bond of faith, in the sense of Heb. 11.1, as the substance of things hoped for and the proof of things unseen. Ontologically, the substance of things hoped for is nowhere to be found but in faith itself; and, epistemologically, there is no proof for things unseen but again this very faith.⁶⁶

Exactly our themes in this book: living with uncertainty, with an ultimate reality that shows itself more in absence than presence, shaping its people’s lives, but never visible to them. We saw this theme in John Courtney Murray, and it will be with us to the end of ALHR. Scientism, putting the natural sciences at the center of a basic life orientation, can be ambiguous in its religious import. It can be world-affirming, inasmuch as it provides a naturalism that, in a world-affirming way, can be claimed to explain all human concerns. But in its illusions of objectivation of reality, it can also provide just the certainty that the Gnostic needs. Scientific naturalism need not be world-affirming, and then it can become the engine of a modern exilic stance toward the world. For what offers certainty can be used to gain control.⁶⁷ In its techno-utopian form, electronic engineering

⁶⁵Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1968), pp. 42–43.

⁶⁶Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics; an introduction* (University of Chicago Press, 1952; Midway Reprint, 1983), pp. 121–122.

⁶⁷Cf. *The New Science of Politics*, p. 127.

can become the vehicle for a worldview that looks very gnostic indeed.⁶⁸

One may remark on the most obvious difference between ancient and modern Gnosticisms, the presence or absence of an after-life. For the ancient and Indian varieties do envision some form of human life apart from (and better than) this life. Scientisms of the kind Voegelin disliked have no such vision of human life. This parallels Westphal's observation that such a feature is secondary in mimetic religion.

Clearly, much of the modern revival of mimetic and exilic religion got its start under the auspices of Christianity, and only lately has it come out in the open, without further need to borrow the legitimations of Christian trademarks. Why so easy a mixing of mimetic and exilic features within covenantal religion? Much of Westphal's chapter 11 is about such mixing, even though it seeks to show Christianity as historical-covenantal religion. But mixing ("syncretism") has been a concern almost from the beginning: note only the Deuteronomic concern to suppress the temptations of idolatry. Mimetic religion in the first millennium BCE could be excluded fairly easily by a prohibition on idols. Mimesis today would not be caught in such a net. It is not so easy to police covenantal religion against exilic temptations. For, as Westphal's examples clearly show, covenantal rhetoric can easily be assimilated to very exilic motives. The human condition of original sin can become a fall into sin, and that fall then becomes a fall into the world. The psycho-social unity of body and soul can be turned into a dualism; heaven and earth can become exilic home and vale of tears; and the church can become the Gnostic elect in a lost world. The ease with which confusion is possible suggests how easy it is to move in both directions. It is such a move that Niebuhr has in mind in the monotheistic transformation of human life. In chapter IV of *Radical Monotheism* he argues that monotheism transforms human concerns that are widespread, part of being human, and not in and of themselves a mark of any type of religion.

Among modern religious options in America, I have omitted Islam and Asian religions. It is not that they are unavailable; they are everywhere in Western culture. These religions each bring an ancient tradition, an enormous body of literature, and often quite subtle philosophical questions. But relations between the traditions of historical-covenantal religion (including for many purposes Islam) and Asian religions will develop only after much more research has been done.

⁶⁸Cf. Mark Slouka, *War of the Worlds: Cyberspace and the High-Tech Assault on Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

Chapter 7

Interpretation in History

7.1 Analogy, History, and Typology

As Niebuhr has it, revelation is the part of history “which illuminates the rest of it and which is itself intelligible.”¹ We have seen Niebuhr’s account of what history can do for the monotheist: its light can show the way to reconciliation, opportunity, and fellowship. These things happen in the context of a community, whether ongoing or one being born out of the events of reconciliation. This chapter is a preliminary inquiry into how the parts of a community’s life-story can be tied together in history, and the central means will be species of analogy across history. The remainder of Part II will explore the implications of that choice. ALHR, Part III will focus on knowledge of providence as a function of human action in history, and ALHR, Part IV will return to the role of language in orienting human life. John Courtney Murray’s four questions are interconnected in such a way that it is sometimes difficult to keep them cleanly separated. Hence the present chapter, about interpretation in history, will trespass some on the domain of language, the proper subject of ALHR, Part IV.

In an individual’s life, events do not repeat themselves, but we can see how early events foreshadow later ones, how early actions show character that is fully manifest only later. It is by analogy that one discerns consistent character across decades of a life, across actions that may have only limited similarity. More formal theories of analogy like to exhibit parallel members of analogous structures, but it is often not obvious how to apply such theories when looking at human character. To be sure,

¹MR, hardback, p. 93; paperback, p. 68.

individuals, football teams, businesses, and even nations can employ a successful strategy over and over again, but continuity of character can be exhibited in ways that show little in the way of structural parallels. Wittgenstein's reaching for the notion of "family resemblances" is more helpful (at least more evocative) than traditional theories that explain analogy by reference to mathematical proportionality and such devices. In a most general way, and as an attempt at a definition that can be adapted and specialized as needed later, I would say that when we see one phenomenon in the light of another, we see by analogy.² This is of course itself an analogy. Nevertheless, when early events illuminate later ones, we are on the track of analogy as it appears in history. When they do so in a history that has a beginning and a goal, rather than being periodic and cyclical, we have the essential prerequisites for history as the covenanter sees it.

As for individuals, so for community, and so also when God is seen to act in history. From past events and actions, we get some idea of what to expect in the future, though obviously without being able to predict in the way scientists and engineers predict. It is not that analogy in history is subject to no conceptual discipline at all, but that the responsibilities incumbent upon it are different from those born by the univocal discourse of the natural sciences. As an initial and partial description, models from history can suggest how to get from the present to a desired future, or, even before that, suggest what the future might hold. Models from the more distant past can interpret the still perplexing recent past. And historical analogies can be pushed in reverse, as when, in Troeltsch's model of critical thinking in history, analogy with the known present works as the critical test of what could plausibly have happened in the past.

As I have said, the term 'analogy' is appropriate in situations in which we can see one thing in light of another. That light can work in quite various ways, and with more than one sort of logic, or even no discernible logic at all. One way to draw analogies between events in history is called *typology* (not in the sense of being a classification of assorted phenomena, but in a sense in which the earlier of two similar events in history is a *type* or *antitype* of the later, which is the *antitype*). Examining how typology works will afford us a way to make concrete the claims about the role of history in monotheism. It is ultimately the relationships that bind human lives across history that we are interested in. Typology, in being exemplary of these, is—one reaches instinctively for the word—typical.

²On this definition (cf. Heidegger's concept of Dasein), peculiarly human being sees at all only by analogy: it understands in the light of its own being, as care, temporality, and mortality. Thus analogy is the original form of knowing, and univocal language and understanding are derived from it by abstraction.

Typology is not the only possible way to tie history together, but it is pivotal in covenantal living.

Essential features of historical-covenantal religion are here. We have seen them in outline in the last chapter, in Merold Westphal's typology (in the other sense) in which religion can be focused on escape from life, on nature, or on history. We have seen the logic of covenant already; it clearly has a temporal structure, but that temporality has so far been explored only within limited horizons. The temporal aspect of providence extends as far as the imagination can reach, and it is not repetitive or cyclical on any scale that I can see. Covenantal religion is then necessarily also historical, because the disappointments of the present are not always resolved into blessings in the present, and people do not learn instantly how to look for them; that takes time, time on a historical scale.

I suppose one starts by asking how it happens that the believer comes to embrace exposure, limitation, and need as bearing blessing. In its most direct form, which I take from *Radical Monotheism*, the answer is simply from history. That it happens in and from history is beyond doubt; that much can be observed. Whether it should, and from what history it should happen, are a matter of dispute. But people enter into such disputes already presupposing their own commitments. If they don't affirm human life in this world as historical, that is assumed, not proven from disputes about history. Niebuhr expands some on the present reception of the gift from history, the believer's labor of reason, experience, and spiritual and moral struggle, in making sense of the encounter with God. Then he returns to the source of the gift. As a matter of contingent fact, it has been encounter with the Jesus of the Gospels. Niebuhr allows that there could be other ways, but does not explore that possibility. (Beyond hints about Rabbinic Judaism in later chapters, I shall not do much better than Niebuhr did.) Then he comes to the hard part:

[W]e confront in the event of Jesus Christ the presence of that last power which brings to apparent nothingness the life of the most loyal man. Here we confront the slayer, and here we become aware that this slayer is the life-giver. He does not put to shame those who trust in him.³

Niebuhr puts a good deal of emphasis on the radical historical contingency of the gift of faith, but he does not show that its structure is *essentially* contingent and dependent on particular and peculiar historical events. Within the limited means available, this book tries to do that. This is from "Faith in Gods and in God," an article originally commissioned

³RMWC, p. 124-125.

as a Protestant's confession of faith. It was typical of Christianity until recently to start the history with Jesus. Today, it is clear that the roots of Christianity go back to the beginnings of the Common Documents, with a focus on the Exodus, no less than do the roots of Rabbinic Judaism. But the form of Niebuhr's confession of philosophical method (starting from history) has been amply confirmed since the time he wrote it.

The pivotal feature of historical religion is that the looked-for resolution of a present crisis is interpreted in light of a past crisis. Thus Christian lectionaries read the Exodus at Easter time, and this manifests a typology in the Gospels that is much deeper than it at first appears. The present is not an exact repetition of the past, but the past offers a start in making sense of the present. One must of course go on from that start, to see what is new in the present.

Whether or not a monotheist accepts the specifically Christian interpretation of the disasters of the first century, abundant examples of typology can be found already in the Common Documents. Exodus typology appears in Deutero-Isaiah, where the prophet sees a return from the Exile on the model of the Exodus. The passage through the Red Sea will become a passage through the desert, the redemption from Egypt a redemption from Babylon. Typologies are plentiful in the prophets, and they look back to various events for guidance. Goppelt's article "Typos" in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* offers some pertinent passages. Egypt appears by name in Hosea 2.16f, and again in Jeremiah 16.14. The Exodus appears by allusion in Isaiah 43.16–21 (a road through the sea before, through the desert now), 48.20f (water from a rock; cf. Exodus 17.1–7), 51.9f (splitting the sea; ransom of captives). A new covenant will God make, like Sinai, but in the hearts of Israel this time: Jeremiah 31.31–34; or like the covenant with Noah: Is. 54.9f. There will be a new kingdom, restoring David's: Amos 9.11f ("I will set up again the fallen booth of David," JPS translation); Isaiah 11.1–10f ("A shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse;" Micah 5.1 (one shall come forth from Bethlehem of Ephrath . . .); Jeremiah 30.9 ("they shall serve the LORD their God and David, the king whom I will raise up for them"); Ezekiel 34.23f ("I will appoint a single shepherd over them to tend them—My servant David"); Ezekiel 37.24f ("My servant David shall be king over them"). There will be a new Zion: Isaiah 2.2f ("In the days to come, the Mount of the LORD's House shall stand firm above the mountains . . . "); Isaiah 54.11–14 (details of Jerusalem's defenses). There will be a new creation like the paradise at creation: Isaiah 11.6f (the lion shall lay down with the lamb); Isaiah 51.3 (Zion is comforted and restored to the condition of Eden).

These things have no particular order, and they do not repeat the

original sequence of events. The present events are not a repetition of the past, nor indeed must they have the same structure. But the experience is in some way reminiscent, and it is the *language* used to crystallize the present experience that comes from the communal memory of the past.

The term *typology* has both a narrow technical meaning and a loose and broad meaning. In the narrow sense, meaning is expected but not yet fully disclosed in history, and some events in the past offer a hint or foreshadowing of that full disclosure. Christian typology in the New Testament often appears in this narrow sense.⁴ The full disclosure in history is in a significant sense eschatological, since, as *full* disclosure, it has a final character. In the broader sense of typology, if history is all of a coherent narrative, we can see the character of historical actors from their past, and so draw some conclusions about what would be in character in the present and future. One can draw analogies not only from hints prior to full disclosure events but also from those disclosures to small events in later life. Past events can illuminate the small happenings of life, which need not be eschatological but may still loom large in the lives of those concerned. An example is a Haggadah by Mark Podwal, which in its illustrations draws parallels between the Egyptian captivity and Exodus liberation sequence and the oppression of Jews under the Czars, the Bolsheviks, the Nazis, and the Spanish Inquisition.⁵ The difference between the narrow and broad senses of typology is not so large as it appears, greatly though it may matter for some exegetical purposes. I accordingly intend the broad and inclusive sense when I characterize monotheistic religion as typological in its relations to history.

The motor in all typology is the *use of language* from the past to make sense of the present and future.⁶ When the Gospel of Mark opens with John the Baptist wearing a camel's hair girdle and a leather belt, we are meant to hear 2 Kings 1.8: there King Ahaziah asks his envoys to describe the prophet whose message they have returned with, and hearing a hair cloak and a leather loincloth, he knows it is Elijah. Again, in American politics in the 1980s, when U. S. policy with regard to Nicaragua was hotly controversial, and many feared an involvement that would be interminable, costly in lives and money, and unwinnable, all in a misguided effort to "stop Communism," the simplest way they could state

⁴Cf. Goppelt, *Typos*, p. 18.

⁵*Let My People Go: A Haggadah*, illustrated by Mark Podwal (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

⁶Recognition that typology works simply as a mode of language rather than by detailed structural parallels across history, or "fulfillment of prophecy" in the sense of baroque hermeneutics, appears in Edward Hobbs's unpublished instructional materials from the 1970s.

their case—in words short enough to fit on a car’s bumper-sticker—was “No Vietnam War in Central America!”⁷ Whether or not one agreed, the meaning was immediately clear; the power and succinctness of typology are unsurpassable. And if one does not agree with a typology, it becomes immediately apparent that a typology can speak falsehood as well as truth. Consciousness of typology in biblical religion is not an originally modern phenomenon, for it was known to ancient exegetes. Modern work is focused in a book by Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*,⁸ and in works by Oscar Cullmann⁹ and E. Earle Ellis that follow Goppelt.¹⁰ Some German exegetical scholarship is collected together in *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*.¹¹ To be sure, *whether* to draw typological inferences from the Exodus to the events of Jesus is a matter of disagreement between Christians and Jews, and it is not my purpose to resolve that disagreement.

Some distinctions ought to be made in order to give the notion of typology a little more precision. Its literary and rhetorical devices are not uniquely diagnostic of typological intentions, for they can be used for purposes and in contexts other than historical ones. And typology is not the only possible way of relating to the past; even in its broad sense, it can be distinguished from other stances toward history.

The literary devices of typology (without historical application) can be seen in a movie, Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*; it is a take-off on the Gospels, with some new material added.¹² We laugh because we see familiar material lampooned (“Blessed are the cheesemakers”), and then a lampoon of critical scholars on top of the lampoon of the beatitudes (“It’s not meant to be taken literally. Obviously it refers to any manufacturers

⁷This observation is originally Alexander Blair’s.

⁸Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, translated by Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982). The original was published in 1939. Goppelt’s Introduction surveys the preparatory development through the nineteenth century. I am indebted to Alexander Blair for notice of this literature and its significance. Details may be found in his dissertation in the Graduate Theological Union, “Christian Ambivalence Toward the Old Testament” (Berkeley, 1984).

⁹I focus on his *Salvation in History* (London: SCM, 1967).

¹⁰E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1978), and *The Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991), hereafter OTEC. Ellis’s foreword to Goppelt’s *Typos* in 1982 is also noteworthy, and it includes references to further literature.

¹¹Ed. Claus Westermann, translated by James Luther Mays (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1964).

¹²Monty Python, *Monty Python’s The Life of Brian (of Nazareth)*, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979). In the same genre is Mel Brooks’ 1981 film, *History of the World, Part I*.

of dairy products.”). The odd thing is that the effect of the whole is hauntingly like the theology of the Gospel of Mark, at least as T. J. Weeden has it: Jesus comes in weakness and humility, not in power or strength. The disciples do not understand, they are dense, they think Jesus is offering them power.¹³ Yet *The Life of Brian* is not typology, because what is interpreted in the “present” is fiction, not history. (One could hear in it implicit questions about history, at least the history of reading of the Gospels, but that is at another level of reading.) And typological rhetoric may not involve history at all, but work from fiction to fiction: as when in preparation for Halloween, we see a reluctant reveler exhorted by the Ghosts of Halloween Past, Halloween Present and Halloween Future, in a lively mockery of Dickens’s *Christmas Carol*.¹⁴

Not only can the rhetorical devices of typology be used in other than historical contexts, but there are ways other than typology to relate to history. Typology is at bottom concerned with real history, where allegory is not:

An allegory is a narrative that was composed originally for the single purpose of presenting certain higher truths than are found in the literal sense, or when facts are reported for that same reason. Allegorical interpretation, therefore, is not concerned with the truthfulness or factuality of the things described. For typological interpretation, however, the reality of the things described is indispensable. The typical meaning is not really a different or higher meaning, but a different or higher use of the same meaning that is comprehended in type and antitype.¹⁵

Whatever challenge real history may make, allegory is deaf to it. Allegory can accordingly be used to fend off the challenges of history, if that is the writer’s intent, and it can fend off history without appearing to do so.

One can draw analogies across history in more than one way. It need not be a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. It could be cyclical, but for covenantal religion, it is not. We may say that history does not exactly repeat itself, but it does rhyme. And there is some liberty in finding rhymes, as we shall see in the next section. More generally, any “laws” of history, not just periodic ones, function in such a way as to give the appearance of prediction and control over events to the one who believes in such laws. One is thereby relieved of the anxieties that are a

¹³Theodore J. Weeden, Sr., *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

¹⁴It happened 1993 October 29, on Roseanne Barr’s TV show.

¹⁵Goppelt, *Typos*, p. 13.

consequence of freedom in history. “Laws” being what they are on the model of the natural sciences, there is a strong tendency to take them as describing repeatable and reproducible experiences, and so a tendency to force any such laws into a cyclical understanding of history.¹⁶

Contrary to any notion of historical laws, typology takes history as known fully only to God; the plan of history is “not subject to human discovery or prediction.”¹⁷ Typology expects the meaning of history to become clear in the course of its unfolding, and though it may be hinted or even prophesied before full disclosure, it is not fully revealed until the events themselves, or even thereafter. They may be surprising, and they will fulfill prophecies only in an analogical and not a literal sense.

The roots of biblical typology lie in the prophets, who, in the crisis leading up to the exile, saw the inevitable catastrophe coming. They interpreted it in the view of the Deuteronomic historian as cycles—but not what a student of Fourier would call truly periodic ones; each cycle at its bottom gets worse than the last, until finally the God intervenes in a conclusive way. The broader story is linear. The prophets saw disaster coming, and, true monotheists, they also foresaw a restoration that would build a deeper covenant precisely in and through the Exile, not in spite of it. Their hearers often could not hear this part of the message. It is in the nature of such a vision of restoration that it speaks in predictions. The “modern” period (baroque, really, in its assumptions) tends to treat predictions as opportunities to *test* the veracity of the prophets, and to test the trustworthiness of their message. This is to push the texts in a direction quite antithetical to typology, one that in the end seeks to evade the responsibilities and freedom of history rather than to embrace them. Apart from being about real history instead of fiction, the logic of typology is far closer to the lampooning of Monty Python than it is to prediction. Any such rhetoric, especially in its humor, puts the responsibility squarely on the hearers.

Indeed, the prophets are amenable to many interpretations, and could later be looked to for interpretations of Jesus, though Jesus is surely not what they had immediately in mind. Yet there is more typology in the Gospels than “fulfillment” of prophecy. Exodus typology in the Gospels has been remarked in many places, both in small scale and large. Overlooked by a Christian readership that has forgotten the Exodus is a typology in the *structure* of the Gospels. Meredith Kline’s 1975

¹⁶E. E. Ellis takes historicism as meaning belief in laws of history from Karl Popper; See Ellis, OTEC, p. 149; he cites *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1980) 2 vols, p. 1.8 f. See also Ellis’s foreward to Goppelt, *Typos*, p. xv, n. 38.

¹⁷Ellis, OTEC, p. 150.

article can stand as an example of the larger claim.¹⁸ Edward Hobbs's commentary on Mark, in progress, will trace Exodus typology through the Gospels in much greater detail. But in brief, and merely in terms of narrative structure, omitting parallels between law and teaching, the key to the typology is that Jesus is the new Israel. Both Jesus and Israel start in Palestine, both go down to Egypt, in both stories there is a slaughter of innocents, in both Israel is tested and fed in the wilderness. Both cross the Jordan and enter Palestine again at Jericho. The ministry corresponds to the period of the Conquest, and in the end, both go up to Jerusalem. Something is being claimed in this parallel; it is as if the story of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement were told as a parallel with Moses and the escape from Egypt, but in a script written by Monty Python.¹⁹ Audiences today are less receptive to grand typology in history than they might be, and so do not hear the Exodus in the Gospels. Whether or not one *agrees* with the Gospels in the claims they make about Jesus, claims made in parody of the Exodus, at least it ought to be possible to understand them. Exodus typology at this point embodies a disputed reading of the Exodus, because for Jewish readers, the covenant at Sinai that matters most is law, whereas for Christians, it is something like history as entry into the promised land. Perhaps I should say that the Gospels should always be read (again, Mark's theology of weakness) with Mel Brooks' lampoon of the self-importance of the disciples when Leonardo Da Vinci shows up at the Last Supper to paint a group portrait.²⁰

To make a preliminary stock-taking, we have seen that typology is a way of seeing connections in real history, and it does so by analogy. In the next section, we see how analogies speak truth in history. In the third section of the chapter, we look at ways to evade history. Then in the fourth section of the chapter, we come to the freedom given in the analogies of history and see how it leads to a responsible liberty of interpretation. The next chapter will work out an example traced through Christian history,

¹⁸Meredith G. Kline, "The Old Testament Origins of the Gospel Genre," *Westminster Theol. J.* 38 (1975) 1-27.

¹⁹Modern writers, especially screen-play writers, regularly simplify history to convey the human significance of the events in ways that are easy to understand. They fill in gaps in the documentary record (e. g., conversations) to make clear what "must have" happened. They do not use typology as frequently as the Bible does, nor do they resort to special effects as a means of showing the significance of historical events. But modern audiences are completely capable of understanding both typology and special effects, even though we have been trained by Enlightenment prejudice to call them improper in religious history. If the Bible is to make sense, it is necessary to recover the ability to hear the special effects and typology in the Bible.

²⁰*History of the World, Part One* (1981).

mostly as a failure to countenance a responsible liberty of interpretation.

7.2 Challenge and Responsibility in History

The confessional interpretation of history as we see it in typological texts leaves one in a state of considerable vulnerability, for its claims clearly have no logically coercive force. They can be dismissed as “just” analogies, and the force of the dismissal is both carried and concealed in the little word “just.” In the terms of philosophy of religion of the last two or three centuries, there is no “proof” of God or of one’s own favorite form of monotheism. One is left responsible for one’s own religious commitments, and an other who disagrees is left free always to say of the lessons drawn from history, “those are *your* analogies.” Indeed they are analogies, and they incur all the sometimes burdensome features of analogy: confessionality, responsibility, the dissimilarities that accompany similarities in any analogy, and also, as we have seen, a certain liberty in the drawing of analogies. It is painful when non-monotheists dismiss a monotheist’s confessions of faith as merely analogical; it is perplexing when monotheists cannot agree among themselves about the analogies that tie together monotheistic faith. These features of analogy can seem quite unsettling, and it is therefore somewhat surprising that analogy in history can speak truth in any sense at all. This section is devoted to the relations between analogy and truth, how analogy can speak truth. In section 7.4, I shall argue that a liberty comes with the analogical language of monotheism, and that the exercise of that liberty can be criticized as responsible or not. But first, we must ask how analogy can illuminate human life and so challenge its hearers, and how one speaking in analogies can be held responsible. I take *challenge* and *responsibility* as the initial features of discourse that mark its capacity for speaking truth. They show themselves in the social context of discourse, in a community of judgement, and can all too easily be obscured or forgotten if discourse is considered as a sequence of propositions abstracted from their speakers and seat in life. If an utterance does not challenge, it is difficult to see how it could in any sense that approximates intuitive usage be called true. If it cannot be held responsible, it is merely subjective, defective in all the ways that the baroque philosophical inheritance so deeply fears. If it cannot be held responsible, it will also quickly lose its ability to challenge.

The subject of analogy has attracted a long and somewhat technical literature. To make the task both harder and more interesting, the problem has changed significantly in recent years. When the problem of religious

language is reposed as one of challenge and disclosure, rather than one of correspondence of propositions to facts, the impasse of the “modern” problem begins to break up. When the speech that challenges and is held responsible is recognized as analogy, progress can be made. When analogy is treated as disclosure instead of itself being modeled on mathematical proportions or predications, the remedy is almost in hand. Truth happens originally as disclosure, and the problem of truth in history, the claim that one part of history can illuminate another, is a particular kind of truth as disclosure.

Look first at how the problem still poses itself intuitively for the contemporary mind, before truth is seen as disclosure. The Baroque period (extending vigorously into the present) sees only “objective” statements as capable of being true. For it, the objective is true independently of any connection with the minds that assert it. Analogy cannot meet these tests directly, and unless it can be transformed into objective language, it cannot speak truth at all. Note how, in this move, challenge and responsibility, essentially intersubjective and personal involvements of truth, have been obscured in the very move that attempts to enforce them. Still soaked in the Baroque and Enlightenment inheritance, we have difficulty conceiving how anything not “objective” could be other than “subjective,” and the subjective is not really capable of being true. And so when claims of truth have been made for analogical discourse and analogical ideas, there has been a tendency to describe analogy in terms that retreat toward the “objective.” This has not been very helpful.

Langdon Gilkey captured the plight of the religious mind fairly accurately in an article he published in 1960.²¹ His posing of the problem remained within the assumptions of “modern” orthodox theology, and a solution would have to escape those limits. But the posing is instructive. Gilkey’s purpose in writing was to lay out the terms of a dilemma and a confusion. The dilemma arises in the assumptions of the neo-orthodox theologians, and they respond to the somewhat earlier dynamic of Liberal theology. That the Liberal theologians rejected the “miracles” of what appeared to be orthodox Christianity is well enough known, but their reasons are not. The first reason is the less surprising; the supposed miracles of modern orthodoxy are in conflict with the laws of nature as known from science. This is to insist on the integrity of the causal continuum, the uniformity of nature that undergirds the laws of nature that make it intelligible to science. The second reason is quite revealing: Special revelation, the “mighty acts of God,” only some of which are strictly miraculous, “denied that ultimately significant religious truth is

²¹Langdon B. Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,” *Journal of Religion* 41 (1961) 194-205.

universally available to mankind, or at least in continuity with experiences universally shared by all men.”²² This is markedly different from Troeltsch’s criterion of analogy, which is really just the objection to the modern notion of miracle on scientific grounds. Indeed, Troeltsch differs from the Liberals at this point, for he insisted above all else on the individuality and uniqueness of different periods in history. Instead, the Liberal theologians have rejected history as the locus of real revelation in favor of universally available experience. They insisted that all religious truth has to be given to everybody on equal terms, without singling out any historical period in ways that would “privilege” it. This is quite at variance with the central commitment of historical-covenantal religion. The neo-orthodox insisted, against the Liberals, on the “mighty acts of God,” the importance of real history. What they did not notice, Gilkey complained, was that the language in which they spoke of acts of God has been exposed as analogical, and can no longer be taken in the “literal” and univocal senses in which modern “orthodoxy” (and the Liberals) understood it. The problem has not escaped the definitions of modern orthodoxy, i. e., of the “traditional” orthodoxy of the nineteenth century, the orthodoxy of literalism. Look at Gilkey’s pivotal insight, which is entirely correct:

The denial of wonders and voices has thus shifted our theological language from the univocal to the analogical. Our problem is, therefore, twofold: (a) We have not realized that this crucial shift has taken place, and so we think we are merely speaking the biblical language because we use the same words. We do use these words, but we use them analogically rather than univocally, and these are vastly different usages. (b) Unless one knows in some sense what the analogy means, how the analogy is being used, and what it points to, an analogy is empty and unintelligible; that is, it becomes equivocal language.²³

As an aside, it will perhaps be frustrating for the reader that my interest in the problem does not entirely coincide with Gilkey’s. He wants to look at the ontological constitution of acts of God as instances of transcendence, as the acts *of God*. My interest is in them as acts provident *for us*, and so I pass by Gilkey’s unsolved problem of the ontological status of God, of divine acts, and their manifestation in the analogical language we use. I am interested in how the events we characterize as acts of God challenge us, how they are provident for us, and (in ALHR, Part III) in

²²Gilkey, pp. 194–195.

²³Gilkey, p. 196.

how we respond. It is then not a coincidence that Gilkey and I focus on different sorts of biblical texts. For Gilkey, the problem of acts of God can be focused in the miracle texts, a few small anomalies in the events of a few people, mostly in the New Testament. For me the focus is in practical parallels across history, the typological thinking of the first section of this chapter, rooted in the Exodus, the Babylonian Exile, and the import of the disasters of the first century for the continuance of the Exodus covenant: large issues, not small, and “mere” history, not physical anomalies. Nevertheless, Gilkey’s instinct for the solution of the problem is basically sound: he wants to understand the analogies by which we make sense of the human relation to God. To start with the human phenomenon is necessarily to start with providence and inquire into the God who provides later. The analogies of language about providence in history are considerably easier to unravel than the later philosophical categories that define the ontological status of God and of divine acts.

Gilkey’s problem is a problem of truth: if the analogies of the texts are not enabled to speak and be understood as truth, then they fall into mere equivocation and lose all power to challenge or, indeed, to offer any hope or consolation. He did not exactly offer a theory of analogy, leaving it as an unsolved problem. My own remarks here will advance that problem only by observing that analogies do, in fact, play a large role in covenantal living, and that they do challenge people today. That is almost a commonplace, but it does not yet go without saying. I don’t know whether to say that biblical texts are true because they challenge, or challenge because they are true. False challenges evaporate under inquiry; true ones do not. The question of analogical truth would better be posed as one of challenge and responsibility than of correspondence to facts, for the notions of challenge and responsibility reintroduce the human community in which truth is known. One of the ways that truth in history can work as disclosure is by challenging people in the present.

The analogies we are interested in are typologies in history. The task is to see how they work to illuminate human life as it is in the present and on its way to a future. Indeed, H. Richard Niebuhr virtually defined revelation as typological when he said that one part of history gives us a starting point from which to move backward into the remoter past and forward into the present and future and make sense of it all. We saw this above in section 5.5 above.²⁴ Niebuhr knew well that history is susceptible of multiple interpretations, most of them not congenial to his project in *The Meaning of Revelation*. Merely suggesting that history can provide meaning is not sufficient, for history can provide many kinds of meaning. For Niebuhr, the way to make sense of life in history was a

²⁴Cf. MR, hardback, p. 93; paperback, p. 68.

confessional recital of a community's history. A good part of our work in section 5.5 was to show that Niebuhr's prescription for confessional history keeps it open to exposure, limitation, and need. This was a considerable confirmation of our central thesis about this schedule of disappointments and the blessings they bear, because Niebuhr did not consciously intend such a tripartite schema.

In effect, Niebuhr claimed that history works as exposure, among the several ways it informs the life of a community. If history is to work as exposure, it has to be able to challenge. It can challenge only by disclosing the present—by showing present engagements with life in the light of past events. It can do so by way of showing failed or dysfunctional or destructive engagements, and it can do so also by showing opportunities in the present. It is because we share a common humanity with the past that we can look at past actions and see how our own actions appear by comparison. We saw many examples of the past illuminating the present in the last section, in the examination of typology. The ability to see some human actions in the light of other human actions seems to be built into being human. While a rigorous philosophical examination of this ability is beyond my present space or powers, the ability itself is well enough attested in common experience that we may assume it and go on. After all, what is the point of narratives, both fictional and historical, if we do not see our own possibilities for action in the light of other human actions?

But though we do not have a complete philosophical anatomy of analogy in history, some important things can be said. History, of course, is a matter of narrative. That narrative, if it makes sense, will project some sort of future continuation from where it leaves off in the present. In other words, history implies some sort of eschatology:

Only on the basis of some vision of the overall direction history is taking, some sense of where things are going, can we *select* what can count as historically relevant in interpreting the past. Thus, historiography operates within a hermeneutic circle: events are identifiable and make sense only in relation to some projected overview of the meaning of the whole. It follows, then, that a vision of our sending or destiny is an unavoidable regulative idea which makes possible "historicity" understood as the experience of cumulativeness and continuity through time.²⁵

What is a vision of the overall direction of history? That can mean many

²⁵Charles Guignon, "Truth as Disclosure: Art, Language, History," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 28 Suppl. (1989) 105; cf. p. 117.

things. Covenant makes better sense on some interpretations than others.

Merold Westphal described historical-covenantal living as a covenantal people walking through history *with* the covenantal partner. In contrast to mimesis, for which disorder is evil, the disorder and unpredictability of history are then trusted to bring good—with whatever pains come in that disorder. The likelihood of the pains is seen clearly enough. Hence there is a certain irony in covenantal trust. It is of course impossible to foretell all but the most imminent events with any confidence. What is said of the covenantal future is rarely so concrete. Nor can one really say what sort of past events the future will be like. We see how disappointments were embraced in the past, how they brought blessing in the past, and simply trust that it will be possible to do likewise, in an analogical sense, in the future. It is not as if the covenanter can predict, can say that of the conceivable futures, he has been promised that some (the “good” ones) are possible and others (the “bad” ones) are not. It is not as if covenant would fail if such a prediction failed to come true, for the covenanter does not rely on predictions of that kind. Indeed, it is often the “bad” possibilities that happen, and covenant is undertaken in full view of that likelihood. Covenant certainly does not give its partisans control over the future, nor exemption from disappointments, not even in the limited form of knowledge of the particulars of the future.

The light of the past and vision of the future work together in a different way. The covenanter trusts that the unknown, uncontrollable, and disappointing future will nevertheless bring blessings, “life more abundantly.” This trust is based on the past. Those who embraced the pains of life as bearing blessing, often at great cost to themselves, can be compared with others who evaded the blessings in order to avoid the disappointments. It is that comparison that challenges the present. To see some who embraced the pains as good shows that it can be done. That it was done at great cost increases the challenge rather than diminishes it.

This is incidentally why it is so important that the light comes from history and not fiction. While fiction could merely *imagine* the possibility of finding blessings in the pains of life, history *demonstrates* that it can be done. What is more, to the extent that present actions and present lives are lived with intentional reference to past actions, present lives presuppose those acts of faith in the past. Thus does the historical past challenge. People act in the present with reference to circumstances—a world of possibilities—that are shaped by the past. That past was not all actions in loyalty to any one vision of human life. Hence the need for a principle of selection, as Charles Guignon observed, and one that works as a vision of possibilities for the future. What is envisioned are not possibilities of or probabilities for what will happen, but possibilities

of *responding* to what may happen.

At this point, we can see how an alleged analogy from the past can be held responsible. For the claimed light of the past is always also a vision of the future. And that claim envisions how one might find good and blessing in the uncertain future. That “how” is subject to dispute, to cross-examination. Whether the pains can bring blessing is a confessional commitment. The how and the whether presuppose each other. If there is no how, there is no whether. If there is no whether, there is no point in asking how. Answering these questions, something that happens anew in every age, is the activity we shall come to know as responsibility in ALHR, Part IV. Behind it stand the events of the past, the inherited history, and their challenge attests to the possibility of finding good in the disappointments of life.

At this point, we are in a position to make sense of Heidegger’s critical failure to diagnose and reject the Nazis, and it is worth the brief digression to do so. What he lacked was contained in the seven lessons from the Exodus, which we saw in section 6.4. The events that led quite diverse groups of Hebrews from Egypt into the desert and into a covenantal unity that they did not have before, something that was new in human history, also led them radically to relativize the status and power of human social institutions before the God who emerged out of the Exodus pilgrimage. No persons or institutions are exempt from criticism, and the covenant people is bound to this life as history, and to each other in a covenant that is open to all. Had Heidegger taken covenant and its openness both to exposure and to other people as the basis of criticism, he could have chosen other than to embrace the Nazis, who exempted themselves from criticism, and for whom life was to be an escape (albeit this-worldly) from many of the more grubby features of human historical existence, in a vision from which whole classes of people were shut out. The project of the National Socialists was the most candid of henotheisms. Most of Heidegger’s work has been philosophical rather than theological, with theological comments occasionally noted in passing. Despite the fruit it has borne in the hands of theologians who read it selectively for their own purposes, his philosophy did not have a coherent theological import that I can see. It is open to every kind of theological application. In addition to the support of the Nazis, Heidegger’s writing was open to mimetic and exilic readings in ways that many have not hesitated to exploit. Exilic readings focus on the early Heidegger as guide to self-knowledge. Mimesis is possible by a selective reading of the later Heidegger’s interest in the “Fourfold”: earth, sky, gods, and mortals. Those readings could have been avoided or forestalled by a view of life that is not only historical but also covenantal. Heidegger has no notion of history as gracious

exposure, historiography as the means of reconciliation, the theme of *The Meaning of Revelation*. Lacking the kind of commitment that could direct one's critical faculties, history for Heidegger could only be open to so many interpretations as to be in the end ambiguous. So despite the fact that historical religion owes Heidegger a considerable debt for seeing that history is ontologically interesting, it cannot be said that he was in any coherent way a friend of historical-covenantal religion.

We began with the possibility that an appeal to certain events of history as basis for and challenge to covenant meets only rejection ("Those are *your* analogies"). But the events of history can speak for themselves. The rejection of a proposed analogy in history may or may not generalize to a rejection of the idea that history, as such, bears grace and truth. When it does not, and only a particular interpretation is contested, we have the problem of the next section. When the implied rejection is of history as such, that rejection itself is eventually exposed in human living. To say this is itself a confessional position—faith that truth will come out in exposure, at least in principle, and that truth is true even when suppressed by power.

7.3 Evading History

Some concrete examples of irresponsibility may illustrate challenge and responsibility in history. They are all ways to dodge the challenge of history, or just not to see it at all. We have bumped into some of them already, but it is useful to collect them all in one place.

(1) History denied: This happens in reductive materialism, philosophical naturalism. It is a growth industry in mainstream academic philosophy in America today. This movement is sometimes called "scientism" (by its enemies), and its hallmark is the prohibition of any kind of meaning or explanation other than that of the sciences. In its a-theistic and anti-transcendent way, this entails a human stance that (unless Gnostic) seeks to fit into nature naturally, a strange form of mimesis, but mimesis nonetheless. Its technical literature is easy enough to find. The intended opponents are Platonisms and Cartesian dualisms, but I don't think it is any more inclined to recognize an ontological difference for history than for the transcendent in Platonism or Descartes.

(2) History invisible, in nature religions: We see self-conscious revivals of mimetic or nature-focused religion, inspired by ancient forms, and also modern analogs that would not be called "religious" but are nevertheless comprehensive ways of integrating meaning in life, ways of coordinating a basic life orientation. I have mentioned Margot Adler and

Jerry Mander already. History is simply invisible here.

(3) History half-seen, and rejected by its victims: When the modern world crashes in upon mimesis, history is seen, but not covenant: Native American protesters against the genocidal policies of white America are forced to live in history, but do not do so willingly, and see no blessing in it. Lame Deer is an example.²⁶ He reacts against elements of Christianity that I would ascribe to henotheistic and gnostic corruptions and does not see history in Christianity or Judaism at all. Such people want to return to a sacred in nature because there is no visible sacred in history at all. Nevertheless, this position is in part an implicit protest on behalf of covenant, and it is a form of demanding responsibility.

(4) History ignored: Most of the Hellenistic religions are represented in modern analogs, as are also the ancient Gnosticisms. What is new in the last four or five decades, at least from the point of view of historians and theologians who do still nominally reside in the ambit of biblical religion, is that contemporary culture has itself, as a whole, taken on the texture of the Hellenistic world. It has a plurality of values that is not a pluralism (pluralism would be plural expressions of some underlying agreements; there are few that go very deep today). Wildly incompatible values tolerate each other only in the sense that they usually conduct their disagreements non-violently. The more syncretistically inclined even pretend not to have disagreements, averring that at bottom we all agree.

(5) Substituting ethics for history: Without any ability to resolve the conflicts of modern society that come from inherited traditions, there are many who would reduce the problems to ethics and then seek an a-historical ethic. They assume that it is possible to do ethics without attention to history, contrary to Alasdair MacIntyre's claim that ethics is at bottom a historical mode of thought. (His argument seems to me at this point, whatever may be said of its other goals, to be a demonstration and not merely an argument. It can be dodged or ignored, but I don't see that it can be refuted.) A moderate version of this position occurs in Joseph Soloveitchik's *Halakhic Man*, where ethics is admitted to be historical (in halakhah, one stands beside Moses himself), but I am not convinced that this insight is really radicalized. I think the contemporary ethics projects of many philosophy departments do not intend even this much. They view history as the source of intractable problems and would like to dismiss historical thinking, in order not to have to face those problems. Ethics is to be the substitute, as a way of resolving disputes without having to live with one's neighbors in their grubby human particularity and grabby demands.

²⁶John Fire Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

(6) Substituting metaphysics for history: This is usually accomplished by some form of Platonism, in which trans-historical absolutes are posited, realities that don't just transcend history while remaining relative to history, but are no longer relative to history at all. My suspicion is that the way this works is by a transformation of the analogies across history from an equivocal meaning to a univocal meaning. First, of course, the analogies have to be restricted to a few chosen ones, so that it is possible to hide the human role in setting them up in the first place. (This is the essence of irresponsibility, for those whose role is hidden no longer have to answer for their choices.) Then, when religious language has become univocal, it can be lifted above history and de-relativized. There are many traditional forms of this option, and it lies at the heart of contemporary analytical philosophy of religion. (William Placher called it the "domestication of transcendence.")

(7) History defended against: Fundamentalism is historical, in the sense of doing historical-covenantal religion. Its partisans will readily admit as much, if asked. But it is loth to admit the full implications of this, it is unwilling to think in the terms of the *critical* history that has developed in the last two hundred years. This is a way of living in history defensively. In Mircea Eliade's terms, we see here a semi-historical stance for which history is real and the center of meaning is historical, but its function is to save us from history, only dubiously to affirm life in history. Needless to say, also, the Fundamentalist stance dodges the responsibility that any body must take for its own religious commitments, a responsibility that is worked out in critical history in a way that is painfully radical in comparison to pre-critical history.

(8) History escaped in messianism: Michael Walzer sees a type in which a leader is sought who will take the covenant people to a promised land (located in some reform of human institutions) where liberation is final, where there is no more need for what H. Richard Niebuhr called permanent metanoia, permanent revolution.²⁷ Many varieties of this move could be cited. It is a fairly direct abdication of the central Exodus commitment that all human institutions shall be desacralized and held responsible to whatever people and events can shed light on their actions.

Walzer had in mind Zionism, but much Christian living in history also takes this form. Jesus is indeed the event that makes sense of history, but the critical evasion of responsibility is made afterward. All too often, the sense that Jesus makes of history becomes a way of defending against history, something that excuses people who believe in Jesus from really encountering the radical freedom of history. Maybe at this point, we have

²⁷ Walzer notes this in *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 135-136. I am indebted to Bill O'Neill, SJ, for notice of this source.

moved from (8) back to (7), from messianism in the future to defenses against history looking at the past. I don't know.

(9) History abolished in eschatology: Some eschatologies do this, some do not. Future eschatologies may be definite or indefinite, and definite ones, rich with details already foreseen, are a perfect vehicle to evade the responsibilities of history. They are a means of enduring history until it shall end. Future eschatologies that refuse to speculate on the day or the hour (Mark 13), the manner or the means, may not be so evasive.

(10) History subverted: Here, critical history is seen, and with it the liberty of interpretation that is given to historical beings. Partisans of this evasion miss the responsibility inherent in covenantal history, and see only the liberty, and thus convert liberty to a libertarianism in which everything is permitted. This is an affluent and respectable nihilism, the besetting temptation of the Liberal positions. Of course, in the end, not everything is permitted, especially not things that would endanger the power or options or resources of the class that advocates such a libertine existence in history.

This position illustrates one side of a dilemma that appears in the light of critical history. Where the human role in religious history is seen, but no means for responsibility, what results is a libertarian nihilism. Where responsibility is sought, out of a desire to be faithful to the traditions, it apparently cannot be found except by denying the human role in human religion. Arguments in the search for responsibility take a form such as you should do *A*, believe *B*, etc. The trouble is that *A*, *B*, and so forth turn out to be analogical concepts, and when their historical particularities are exposed, only historical individuality is left. And if one has a concept of analogy that requires some univocal core of identity between the phenomena compared, then the analogy has evaporated under the light of criticism. Now not even historical individuality is left. I shall return to this problem in chapter 9, when we come back to Ernst Troeltsch. I would claim that a radicalized concept of analogy is the remedy to these problems.

What is not yet obvious is that both the linguistic and ontological sides of analogy are a process of responsibility, a process in which human relationships and their languaging are challenged and adjudicated in a community of moral obligation. Responsibility is an activity, the giving of and asking for reasons for actions, past and proposed. It proceeds in terms of human relationships, not natural causes.²⁸ What would emerge,

²⁸A low serotonin level in the brain is a common naturalistic explanation for behavioral dysfunction in some quarters today, but real as this cause may be, attention to it alone ignores rather than addresses human relationships, either on the assumption that they will take care of themselves once brain chemistry is

if this suggestion were to become a live research project, would be a sense that all the concepts and practices that make up a covenant and its conduct are analogical, and the analogies are a matter of human involvement that may not ultimately be abstracted from. What is said is always a “we see” one area of life in the light of another, and “it seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit” to conduct our life in such and such a way in the light of this history.

The dialectic of responsibility is one in which others are allowed to dissent and go their own way, but if they intend to participate in responsibility, they are obliged to show how their different proposed way to conduct a covenant might satisfy—for example—the seven canons which I have seen coming out of the Exodus in my comments above, in section 6.4. If they cannot discharge this obligation, then eventually, they forfeit their claim to be doing covenant at all. Though this testing may first appear at the level of discourse, disagreement conducted verbally in a covenantal community, ultimately it happens in living, not in logic. Whether something works out in a way that embraces all of life as good, understood as history and including its pains (this is the essence of covenant), is seen in living.

7.4 A Responsible Liberty of Interpretation

Historical existence is a matter of freedom, uncertain, indeterminate, and risky. Analogies in history illuminate the present in the light of the past. It is sometimes not noticed that the analogies drawn across history are themselves indeterminate; they could have been drawn in other ways. In general, multiple typologies are possible, and they can be complementary or opposed. And typological analogies are always incomplete: they almost never by themselves imply exhaustive instructions for how to live faithfully in the present. There is always room left for a liberty of interpretation. But can such liberty be responsible? Unless this question can be answered in the affirmative, then we are left with nihilism, a world in which everything is permitted, and so nothing matters. Where there is truth, there can be responsibility. Truth begins in disclosure, challenge, and responsibility. In the last two sections, we considered challenge, disclosure, and the ways of evading them, turning from history. In this one, we consider responsibility and liberty.

corrected, or on the assumption that human relationships really do not ultimately matter for their own sake. We shall come to responsibility as an activity in ALHR, section 14.1, when we focus on the language patterns of radical monotheism.

Where there is liberty, that liberty is bound to be exercised in multiple and competing ways. And so we see plurality in religion and culture, multiple ways of understanding and living human life. If variant possible choices are exercised responsibly, then the competing options should be able to get along with one another in peace: this is not just plurality, but pluralism. In a pluralism, different constituencies share a common undergirding commitment within which their various choices are interpreted as valid exercise of a permitted liberty. The rest of this section will examine first the features of responsibility itself, then the interpretation of life that is to be tested for responsibility. Then we look at pluralism in history, and briefly at what happens when pluralism fails.

One of the enduring if ambiguous characteristics of monotheists is that they cannot agree on how to conduct a covenant, on how to be monotheists, on what the providence of God might be providing in the present and foreseeable future. This is not just an ornery temperament. Typological reasoning will not by itself provide answers to all questions of how to act in the present and for the future. The parallels from history may be strong, but as often as not, people who do agree on what the illuminating events are do not agree on what their light shows. Even having seen the parallels from history, the interpretative act is only half-done. As with any analogy, there are not only similarities but often greater dissimilarities. Those dissimilarities between historical models and one's own situation require adaptation of any lessons learned from history to the different circumstances of the present. The present will always present the new, what is not predictable by recourse to history, even when it can be explained in terms of history. Where nature is the realm of the efficient causation of natural laws, history is a matter of intentionality, and efficient causation in history is the causation of intentional actors.²⁹ With intention and human acts comes freedom, and with freedom we are in the realm of the human, events that are both unique in their individuality and typical in their similarities across time. If there are universals peculiar to history, they are not the universals of the natural sciences, which are strictly generic examples of the covering laws that govern natural phenomena.

The problem, if it be one, is not simply the unknown, the indeterminate, or the new in the historical present, but the fact that in any situation, there are multiple courses open; it may easily be that more than one of them can lead to legitimate goods. My aim is to demonstrate that one

²⁹Ernst Troeltsch, "Historiography," in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 6, p. 719, calls it a matter of psychological motivation. Phenomenological philosophy would gloss the term "psychological motivation" as "intentionality."

can criticize choices and discern whether they are responsible or not, without thereby always reducing them to one choice that is provably best. If plurality of choices amounted to an arbitrary freedom in all things, there would be no responsibility at all. One correlate of truth, moral judgement, and disclosure of human action is that there be some sort of responsibility. Implicit in the assessment of truth is the presence of the assessors, the community of critics who support and enforce standards of judgement.

What, then, are responsibility and its corresponding vice, irresponsibility? They are the characteristics of individual and corporate actions that allow them to be criticized in a community of judgement. Niebuhr finds four aspects of responsibility in the beginning of *The Responsible Self*.³⁰

The first of these is that human acts have an intentional structure that distinguishes them from vegetative movements of the human body, and gives them a meaning by reason of their place in larger series of acts; they can be placed in a narrative. One act leads to another. Responsible action is about responses, and a response is made to prior acts and expects subsequent acts in reply. Because of this, the sequence of actions in a narrative is in essential ways a conversational structure.

The second feature of responsible action is that it presupposes and expresses an interpretive act, whereby the one acting has assessed what is happening and what is fitting in the context of action. There is a sizing-up of the relevant features of a situation, of what has been "said" in the acts of others so far. And there is an estimation of the possibilities, implicitly the possibilities for good, and of the moral obligations incumbent upon oneself and the various other actors. Ultimately, as Niebuhr says, we interpret events as life-giving and death-dealing.

The third aspect of responsible action is that it can be held accountable. The one acting is expected to disambiguate his actions where it is unclear what he was doing, or unclear what its purpose was. He is expected to be able to defend his motives and goals if they are questionable. The conversational character of acts works at several levels. The acts themselves have a conversational structure, even without words, but there also can be further conversation, in words, that accompanies the acts in order to interpret or assess them.

Fourth and lastly, where there is conversation there are multiple conversants; action and conversation take place in a community. Response is part of conversation among social beings; continuity of the self grows out of the sociality of the self. Only in a community of judgement is it

³⁰H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 61–65.

possible to have intersubjective assessment, accreditation, or standards. It should be noted, incidentally, that the community of judgement is implicitly present in the intentional structure of acts even when no other members of it are present physically.

To be irresponsible is to be unable to give satisfactory justification of actions; it is to miss an obvious opportunity, to fail a standard obligation, to wrong someone else. What is “obvious”? The obvious is conspicuous, it stands out, it is uncovered by events in the common past, it is what any “reasonable man” (as the law calls the standard interpreter) would see. What is a “reasonable man”? He is a member of a community of competents. The community has standards for interpreting what is happening, and standards of what is expected of its members, sometimes in articulated statutes, sometimes in tacit practices. It is irresponsible to cover up a possibility for good, or ignore visible danger of evil; and irresponsible to wrong, abuse, or take advantage of another person. These maxims embody the virtue of justice—easily defined as giving others their due; not so easily is it spelled out what that is.

We saw in Niebuhr the roots of the idea that all of life is to be affirmed as good. The monotheist will be asked whether he has acted accordingly. Attention naturally concentrates on the hard parts, and so he will be asked whether he has embraced exposure, limitation, and need; that is, whether he has faced them and found in them the good they bring. That is a matter of judgement, and it does not originally proceed by application of a rule. When a community has agreed upon standards, one can sometimes verify by inspection whether another has lived up to them. But when the standards themselves are in question, criticism proceeds differently. Even here, we can say that those who look for the good in the disappointments of life will be compared with those who do not, and those who look for the good in one way will be compared with those who look for the good in another. It is in that comparison that the confessional stance shows itself in a circular way: the monotheist believes that exposure brings both good and truth, that the event of disclosure will show both *what* is good and *how* the actual acts and events can become existentially saving good for the people involved. One who is not functionally a monotheist doubts whether there is a good at all, and also whether being exposed as out of harmony with it will do the exposed person any good. It is important to note that nothing said so far implies that there is only one way to find the good, or only one way for a community to erect standards of criticism. There will be different appropriations of the good in life, with some measure of success for each.

To find the good in life, to find the good in a situation, is to *interpret* it as bearing some good. This is Niebuhr’s second constitutive feature of

responsible action: estimation of what is happening, what is possible, and what is fitting in response. As I have said in the previous section, history is a start for interpreting the present, but often it will not resolve the inevitable ambiguities of that present. The limitations and opportunities in the present eventually stand out from the hiddenness and confusion in which the interpreter comes to his choices. A liberty of interpretation shows itself when one can see that a story can be continued in more than one way, there are multiple possible ways to find good in the limitations of life.

Where the possibilities of life are predictable, pretty much the same from one day to the next, from one generation to the next, a monotheistic community can come to some consensus about how to live with those possibilities in faith. Where the possibilities of life change, there the interpretative acts of the faithful become conspicuous, and some liberty of interpretation is exercised. The problem is not just the "large-scale" changes of history, the rise and fall of nations and empires. Today, the very concepts that shape basic life orientation are changing. These conceptual changes parallel changes in media and technology. When an inventor devises a new technology, ordinary people's lives are changed by the new possibilities it raises. I have in mind the television series *Connections* and the critical thought of Marshall McLuhan.³¹ Changes in one technology profoundly affect how another fits into life, and then invite yet further changes. Possible changes in culture, of course, extend well beyond technology and the media; economics, geopolitics, law, the sciences and the arts all contribute to the cultural matrix within which a monotheistic community must chart its future and work out of the covenant of biblical religion. To follow the sort of thinking in *Connections* and *Understanding Media*, the problem is to see what a new technology offers, to see just how change in one practice affects all other human involvements, making possible new ways of handling them. (This is an especially direct application of the definition of analogy as the ability to see one thing in light of another.)

Responsibility is a test not only of whether someone can see the good in the limitations of life, but also in the need and exposure constituted by encounter with a different ethnic group, a competing cultural tradition. This is a major theme running through *The Meaning of Revelation*: exposure is faced in the process of doing history candidly and openly. The contact of different communities and different ethnic groups and different subcultures within a larger community witnesses to a liberty of

³¹A printed account of the TV series can be found in James Burke, *Connections* (Boston: Little Brown, 1978). See also Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

interpretation that is exercised differently by different constituencies. For a concrete example, in Judaism and Christianity, different communities pray in different ways. They can today seem merely baffling to each other. In the past, this has been an occasion not only of anathemas but often bloodshed. More shows itself here than just different ways of dealing with limitation. The communities themselves are valuable and worth preserving in the richness of their differences. Insofar as they are part of the larger human community, they constitute a claim on each other, a claim of fellowship, of human need for each other. Their differences testify to the human social acts of interpretation which people would as often as not like to hide rather than acknowledge. With this attitude, the choices when communities encounter one another seem to be degrees of rejection and separation, adjustment and accommodation (but not real fellowship), or conquest and suppression of one by the other.

The roots of pluralism lie in the oldest strata of the Pentateuch, and the process by which pluralism originated has shaped its career in monotheism ever since. As the Bible presents the story, especially in its Deuteronomic voices, Israelite religion appears as monotheistic (in an arithmetic sense) from the start. But there are traces of an older plurality, of peoples coming together from somewhat diverse origins.³² The names of previously distinct gods (El, El Olam, El Shaddai, El Elyon, El Bethel, occasionally even traces of the Baals) were assimilated or transferred to the identity of the one God, Yahweh. Plurality is transformed into pluralism only when the various different members of the plural society not only maintain their differences, but also hold values in common that give them a unity, something that underlies and unites them in their differences. That unity is more than mere toleration of people one disagrees with or doesn't care about. The work of transforming plural groups into a pluralism is done, at the level of its literary justification by the J, E, and P sources in the Pentateuch, but especially and originally by J. By contrast, D, the Deuteronomic tradition of Elijah, Elisha, and the Deuteronomic Reform under Josiah, is in some ways a dissent from the tradition of pluralism, for it tends to attack pluralism and condemn it as syncretism hopelessly contaminated with polytheistic commitments incompatible with the character of Yahweh. Hobbs's account makes it clear that pluralism (without an articulated concept of it) was intentionally fostered from the beginning to the end of the Bible. Despite occasional

³²An account can be found in Edward C. Hobbs, "Pluralism in the Biblical Context," a paper discussed by the Pacific Coast Theological Society, November 16-17 1973. It is reprinted in Wilhelm Wuellner and Marvin Brown, eds., *Hermeneutics and Pluralism* (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1983). It is available on the Internet at <http://www.pcts.org/pluralism.html>.

counter-movements to suppress it recorded in both the Common Documents and the New Testament, it survives from the Yahwist at least as far as Paul. (I don't know early Rabbinic Judaism well enough to trace pluralism through the period of the Talmud. The florid pluralism in both Palestinian and diaspora Judaism of the first century was severely pruned by the disasters of that century.)

Indeed, the roots of pluralism go back behind the Pentateuchal source that scholars identify as "J," written early in the Monarchy; traces of pluralism appear in the Exodus texts. The word "Hebrew," as used of the people in Egypt who later escaped in the Exodus, meant simply lower-class transients of quite various religious and ethnic origins. They became bound together only after the escape, in the wilderness, where they needed each other. In such circumstances, ancestral gods would be an impediment, as such gods served to distinguish, not to unite. Yet the inheritance of such ancestral gods cannot simply be made to unhappen. The social unity that was forged in the wilderness is reflected in—or as likely, made possible by—a unity in which various gods were assimilated to the God of the Yahwistic faction, which presumably included Moses himself. Out of this come the roots of covenant as a theological and political institution. There were many innovations in the religion born in the Exodus; I found seven in section 6.4 in the last chapter. We are now most interested in the pluralism that grew from the fusion of diverse tribal traditions contributing to the Exodus. It was a turn from kinship and ethnicity to something that was, in principle, open to any who cared to join. Particularity and its exclusiveness can occur not only based on kinship but also by way of common history, geography, or language, even economic interests. These have occasioned many conflicts in history. Covenant—affirmation of a pluralism open to all—is the basis for resolving or preventing such conflicts. What is at stake in the difference between covenant and kinship is the boundary of the universe of moral obligation: to whom is one bound by reciprocal obligations? Is the community open to newcomers, and if so, on what terms?

More tricky is the question of how to handle disagreements *within* the community of moral obligation, and how much disagreement is permissible. Let me offer some speculation on what is needed for a community to support pluralism; it is no more than speculation. Beyond the sociological prerequisites for plural subcultures in a larger culture, there must be a dialogical infrastructure, conceptual means by which members of the community and of different sub-groups can recognize, share, criticize, and affirm the underlying unity that binds them all together. There needs to be a conceptual machinery flexible enough to handle the changes that come over time and hold the larger community together

through those changes. Debate and disagreement in the larger community require willingness to give reasons for one's own position, willingness to hear others' reasons, enough forbearance not to inflame dialog, and willingness to wait and persuade rather than coerce.³³ There must be an ability to hold together voluntarily sub-cultures with different interests, by some conceptual and moral means. Force will not do, in the long run. That way leads not to pluralism, but to toleration and empire. Here, different sub-groups acknowledge no common commitments, and they tolerate each other because they are forced to, or perhaps because of benefits afforded by the imperial power (such as absence of strife). There must be a willingness in each constituency to make some concessions to the others. To look at matters from a class perspective, will the rich and powerful take care of the weak? Will those with superior cognitive and ideological agility advance only their own class interests, or will they consider the interests of the larger community as a whole? Will they consider the self-perceived interests of the unsophisticated? Do the poor or unsophisticated have confidence in the cognitive leadership of the sophisticates? Are the unsophisticated willing to change in face of the challenges of history? In many societies today, the "conservative" poor are not at all convinced of the sophisticates' good will or faithfulness to tradition, and usually their suspicions are justified. These requirements for social cooperation are not satisfied casually.

Clearly, the means for pluralism are not satisfied trivially, and pluralism can easily fail. Benignly, it can fail through loss of plurality, due to natural homogenization of a formerly complex community. Less happily, one sub-group can attempt to enforce its views on all the others. And different groups can part for loss of common interests. The root forces militating against genuine pluralism arise from what Niebuhr calls an "ethics of survival."³⁴ We fear that God may die if our version of monotheism does not survive. Whatever the appearances may be, people seek meaning in face of ultimate meaninglessness, but at bottom without confidence that any such meaning can survive the disappointments and limitations of life. Stripped of its familiar vocabulary, the confidence of biblical religion is that history will ultimately turn out as blessing, in spite of its pains along the way. This places a terrifying existential burden on those treated badly, and it ought to place a terrifying moral burden on those who are treated well by history. As we have seen in the last chapter of Part I, such a confidence is all too easily perverted into abandonment of others in need, an utter subversion of the monotheist's commitment to

³³This short list comes from the Williamsburg Charter, the text of which can be found in *This World* 24 (1989 Winter), at p. 52.

³⁴See RS, chapter 3, "The Responsible Self in Time and History."

help others.

But there is an additional tension working against pluralism, an additional plane of possible cleavage, at least for monotheistic communities. It is caused by the double commitment of historical-covenantal religion to its particular historical origins, and at the same time to a universal and covenantal openness to all. It is sometimes called “the scandal of particularity.” Where there are already conflicts of interest between sub-groups, it can easily happen that one group will opt for the virtues of universality where another wants the virtues (and also the comforts) of the familiar and particular heritage. It does not always follow that one is right to the exclusion of the other. What could be resolved as a new pluralism, were there forbearance and imagination to discern the universals of monotheism as they appear in conflicting embodiments, instead leads to strife and schism, because neither group can see the genuine virtues maintained by the other.

The factions in a separation are not wholly innocent, yet history shows that the heirs of schisms have done tolerably well by monotheistic standards. In hindsight they have usually all held some interpretation of the tradition which serves to foster the embracing of good in all of life, including its disappointments: exposure, limitation, and need. Groups that deny this universal goodness of life tend not to last long, or else to become easily distinguishable from biblical religion, because they are doing something clearly different. Ambiguity is a recurrent lesson of history: in the sectarianism of monotheists, monotheistic faith has usually been preserved in some form on all sides.

Consider Aquinas’s inquiry into the sin of schism: he calls it a sin against peace, against unity, and against charity.³⁵ But if the history of monotheism exhibits pluralism based on an underlying unity, the plurality in schism can be wrong only in a qualified sense: the primary wrong of schism is its offense against peace and charity. It is not obvious to me why a move to plurality in place of uniformity is wrong. Offenses against peace and charity are common, but not inevitable. It may be that after a schism, some forms of *visible* unity and cooperation are no longer apparent, but so what?

Ambiguity is deepened when interested parties oppose the schism. Those who lose power in a schism, especially rulers who lose subjects, rarely can see any good in the motives or actions of the departing body in a separation. Those who are enlivened by a vision of something new in monotheism rarely can see the good in the conservative caution of the traditional party, usually in a majority. But not only the powerful are threatened by a schism; the weak who derived some security from an old

³⁵*Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 39, Prologue and Article 1.

order and long to regain it in times of economic and social change can be equally adamant in condemning all change as betrayal of the faith. Usually, the faith *is* compromised in some way; but that is always the case, even in the “tradition.”

In hindsight, schisms often cannot be healed in the sense of recovering the trajectory that would have happened had there been no schism. The separated traditions have gone too far and have developed their own particularity in embodiment of historical-covenantal religion. What *is* a possible remedy for schisms is mutual respect of traditions, conduct of remaining disagreements in integrity, neither compromising one’s own position nor anathematizing the other party. The exposure that was rejected in the events of a schism can still be embraced later, the competing goods of separated parties reconciled within a larger pluralism and its underlying unity. Because schism arises in situations where the exposure of competing goods has been refused, confused, or otherwise prevented, schisms are symptoms of the opportunity for exposure of sin.

When different groups join together in a common culture, resulting in a pluralistic culture, we generally take this as a good thing, a sign of unity and harmony, a vindication of the universality in monotheism. When a community breaks up, it usually does so in acrimony, dissension, and strife; sometimes bloodshed. Yet if pluralism is formed from previously separate plural traditions, why is it a bad thing when change goes in the other direction? Clearly, schism is usually an *occasion* of sin, grave sin; but why does the sin reside in the arithmetic? Why is plurality an evil where there was before uniformity? Might it not be that the inability to conduct a disagreement in integrity and mutual respect, without acrimony, dissension, or strife (not to mention bloodshed), is evidence of sins other than just those which could be assigned to the multiplying arithmetic of sects and sub-cultures? Could mutual and reciprocal condemnations evidence sins that can be distinguished from the plurality that emerges where before there was uniformity?

The move from apparent uniformity to plurality without pluralism happens when the previous understanding of common commitments is not versatile enough to support a true pluralism. The difference between plurality and pluralism is crucial. Plurality is just arithmetic, but *pluralism* denotes a condition in which the several constituencies in a larger community see some common commitments that are expressed in plural ways. “Put another way, *pluralism* is an achievement, not simply a sociological fact.”³⁶ Cultural forces militating in the direction of plurality will, when there are not conditions for pluralism, produce *only* a plurality,

³⁶George Weigel, “Achieving Disagreement: From Indifference to Pluralism,” *This World* 24 (1989 Winter) 54-63; p. 61 (His emphasis).

usually with strife along the way. As George Weigel says, the *goal* is disagreement, not agreement: what passes for disagreement in conditions of mere plurality is usually, in his words, cacophony, indifferent toleration, or suppressed and suspended hostilities. Real disagreement requires mutual understanding and respect, and a common ground of shared values on which to disagree.

When people choose uniformity over pluralism, what was covenantal monotheism comes to value itself more than the goods it was meant to serve, and it becomes a henotheism. When plural options emerge out of a previously uniform tradition, each party can seldom see the good that the other party hopes to find by means different from its own. The opposite temptation occurs when a monotheistic community loses the will to enforce responsibility and abdicates discipline entirely. This is usually a degeneration into polytheism or syncretism, not just pluriformity.

Plurality, whether it is aboriginal, arises from schism, or comes from genuine pluralism, is an occasion of exposure in a respect that quite transcends all the differences between different constituencies: The *mere existence* of another monotheistic group is a reminder of the insecurity of believers and the contingency of what is believed. Above all it shows the responsibility of the community for its own faith. It would be so much easier to place all the responsibility on God. To put all the responsibility on God is more than having a promise of providence in the uncertain future. It would be to read history as if the promise extended to all times and places, with particular details known in a controllable way in advance, so that one can be exempted from anxiety, and even calculate and plan how one will receive and take advantage of providence in an optimal way. With exposure of responsibility comes also exposure of the loneliness of religious commitment, of the precariousness of human life, communal as well as individual, especially when human life is seen against a horizon of history rather than nature.

Peter Berger's early work focuses with a special intensity on the ways in which society gives its construction of reality the appearance of "objective" reality, not just an interpretation of reality, thus concealing the full responsibility of all parties involved, and escaping the subjective experience of responsibility.³⁷ In light of plurality, religion shows itself as a human and social artifact. Religion may indeed be a responsible act of faith, but that responsibility is never complete when it is hidden. The role assigned to religion in the life of society is to legitimate the social structures by which rewards and pains are apportioned, to make order look

³⁷His concern with legitimation and its attendant falseness is especially prominent in *The Precarious Vision* (New York: Doubleday, 1961) and *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (New York: Doubleday, 1961).

just. This function is expected of all religion, whether exilic, mimetic, henotheistic, or historical-covenantal. To this end, individuals are led to place responsibility for their acts on their roles in society. Indeed, they are prevented from not doing so. To take full responsibility for one's own acts would be to step outside of the reality that then assumes an objective character independent of collective human choices. That stepping outside has been called *ec-stasis*. The usual function of religion is to prevent or tame ecstasis. But sometimes religion does not do this; sometimes instead of supporting the social fictions, it exposes them, as in the message of the Prophets. (Let it not be thought that the Law disagrees; the Law was edited by the prophets, and the purpose of Pentateuchal narrative was to present a standard of justice for the monarchy.) At least historical-covenantal religion can embrace exposure, whatever may be said for other religious options. Yet even biblical religion performs the usual functions of religious legitimation, as when it preferentially legitimates itself by citing its willingness to embrace exposure, as indeed Alasdair MacIntyre does, at the end of his essay "Relativism, Power, and Philosophy."³⁸ Authenticity is in considerable measure just such an openness as MacIntyre would promote. In contrast to the solemnity of Heidegger, for whom authenticity is an achievement, or Bultmann, for whom it is a gift of grace, Peter Berger finds it in comic exposure. Exposure of the social fictions is always potentially comic.³⁹ When what is exposed is bad faith of a sort so committed as to reject that comedic vision, the consequences are indeed grave, a pervasive falseness at the heart of life and wrongdoing mounting even to genocide. Yet comedy offers a hospitality to all who consent to take part in it, and Berger instinctively knows here that exposure is gracious.

³⁸*Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 59 no. 1 (1989 September) 5.

³⁹Peter Berger seldom deals with real depravity, though he retained an interest in bad faith from his early days. His novel, *Protocol of a Damnation* (New York: Seabury, 1975), is an exception. Even there, the contrast between the reader's view and the characters' view is comic, if also grotesque.

Chapter 8

Exposure in History

8.1 A History of Estrangements

In *The Meaning of Revelation*, Niebuhr wanted to do more than show how history functions as revelation with enough nuance to avoid crude misunderstandings. Where history is taken as revelation of the God of monotheism, he wanted also to show how it works in the life of the community of believers. Section III.ii, “Interpretation through revelation,” explains how revelation enables a covenant community to make sense of its history: (1) It gives the past coherence; (2) It enables reconciliation and offers freedom; (3) It enables a process of appropriation, wherein new members can enter the covenant and adopt its history as theirs. This chapter focuses on the second of these (actually, it is the “first” function, in Dumézil’s schema), exposure that enables reconciliation. I shall explore one concrete example of how history offers reconciliation.

Niebuhr’s treatment is a somewhat abstract account. Let me expand on it slightly. Typology, which we saw in the previous chapter, is the basis of covenantal reason in history. It enables us to make sense of history, and indeed, to remember anything at all. Typology is not the only way of thinking in history, and even typologies, if poorly chosen, can lead one astray. Parts of a community’s history drop out of memory, become shaded, corrupted, or hidden. Obviously, this is convenient for the parts we are embarrassed by, ashamed of, and would rather not acknowledge. This history, in all its parts, does nevertheless live on in the present, for our lives are built on it, and even if unacknowledged, we live from it. The consequences of the past are certainly visible to an external history, for they are marked by social institutions, political boundaries, and other

facts of life in the present. In Niebuhr's vision of covenantal history, what is taken as the center of history and avowed as such works as revelation. The believer who identifies with it can recover what was lost or shaded or covered up. The recovered history returns with an offer of grace, albeit sometimes a costly one.

The revelatory event resurrects this buried past. It demands and permits that we bring into the light of attention our betrayals and denials, our follies and sins. There is nothing in our lives, in our autobiographies and our social histories, that does not fit in. In the personal inner life revelation requires the heart to recall the sins of the self and to confess fully what it shuddered to remember.¹

Not to look at the estrangements between Christianity and Judaism in an account of the central dynamics of radical monotheism, historical-covenantal religion, would be a conspicuous omission. When this estrangement has played such a persistent role in the life of Christianity, for a Christian writer to omit it in a discussion of history as exposure that offers grace would be an omission undermining the entire thesis about exposure. I cannot do full justice to the problem—the literature is already large, scholarship has only begun to explore the relations between Church and Synagogue, and, at the present, questions multiply faster than answers. Indeed, inquiry into the history of Christian anti-semitism since World War II has well begun the work that Niebuhr describes, even if it remains still very unfinished. It is possible to indicate the general shape of what is now known, and to offer some reflection on the central dynamic of monotheism that would enable it to degenerate in ways that manifest themselves as anti-semitism: the hostility of one monotheism to another.

The spirit of this chapter is one of inquiry into the logic of covenantal religion. It is philosophy of religion as much as systematic theology, and more than it is empirical history or exegesis of biblical texts. I depend on others for that work. One of John G. Gager's recurring comments in *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*² is that the writers he surveys all do history or exegesis with theological applications in mind. I am only reflecting on the theological applications. A faith informed by and growing from history, when it reflects on itself and its history, will always do so with a view to its future. Origins of Christian anti-semitism arise already within the New Testament, but my project is not biblical criticism, nor even a thorough survey of the later history of Christianity. For both, I

¹MR, hardback, p. 114; paperback, pp. 83–84.

²John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism; Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

am dependent on others and on scholarship that is changing as I write.³ I have some trepidation in adducing exegetical considerations from the unfinished research of others. But in the end, this project's true center is to look at Christian sins and ask how they arise in the dynamics of historical-covenantal religion. It would be performatively infelicitous for me to attempt a serious examination of the sins of Judaism (such as temptations to henotheism); examination of the Jewish conscience can, of course, only be done by Jews. The situation here is a little different from my usual approach, which is to show that Judaism is included wherever the treatment is not specific to Christianity. The problem of Christian anti-semitism unfolds into the mutual relationship of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.

In forecast, the problem is one of functional gnosticism and henotheism in Christianity, and they are revealed all through the engagement with Judaism. Mimetic religion in Christianity is surely also present, but it does not show itself in relations with Judaism. It also is reappearing in the present in new ways (environmentalism as nature religion, dalliance with the now candid pagan revival). All that is a work for another time or another person, inasmuch as it is not really central to the dynamic of anti-semitism, the limited task of this chapter.

The first section of the chapter is devoted to an exposition of the long record of Christian anti-semitism in history and the New Testament. Working backward, the focus ends naturally with Paul and the Law: the issue is Jewish Christian emigration from halakhah, leading eventually to the gentilized Church's rejection of halakhah. The next section will look at its roots in Christian degeneration into henotheism and Gnosticism, functionally exilic behavior within nominally covenantal religion. The last section will explore exposure embraced, Judaism as exposure of Christianity, by its mere existence, even when the Christianity exposed is innocent. One turns naturally from exposure to Chalcedon and christology and asks how a christology might be articulated in ways that forestall, rather than foment, anti-semitism. The task is not to resolve the disagreements between Christianity and Judaism, but to see how to leave them unresolved, how to conduct them with respect and integrity (and hopefully esteem and affection) on both sides. In closing, I shall speculate on some of the opportunities missed, opportunities still open for Christian monotheism. The issues turn on the dynamic relation between particularity and universality, the ability of historical-covenantal religion to continue to live the covenant in changing cultural circumstances. In-

³This will in time necessitate revision of some of what I say; indeed, Gager speaks of a Kuhnian paradigm-shift underway, and as yet incomplete; cf. his p. 198.

evitably, going through the history will seem at first to offer no promise of grace or salvation. In fact, the earlier parts of the history are not as bad as the later, and the appearance of essential and ineradicable malice toward Jews in the New Testament is not really true. In the end, there is a message of grace, but it comes only after long work.

In recent work even the terminology is changing, and not always in ways that are clear and consistent. "Anti-semitism" is distinguished from "anti-Judaism" by the fact that anti-semitism is secular and often racist; anti-Judaism comes from Christian theological origins. As we work back to the New Testament, it will become evident that the issue that separates Christianity from Judaism is the Church's emigration from halakhah, Jewish Law. One could speak of an original "extra-halakhism," leading to an "*anti*-halakhism," and from there a development of the theological anti-Judaism that colors Christian history to the present, with a collateral secular anti-semitism arising in the Enlightenment and its children. Barbarous neologisms, but clear, and wearing their meaning on their sleeves. Mostly I shall follow the somewhat confused but familiar older usage and speak simply of anti-semitism.

Our situation is radically changed from any that went before World War II by the Shoah, the destruction of European Judaism. It is the event that forces a crisis of conscience, the event whose light constitutes exposure of far more than just what the Nazis did. Some of the research into Christian anti-semitism is older (James Parkes, e. g.), but the greater part of it is more recent. Parkes traces a considerable literature from before 1934,⁴ but the questioning has achieved a level of intensity since that it never had before his work. In a real sense, this only became urgent because of the Holocaust, for there has to be an event of some visibility before one can inquire into its causes.

Questioning has proceeded along several lines. First was documentation of the Shoah itself; in the years after the Second World War it became evident that without collecting the record, it would be lost.⁵ More urgent, from a Christian perspective, was to find out how the Shoah was enabled in a supposedly Christian Europe: what was the Christian preparation

⁴James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue; a Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (Cleveland: World Books, 1961); originally published by Soncino in London, 1934. This literature is to some extent a part of the wider interest in and recovery of the history of the ancient world; it prepared the way for the post-Holocaust questioning.

⁵Popularly, the work of Elie Wiesel stands out. Technically, Raoul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews, 1939-1945*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985) is definitive in its research into the Nazi archives. A review of this and other recent literature can be found in Edward Alexander, "What the Holocaust Does Not Teach," *Commentary* 95 no. 2 (1993 February) 32.

for secular anti-semitism? The tradition from before Parkes has been extended and deepened. Events of 1959 revealed that anti-semitic prejudice and violence continue and remain widespread, even in America, highlighting the continuing need to combat it. Charles Glock and Rodney Stark recount, in the preface to their *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism*, how an act of vandalism against a synagogue in Cologne in 1959 stimulated further vandalism, in over 600 incidents, in the United States in the period immediately following.⁶ Alarmed, the Anti-Defamation League commissioned a series of surveys to determine the extent of the problem; Glock and Stark's findings are quite revealing. Strong commitment to Christian religious orthodoxy may or may not lead to theological anti-Judaism, but theological anti-Judaism quite reliably and consistently leads to anti-semitism: prejudice against Jews in terms that go well beyond theological issues.⁷ The fact that orthodoxy more often than not led to theological anti-Judaism should not obscure the fact that it did not always do so, and did not necessarily do so. Correlation does not in and of itself explain causes. The causes for the inference to exclusivist particularism were not uncovered in the study. Glock and Stark are quite clear in indicating the statistical significance of their findings, and their inference that (at least as a matter of sociology) the place to interrupt the development of anti-semitism is in the inference from orthodoxy to theological anti-Judaism. We shall see that that inference, alas, was made early. They suggest that the logic of the trouble arises in an inference from orthodoxy to an "exclusivist religious particularism"; this, I would say in theological language, is the antithesis of openness to a responsible liberty of interpretation of the terms of a covenant. More bluntly, it is henotheism, not monotheism. It is remarkable how often Glock and Stark's careful qualification of the significance of their results is misunderstood, invariably in ways that support the positions of those who misunderstand. Richard John Neuhaus notes some who say Glock and Stark "failed to prove a causal connection" between belief and anti-semitism, and so would discredit the study. True, but irrelevant. These people would presumably like to evade the charges, leaving the doctrinal underpinnings of anti-semitism undisturbed.⁸ Norman Ravitch makes the opposite mistake, taking incompletely explained correlation for causal connection, presumably in order to insinuate an *essential* link

⁶Charles Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). Cf. the preface, p. ix.

⁷Glock and Stark, pp. 133–135.

⁸"Christian Belief, Anti-Semitism, and Salvation History," *Una Sancta* (Chicago) 23 no. 3 (1966) 72f; pp. 73 and 76.

between anti-semitism and *any* form of orthodox Christian belief.⁹ Both types of readers of Glock and Stark can reach such an interpretation only by not reading what Glock and Stark actually said. In any case, from the perspective of the late 1980s, one can say that even Glock and Stark underestimated the seriousness of the problem. Deborah Lipstadt's *Denying the Holocaust; The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* documents the most appalling contemporary manifestation of refractory anti-semitism.¹⁰ The hidden and recently noticed phenomenon of Holocaust-denial would seem to corroborate my thesis that the Holocaust is for non-Jews in Western culture *exposure*: there is hardly any other way to explain the energy expended by the deniers in attempts to cover it up.

The history of anti-semitism can be traced briefly from the present to its sources in the New Testament. Anti-semitism is usually suppressed today in America, in light of the Holocaust; few respectable persons would be caught expressing anti-semitic prejudices.¹¹ Yet even when secular anti-semitism is scrupulously avoided, theological anti-Judaism survives. Alan Davies surveyed its prevalence in theology in 1969, and I have no reason to think it is really gone thirty years later.¹² It was his complaint that even when anti-semitism is recognized and repudiated, its theological roots are often not seen, not searched out, but even protected from criticism. Davies's survey takes the Catholic and Protestant traditionalists and radicals as groups, one chapter at a time. Catholic traditionalists retain a doctrine of supersession, displacement of Israel by the Church, even when they attempt to be friendly toward Judaism. This must be a great irony to Jewish readers, and not a very comforting one, since I think that as long as theology retains a doctrine of supersession, it tends to resolve itself eventually in the direction of candid and hostile anti-Judaism. The Catholic radicals have moved beyond supersessionism, in however exploratory a way, and are able to affirm a real and enduring Jewishness at the core of Christianity. But this work was hardly begun in 1969, and indeed, in 2000, the shape of a coherent systematic theology free from and immune to anti-Judaism is yet to be seen. There is a widespread turn

⁹Norman Ravitch, "The Problem of Christian Anti-Semitism," *Commentary* 73 no. 4 (1982 April) 41 ff.; cf. especially p. 51.

¹⁰Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust; The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Free Press, 1993). Edward Alexander's review of Lipstadt mentions related works, and can be found in *Commentary* 96 no. 5 (1993 November) 54.

¹¹Few is not none; venomous anti-semitism has reappeared in some Black groups whose causes are championed in some liberal political circles. (There is anti-semitism in white racist groups, but they are not respectable.)

¹²Alan T. Davies, ed., *Anti-Semitism and the Christian Mind; the Crisis of Conscience After Auschwitz* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

to Romans 9–11 as the passage in the New Testament friendliest toward Judaism. This is not really sufficient to ground a theology truly friendly to Judaism, but if it is listened to carefully, with open ears, it would rule out real hostility to Judaism. Romans 9–11 does not get beyond its author's exaggerated concern over the mystery of Jewish disbelief in the Gospel, and that concern provides enough leverage to undermine everything favorable to Judaism in these three chapters. Nevertheless, it should be clear that for Paul, the covenant with Judaism is not abrogated, but continues in force and salvific power until Judaism shall be converted at the end of time (Romans 11). Not very complimentary to Judaism, but not homicidal, either; it ought to imply limits on Christian anti-Judaism stricter than have been observed in fact.

Among the Protestants, the Evangelicals share the pattern of the Catholic traditionalists, and in this they follow the more blatant example of the Reformers. One may supplement Davies's account from Ben Zion Bokser, who quotes statements from the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ, and the Lutheran World Federation, to the effect that even if postponed into the eschatological future, the will of God is for the Jews to accept Jesus as the messiah and be integrated into the Church.¹³ These are liberal voices, and it is safe to conjecture that Protestant conservatives are even more persistent in supersessionism, the doctrine that the Church has displaced the Synagogue, and that Judaism is at fault for rejecting the messiah.

Davies next examines Karl Barth, who attempts as friendly a position toward Judaism as he can. Nevertheless, Judaism in its denial of the messiah is forced to play a role in Christian theology of witnessing despite itself to the messiahship of the messiah. This pushes the envelope of Romans 9–11 fairly radically, even if it is not yet something that will make a Jew feel good about himself. "Few Christians, one suspects, realize the extent to which the average Jew feels uncomfortable at being made to play a role in Christian eschatology, even when this role is not a deliberately malignant one."¹⁴ It is clear that Romans 9–11 will play a central role in any Christian theological comportment toward Rabbinic Judaism. It would have been better if Paul had been less troubled by the Synagogue leaders' coolness toward Jesus.

Turning from Barth and conservatives to Protestant liberals, there are some real gestures toward friendship with Judaism. The liberal suspicion of theological absolutes makes it relatively easy to resist the temptation to try to convert Jews to Christianity. (But suspicion of absolutes, carried

¹³Ben Zion Bokser, *Judaism and the Christian Predicament* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1967), pp. 33–36.

¹⁴Davies, *Anti-Semitism and the Christian Mind*, p. 120.

too far, can make it hard to find a position that one can put much weight on.)

Davies's survey of theology as it stood in 1969 clearly identifies the central affirmation in Christian theology that leads to anti-Jewish consequences as the thesis that Christianity has displaced or superseded Judaism in the Covenant. Among its older attendant ideas are the charge of deicide hurled against the Jews even by schoolchildren in America in the recent past, and the spiteful calumny that the destruction of Jerusalem and the diaspora itself were divine punishments for the rejection of the messiah. There are further, and deeper, theological issues, as we shall see, but it is supersessionism that is the door to anti-Jewish theology. The principal corollary of the doctrine of supersession is that Jews should convert to Christianity, and Judaism should go out of business. In practice, this leads to the mission to the Jews, and where that does not work, later, in the Middle Ages, to expulsion of the Jews from one European country after another. Where Christians simply exterminated heresies, Judaism was left to live, oppressed, because Christian theology required its eventual conversion. Where expulsion or stronger measures are impracticable, Christian theology retreats to the mission to the Jews, but is exceedingly tenacious and unwilling to give up the supersessionism that can later unfold into the full array of anti-Jewish measures. In post-Christian imitations of anti-Judaism, there is no such restraint, and Jews are simply killed. Frequently, and especially in the Medieval and later history, Jews were killed by Christians who forgot or never learned to stop at mere oppression.

Let me note, before continuing the exposure of hostility toward Judaism, something of the end point of the search: The critical assumption buried in this anti-Jewish structure of theology is that only one daughter can legitimately inherit from Second Temple Judaism, that there can be only one real covenant community. In the end, there is no liberty of interpretation of the terms of the covenant, and there can be only one legitimate reading of the Common Documents. These assumptions are the root of Christian violence towards Jews, but they were never spelled out. Had they been, they would have appeared as answers to questions, questions that could have had other answers instead.

I would like to move fairly quickly to the Patristic theologians and the New Testament, where the problems originate. The intervening history is a tale of violence since the First Crusade, legal disabilities until the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century, and secular anti-semitism mixed with violence after that. One turns with surprise to histories such as Wistrich's or Poliakov's, to find how much space is devoted to post-

Enlightenment and present-day anti-semitism.¹⁵ The Nazi destruction of European Judaism was by no means the end of the phenomenon; it continues, even where there are no Jews to hate. The term *anti-semitism* was coined in the 1870s by Wilhelm Marr to promote a new Jew-hatred, one that was not religious (he had no love of Christianity), but based on economic, social, political, and in the end racist reasons. That the term was demographically without any basis has not stopped its currency.¹⁶ The movement which Marr crystallized spread from Germany to Austria-Hungary, France, and Russia; it was evidently a reaction to the emancipation of Jews from legal disabilities that they had lived under until the Enlightenment.¹⁷ Secular anti-semitism was able to take over from Christian prejudice the calumnies against Jews and Jewishness that Christian imagination had used to justify continuing against live Jews in the present the hatred for events long past. In this list are charges that the Jews were the murderers of God, "deicides," children of the devil, followers of the anti-Christ, the synagogue of Satan, plotting to destroy Christianity, poison wells, desecrate the Host, massacre Christian children, and establish world dominion for Judaism.¹⁸ (I myself, though not Jewish, heard what are hopefully the last fading echoes of a few of these calumnies when I was a child in school.) Somewhat secularized, such fevered imaginations returned in the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a preposterous forgery attributed to Jewish leaders in nineteenth-century Russia. Before the Enlightenment, Christian portrayal of Jews was usually negative, especially in the Passion plays that depict the central events at the origin of Christianity as a distinct religion.

Many legal disabilities were imposed on Jews in Christian Europe. These included imposition of distinctive and demeaning dress, limits on where they could go, what economic occupations were open to them, even attempts to suppress the Talmud. Christian law forbade Christians from lending money at interest, but did not apply to Jews; Jews were

¹⁵Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism; The Longest Hatred* (New York: Pantheon, 1991), and Leon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, 4 vols., translated by Richard Howard. (New York: by Vanguard Press, 1985).

¹⁶Poliakov, vol. 1, Appendix A, presents blood-type statistics that show clearly that Jewishness is not a racial phenomenon; genetically, Jews are indistinguishable from their neighbors. George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution; A History of European Racism* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), gives a history of the secular doctrines of race which provide the major non-Christian foundation for the Shoah. In an inquiry into the Christian roots of anti-semitism, I can afford to pass it by.

¹⁷Wistrich, Introduction, p. xv.

¹⁸Wistrich, Introduction, p. xviii–xix.

barred from many other occupations,¹⁹ and so were channeled into an economic status that inevitably attracted a special odium and resentment, one that was easily transformed into a negative estimate of the character of all Jews.

Medieval Christian art and popular ideology easily dehumanized and demonized the Jews, with a versatility of imagination that is difficult to believe and has been mostly forgotten in the present.²⁰ The one mitigating factor seems to be that the Church sought some protection for Jews from the more preposterous accusations, though it nevertheless sanctioned restrictive legislation against Jews.²¹ Franciscans and Dominicans, preaching a revival of Christian commitment, seem to have been fomenters of serious anti-Jewish attitudes, which often led to massacres.²² Only a little later, Luther's *Concerning the Jews and Their Lies* includes a plain incitement to arson against Jews.²³

My source for the history before the Reformation is Leon Poliakov. It is a tale of degeneration of relations between Jews and Christians from about the time of the First Crusade (1096) through the fifteenth century. Earlier, conditions were not exactly cordial, nor what modern legal theorists of religious freedom would find acceptable, but the level of invective was lower, and the rate of violence much lower. In the sixth century, it is quite plausible that Jewish missionary activity was still alive in Gaul; legal restrictions on Christian contact with Jews seem designed to impede conversion. Jews in Lyons in the ninth century lived freely, and even kept Christian servants.²⁴ Polemic against the Jews until this time displayed none of the preposterous later charges, but was limited to theological grievances. This changed sometime in the ninth century, when church teaching began to single out the Jews for special negative attention. In Wistrich's summary, until the ninth century, there was no popular anti-semitism, but rather Judaism held a missionary attraction for the Christian lay population.²⁵ Only a little later is Rashi (1040-1105), at Troyes, the great Talmudist whose commentaries are classic still today.

The summer of 1096, as the First Crusade was getting under way, seems to have been the turning point down into a spiral of ever deeper Jew-

¹⁹Wistrich, pp. 25-26.

²⁰Cf. Wistrich, p. 29 f.

²¹Cf. Wistrich, p. 35. Wistrich cites Kenneth R. Stow, pp. 81-85 of "Hatred of Jews or love of the Church? Papal policy toward the Jews in the Middle Ages," in Shmuel Almog, ed., *Anti-Semitism Through the Ages* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

²²Wistrich, p. 34-36

²³Cf. Wistrich, p. 39.

²⁴Cf. Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, vol. 1, pp. 26-30.

²⁵Cf. Wistrich, pp. 32-33.

hatred and violence. Pope Urban II, late in 1095, preached the crusade as an expedition to slaughter infidels in the Holy Land. The masses drew the logical conclusion that a good start would be to slaughter infidels (i. e., Jews) at home first. There was a massacre at Rouen, and many more in Germany that spring and summer.²⁶ Later crusades began the same way, with slaughters of Jews at home.²⁷ In 1144, a murdered boy in Norwich was the pretext seized as origin of the myth of Jewish ritual murder.²⁸ Despite attempts by both the Emperor and the Papacy to lay this myth to rest, it took root and has lasted for centuries; in some quarters into the present.²⁹ Famines and plague in the fourteenth century provided further pretexts to savage Jews, by now a convenient object of frustration, and thought to be responsible.³⁰ Conditions degenerated erratically into the period of the Reformation.

I am more interested in the theological roots of anti-semitism than in the particulars of the violence through the centuries, terrible as that history is. One must read a work such as Poliakov's to believe the extent of that violence and depth of its hatred. The crusades were supposed to foster a revival and deepening of Christian belief, but instead, if the precipitous rise of anti-semitism may be taken as a symptom, what resulted was better characterized as a henotheism, an exaltation of Christianity in absolute terms that have lost the sense of a universal dependence before God, a universality that would make Christians brothers to non-Christians. Instead, they are enemies: non-Christians are "infidels," a term of condemnation and hatred. Though Rome occasionally tried to protect Jews from the worst violence and most preposterous accusations,³¹ in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) it imposed legal disabilities that continued in various forms until the Enlightenment.³² The preaching of the mendicant orders produced results similar to the crusades and was often explicitly directed against Jews. Migrant flagellants encouraged fervor of belief

²⁶Poliakov, vol. 1, ch. 4, pp. 41–46.

²⁷Poliakov, vol. 1, p. 49.

²⁸Poliakov, vol. 1, p. 58.

²⁹Poliakov, vol. 1, p. 61.; Wistrich, *passim*.

³⁰Cf. Poliakov, ch. 6; vol. 1, pp. 105, 109, and *passim*.

³¹Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, "Response to Rosemary Ruether," in Eva Fleischner, ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* (New York: KTAV, 1974), gives an account of the history. Yerushalmi observes that Pius XII seems timid on behalf of the Jews, in sorry contrast to the medieval popes. Whether or not that is so, more Jews were protected in Italy, and by the Church, than anywhere else in Europe during the Nazi era except Denmark. Denmark's Jewish population was tiny compared to Italy's.

³²Cf. Poliakov, vol. 1, p. 64.

and brought in their wake more violence against Jews.³³ In every case, the attempt to invigorate faith carried a seemingly inevitable consequence that henotheism increases more than commitment to radical monotheism.

If I may turn to the fourth century, we find John Chrysostom, an outstanding preacher, and one expressing notably anti-Jewish sentiments in the eight sermons "Against the Jews." Whereas in the period from the First Crusade on, most of the evidence simply attests the fact of oppression and homicidal violence, in the Patristic period, we actually begin to see theological reasons for the anti-Jewish animus. When violence does not demand all one's attention, it is possible to see the theological dynamic that gives rise to this disorder.

Some things change and some things do not as we move back from the tenth to the fourth centuries, and this is true of both theology and culture. John Chrysostom's homilies against the Jews afford a window into the late fourth century world; my source is Robert L. Wilken's *John Chrysostom and the Jews; Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century*.³⁴ Judaism is not just still a live option in the fourth century, it is in some ways more credible than Christianity. Christianity has not yet reached the dominance that it would appear to have in the tenth century, on the eve of the Crusades. In this sense, the relative places of Judaism and Christianity in the culture have almost been reversed; only almost, because Hellenistic pagan religions are a third option, shaping the lives of a sizeable fraction of the people. This is a great revision of the received tradition; Christian histories until recently have tended to assume that Judaism from virtually the death of Christ was like the Judaism of recent centuries: not missionary but ghettoized, a marginal phenomenon in culture. And they assume that secular (pagan) anti-semitism was widespread then as now. Both assumptions are false; pagan attitudes toward Judaism ranged from the curious to the favorable and turned hostile only in circumstances aggravated by other considerations (e. g., politics and economics in Alexandria).³⁵ On the whole, ancient pagan attitudes toward Jews and Judaism were far less hostile than modern secular attitudes, especially before World War II. Judaism was widespread

³³Poliakov, vol. 1, p. 111-112.

³⁴Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews; Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983). Chrysostom was deaconed in 381, priested in 386, and made patriarch of Constantinople in 398 (*Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*). Texts of the first and eighth sermons can be found in Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978). The sermons were preached before the Jewish autumn and spring Holy Days in 386 and 387 CE.

³⁵Gager, *Origins of Anti-Semitism*, chs. 3-5.

and accepted in the Roman and Hellenistic world.

In the fourth century, the later “establishment” of Christianity was by no means obvious, much less certain. In 361-363, Julian was Emperor, known as Julian the Apostate to later history—but in his own time, as Emperor, with the majesty he commanded, and as a pagan and Hellenist, his reign augured every possibility that Christianity might never be secure, dominant, established, or forever the religion of the sovereign. If it could happen with Julian, it could happen again. Judaism was not only a live option for Hellenistic pagans, it was even more so for Christians: Judaizers in the Church attracted many to the observance of Jewish festivals and presumably then to observance of Jewish law.

John Chrysostom was an active preacher in Antioch in the 380s and 390s, and he lived with all these cultural uncertainties and insecurities. He came from a family of means sufficient to have an excellent education in rhetoric, the basic language skill that enabled one to have a career in public life. Wilken makes two major claims about the sermons against the Jews: they are directed against Judaizers in the Church, not to Jews in the synagogue, and their rhetoric is misunderstood if judged by modern standards. The rhetoric of that time resembles today’s editorial cartoons in its level of exaggeration. If the visual devices of political cartoons today were turned into words, one would have something like rhetoric then, as it was used in adversarial situations: one’s opponent is routinely characterized in the most vicious terms. The catalog of vices is used so often as to be monotonous.³⁶ Wilken would like to exonerate Chrysostom of the most serious charges, charges which would make him seem like a modern hate-monger of impressive proportions. For unless it is understood that ancient verbal rhetoric was taken as we take cartoons (my analogy, not his), rather than the way we would judge the same implications stated in words, Chrysostom’s invective would seem outrageous, crude, tasteless, incitement to hatred, bigotry, and implicit license for hate-crimes. The modern conventions of civility and tact did not apply. Wilken’s exoneration may or may not withstand criticism; James Parkes, by contrast, found Chrysostom unusually bitter and lacking in restraint even for his own time.³⁷ Wilken’s defense will not mitigate my complaint against Chrysostom, to which I shall come shortly. Chrysostom’s preaching did not lead to violence (at least not in reports I am aware of), nor greatly disturb a culture in which Christians and Jews lived side by side, usually in peace, and in which Christians attended synagogues far more often than burned them. Violence was a problem to some extent; in the summer of 388, Christians in Callinicum burned a synagogue and a Gnostic chapel,

³⁶Cf. Wilken, *Chrysostom*, p. 112 f.

³⁷Cf. *Conflict of Church and Synagogue*, p. 163.

and the Emperor Theodosius would have punished them and rebuilt the synagogue, but Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, heard of it, was outraged, intervened, and the order was retracted. The Theodosian code protected Jews and Jewish observances.³⁸ In the fourth century, Jews had been in Antioch for six hundred years, sharing the city's fortunes and enjoying respect while standing apart religiously. In Chrysostom's words, many "have a high regard for the Jews and think that their present way of life is holy."³⁹ Clearly Christians and Jews were not at each other's throats.

However much the invective of John's sermons may have been understood and discounted in his own time as mere exhortation, attempted persuasion against Christians participating in Jewish observances, it was not so understood by later readers. And John Chrysostom's hidden assumptions (to which I come momentarily) and his taunts ("Christ-killers") were ready for worse uses later. The eight homilies were translated into Russian, in the eleventh century, when Jewish homes were being plundered in the first pogrom, by the grand Duke of Kiev, Prince Vladimir.⁴⁰ And Chrysostom blames his contemporary Jews for the deeds of the Jews in the New Testament; he equates them all, and silently equates "the Jews" with their leaders, who, as Ben Zion Bokser points out, were collaborators with the occupying Roman power.⁴¹ Rhetoric or not, it was taken literally later and provides license for extreme hatred.

Wilken's theologically most interesting claim, and one I am inclined to credit on the face of the texts, is that the sermons are directed to Judaizers in the church, and not to Jewish neighbors in the city. The audience and assumptions of Chrysostom's argument are pivotal. The simplest witness is the texts themselves; what they inveigh against is precisely Christians attending Jewish festivals. Chrysostom names the problem in his sermons—"wicked associations with the Jews"—i. e. activities practiced and fostered by Judaizers, not Jews themselves:

I beg you to shun them and avoid their gatherings. The harm to our weaker brothers is not a small matter, nor is the opportunity for them to flaunt their arrogance a minor matter. For when they see you [Judaizing Christians], who worship the Christ who was crucified by them, observing

³⁸Cf. Wilken, *Chrysostom*, pp. 53–54. The events relating to the synagogue at Callinicum are recounted also in Parkes, *Conflict*, p. 166.

³⁹Wilken, p. 65; *Adv. Judaeos* 1.3.

⁴⁰Cf. Wilken, *Chrysostom*, p. 162. The term christ-killers is implied at Sermon 1.5; cf. Wilken, pp. 125–126; Wilken thinks it is recent in the late fourth century.

⁴¹Cf. *Judaism and the Christian Predicament*, p. 21. (One could as well hold all of France responsible for the actions of the Vichy government.)

Jewish ways, how can they not think that everything done by them is the best? How can they not think that our ways are not worth anything when you, who confess to be a Christian and to follow the Christian way, run to those who degrade these same practices?⁴²

It is clear that the sermon is (1) addressed to Christians, and (2) a directive to avoid Jewish activities, not an incitement to violence. The problem is that “there are some who consider the synagogue to be a holy place,”⁴³ and these make sense only as Judaizers or as those to whom the message of the Judaizers had some appeal. But the crucial assumption is in Chrysostom’s logic: that Christianity or Judaism, *but not both*, can be worthy of devotion. This is the Great Exclusive Or: “If you admire the Jewish way of life, what do you have in common with us? If the Jewish rites are holy and venerable, our way of life must be false.”⁴⁴ This assumption is shared by some others, notably some among the pagans, but not by all; John Chrysostom has to argue it against the Judaizers, who presumably believe that the relation between Christianity and Judaism is *not* an exclusive alternative. The Emperor Julian, who wrote a tract against the Christians, sought to undermine their advance and planned to do so by rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. Julian’s program and motives were (1) to prove that Christ’s prophecy in the Gospels about the destruction of the Temple was false (by rebuilding it); (2) to prove that Christianity was illegitimate and apostate from Judaism, by legitimating the observance of Jewish law; (3) to enlist Jews as allies in his religious reform by restoring sacrificial worship in Jerusalem as he intended to do throughout the Empire (in general, pagan sacrifice, but he included Jewish sacrifice too). Julian’s argument presupposes the great Exclusive Or: the truth of Christianity depends on falsity of Judaism, and without the falsity of Judaism, the truth of Christianity fails.⁴⁵

John and Julian agree: only one of Judaism and Christianity can be true. The consequences for Christianity are fateful, for this assumption lies hidden underneath all the anti-Judaism of Christian theology. Distinctions have to be drawn carefully, for to say that there is only one God and to say that there is only one way to worship that God are two different positions, but easily confused. To say that there is only one way of wor-

⁴²Chrysostom, *Adv. Judaeos* 1.5, Wilken *Chrysostom*, pp. 125–126, or Meeks and Wilken, p. 96. Parkes, *Conflict*, pp. 174–177, notes Conciliar prohibitions which make sense only on the supposition of frequent and friendly contact between Christians and Jews.

⁴³*Adv. Judaeos* 1.5, Meeks and Wilken, p. 94.

⁴⁴*Adv. Judaeos* 1.6, Wilken, *Chrysostom*, p. 68, Meeks and Wilken, p. 97.

⁴⁵Cf. Wilken, *Chrysostom*, pp. 145, 148.

shipping the one God is to delegitimize all monotheistic faith-communities except one's own; this is the door to henotheism, and so to degeneration from radical monotheism.

The circumstances in Mesopotamia were somewhat different, but not different enough to offer much hope. Jacob Neusner is optimistic that Aphrahat, a monk-bishop in fourth-century Iran, offers an example of courteous and respectful disagreement with Judaism, rather than vilification and invective.⁴⁶ In the end, however, Aphrahat exhibits the same root assumption that lies underneath all Christian anti-semitism, the Exclusive Or: Christianity has superseded Judaism; the exposition of Aphrahat's arguments in the body of the book and in the translations bears out both Neusner's assessment of Aphrahat's courtesy and his locally peculiar implementation of rhetorical strategies common to the rest of the Christian apologetic against Judaism. The reasons for respect and courtesy instead of invective are not yet clear. Neusner affords one striking insight into the encounter between Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. It seems that the rabbis from the Land of Israel came as innovators to upper Mesopotamia, and where they arrived before Christian missionaries, Christianity did not take hold for another century or more. Where the Christians arrived first, the new Rabbinic Judaism of the Talmud had a poor reception.⁴⁷ He continues, in conjecture, to speculate on the degree of novelty in the new talmudic Judaism as compared with the older inheritance from the settlement after the Exile, from which I am assuming that Babylonian Judaism is continuous. But here, it looks as if it was a race between Christian and rabbinic missions from Palestine to different congregations in upper Mesopotamia. The difference between Rabbinic Judaism of the Mishnah and the Babylonian Judaism lasting from the Exile is significant enough to earn for the rabbis of the Mishnah respect both for high creativity and for innovation that was also conservative. In my book, this counts as a virtue; in the rhetorical and apologetic climate of the ancient world, it was a vice—newness was very unconvincing; antiquity was venerable.

The critical assumption, the Exclusive Or, is not original with Chrysostom; it is spelled out also in the second century. We see it in the Epistle of Barnabas—"I further beg of you, as being one of you, and loving you both individually and collectively more than my own soul, to take heed now to yourselves, and not to be like some, adding largely to your sins, and saying, 'The covenant is both theirs and ours.'" ⁴⁸ Barn-

⁴⁶Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism; the Christian-Jewish argument in fourth-century Iran* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971); cf. p. 5.

⁴⁷Neusner, *Aphrahat*, p. 2.

⁴⁸Cf. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Roberts and Donaldson, p. 138 (*Barnabas*, ch. 4); Parkes quotes it in *Conflict*, p. 84.

abas in the next sentence draws the only possible Christian conclusion from the Exclusive Or: the Jews have lost the covenant. The possibility of an inclusive inheritance from Second Temple Judaism is raised only to be denied. Usually it was not even raised. Symmetric conclusions could be found in Jewish assumptions that only the rabbis could inherit from Second Temple Judaism, that Christianity is not just not (halakhic) Judaism, it is not Judaism of any form at all. The two rejections are not the same, and the difference is precisely the critical distinction. It is not obvious that the synagogue always bought the Exclusive Or, as we shall see; it may have occasionally acquitted itself better than the Church.

We have followed this line of thought (in admittedly large leaps across the patristic literature) to the threshold of the New Testament and the parting of the ways between the Church and the Synagogue. But before we come to the New Testament documents themselves and the situation for which they bear evidence, I would like to turn to the issues raised by Marcion, the second century thinker whose challenge forced a definition of the canon and also of the relation between the Church and the Common Documents. It is the estimate of John Gager, following David Efroymson, that anti-Judaism was the price of keeping the Common Documents as Old Testament. My claim is that this predicament (it was not seen negatively at the time) presupposes the great Exclusive Or. One can trace this logic through Marcion's challenge, Tertullian's response, the arguments of Celsus, as well as others. Marcion and Celsus object on the basis of premises that are already in Christianity; the Christian apologists accept those premises and turn them instead against the Synagogue. It is my further conjecture that the response to Marcion licenses exilic religion in Christianity; more than henotheism was bought from Marcion. For Marcion, (1) law is beneath human dignity; (2) the God of the law is unwise or malicious; (3) Jesus came as the revelation of a new God, one who did not impose a law on people; (4) the inherited scripture is no longer holy scripture, but a record of the evil God; and (5) binding scripture is limited to only expurgated parts of Paul and Luke.⁴⁹ In Marcion's conception, God changes his mind, trades Jews for gentiles, and abandons the Law. Jesus was in conflict with the people of the (former) covenant. The Bible is supposedly sacred to Christians, but it is a Bible whose law they do not keep; and Christian claims of both newness and venerable antiquity are inconsistent. This would indeed pose a problem for Christian apologetics; the solution is to discredit Judaism and appropriate its antiquity.

⁴⁹David P. Efroymson, "The Patristic Connection," in Alan Davies, ed., *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979); cf. p. 100. Gager cites this list, with some deletions, at his p. 162.

Tertullian's response is instructive. Most of his anti-Jewish writing is not in works about Judaism, but in the attack on Marcion. It is needed to save the Old Testament, God, and connections to antiquity from Marcion's attack. The solution to the dilemma of how to keep the God of the Jews without keeping that God's law as well is to posit the inferiority of Judaism. That inferiority required the law, but Christians, not being inferior, do not need the law. Tertullian could hardly take offense at the abrogation of the law, because he shares it. Instead, he accepts the reading of the law as harsh, in agreement with Marcion's complaint, but he blames the Jews, not God, and in so doing, deepens the estrangement between Judaism and Christianity. God's law and its harshness were deserved; the Jewish rejection of Jesus was foretold in the Old Testament. Justin in the *Dialogue with Trypho* uses similar arguments earlier, to save God and the Old Testament for Christianity at the expense of Judaism. Irenaeus in the *Adversus Haereses* is similar; not surprisingly, the parable of the vineyard gets heavy use. Origen in the *Contra Celsum* repeats the pattern, one that is set for the rest of Christian history.⁵⁰

What is so compelling for the Christian apologists is that Marcion and Celsus object on the basis of premises already established in Christianity, though I claim they were not spelled out enough to be questioned: namely, the great Exclusive Or. Marcion did not create the problem—it was already built into mainstream gentile Christianity (displacement of Judaism, abrogation of law, Jesus in conflict with the Jews, a bible sacred to Christians who don't keep its law, and the contradiction between claims of simultaneous newness and of oldness). Celsus makes some of the same arguments, apparently dwelling especially on the alleged contradiction between new and old. In effect, he claims that you can't have it both ways—you cannot both claim Jewish antiquity and reject the Jewish law. Christianity silently accepts the hidden premises and turns them against Judaism. The main hidden premise, once again, is the idea that only one daughter can inherit legitimacy from Second Temple Judaism, that there can be only one way to worship the one God. Interestingly, in Hellenistic and Roman times, this was not the case: the last years of Second Temple Judaism were a time of great pluralism, experiment, and creativity. Out of that creativity grew (or survived) Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. Only at the end of the first century, after the disaster of 70 CE, does there appear the great Exclusive Or. Beneath it lies a further assumption that religion is to be justified, to be argued *to*, not from.

It is always a risk in a debating situation that one may take on an adversary's premises unnoticed in order to refute him. I would further conjecture that the response to Marcion licensed a certain amount of

⁵⁰Cf. Efraymson, pp. 105–107.

functionally exilic religion in Christianity. It is clear that the Exclusive Or is henotheistic, but Marcion's legacy was more than mere henotheism. Most of this conjecture must wait a few pages until we can see the influence of Marcion beyond the anti-Judaism of most later Christian theology.

We come to the New Testament after working back through a long and sorry history of anti-Judaism and worse. Here we look at texts which are in some sense sacred, and so the stakes are much higher. One can disown parts or, if necessary, all of John Chrysostom. It is not like that with the New Testament. My claim is that all rides on how the New Testament is read, and I can show this only from a few examples of recent work. It can be read as everywhere consistent with the great Exclusive Or, and it can also be read in other ways. If it is treated as timeless, de-historicized, without human voice, without human context, God speaking directly to every age, made naively and immediately applicable to every time and place, then how the interpretation of the texts will come out is largely hidden, a matter of chance and the hidden pre-understanding given by received tradition. That such a pre-understanding embodies the Exclusive Or and consequent anti-Judaism at the most basic levels, governing interpretation at every other level, may safely be asserted from common experience. At least this can be said from memories of the 1960s in America, and Alan Davies' 1969 book bears this out in its survey of the theological literature then. If, on the other hand, the New Testament texts are taken first as the words of humans speaking to each other, before they in any sense become the Word of God, then they have a human context, they become evidence of a faith, albeit the faith of sinners, but nevertheless one that can be criticized and participated in today. As witness to possibilities for faith, the texts may become Word of God.

May—or may not. Can they still, today? This involves one in exegesis and historical criticism. A scholar with a far horizon and the reach of only a common hoe is continually forced to apologize for what he cannot treat. The present treatment cannot be exegesis in enough detail (or even a survey of enough of the exegetical literature) to qualify as serious work in New Testament. As the reader has seen by now, I have to summarize in even less space than my sources a lot of very complex history. I do put this forward as serious questioning in theology, and if it is not original work in exegesis, it is informed by at least some recent work on the New Testament. It is about the theological questions one brings to the New Testament and its history, contemporary with the first of the tannaim and the earliest days of Rabbinic Judaism. It is also about the applications silently known to come after those questions. It is enough, I think, to support the theological observations I wish to make in claiming that the

temptation to henotheism and functional Gnosticism came early and often to the young Church.

If I may telegraph the results, John (and before it, Matthew) are one side of a messy divorce; Mark and Luke-Acts have far less serious problems. In Paul, Galatians is directed to Judaizers rather than to Jews, and Romans 9-11, while not calculated to make Jews feel good about themselves, clearly thinks that the covenant is still valid for Judaism. It could have served well as an upper bound on Christian anti-Judaism, had there been will to use it as that. Instead, it was more like a lower bound.

Contrary to appearances, we are on new ground in the New Testament. Traditionally, it is read through a filter or lens that imposes the Exclusive Or on all texts; it is remarkable how often even responsible translations like the RSV disambiguate the Greek in ways that impose the displacement of Judaism by Christianity on the texts. Seeing beyond the Exclusive Or that is read into the texts requires careful attention to what they actually say, and some reasonable inferences about their original context.

This reading has gone through profound changes over the last forty years. John Gager recounts the history of the reading in the first two chapters of his *Origins of Anti-Semitism*. There was no small progress in uncovering the depth and extent of anti-semitism in Christian theology before World War II, as the references in James Parkes' *Conflict of Church and Synagogue* well document. Nevertheless, because of the Shoah, a watershed was passed in the work of Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*.⁵¹ Hounded by the Nazis during the war, he wrote as he ran. Family members were murdered. The result was published in 1948 in France. It is a reading of the Gospels, noticing what is usually hidden by the assumptions of Jew-hatred and supersession of Judaism: Christianity has deep kinship with Judaism, Jesus was Jewish, his names are all Jewish, and he spoke a Jewish language. Honor of Jesus is incompatible with anti-semitism. The Church abandoned circumcision only with hesitation, and the religion of his time and people was vigorous, lively, and creative. His teaching was Jewish, in a Jewish context, continuous with reform movements two centuries older than he was. The diaspora was older than Jesus, and so cannot have been a consequence of rejecting him. The Jewish people *as a whole* did not know about Jesus, and cannot be accused of rejecting him. On the contrary, those who knew him took him to their hearts. They cannot be said to have rejected his messiahship until it is shown that he explicitly presented himself as such to them, a proposition which the texts do not support. The object of his condemnations does not make sense if taken as the Jewish people; it does make sense if

⁵¹Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).

taken as a vice that occurs in every time and place. It is poorly called “pharisaism” (Jesus himself was probably a pharisee), and would better be just described functionally as one way to subvert covenant. The charge of collective guilt for his death makes only the poorest sense; the responsible Jewish leaders were collaborators with the Roman occupation. We have no witnesses to and no transcript of his trial; the texts used to assign collective responsibility make particularly weak and suspect evidence. And the later Christian grudge against Jews and Judaism is utterly without basis. This is entirely contrary to the reading of the New Testament that Christians have until recently grown up with.

Marcel Simon, in *Verus Israel* (1964), extends the critique to an initial review of the history from 135 to 425, from Bar Kochba to the Theodosian Code and the consolidation of the Talmuds.⁵² Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *Faith and Fratricide; the Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* was the beginning of the recent Christian response and self-examination.⁵³ While not all of her specific diagnoses have won continuing critical assent, at least not in every detail, her basic thesis, that the place to look is in Christian theology and Christian texts, has been accepted. Alan T. Davies’s 1969 survey of Christian theology, which I have already noted, preceded Ruether but did not attract as much attention. It is less ambitious and extrapolates less from the data, merely noting the persistent anti-Jewish assumptions in a sample of theologians then available. His 1979 collection is my principal source for recent changes in hermeneutics, witness to the possibility of reading the texts and the history in a new way.

The pivotal distinction operates in all recent Christian exegesis: is a text hostile to Jews as people (anti-semitic), or only to the continued non-conversion of Judaism as a religion (anti-Judaism)? Anti-Jewish polemic sought to distinguish and legitimate Christianity with respect to Judaism. I think that the effort to legitimate or defend, *at all*, forces Christian rhetoric into the Exclusive Or, but that contention must wait a few pages. Anti-semitism appears in John, possibly in Matthew, but not in Paul. Indeed, were there the will to read what is in the texts, in at least one central place, Paul argues very clearly against anti-Jewish sentiment of any kind.

The last Gospel is the worst; John is a rich source that later writers mine for anti-Jewish invective and then turn to anti-semitic purposes. I

⁵²Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel; A study of the relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)*. Translated by H. McKeating (Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁵³Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide; the Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

follow John Townsend's analysis. The Fourth Gospel has a developed replacement theology, of the church displacing the synagogue. The bill of charges: Jesus is the vine, i. e., Israel, replacing the Jews; they have no right to call themselves children of Abraham; the Law is alien to Christians; Jesus ignores it publicly; Jesus is the replacement for the Law, for which rabbinic symbols are bread, light, water, wine (all of which John uses for Jesus). Jews failed to understand the law and have never known God; the Temple is replaced with Jesus's body and Christian worship; Jesus is the shepherd; a scriptural symbol for God.⁵⁴ The other Gospels speak of scribes, pharisees, priests, etc.; John speaks of "the Jews." This indicates some distance from the synagogue, although the separation is recent and still painful. Compare Luke, who uses the term "Jews" only when his narrative is far from them, in the later part of Acts, and distinguishes persons and parties within Judaism when it is among Jews. Whatever the reason, the rhetorical effect in John is highly anti-Jewish, and fuel for worse actions. Yet even John occasionally is not as incriminating as the synoptics, especially Matthew, in details of the Passion. The synoptics give more emphasis to Jewish leaders' roles and less to the Romans.⁵⁵ Not a pretty balance, but even John was no Marcion; he has none of the anti-Jewish arguments later devised to meet Marcion.⁵⁶ One should remember that Matthew and John were themselves Jews, and their hard words are the hard words of one Jew for other Jews. With this fact in view, gentile Christians should be able to see that, as gentiles, they (we) do not have the same standing to criticize that Matthew and John did, and even Matthew and John have abused their right to criticize. When insiders in a community trade invectives, it does not license outsiders to repeat the same abuse against the entire community.

In the same volume, Douglas R. A. Hare treats the synoptics and Acts. The polemic operates in three degrees of development. Hare's terminology is not entirely helpful, for he calls "prophetic anti-Judaism" the critical invective of the sort that appears in many places in the Common Documents. My problem is that one cannot reasonably call anti-Jewish words spoken by one Jew to another, and spoken in the assumption that God has not and will not abandon Israel, but that at least a remnant will be saved. The fact that others later read prophetic criticism in an anti-Jewish way does not make it anti-Jewish in its original context.

Worse is Jewish-Christian anti-Judaism, and calling it "anti-Judaism"

⁵⁴John Townsend, "The Gospel of John and the Jews: The Story of a Religious Divorce," in Alan T. Davies, *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 72.

⁵⁵Townsend, p. 76–77.

⁵⁶Townsend, p. 81.

is perhaps fair, but with qualifications, since it denotes a form of polemic by a party that is still in some sense Jewish. It is worth quoting Hare's definition at some length, for it presages the essential issues in ways more profound than one might suspect:

The Jewish community has always shown itself able to tolerate a wide variety of haggadic and halakhic nonconformity within its midst, albeit with vigorous protest and healthy disagreement. Intolerance has been severe only when the majority felt that nonconformists were eroding Israel's sense of identity in a way that would lead to gentilization and assimilation. Consequently, it was not the conversionist anti-Judaism with its insistence that faith in Jesus was essential to participation in God's eschatological people that caused the parting of the ways. It was rather that this troublesome thorn in the side of Judaism seemed to challenge the central symbols of the nation's identity. It was not Peter's sermons demanding faith in Jesus, but rather his practice of eating with gentiles that endangered the church in Jerusalem.

Hare continues a little later:

By subordinating all the primary symbols of Jewish identity—Torah, temple, circumcision, Sabbath, food laws—to a rank below the central Christian symbol of the crucified and risen Jesus, Christian Jews challenged ethnic solidarity too severely to be tolerated.⁵⁷

For now, let me only observe that Christian hurt at the Jewish rejection of Jesus is matched or mirrored by Jewish hurt at Christian rejection of halakhah as the defining boundary-symbol of Jewish identity.

The third degree of anti-Judaism is gentilizing anti-Judaism, with the conviction that Israel's apostasy is incurable, that Judaism has been rejected, displaced, superseded. Some prophetic texts not originally meaning this can be bent to this end. The Exclusive Or is here in its initial form, I would say.

This last anti-Judaism appears only in Matthew; Mark's problems are mild by comparison. Mark 12.1f, bitter as it is, is directed to the leaders, not all of Judaism (12.12). "Mark contains only the barest traces of prophetic and Jewish-Christian anti-Judaism, and not the slightest evidence of that gentilizing anti-Judaism that was later to dominate Christian

⁵⁷Douglas R. A. Hare, "The Rejection of the Jews in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts," also in Davies, *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*; pp. 31–32.

theology.”⁵⁸ Luke-Acts contains much prophetic anti-Judaism, but still no real gentilizing anti-Judaism. Here, where the Jewish people are responsible for Jesus’s death, this leads to a call to repentance, not to displacement of Judaism, as is clear in the sermons in Acts.

In Matthew, Israel, which is to say Judaism, is rejected by God: 21.43, 22.7f, 23.37-39. Matthew adds to Mark’s parable of the wicked tenants a rejection of Israel (21.43). The wedding banquet, in which the original invitees (i. e., Judaism) turned it down and are replaced, originates here (22.7 f.). Matthew has no remnant (contrast Romans 9) or eschatological salvation of Israel (Romans 11). Hare places Matthew at a time when the separation is nearly complete; the failure of attempts to convince the synagogue is becoming clear. Much of the most familiar invective comes from Matthew: “brood of vipers,” and the repeated charge of hypocrisy.

Hare’s concluding remedies are fairly sensible: the idea of expurgating the New Testament inevitably suggests itself after seeing the anti-Jewish polemic in it and the worse uses that polemic has been put to later. But expurgation has never been used on the invectives in the Common Documents; some of Ps. 137 and all of 58 are for most purposes unusable, but are nevertheless not deleted from the canonical text. The reader has great choice in which passages govern the interpretation of others, and both Jewish and Christian readers of the Common Documents have no trouble steering around invectives. Lectionaries can do the same. Even in Matthew, the Great Commission, to missionize all peoples, *panta ta ethne*, would, in Hebrew, mean “the nations,” i. e., the goyim, non-Jews. It is applied to Jews only by assumptions brought to the text. And the saying about those who say “Lord, Lord” but are hard-hearted could just as easily be applied to exonerate Judaism as to condemn it. In the end, the interpreter is responsible for his interpretation.

The earliest documents in the New Testament are the undisputed letters of Paul. Krister Stendahl in a short essay argues that Paul is usually read to focus on things quite other than his real interests, and to mean even the opposite of what he says.⁵⁹ A strong charge, yet a gentle argument. Usually, Paul is read to intend—even to originate—the great Exclusive Or and the displacement of the synagogue, because of its legalistic depravity, but this appears only in later writers. The events on the Damascus road are usually interpreted—and named—a *conversion*, whereas, on form-critical and theological grounds alike, the text, in all its variants, is a prophet’s *call*, not a conversion at all. A call changes the vocation of one who becomes a prophet; a conversion is between two

⁵⁸Hare, p. 35.

⁵⁹Cf. the title essay in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

religions, and the later parting of the ways is retrojected back into a time when the ways had not parted at all, and when it was not at all evident that they would ever part. If there is no conversion, I would observe, there is no Exclusive Or; this is beyond Stendahl's comments, but it does follow from my own argument.

Much of the Pauline argument and later Pauline theology focuses on "law vs. gospel," "law vs. faith." Really, in arguments about kashrut, Paul is arguing for a gentile Christian liberty, not against Jewish Christian kashrut. This is the brunt of Galatians, a book about gentile Christian Judaizers, not about what we would today call observant rabbinic Jews: against the idea that to be a Christian, one has to assume the full apparatus of circumcision and kosher food laws. "In none of his writings does he give us information about what he thought to be proper in these matters for Jewish Christians."⁶⁰ I am not aware that he ever says that kashrut is bad for those brought up in it, in and of itself, or that they should give it up; though many have, of course, read this *into* the texts.

Romans, by contrast, is written *to* a gentile church, *about* real Jews, and about gentile (Christian) attitudes toward (non-Christian) Jews. Chapters 9-11 are prominent as an appeal to gentile Christians not to set themselves or the Church above the Synagogue. While Romans 9-11 do not overflow with sentimental affection for the Synagogue, and even display a sense of grievance toward it, they nevertheless are unambiguously positive towards Israel's election and continuing covenant, and what is more, they demand from the gentile Church at Rome a positive evaluation of nascent Rabbinic Judaism (if one can even call it that at such an early date). Law is an issue again in Romans, but in a way different from Galatians. The issue is not Judaizers, who would circumcise gentile converts to Christianity. It is rather the attitude of gentile Christians secure in their freedom from the law. How are they to think of the Synagogue, the people who still live by the Torah? The relation of each to God needs to be clarified in such a context. Justification by faith apart from the law is for gentile Christians; the question being asked is not, How is justification to be had?, but How are gentile Christians to be justified? The text is in chapter 3. After "we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (v. 28, RSV), a moment later, Paul adds that God "will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith [*ek pisteos*] and the uncircumcised through their faith [*dia tes pisteos*]" (v. 30). One might observe that the justification of the circumcised, those who keep kashrut, the Torah, is ambiguous—whether it is by faith, in a

⁶⁰Stendahl, p. 2. A concurring estimate of the audience and intent of Galatians seems to be widespread; cf. Lloyd Gaston in Alan Davies's 1979 collection, and John Gager in *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*.

way disconnected from the Law, or in some way connected to the Law. Paul disambiguates immediately: “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (3.31). It is difficult to see how to interpret these verses in any consistent way, *if one assumes the great Exclusive Or*—but if one surrenders the Exclusive Or, the problems melt away. In my own estimation, kashrut itself *is* faith. Kashrut and the way of the gentile church are functional equivalents, not exclusive alternatives. To be sure, they can *both* be perverted in ways that seek human control over the process by which God justifies man, and so seek defenses against exposure, limitation, and need, by which God gets through to man. This perversion is prejudicially and grotesquely mischaracterized as “pharisaism.” Not even the Gospels add the *-ism*—that is wholly the product of later Christian anti-Judaism.

The relation between the gentile church and the continuing Synagogue is addressed in a particularly focused way again in the end of chapter 11. Conceit (on the part of the gentile church) is excluded in 11.25 (as boasting was in 3.27). Paul addresses the status and future of the continuing Synagogue and its relation to the Church, and he does so directly:

As concerning the Gospel they are enemies for your sakes;
but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’
sakes (AV).

One must go back to the Authorized Version or the Douay Rheims because almost all the translations after 1920, the RSV included, have corrupted the text; they all have inserted “of God,” so that the text reads “enemies of God”.⁶¹ “Enemies for your sakes,” *echthroi di’humas*, is ambiguous, and modern translations have all disambiguated it. Enemies *of whom* could just as well, so far as I can see, leave room for the interpretation “enemies of you, for your sakes.” A translator may not disambiguate at all without so to speak “running a red light,” but a preacher is permitted more. The corrupted text, disambiguated as “enemies *of God*,” is hard to make theologically consistent with what follows: “For the gifts and call of God are irrevocable” (verse 29). The critical sentence, verse 28, in a parallel structure, hardly makes sense in recent translations: how can they be enemies of God yet beloved of God? How can God

⁶¹The example can be found in Norman Beck, *Mature Christianity in the 21st Century; the Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), pp. 111–112. All of the common translations (NEB, RSV, JB, NAB, New RSV) corrupt the text, as well as some seven others. The French Jerusalem Bible and some English translations get it right; the Vulgate follows the rhythm and meaning of the Greek nicely.

consider them enemies if he loves them? Only if one brings to the text the revocation of the Covenant, the revocation of Torah and with it kashrut, the implementation of the Covenant. But Paul could not rule that out any more plainly than he does (3.31, “we uphold the law,” noted above). A little earlier, Paul has answered another question, what will become of the continuing Synagogue: will it accept Jesus as the Messiah? Later Christian tradition has blindly steam-rolled over his answer and assumed that at the last day, the Synagogue will convert. Paul says no such thing. “Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in”—as I say, this is not sentimental affection toward the Synagogue, but look what he says next—“and so all Israel will be saved.” There is absolutely no mention of the final conversion of Judaism to Christianity that Christian tradition has always read into this text.

At this point, Stendahl notices something that few others have: “It is stunning to note that Paul writes this whole section of Romans (10.17–11.36) without using the name of Jesus Christ. This includes the final doxology (11.33–36), the only such doxology in his writings without any Christological element.”⁶² Look at the “mystery,” as it appears again in the doxology at the end of chapter 11: “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! . . . For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever” (11.33, 36). Faith must always be a mystery if it is accepted as a responsible liberty of interpretation of the covenant, and a mystery especially because it leaves room for alternative interpretations of covenant. One must inevitably feel a bit lonely, insecure, without defenses against those who demand defenses, justification. But justification comes from God, it is not to be mounted by man. The alternative, self-justification based inevitably on the Exclusive Or, is the gate to henotheism. “Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls” (14.4). My contention is that if these verses had governed, they would have put a lid on Christian anti-Judaism. As it was, they were made to say the opposite of what they say.

It is easy to forget (or never learn) that the first century of the Common Era was for all constituencies in Judaism a time of turmoil and transition, not only for those who parted company with the majority of Judaism but also for those who became the majority. It was not at all obvious in the 50s, when Paul wrote Romans, how things would turn out; this is true in the infant church far more than is commonly appreciated. It was not clear

⁶²Stendahl, p. 4.

at the beginning that there would be a mission to the gentiles, nor for some time, what shape it would end up with. Paul was far from the only mission to the gentiles; Krister Stendahl asks whether, if there had been no Paul, there would have been any gentile Christianity.⁶³ The answer, in light of obvious but usually ignored texts in Acts, is an unqualified affirmative. Judaizing was attractive, not repellent, to prospective gentile converts. In fact, Paul was a disruption in the gentile mission, which is clear from the few witnesses to his controversies with other apostles. It is clear enough from them and external evidence that Paul went only to places that did not already have a gentile church; in particular, he never went to Alexandria, presumably one of the largest gentile churches. I would wonder whether, if there had been no Paul, Christianity might have been something more like Reform Judaism, but such questions are extremely hard to answer, and one cannot know with confidence how christology would have developed in an enduringly Jewish or Judaizing Christianity.

Philo tells us of a spectrum in Alexandrian Judaism quite different from the Palestinian Judaism of Josephus (Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots), and even that spectrum is probably truncated to list only the largest groups.⁶⁴ Jewish commerce with ideas other than Josephus's short list was considerable. Among the other unknowns: The full horror of the disasters in the later part of the century could hardly be imagined (the prophecies in the Gospels are for the most part *vaticinia ex eventu*, written after the fact). The depth of rancor between Church and Synagogue at the end of the first century and into the second would have been equally hard to estimate. Its extent is hard to gauge now, given the conflicting evidence both of polemics and of the continuing appeal of Judaizing in and to the Church.

On the Jewish side, it is usually assumed, if one has no other information, that Rabbinic Judaism was quite continuous with Second Temple Judaism in all respects that were not directly affected by the destruction of the Temple and consequent cessation of its activities. But Jacob Neusner's comments in his account of Aphrahat indicate that the addition of the Oral Torah to the familiar written Torah may have come as a considerable innovation to the Jewish communities of Babylonia. Benjamin Helfgott's *The Doctrine of Election in Tannaitic Literature* indicates a gradual process in which the Oral Torah was consolidated, a process not finished until the end of the second century with the publication of

⁶³Stendahl, p. 69 ff.

⁶⁴For Philo's circumstances, see Birger Pearson's account, "Christians and Jews in First-Century Alexandria," in Nickelsburg and McRae, eds., *Christians Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 207-208.

the Mishnah by Judah the Patriarch around the year 200 CE.⁶⁵ Jacob Neusner's work on the history of Judaism in Babylonia provides more detail and a more critical appraisal of the history.⁶⁶ The first-century disasters were formative for Rabbinic Judaism in many ways. The pluralism before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE is washed away, and only the rabbis were able to hold a community together afterward. One can imagine distant but real comparisons with the changes by which a new industry, at first populated by many start-up companies, goes through a "shaking out" process, in which only a few large companies survive; the others are bought out or perish. The consolidating trend in Judaism could only have been reinforced by the final expulsion of all Jews from Jerusalem after Bar Kochba in 135 CE. This much is fairly well known to received historiography; what is less known is the Jewish history in Babylon. It was a period of comparative peace, even despite the politics and manipulations of the Jewish community from both the Roman and Parthian sides. Judaism was to some extent courted by both sides, rather than caught between them. What resulted was a parallel development in Babylonia and Palestine of the conceptual and human institutions of Rabbinic Judaism. It was a labor both of inventing the rabbinate and the schools, and of catechesis of the entire community, introducing to it the Oral Torah in addition to the older, written Torah. All in all, a time of great theological creativity and vision, and remarkably good relations with non-Jewish neighbors.

Inevitably, one comes to the *birkat ha-minim* as the occasion for the final expulsion of Christians from the synagogue. At least this is the received tradition. It is an insertion into the twelfth of the Eighteen Benedictions, said in the daily synagogue prayers. Supposedly, it was composed by Rabbi Samuel the Small, at the request of Gamaliel II, the Patriarch at the end of the first century, in order to make it impossible for various deviants, Christians among them, to participate in synagogue worship. But both the date of the *birkat* and its intended parties are not entirely clear.⁶⁷ Even granting the received tradition, for the sake of argument, it must be contrasted with the attractiveness of the synagogue

⁶⁵Benjamin Helfgott, *The Doctrine of Election in Tannaitic Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954.)

⁶⁶Cf. Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, 5 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965). A readable popular summary can be found in Neusner's *There We Sat Down: Talmudic Judaism in the Making* (New York: KTAV, 1972).

⁶⁷Cf. Rueven Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the lack of evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish prayer in late antiquity," in E. P. Sanders, A. I. Baumgarten, and Alan Mendelson, eds., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1981), vol. 2, pp. 226–244, and Marcel Simon, "The Christians in the Talmud," chapter 7 of *Verus Israel*.

to Christians as late as the time of Chrysostom. My conjecture is that Christians were welcome to become fully Jewish, but those who blurred the lines were not welcome. This parallels Paul's argument against the Judaizers: go one way or the other, but do not blur the boundaries. In the end, the middle ground was forcibly evacuated.

There are two issues here, the messiahship of Jesus and the keeping of halakhah, indispensable marks of identity respectively to the church and the synagogue. At bottom, the right of the Synagogue to order its own house is at stake: this is what a responsible liberty of interpretation is. Inevitably, for "administrative" purposes, it retrojects later definitions of what and who the Synagogue is onto the earlier history, even if critical historians and honest preachers cannot do this. A responsible liberty of interpretation on one side implies the same on the other; what goes for the Synagogue goes for the Church: if one was entitled to make halakhah the mark of identity, the other was entitled to relax halakhah and focus on Jesus as messiah instead. In the end, *responsibility* is the ability to deal functionally with life as it comes to you later on; it is to some extent decided in retrospect, and Gamaliel's advice in Acts is to the point: let it be, for if it is of God, it will work, and if not, it won't. If it is a real *liberty* of interpretation, neither has a right to disallow the other's continuing right to call the common tradition its own, even if both houses interpret the common tradition in mutually inconsistent ways. Inevitably it is a contested history, more contested than it needs to be. Both sets of heirs are blamed for their forefathers' deeds in the distant past. The forebears are in turn blamed for their later heirs' misdeeds. And both sets of heirs claim exclusive legitimation (in some sense thereby dodging responsibility) for the settlements they inherit. It would have been better were it possible to acknowledge the responsibility (and enormous creativity) of both the Church and the tannaim, and, as Alan Segal says in the opening of *Rebecca's Children*, call Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity both children of Second Temple Judaism.⁶⁸ To do that, as can readily be seen from the texts, was supremely difficult then. It need not be so difficult now.

⁶⁸ Alan Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Harvard University Press, 1986).

8.2 Exilic and Henotheistic Religion in Christianity

The long history of estrangements between Christianity and Judaism opens the way to a multitude of questions. Among those that present themselves immediately are two that grow out of the patristic controversies. One asks why, in its deeper theological roots, was the parting of the ways handled so badly? Specifically, how were henotheism and exilic religion involved in early Christian theology? Henotheism would seem to be implicated in the Exclusive Or that we have seen lying presupposed beneath so much patristic and even some New Testament theology. Gnosticism (exilic religion) is involved in a secondary way through the controversy with Marcion and the successes and failures in meeting Marcion properly. Inevitably, as I begin this section, exposure in history is still bitter disappointment for Christianity, not fun to review. In the end, I shall argue that the Christian encounter with Judaism should be seen as gracious exposure, and that it can be fitted naturally into a healthy christology.

Henotheism is in many ways the more important and certainly much the less subtle problem in the roots of Christian anti-semitism. We have seen the pivotal assumption all through patristic rhetoric, usually presupposed silently, occasionally spelled out, as Chrysostom does: that we can't both be right, one of us has to be wrong. The most notorious expression of this is the "extra ecclesiam nulla salus," which comes close to being a definition of henotheism: outside of (this) church, there is no salvation. Some closed community becomes the center of value and focus of loyalty.⁶⁹ The most exquisitely difficult problems arise when the community is itself the home of a universalizing and genuinely monotheistic faith. For then, the necessarily particular social and conceptual implementation of a universal faith has itself been made functionally less than universal in its commitments. The diagnostic mark is, of course, the Exclusive Or: this way or no salvation. Such a stance is not hard to see in Christian rhetoric. It runs through all but the earliest history of anti-Jewish polemic, and it animates all campaigns against heresy, and much of Christian missionary work. Often the line is crossed from genuine monotheism to degeneration and henotheism when the performative force of parenetic or evangelistic or controversial rhetoric is mistaken or transformed for lack of context; here, attentiveness to the original historical context, issues, and hearers of authoritative texts is one salutary protection against trouble.

⁶⁹Cf. Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism*, p. 25 f.

What is not so obvious from the definitions in *Radical Monotheism* is the connection between henotheism, when it occurs as a degeneration from monotheism, and an underlying desire to seek secure justification for one's own religious commitments. There is a defensiveness implicit in the Exclusive Or, and it seems the best defense is all too often an offense: one must undermine one's theological neighbor in order that one might oneself survive. The first centuries of the Common Era seem to have taken for granted a certain level of apologetic—theological polemic, argument directed to justifying one's own position and undermining others. What we see is argument of the form “you should believe because of the following *proof*,” not confessional invitation of the form we can see in the Deuteronomic sermons such as Joshua's—“choose this day whom you will serve,” an invitation to find life good at great cost. An invitation is performatively of a quite different force from proof, a difference often missed. Middle and late antiquity would have had mostly deaf ears for Niebuhr's warnings against apologetic in the beginning of *The Meaning of Revelation*. But they are hardly unique; few centuries failed to deserve his reproach that apologetic, defensiveness, leads to something other than faith in the biblical God. There will always be attacks from non-covenanters and doubts that arise within the life of covenant. The natural fear of defeat at the hands of scoffers would be enough to explain the theological defensiveness that results, but there is more. For the scoffers have touched a raw nerve of faith. They have reminded the believer of the irreducible vulnerability that is the essence of creaturehood. They have reminded the believer that it is possible to reject exposure, limitation, and need, and they have heaped scorn on any who would embrace these pains of life. The natural response is to try to justify the blessings that come with covenant. Natural, but not covenantal, because that would mean justification from something other than covenant. The result insidiously subverts radical monotheism far more effectively than the original outsiders' attack ever could.⁷⁰ This section of *The Meaning of Revelation*, “Revelation and Confessional Theology,” could be read as a guide to the sins of the Church against the Synagogue, in almost every age.

It is harder to know what life was like in distant times than in the recent past. The Baroque period and since, from the Enlightenment to the present, display a concern for proving the existence and goodness of God that, if not wholly new, was, I think, not such a serious pathology in earlier ages. Anyone familiar with higher education in America in the middle of the twentieth century ran into the phenomenon of formal and informal debate on proofs for the so-called “existence of God.” I think

⁷⁰Cf. MR, hardback, pp. 38–39; paperback, p. 28.

this is characteristic of the entire Anglophone tradition. Such interest survives in many places, but may have waned a little by the 90s (though not if anthologies in beginning philosophy courses are any indication). To be fair, this concern may have arisen in response to other pathologies, which I shall not search out here. It remains disastrous to seek proof of a starting point: to try to reason to a starting point silently converts it into something else and hides one's real starting point. But this is not the most serious pathology of the search for proof of monotheism.

To return to one form of a definition of monotheism, it trusts that good, blessing of some sort, will come in even the hard parts of life, the exposures to, limitations by, and needs of others. To seek proof of this is a fatal mistake, if one examines the logic clearly. For the commitment of historical-covenantal religion, monotheism, is that the disappointments of life bring blessings, even when it is not obvious how they do so. But to ask for proof is to move the discourse to another level: proof *from* what? What premises would be acceptable? Inevitably, the demander of proof wants to start from places where the blessings are self-evident, and in the end, that means disappointment-free. We have in the twinkling of an eye alternated out of monotheism and into a different religious world. If one looks at the logic and the language a little more, the rhetoric of monotheism is of the form, "such and such disappointments in the past ended in blessings (Exodus, Exile, the disasters of the first century), and we invite you to trust—as we do—that it will be so in the future." This is an analogical move, and analogy cannot support calculation or proof. How it can speak truth, genuinely challenge its hearers, and be held responsible in its turn remains an insufficiently explored philosophical problem. But it does. When analogy is mistaken for proof and subjected to the standards of proof, it is pushed in the direction of univocal language, and the resulting stance is (at best) deeply in tension with monotheism.

Look at the human activity that is the locus of exposure, limitation, and need, in religious rhetoric: it is world-construction, the "social construction of reality," Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's famously ironic title for their work in sociology of knowledge.

What is exposed? Human existence in a context of chaos: anomy, against which religious reality is erected as a defense. Human vulnerability in the cosmos, an invitation to panic and terror. What is exposed, more immediately, by the existence of another religious tradition, is one's own responsibility in erecting defenses against chaos. This is what is so unsettling: for it would be so comforting if the defense were simply to hide cosmic chaos, rather than provide a way of dealing with it. If other people, especially ones who start from common premises, handle the matter differently, then it becomes extremely hard to deny or hide one's

own creative acts in meeting human insecurity in the universe.

How is limitation an issue? Limitation is often handled not too badly; the first-century accommodations after the disasters are an example. Both the rabbis and the fathers rebuilt with great resourcefulness and vision and creativity after the disasters that started with the Passion and continued through the Bar Kochba revolt. Their creativity is not acknowledged, for apologetic reasons: to do so would undermine the appearance that religious chaos has actually been banished. When limitation is handled poorly, as it sometimes is, Gnosticism or functional Gnosticism is usually what results, a Marcionite theology whether Marcion is repudiated or not. For exilic religion treats precisely limitation in life as the thing that constitutes it as fundamentally defective, and so it can hardly find good in its limitations. Though this has been a chronic problem, it has not usually been the dominant problem.

Need appears as the needs of one's neighbor religious group: can one live in peace, can one acknowledge their right to co-exist? Can one handle disagreements with respect and forbearance, and not with attempts to liquidate the competition? A neighboring religious group, by its existence, not only constitutes exposure, but also demands concessions that inevitably threaten, or at least appear to threaten, one's own religious identity. This, of course, was at stake for the Synagogue late in the first century, and has been an issue for Christianity in every age where missionaries had to choose between openness to foreign cultures and some form of strict orthodoxy.

Look at how things might have been, and can still be. Christian and Jewish scholars can read Isaiah 53 as referring to all Israel, when doing critical work on the Exilic period, and the Christian can still appropriate it to interpret Jesus.

It is entirely possible, for example, for a Christian scholar to concur with Jewish colleagues that the suffering figure of *Isaiah* 53 represents Israel as a whole, not the messiah, in the intention of the original author. This does not in the least prevent the Christian from seeing a fulfillment of this hope in the life of Jesus, the obedient Israelite. The Christian does not expect Jewish scholars to concur with this appropriation of the Isaianic hope, nor will he/she hate them for their refusal! If Ruether really means that Christians should refuse to appropriate Old Testament texts as a means of illuminating the event that gave birth to Christianity, she is asking too much. At stake here is the nature of Christianity as a religion in which salvation-history manifests the character of God. The pedestrian reduction of this enormous experience

to “grace and good deeds” may be as common as Ruether supposes (pp. 224 f.), but not for that reason adequate.⁷¹

A body is inevitably afraid that if its responsibility in its own religious particulars is exposed, it will be left with nothing but vague generalities. Evidently, Hare sees Ruether as demanding to leave Christianity with only vague generalities. This is not necessary, for one body’s interpretation need not interfere with another body’s different, inconsistent and incompatible interpretation of their common history, *if* both bodies are comfortable with a responsible liberty of interpretation. If that liberty has to be covered up, in order to protect the appearance of responsibility, or in order to hide the threat of religious chaos, then the other body’s interpretations cannot be tolerated. Such deviant ideas have to be “nihilated”⁷² conceptually, or their bearers liquidated physically, if the appearances requisite to such a religion are to be maintained. But such a religion is fundamentally henotheistic.

Look at what might have been, as imagined from the rabbinic side. It is Ruether’s reading of Benjamin Helfgott, and whether or not it is actually in the tannaitic sources, its possibility raises a challenge.⁷³ There is in Genesis 9 a mostly forgotten passage, wherein God commands Noah not to eat meat with the blood still in it, out of respect for the life of the animal. The list of prohibited acts is extended in the Talmud; one place where the short list can be found is Sanhedrin 56a: social injustice, blasphemy, idolatry, adultery, bloodshed, robbery, and of course, flesh cut from a living animal. The Gemara continues with additions proposed by various tannaim, some as early as the second generation (the period 90-130 CE, according to Strack-Stemberger⁷⁴). The short list of seven seems to have become traditional. It evidently developed when Christianity was a noticeable presence, and it deals with most of the issues between Judaism and possible alternative traditions in an exemplary way. The only one conspicuously not dealt with is the possibility of alternate readings of the Common Documents; there, the rabbis are open to the charge of mirroring the exclusivism of the Church, if without as much venom. This is a serious omission, but one that can easily be remedied. In

⁷¹Douglas R. A. Hare, “The Rejection of the Jews in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts,” p. 42.

⁷²Nihilate, without the prefixed “ad-,” is a technical term in sociology in the account of Berger and Luckmann. It denotes one community’s effort to demolish the conceptual structures of a competing community, in order not to face the challenge of that competition.

⁷³Cf. *Faith and Fratricide*, pp. 236–237.

⁷⁴H. L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). Cf. notice of Hanina b. Gemaliel II, p. 82.

any case, the stance of Judaism toward other traditions is this: within these seven laws (principally, I would guess, the prohibitions on idolatry and blasphemy) there is the possibility for the “righteous among the nations” to “have a share in the life to come.” The particularity of Israel’s (here, the Synagogue’s, not the Church’s) election is the corollary of rabbinic universalism: in principle, it does not exclude others or leave them without resources. In practice, this was not heard by the Church, and the issue of disputed right of interpretative access to the Common Documents was handled badly on both sides.

Let me turn from henotheism to the persistent strain of exilic religion in Christianity, a less obvious and far more subtle problem than henotheism. Merold Westphal’s account of historical-covenantal religion should have alerted us to the depth and seriousness of the problem, however delicately he stepped through the New Testament texts. For the problem arises early. Gnosticism may have been older than Christianity, and it occasionally consorted with some forms of Judaism. At the present, its origins are the focus of much unfinished research. Certainly it was a possible interpretation hovering over the apostles’ mission, and both the Gospel of John and some of the Pauline epistles are in one place or another concerned to distinguish themselves from Gnosticism.

As one can see from Westphal’s account, it is easy to mistake the difference between heaven and earth in covenantal religion as an opening to exilic religion.⁷⁵ Here God is distinguished from the world in ways that separate covenantal religion from mimesis, nature religion. But heaven and earth become not paradise and hell but a new heaven and a new earth; the cosmos is subsumed within history. Nevertheless, as anyone knows who has run into “pie-in-the-sky” theology, heaven can be treated as an escape from a defective world. Contrary to exilic religion, salvation is not escape from the body, but precisely resurrection of the body. Nevertheless, in the soon to be acquired doctrine of immortality of the soul, one could enjoy the comforts of a Gnostic doctrine of body and soul despite the attempts of the early Church to distinguish itself from Gnosticism. The Pauline use of “spirit” and “flesh” has little or no correlation with the physical and the un-physical, as Westphal well noted; sins of the flesh can be quite spiritual and not physical, and virtues of the spirit quite physical. The world is not to be escaped from in the church, nor is it to be equated with sin. Nevertheless, Christianity has all too often equated life in its sinfulness as something to be escaped from in the eschatological fulfillment of redemption. Recent critics unsympathetic to Christianity have not hesitated to notice that some forms of it take a very negative attitude toward the world and pleasure in the world.

⁷⁵Cf. Westphal, pp. 224–226, and section 6.4 above.

Let me only notice in passing some familiar features of Christianity that lend themselves to exilic interpretation. Platonism has in many ages been the dominant philosophical vehicle for Christian theology. Some have even dismissed Christianity as “Platonism for the masses;” a few have even advocated keeping the Platonism and editing the rest. Westphal has already laid out for us the origins of body-soul dualism in the Orphic and Pythagorean tradition, a doctrine that lays the groundwork for seeking escape from this life to another. Christianity took over the later stages of this philosophical heritage, especially Neoplatonism, in the thought of Augustine and later Aquinas. It was moderated some, and Augustine rejects overt gateways to Gnostic theology. Origen was perhaps the high-water mark for gnosticizing theology in the patristic age, but his spirit can be found today everywhere that the body is denigrated in comparison to the soul, or where hope rests in immortality of the soul, implicitly escape from the body. From another perspective, recall how easily Luther Martin could make Christianity look like just another mystery religion, different only by its success. He does this, to be sure, by selective attention to the evidence, suppressing ties with Judaism and the inheritance from the Common Documents.

The name of Marcion is not well known today, though the crisis he provoked in the second century had a profound influence on later theology, as we have already seen in Tertullian’s and others’ responses to him. There is a colloquial proverb, “be careful who you disagree with,” implying that carelessness will lead to adopting the opponent’s presuppositions in order to facilitate the prosecution of the disagreement. But to adopt the opponent’s presuppositions is already fatal, for often more is conveyed in the silent presuppositions than in the propositions that are candidly asserted. The response to Marcion accepted too much of his discrediting of received Scripture in order to shift the blame from the Church to the Synagogue. The New Testament canon was clarified in considerable measure as a response to Marcion, and the Church intended to include documents that he considered hopelessly “Jewish.” It did so at cost of reading them in an anti-Jewish way. The damage was done. A point of chronology should be appreciated, for the Mishnah was not published until ca. 200 CE; the final redaction of both the Mishnah and the New Testament proceeded at about the same time. For the Church, the God of older history became a God of wrath, superseded in the New Testament; the accepted scripture became *Old Testament*, the Old Testament was superseded, obsoleted, completed, fulfilled *to the exclusion of* observance of any law. Others later could treat it as just plain evil. Usually later Christian theology does not go this far. The Common Documents are simply ignored or forgotten, and this forgetting

is the mark of the lasting influence of Marcion.

The problem is not gone today. Among recent disturbing signs, current work on the New Testament too often places the Gospels in a genre apart from the Common Documents, among other and extra-canonical “gospels,” rather than next to the Exodus. The similarities between the Jesus narrative and the Exodus are seldom mentioned, and to my knowledge never mentioned in full: both Jesus and Israel start in Palestine, both go down to Egypt, there is a slaughter of innocents associated with both, both are tested in the desert, both are fed by angels, both cross the Jordan at Jericho, re-entering Palestine, and I suppose the period of the conquest corresponds to the ministry. Both end by going up to Jerusalem, eventuating in a new understanding of covenant. I have remarked this above in the discussion of typology, and the contemporary silence on the Exodus in the New Testament marks a tacit bypassing of typological thinking. In a literature department, this typology would be recognized as an important structural parallel, however it arose—consciously and deliberately, or unconsciously, out of the inarticulate imagination of the communities that produced the Gospels. Once recognized, it would have to be reckoned as constitutive of at least some of the meaning of the later document. Not so in Gospel-criticism that ignores the Common Documents and treats Christian origins as a Hellenistic phenomenon.⁷⁶

It is surprising to find explicit attempts to revive Marcion. Harnack expressed understanding for the Christian move that held on to the Old Testament in the first centuries, but felt that all need to do so now was long past.⁷⁷ One would not expect to see such ideas after World War II, but they do reappear. David Flusser noted as recently as 1980 that some Christian theologians would like to “de-Judaize” Christianity.⁷⁸

Alexander Blair has done an inquiry into reasons deeper and more various than I can for Christian neglect of the Common Documents.⁷⁹ There are many kinds of reasons for passing the Common Documents by, but among them I would like to note one, as an indication of important work beyond what I can do here. The starting assumptions that a theologian

⁷⁶One example is Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels; Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990). There are doubtless others.

⁷⁷Cf. Harnack, *Marcion: das Evangelium vom fremden Gott; Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche*, 1921, 2nd ed., 1924. Translated by John E. Steely and Lyle D. Bierma as *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1990).

⁷⁸Cf. the introduction to Clemens Thoma, *A Christian Theology of Judaism*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 2.

⁷⁹“Christian Ambivalence Toward the Old Testament,” (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1984)

makes are, in Blair's estimate, anthropological: whether human existence is corporate, that is, understandable only in terms of relationships between people in the plural, or whether it is generic, understandable on a one-at-a-time basis, in the singular, apart from human communities that people are members of. The Common Documents are inescapably corporate in their understanding of human life; the New Testament can be fudged. Blair contends that it, too, is corporate (I would agree), but it can, with selective reading, be turned to generic ends. Christian theologians with a corporate understanding of human existence read the Common Documents; those whose agenda is generic cannot make sense of them, and so usually don't read them. The connection to my concerns lies in this: Gnosticism sees the problem of human existence as mental pain, to be solved by a turn inward, away from the physical and social world that causes pain. Covenantal religion, by contrast (and here it clearly includes the New Testament), sees the problem as human wronging of other people and seeks a remedy in interpersonal relations. The one leads naturally to a generic, the other to a corporate understanding of human existence, with proportionate interest in the very corporate Common Documents.

Some would like to find in Marcionite theology a generous and liberal attitude to Christian-Jewish relations. Indeed, they would take Marcion's program as a strategy to separate Christianity and Judaism from each other, and so to keep peace between them. I think not. One even gets the impression that some Jews wish that Christians would just give up trying to read the Common Documents as Old Testament, and leave them to Judaism as Tanakh. But this would Marcionize Christianity utterly. While this might appear to be the lesser evil of the choice between Christianity as henotheistic or exilic, a Marcionite Christianity is not really any safer for Judaism than the mixed exilic-henotheistic Christianity that actually developed. In the light of the Nazi treatment of the churches,⁸⁰ it is utterly implausible that the churches would have been allowed to survive in anything other than a Marcionite form. After all, how could the Nazis not take advantage of the opportunity to purloin the authority of Christianity to their own ends? And how could they not de-Judaize Christianity in order to do so? This is a crude but sufficient definition of an effectively Marcionite theology. Harnack showed the way.⁸¹ If the Nazis had had their way with the churches, they would

⁸⁰Cf. John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933-1945* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

⁸¹At the head of the tenth chapter of Harnack's *Marcion* stands the thesis that, even if the church was right to retain the Old Testament in the second century, reason to do so was gone by the sixteenth, with no excuse whatever to retain it in the nineteenth century.

merely have been finishing a process that was under way for some time. De-Judaizing of Christianity is not the only way to look at it, for one could also call it the implementation of a Marcionite philosophy of culture. A Marcionite culture is precisely what gave license to the Shoah.

I think Yosef Haim Yerushalmi is completely right when he says life for the Jews would have been much worse if the Church had embraced Marcion, rather than rejected him at least in principle. It is Yerushalmi's thesis that, however nasty the Church has been in practice, owing to its commitment to its own legitimacy at the expense of Rabbinic Judaism's, it officially expressed that commitment in ways that nevertheless required protection of Jews and Judaism from the worst injustice. Such protections were ignored sometimes, more by lower clergy and populace than by the bishops. For example, despite legal disabilities that would be called outrageous today, forcible conversions were usually forbidden. Yerushalmi looks for reasons for the persistent Christian reluctance to liquidate Judaism entirely:

The decision to preserve the Jews has always appeared to me linked to an even more primal decision made in the early centuries, one which involved an intense inner struggle whose outcome was long in doubt. It was the decision to retain the Jewish Scriptures in the Christian canon, and to posit a direct continuity between the two. However adversely the exegesis which this decision entailed may have affected the image of the Jews, it is as nothing compared to what might have followed otherwise. One shudders to contemplate what might have been the fate of the Jews had Marcion been victorious.⁸²

Norman Ravitch states the case positively in a 1982 survey. Speaking of "the current theological revolution in the Christian interpretation of the Jewish people," he says,

One must, however, hope that it will continue to seek to tie Christians and Jews, Christianity and Judaism, ever more closely together—that it will enmesh them together more umbilically into the Christian-Jewish nexus. Despite its tragic consequences and historical ambiguities, the Christian-Jewish nexus probably protects Christians and Jews from mutual hatred and self-hatred better than any sec-

⁸²Cf. his "Response to Rosemary Ruether," in Eva Fleischner, ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* (New York: KTAV, 1974), p. 101.

ular ideology currently available.⁸³

He also notes that Christian attitudes toward Judaism tend to oscillate between hostility and a friendliness that one suspects does not really respect the differences. Seeing the common heritage and the differences both at the same time seems to be much harder than seeing either alone. I have my reservations about an “umbilicus,” but friendly respect is a worthy goal.

Let me emphasize my reasons at this point for my choice of the term “Common Documents” over “Hebrew Bible.” “Hebrew Bible” is widely used today as a way of escaping from undesirable implications of the Christian term “Old Testament.” The term “Old Testament” today is freighted with supersessionism, the thesis that Judaism is no longer the true Israel. Unfortunately, the term “Hebrew Bible” is vulnerable to equally undesirable connotations. In Christian hands, it sounds like the documents in question are not really Christian, or have no real place at the heart of Christianity, but are really only Jewish. The Common Documents are then not really common at all, and so not really Christian. This is especially suggestive because among Christians, skill with Hebrew is even rarer than skill with Greek. The implication is that as Jewish, these documents imply that Rabbinic Judaism is the only real or legitimate heir of Second Temple Judaism. The Christian who accepts this assumption is left with one of only two next steps that I can see: either the texts can be seized for the Church, and the Synagogue is disinherited; or the texts are abandoned, and Judaism is a religion of an inferior god. The first is the anti-Jewish position of the orthodox Church, a theology that can fairly be characterized as “supersessionist,” and the second is Marcionite theology, officially repudiated by the Church but tacitly adopted much of the time. From the point of view of Rabbinic Judaism, it is only a question of which Christian theology is worse. I am not alone in thinking that the Marcionite theology is the more dangerous and the worst violence against Jews has occurred in this most Marcionite and least orthodox of centuries.⁸⁴

The same texts are read in different ways by Jews and Christians, resulting in what Krister Stendahl has called an “ambiguous bond.”⁸⁵

⁸³Norman Ravitch, “The Problem of Christian Anti-Semitism,” *Commentary* 73 no. 4 (1982 April), p. 52.

⁸⁴Harnack’s *Marcion* will serve as witness of the currency of Marcionite theology, and the general disintegration of any coherent Christian orthodoxy needs little remark.

⁸⁵Cf. his “The Ambiguous Bond: The Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament,” in *Christian Hebraism; the Study of Jewish Culture by Christian Scholars in Medieval and Early Modern Times*, Proceedings of a Colloquium at

What is sought is a term that reflects this. It is obviously a fact that all of the Jewish Bible and some three fourths to four fifths of the Christian Bible are documents in common. Equally obvious to anyone with any familiarity with both traditions is that there is no common interpretation of them. To read the Common Documents as Tanakh is to read them on the way to the Talmud and the Synagogue. To read them as Old Testament is to read them on the way to the New Testament and the Church.

On a bad day, one might as well call them the Contested Documents as the Common Documents. But it seems better (and more effective) to me to encourage a virtue than to discourage a vice. Which virtue? The resolution of all differences between Judaism and Christianity? Certainly not! Instead, the ability to conduct a disagreement with civility and respect—respect for both the other's position and one's own. An Israeli politician was once quoted to say, "when you have a disagreement with a friend, the friend is still a friend, and the disagreement is still a disagreement." This is true, but one should have in view a conduct of the disagreement that does not require its premature resolution. This might be possible if there were a livelier sense of a responsible liberty of interpretation, and some philosophical interest in the problem of how confessional statements can speak truth without being forced to speak the univocal language of logic or science: how they can both hold and be held responsible. The lasting enmity between Christians and Jews testifies to these two problems. They remain mostly hidden, and they are more general than this inter-religious disagreement would suggest.

When one remembers the inner dynamic of exilic religion, treating cosmos and creation as fundamentally defective, and the contradictory dynamic of historical-covenantal religion, treating cosmos and creation as fundamentally good, the logic seems obvious. My contention is that to define Christianity as a species of Gnosticism is deeply dangerous to Judaism in the long run. It may appear to avoid the direct conflicts arising from Christian henotheism, and from an Exclusive-Or reading of the Common Documents, but it does so at intolerable cost, even to Christianity. Look at the consequences of a Marcionite theology, not for Judaism but for Christianity itself. On my reading of Christianity as an attempt at historical-covenantal religion, a Marcionite theology invites it to betray its roots and its God. Such a move works only at cost of separating Christianity from both its own history and from covenant. It keeps gentiles out of all that the New Testament sought to allow the gentiles into.

As a general reflection, I would ask why the seductive attraction of functionally exilic religion has been so strong for Christianity. One

would expect Stoicism, which attempted to be basically positive about life, though without turning to history, to look favorably on Christianity. It did not. But Gnosticism just “cuddled up to Christianity.”⁸⁶ One would not suspect that Gnosticism and Christianity are supposed to have radically different outlooks on life. As should be clear, Jesus has often been mistaken for and treated as a Gnostic redeemer, one come to save us from the world, to get us out of the world, or to show us how to turn inward, to the Self, and escape that way. Much turns on differing interpretations of the same words and texts. Consider “freedom”: Gnosticism talks a great deal about human freedom and about realizing or not realizing one’s freedom. But for Gnosticism, freedom comes without responsibility, or at least without any externally visible mechanisms, any inter-subjectively criticizable means, for enforcing responsible behavior. In fact, Gnosticism talks a lot about responsibility, but it is responsibility to or for one’s self, and not to anyone else.⁸⁷ I am inclined to say that responsibility only to oneself is a contradiction in terms; responsibility is originally to *other* people. There is such a thing as responsibility to one’s self, but it is derived from the experience of responsibility to other people. The issue of responsibility is the issue of exposure. To continue in applying Alexander Blair’s distinctions, generic pain seeks a generic solution, turning to the self; corporate pain seeks a corporate solution, turning to others. This is the encounter with need. Gnosticism rejects it. One gets help from others and is willing to help them in turn; for exilic religion, self-love gets all the attention. One would then ask where do the differing characterizations of limitation manifest themselves. Remember that Gnosticism had no use for the marks of identity of the Church: doctrine, ritual, canon, hierarchy. The marks of identity for the Synagogue are functionally the same: Torah, observance, canon, and the authoritative rabbinate, and the Gnostic rejection is the same. Limitation appears as the question of obedience, submission to the hierarchy, or in the case of Judaism, the rabbinate. To submit to a human authority and to institutions is to entrust one’s self to another’s decisions. The corporate response to limitation affirms human social institutions, which always make some demands on individuals. The generic response, by contrast, has built into it a distrust of institutions. The reasons for distrust of institutions and authorities are simple enough; they are corrupt, unimaginative, stupid, mean, with a host of other vices, and they merit caution if not distrust. The covenanter trusts anyway, even if with open eyes. Blair thinks that the Common Documents were a threat to Indo-

⁸⁶This expressive summary is Sharon Boucher O’Hara’s, in a private conversation.

⁸⁷I am indebted to Alexander Blair for this crucial distinction.

European culture because Indo-European culture has tended to be generic in outlook, where the Common Documents are unmistakably corporate. I would recall the reader to the argument of chapter 3, about the Trinity; there, I contrasted the Indo-European categorization of human existence as a matter of legitimacy, action, and sustenance, with the categories in the Shema: *lev*, *nephesh*, and *me'od*. The last, *me'od*, is the fullness of human being, and though not etymologically related to *mo'ed*, the Great Congregation, is a natural step to it. This is to proceed from the individual outward; inescapably corporate. The primary Indo-European categories of legitimacy, force, and sustenance by contrast show no such progression from the individual to the corporate. To return to the question, why has functional Gnosticism found such a ready host in Christianity, I would speculate that one recurrent mechanism has been the interpretation of terms in a generic rather than corporate way. Then the essential prerequisite for actually meeting exposure, limitation, and need can easily be eliminated: the presence of other people. From this, by a short step, the covenantal criticism of human *actions*, taken as a critique of human "nature" and then turned inward on the self, can easily become a criticism and rejection of human bodily and social *existence*.

Is it possible for Judaism today to become confused with Gnosticism? With difficulty, yes. Difficulty, because if one is an observant Jew, it is hard to curse what observance regularly blesses, and in so many very physical ways: the stuff of everyday life. One can tell when a Jew is vulnerable to Gnostic temptations; he (or she) ceases to be very observant. What is lost is the Priestly code, Leviticus, kashrut. What survives is a parody of Deuteronomic ethics, whose most salient feature at this point is a real and very corporate generosity of spirit. This is stripped of the means of enforcing responsibility, or of conceiving responsibility as living properly within the limits of human creaturely existence. What develops next is a utopian socialism, and when enforcement returns, it is a coercive utopianism, but the former and Deuteronomic respect for human creatureliness has been lost; the result is an attempt to escape from the conditions of being human into a this-worldly paradise of human making. Eric Voegelin was first to explore the Gnostic functions of many modern political salvation movements, on both the right and the left. The affinity with Deuteronomic ethics explains why when Jews become functionally gnostic, they choose a Gnosticism of the left rather than the right. They also invariably cease to be observant. An exilic outlook on life is really incompatible with Judaism, which cannot be mistaken for anything but covenantal religion. It can be henotheistic occasionally, as when, in its own way, it mirrors Christian exclusivism with respect to the Common Documents. But Judaism certainly polices itself against

Gnosticism better than Christianity does.

If one form of gnosticism works by eroding the inter-subjective means of enforcing responsibility, especially with respect to the body (as in a sexual antinomianism), this may be taken as typical of liberal gnosticism. A “conservative” gnosticism arises in the distinctive mark of biblical literalists, for literalism seeks to evade responsibility for the religious commitments of its partisans. Not always, but frequently enough, and especially the responsibility that is characteristically exposed by critical history. This is to seek escape from cognitive relativity. Escape is, of course, the mark of functional gnosticism. Relativity and responsibility are among the principal features of history, features that render it threatening (they appear as limitation and exposure). Are literalism or evangelical theology a sufficient condition for henotheism or gnosticism? No; Marvin R. Wilson’s *Our Father Abraham; Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, will do as a counter-example.⁸⁸

We began this section as an inquiry into the roots of Christian anti-semitism and found two, henotheism and functional gnosticism. Today, the problem with Christian Gnosticism is usually not that they are overtly anti-semitic. Far more often, they simply undermine the means of rejecting anti-semitism when it does arise. Worse, of course, is the undermining of covenantal religion itself. H. Richard Niebuhr saw henotheism early in *Radical Monotheism*, and at some point, he called it a state of incomplete conversion to radical monotheism. This is certainly true. I would like in the next section to imagine what Christianity might look like if it were more attentive to embracing exposure in history as gracious. The focus will, in the course of the logic, pass through christology.

8.3 Grace in History

It is one of the central theses of this work that exposure brings grace and freedom. It is nevertheless usually unwelcome. Unwelcome exposure at first doesn’t show the good that was missed; all you *see* are the *symptoms* of a failed engagement with life, and they can be very ugly. The failed engagement itself may remain mostly hidden. It takes some digging to see the full extent of the problem, and even then, a solution may not be obvious. In the case of Christian anti-semitism, at first one does not even see the root causes in Christian henotheism and Christian functional gnosticism. The wrongdoing is so pervasive even, at first appearance, in the New Testament, that some have even wondered whether the New

⁸⁸Marvin R. Wilson *Our Father Abraham; Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

Testament can survive as canonical scripture, and whether the Church can survive and recover from the blow of such exposure. Things are not as bad as the first appearances, and it should be clear from our short review of the history that the sin, while grievous, is not so extensive as to constitute total depravity. But how, beyond the “bad news,” Christianity might look positively on this sordid history is yet to be seen.

This is not the first time, even in the encounter of theology with critical history, that new evidence has required major changes in religious worldview that at first seemed devastating. Consider an example that has been explored much more fully, the evidence for the Documentary Hypothesis, the thesis that the Pentateuch passed through the hands of four editors (and so cannot seriously be treated literally as the work of one divine author). In the nineteenth century, it was taken as a great embarrassment by the church at large, a threat to faith, news that, if true, would undermine the entire Christian enterprise. And there was no lack of hostile critics who drew exactly such an implication. There is no shortage of defenders even today who think that source criticism and all the other kinds of critical examination of the Bible are fundamentally inimical to faith. In the last century, the faith of the critical scholars was questioned, and their careers often suffered as a result. One thinks of D. F. Strauss. The evidence as it once stood can be seen in H. H. Rowley’s little book, *The Growth of the Old Testament*.⁸⁹ It is now out of date, but it was very accessible, and it presented the evidence internal to the texts in a clear and succinct if somewhat dry summary. It left out most of the theology in the Pentateuch that would have enabled the Pentateuch, read critically, to survive as a message of hope and covenant after the apparent ravages of “higher” criticism. One can find that theology and its good news in later works; Hans Walter Wolff and Walter Brueggemann’s *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* lays out a careful recreation of the theology of each of the major editors of the Pentateuch.⁹⁰ At this point, historical-critical work pays off: one can see a new message of grace, more applicable today than the old readings of the Pentateuch, precisely because of, not in spite of, embodying the Troeltschian tests of criticism, analogy, and correlation at every stage in the critical reading of the texts.

Even in mathematics, it can happen that new information can constitute exposure that threatens major and foundational bodies of mathematical theory. People knew in the seventeenth century that Newton’s

⁸⁹H. H. Rowley *The Growth of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963). See also Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), for a recent version of the Documentary Hypothesis.

⁹⁰Hans Walter Wolff and Walter Brueggemann, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975).

differential calculus relied, at crucial places in its logic, on division by numbers approaching zero. Division by zero returns a quotient that can be anything or nothing; all further inference is void. In the nineteenth century, they began to worry. To an outsider, this would have seemed to undermine the entire enterprise, and with it all the glorious mathematical achievement of the eighteenth century. To professionals, it demanded attention. Yet in the critical work of Cauchy, Weierstrass, and others, the calculus was rebuilt, stronger than before.⁹¹ One would expect the credibility of the sciences to suffer when Newton was caught virtually dividing by zero, but it was taken in stride. Similar challenges in theology have been assimilated by theologians with some effort, but only with the greatest difficulty by the laity. The culture at large remains mostly uncomprehending of the possibility that anything other than literal divine authorship of the Bible could have authority or say anything meaningful to its readers.

Another example is the challenge of Charles Darwin to Christian theology. This is related to the first; for the real challenge to received tradition came not from science, but from history. Nevertheless, Darwin stands as a symbol that the popular imagination can understand, a symbol for the contradiction between its instinctive biblical metaphysics and hermeneutics and its practical knowledge in science and everyday life. People come to scientific texts, the Bible, and television (to take only one representative example from the world of the media) with three quite different ideas of how to interpret these texts, of how they can speak truth, of what kinds of truth these texts can speak, of what sorts of things are real, and what sorts of things can happen and be reported as fact in such texts. The working of language is involved at every point in understanding the contrasts between these texts, and it is still incompletely explored despite the considerable work of the twentieth century. The “conflict” between biology and religion remains poorly explored after a century and a half, because the real roots of the perceived conflict between science and religion are not seen. Prominent among them are poor understanding of critical history and the philosophy of language.

Many in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were hostile to historical-covenantal religion, both because it *is* covenantal, and because it has, in fact if not principle, degenerated into exilic and henotheistic religion, and so has all too often become life-denying instead of life-affirming. A contradiction? Inconsistent? Yes, but full of rhetorical opportunities for the enemies of covenantal religion. Covenantal religion would embrace disappointments that the critics would rather not, and in

⁹¹ An account can be found in Carl B. Boyer and Uta Merzbach, *A History of Mathematics* (New York: John Wiley, 1991), chs. 23 and 25.

its degenerate form, it rejects as evil things that the critics can see quite well are good. They revel in exposing the symptoms of covenantal religion's failed engagements, but are really not interested in getting to the bottom of things, because they are not any more covenantal than those they expose. The "defenders" of covenantal religion, who see chiefly the hostility of the critics, the incomplete exposure, and the too facile implications drawn to the depravity of covenantal religion, reject the exposure instead of embracing it.

What one does not see at first is the opportunity, the grace offered in exposure. I contend that the fruit of exploring Christian anti-semitism is a real freedom in history. When one sees the problem as denial of any responsible liberty of interpretation in the life of covenantal religion, the possibilities for solutions are already apparent. Historical-covenantal religion offers openness and freedom, flexibility in particular incarnations of universality, as long as the affairs of the covenantal communities are themselves kept open to exposure and criticism. I would contend several things in this section, of which the first two are that (1) Judaism will always be exposure of Christianity, and this is not necessarily exposure of *sin*, but instead merely exposure of innocent historical relativity, and that (2) in the light of history, one central issue in christology should be whether Jesus is Exposure Incarnate or a functionally Gnostic redeemer.

Judaism is exposure of Christian relativity, exposure of the Christian exercise of a responsible liberty of interpretation of the terms of the covenant. The same could be said reciprocally for Judaism, of course. The *mere existence* of an alternate covenantal tradition growing out of the same history is exposure, though not necessarily exposure of sin; it is exposure of the confessionality of faith, of its vulnerability, its relativity, and also of human communities in need. It is not exposure of sin, for there is no wrong done in simply being a covenantal tradition, or in freely adapting that tradition to meet new circumstances. It is exposure nonetheless, exposure of being in the world in the face of chaos, when we would prefer that chaos remained invisible. Chaos, loneliness, and sometimes abandonment; for when human choice in human institutions is apparent, they lose much of the daunting air of inevitability that makes them such a comfort against chaos, if a false one. Enemies may scoff, and those who are not convinced may simply pass the kerygma by, because they are not covenantal at all, or because they are of some other particular incarnation of covenantal religion. All of this exposure can be stonewalled, rejected, evaded, merely by anathematizing the other covenantal tradition, and covering up one's own creativity and passing it off as a much older tradition. At this point, of course, the exposure becomes more than

exposure of innocent relativity, but of a guilty coverup, and of the sins of henotheism or worse associated with it.

The forces militating in the direction of a coverup are formidable, to be sure. Human self-interest, stupidity, and forgetfulness all make it much easier to give simple reasons why a community of faith is how it is. "Thus says the Lord" is much more efficient than "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us." The latter betrays a very unstable relationship between the "us" and the Holy Spirit: one has all the responsibility, the other all the power. It is not entirely a coincidence that this passage appears where relaxing kashrut is at stake, one side of *the* issue in the crisis of first-century Judaism (the other being, for the minority, the religious significance of Jesus). In full, it reads, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things," that is, no food sacrificed to idols, or with blood in it, or strangled; and no unchastity (Acts 15.28). The council of Jerusalem had to exercise a liberty of interpretation in a situation where its exercise could not be covered up, but had to be acknowledged. Christian theology ever since has all too often tried to retract that acknowledgment, and turn it from a responsible human act into an act of God, or at least an act of some *other* people, the authoritative apostles. The rabbis could with equal justice have said that it seemed good to *them* and to the Holy Spirit to tighten kashrut rather than relax it, and to ignore Jesus. Evidently, and we may conclude this from their actions if not from their theoretical work in sociology, both sides thought the situation unstable: Jewish identity as it was in the end of the Second Temple period needed to be either reinforced and separated more clearly from pagan society, by focusing on Torah and observance of the law, or else aggressively adapted and marketed to the gentile world.⁹² The liberty of interpretation on the Christian side is well enough known. On the Jewish side, the creativity of the rabbis was concealed in the tradition that the Oral Torah went all the way back to Moses and was written down only by the tannaim.

A community of faith has to legitimate its structure to its members, and if the answer to "Why?" is "Because it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," then a dissident can always reply, "Who do you think *you* are? And why do *you* get to decide?" In face of challenges such as this, challenges that can be torment for the leaders of the community, the temptation to efficiency can become overwhelming. But if the responsibility of a

⁹²The sociological determinants of this crisis are beginning to be explored, but have not been much assimilated by theology. Cf. John G. Gager, *Kingdom and Community; The Social World of Early Christianity* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1975). Christianity was very human, and very much like all other new religious movements in its sociology.

community of faith is to be covered up, it will inevitably find necessary further measures of cognitive nihilation, measures designed to destroy the witnesses to responsibility that come from outside the community itself and its own traditions.⁹³ Hence the need to delegitimize the competition.

When it is realized that an alternative covenantal community, by its mere existence, constitutes exposure for one's own community, even if only exposure of innocent relativity, then it is possible to respond in a different way. If—if—one already has a general commitment to embracing exposure as gracious, then it is possible to look for the grace in this exposure. Grace, *charis*, denotes in secular usage very much what it means theologically here: the ability to move gracefully, as in dance, or as in a host's care and solicitude, and guests' reciprocated courtesy. Here, grace shows itself in living in and with historical relativity. At this point, a body is on the threshold of pluralism, in which both the common heritage and the differences between the several traditions can be openly acknowledged and cherished.

Thus I would say that of all the debts of gratitude that the Church owes to the Synagogue, one of the greatest is merely for its continuing presence as a critical neighbor. If Hitler had succeeded in exterminating all the Jews, worldwide, the Church would have been morally bankrupt. Eventually, it would have become visibly so. The Other who is different thereby exposes one's own innocent historical relativity and responsibility. If this exposure is refused, then innocence becomes guilt, and the exposure is of course deepened and much more serious. One who professes to embrace exposure as gracious is obliged to embrace this exposure, too. The Catholic Church accordingly needs the Synagogue to be strong, healthy, and different. The Synagogue has bigger reasons for existence than merely to keep the Church honest, and it is for those larger reasons that the Church honors the Synagogue: continuation of the Exodus covenant, in which the Church also participates.

A sibling respect will work only with an openness to the history we share. When Christian scholars are experts in the story of anti-semitism, and Christian laity know the rudiments of it, and when the story can be told comfortably, ending in patent grace and reconciliation, then one can hope that the future will be different from the past. If the Church could tell this story well in its liturgy, it might permanently end Christian anti-semitism.

Judaism is exposure for Christianity in a second and much less clear way, in its criticisms of Christian devotion to Jesus. While the criticisms

⁹³More on such needs can be found in Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), and Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

do not seem to me to be simply true (in its more careful forms, christology *is* compatible with radical monotheism), the Jewish objections do touch on a truth. The appropriate strategy seems to me to be to devise a way to meet the Jewish objections to Jesus as the messiah enough to live with them, leaving them unresolved. It is also, of course, necessary from purely Christian grounds to maintain an internal critique of more and less successful Christologies.

Inevitably, the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the messiah remains disappointing to Christians, even if, following Paul, it is a disappointment that we can learn to live with. Rabbinic Judaism, in the end, was neither convinced nor impressed with the Church's project to declare Jesus as the messiah, and this in no way contradicts the fact that the Jews of Palestine—his own people—took Jesus to their hearts. Let it be said that the rabbinic rejection is not a sign of malice. It is, however, something that Christian theology has to make sense of. What I am suggesting is that, even when one assumes, for purposes of the argument, that Jesus *is* the messiah, it would be better to leave open Christian understanding of the relation of Rabbinic Judaism to Jesus, to leave disagreements unresolved, just to embrace and savor the exposure in the existence of Judaism as a neighbor to Christianity.

Alan Davies notes that Karl Barth forces Judaism to be a witness to the messiahship of Jesus despite itself.⁹⁴ Barth, for one, has read at least this much in Romans 11 correctly: the continuing Synagogue is still Elect. He goes on to say that its unbelief testifies to the unworthiness of man with respect to the love of God (p. 117), and this fits naturally into his emphasis on the radical pervasiveness of human sin. Barth apparently holds against Judaism its rejection of Jesus. Without the full paraphernalia of Barth's doctrine at this point, I would like to suggest something a little different. The rabbis had a right not to be impressed with Jesus. Their apparent rejection is not necessarily a symptom of sin, it merely arises in their entitlement to order their own house in their own way. It seems to me that Davies is concerned that Barth's doctrine turns the Jews from a living body and real neighbors into stick-figures, made to say not what they themselves say, but what Christian theology puts in their mouths. Romans 11.28, disambiguated as "they are [your] enemies for your sake," is more positive than Barth, by a little: it does not accuse the Synagogue of sin or rejection, nor does it say *why* in the mystery of God's providence they have been moved to unconvincedness "for your sake," that is, for some real good in your (i. e., the Church's) life. That the good may not be obvious is no cause to doubt its reality.

I would say that exposure, real exposure to living other people, is

⁹⁴Cf. *Anti-Semitism and the Christian Mind*, pp. 113–121.

always incompletely met until the companion limitations and needs have been seen also. Need appears as the invitation to pluralism: at a minimum, a continuing dialogue in which all parties are allowed to be heard and to speak for themselves. Not just Judaism's need to be allowed to live in peace is at stake. Christianity would in my estimation be impoverished without Rabbinic Judaism as its neighbor, and, if Judaism were to come to an end because of Christianity, Christianity could not survive spiritually or morally.

Needless to say, I have strong theological reasons for leaving the disagreements over Jesus unresolved. It could seem that the Christian's position, at least, then becomes performatively inconsistent: Jesus is or is not the Messiah; one cannot have it both ways. The disagreement with Judaism cannot in the end leave this inconsistency unresolved. But too much consistency sought too fast for the sake of avoiding chaos or confusion can lead to error. The challenge is not to resolve the outstanding disagreements between Christianity and Judaism, but to conduct these disagreements faithfully: with integrity (not selling out one's own tradition), but without anathemas, and without rejecting the exposure contained in the disagreement. This requires respect for both one's own position and the other's.

What I take to be the Jewish objections, if pursued, touch on more important things than just the Synagogue's right to conduct its own affairs without reference to Jesus. Christology is for Christians central in the way that observance of Law is central for Jews. From the Christian side, what matters is how the christology is formulated. Disagreement from the Jewish side will remain, but it is important that the christology not be in obvious violation, even on Christian standards, of principles that both parties hold as constitutive of radical monotheism.

How is one to approach the christological problematic? I have no intention of providing a complete christology here, but only of articulating what appears to me to be one elementary condition for a successful christology. The objection attributed to Judaism is that to speak of Jesus as divine is idolatrous. Not to put too fine a point on it, this is true even from a Christian perspective, as it is a disastrous oversimplification of the distinctions that eventually were articulated in the Definition of Chalcedon. (I work from Chalcedon rather than from the New Testament because Chalcedon is both authoritative and philosophically more economical; it remains, of course, subject to correction by any revisions in the understanding of New Testament christology.) The definition, "two natures in one person," was intended to safeguard the humanity of Jesus, and I leave to others a metaphysical explanation of how a divine nature may be incarnate in a human person without incurring the charge of idol-

atry.⁹⁵ Judaism agrees with Christianity, so far as I can see, in the terms Westphal has observed, namely, that God sanctifies a good world for us, he does not rescue us from an evil world. "When the Holy One, blessed be He, descended on Mount Sinai, He set an eternally binding precedent that it is God who descends to man, not man who ascends to God."⁹⁶ God's presence in the world does not raise a problem for Judaism, even if God's presence in *Jesus* remains an unconvincing claim.

The Jewish objection nevertheless touches, if unclearly, a real truth. My sense is that the question unearthed by the Jewish critique can be stated as a choice: Chalcedon and exposure, or Jesus as a Gnostic Redeemer? When the Jewish objection is right, it is usually because Jesus is being treated functionally as a Gnostic redeemer. This possibility was hinted already in Merold Westphal's remarks, noted above, that Jesus comes to join us in a good world, and not to save us from an evil one. Clearly, he is very aware of how Jesus can be treated as if he were a Gnostic redeemer, and I have already looked at how Christianity flirts with functional gnosticism above. Even when Christianity does not become Marcionite, condemning the God known in the Old Testament as evil, somehow the *world* often becomes flawed or evil, and Jesus then comes to save us from it.

We have seen the abuse of Jesus as a Gnostic redeemer. The alternative, christology on the theme of exposure incarnate, would lead to a more systematic embracing of exposure, and in particular, embracing the exposure of cognitive and historical relativity. Remembering that God in the first function is God acting as truth, and where this touches human life, it is God present as exposure, perhaps we could say that Exposure in Person is present in the man Jesus. If Christians can remember that Jesus is about exposure, and above all, the exposure constituted in others' suffering, then perhaps they (we) can be more friendly to Judaism in the future. Monika Hellwig would start a christology by alluding to the covenant of Genesis 12, in which God commissions Abraham to be a blessing to the nations, with Jesus as the fulfillment of that covenant commission. In Jesus, Israel is being a blessing to the nations.⁹⁷ This in no way entails a supersession of the continuing Synagogue's election;

⁹⁵Cf. Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), ch. 4, "The Incarnation and the Christian Distinction." I think popular devotion is more like what Sokolowski repudiates: a functionally monophysite christology, in which while there are two natures in one person, that person is nevertheless divine.

⁹⁶Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, p. 48. Translated by Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983). Originally published in 1944.

⁹⁷Cf. Monika Hellwig, "From the Jesus of Story to the Christ of Dogma," in Alan T. Davies, *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, p. 131-132.

a blessing for the nations should not mean a curse for Israel. And acceptance of the blessing would seem to be contradicted by hostility for Rabbinic Judaism. One should recall that the purposes of Chalcedon were twofold: to safeguard respect for the humanity of Jesus, and to affirm that God was really present and acting in what was really a human being, without diluting or compromising either fact. How the divine “nature” is imagined is critical, for it seems to me that if the two natures are both “persons,” one of them invisible, omnipotent, omniscient, etc., but both of them “persons” (i. e., individuals) in the modern and human sense of that word, then functional idolatry has already created an anthropomorphic God, before there is any thought of an incarnation. The incarnation then simply makes patent the misconception of God.

If Judaism does not accept the idea that Exposure is particularly incarnate in Jesus in anything like the terms of Chalcedon, it seems to me that Jews do nevertheless believe that exposure brings grace and freedom. Joseph Soloveitchik’s account of repentance in *Halakhic Man* is notable in the terms of the present discussion for two things: It is not organized on Indo-European tripartite functional lines (there is no reason why it should be, and in this it is a fascinating contrast to Christianity); and nevertheless, one can see full openness to exposure. “Repentance, by definition, means (1) a retrospective reflection upon the past, separating out that which is living from that which is dead; (2) a vision of the future in which one distinguishes between a future that is already present and one that has not yet been ‘created’; (3) an examination of the cause located in the past in light of the future, determining its direction and destination.”⁹⁸ Rabbinic Judaism is here exemplary in its insistence on openness to truth. One is reminded of the parable in Matthew about the people who said, “Lord, Lord” (Matthew 7.21), or those who did not help others in need (Matthew 25.40). As much can be said about exposure as about need. With the history of Christian anti-semitism in view, and loyalty to Jesus at issue, a similar lesson could be drawn again from Matthew, where a man had two sons (Matthew 21.28), and one promised to obey but did not, while the other refused but did obey.

Exposure in history is a guide to mistakes to avoid, and freedom from the hold of the past. Exposure virtually always discloses also limitation and need that have been rejected, and the embracing of exposure is not really consummated until they have been met positively also. Each child of Second Temple Judaism needs the good will of the other, its neighbor, in a shared world that is truly a social world and not just an ecosystem in which different religions, like different species, share the same territory but are fundamentally in competition and occasionally even predatory on

⁹⁸*Halakhic Man*, p. 115.

one another.

Where Judaism has been critical of Christian attitudes toward Jesus, Christianity has been very rejecting of the Jewish attitude toward the Law. The situations are not entirely symmetrical. I think Christianity should care more about whether others do what Jesus said to do (in this case, embrace exposure) than what they say about Jesus. Judaism, treasuring the law as the sign and embodiment of a love affair with God, needs from Christianity not observance of the law by Christians, but respect for Torah as the embodiment of covenant in Judaism. What is offensive are Christian charges, invoking Paul on the Law, that Judaism is legalistic in a pejorative sense, producing men who are hard bargainers with God, not joyful sons of the covenant. Soloveitchik is to the point. The focus is not on the rules themselves, but on the creativity of the halakhic mind, what it does with its own human life. The account in *Halakhic Man* confirms Merold Westphal's phenomenology of covenantal religion quite well. The contrast to halakhic man, *homo religiosus*, starts in the concrete world and seeks transcendence; halakhic man starts from transcendence and seeks to bring it to the concrete world. *Homo religiosus* carries overtones of Barth's religious man (not to be confused there with Christian faith), and of a mixture of Westphal's mimetic and exilic religious outlooks. *Homo religiosus* seeks to "unite with infinity and merge with transcendence," where "Halakhic man's religious viewpoint is highly exoteric. His face is turned toward the people."⁹⁹ What results is forged and transformed from the tensions of universal human tendencies that manifest themselves untransformed in *homo religiosus* and in scientific man (the other alternative to halakhic man). What results is a joyful affirmation of this world and life in it. Leaving aside Soloveitchik's phenomenology of religious worldviews, what strikes the Christian reader is the absence or inconspicuousness of the marks of halakhah most striking to an outsider: the details of observance of the law. The book is not organized around the six orders of the Talmud, dealing with agriculture, festivals, family matters, civil affairs, kashrut and holy things, and lastly cleanness and uncleanness. It is truly about the life that results from the observance that is regulated in the Talmud.

My own few contacts with halakhah have been entirely positive. In a shared household, a casual disposition of ordinary items can manifest the presence of God: An empty oven left on low Friday night is like having the Reserved Sacrament under my own roof. Utterly gracious, totally gratuitous, liberating and free, and all these in a very Pauline sense, precisely because there was nothing I could do to participate, because I am Catholic. For me to attempt to participate would be to make

⁹⁹Cf. *Halakhic Man*, pp. 40, 41, 42.

the mistake that Paul argues against in Galatians. For Jews, for whom halakhic observances are in some sense obligatory, the experience must be different. Routine, perhaps. Usually not rapturous. Above all, it is not what Paulinists of the tradition received from nineteenth-century polemic would have one believe: crabbed legalism. It is more like concern for correct liturgical observance in those Christian denominations that worry about such things; truly a joyous matter, if sometimes also routine.

I have already quoted the midrash on Songs in section 6.4 above, in which the law is received on Sinai one commandment at a time, and each commandment personified asks each Israelite in turn, “Will you have me?” The issue is not law vs. gospel, but boasting and control vs. faith and trust. As John Gager reads Romans, the embodiment of faith, for Jews, *is* Torah.¹⁰⁰ Those who preach Paul so loudly can be among the most “pharisaic” (if that word can be divested of its anti-Jewish meanings for a moment), and those who keep a kosher kitchen can be among the most gracious—in a Pauline sense. Seeking control over the human relationship to God is the vice to be avoided, and control is an attitude: the embracing of exposure, limitation, and need can become works-righteousness, if one forgets that each of them are contingencies beyond one’s control and treats them instead as commodities to be bartered in life. As a prophylactic, I am tempted to enjoin Christians who preach gospel against the law to have the passage from Songs Rabbah etched in letters of fire on the backs of their eyeballs. But if I did, someone would misunderstand and ask whether I had in mind an excimer laser or surgically micro-pipetted hydro-fluoric acid as the etching agent.

As we noticed in section 5.5, halakhah and haggadah occupy nearly reversed roles in Judaism and Christianity. In Rabbinic Judaism, halakhah, regulation of behavior, is sacred and central, and haggadah, sacred narrative, serves the law. In Christianity, narrative is sacred and central, and ethics serves that narrative. Nevertheless, there is a lesson for the Christian observer in the Jewish focus on observance and regulation. Notice that the middle part of the *Summa Theologica*, the part dealing with the virtues and the constitution of human being as subject of the virtues, is more than half of it by weight. Here again, even though not framed in terms of statute, the particulars of concrete embodiment occupy the greater part of the exposition of the life of faith. It is philosophical and anthropological in its questioning; this is its Greek and Roman inheritance, and it must seem as bewildering to Jewish readers as the Talmud is to Christians. Christian moral teaching seems unsystematic, where the Mishnah is systematic. The counterpart of Torah in Christian affections is Jesus, even though its ethical counterpart is Christian moral teaching.

¹⁰⁰Cf. *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*, p. 216.

Alasdair MacIntyre, in the beginning of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* lamented that he was forced by considerations of space to omit Jewish moral tradition from comparison with the few recent European and Christian traditions of moral reasoning. I suspect that the terms of the comparison would be more radical and so more illuminating than any others that he found in the Christian mainstream. One naturally asks why some embodiments of covenantal religion are based on statute, others on virtue, and whether there are yet other possibilities. This remains to be explored.

If Rabbinic Judaism needs respect from Christianity for the embodiment of covenant in Torah, Christianity needs respect from Rabbinic Judaism for its own roots in Second Temple Judaism. What is at stake is whether Jews admit a kinship with Christianity, or dismiss it as without real connection to a common heritage. To be concrete and specific, this appears in Jewish attitudes toward Christian use of the Common Documents. It may appear that I am picking a bone with my Jewish neighbors, and perhaps there are some Jews who would not credit Christianity with being an Exodus tradition. In my experience, however, Jews have been more willing to credit Christianity with a share in the Exodus than many Christians have been to own the Exodus as foundational and primary. In any case, acknowledgment of a responsible liberty of interpretation is the guiding principle, if there is to be mutual respect. As a general rule of hermeneutics, multiple interpretations are possible, and that is certainly true here. Christianity needs to use the Common Documents as the light from history to interpret the Jesus events; without them, the New Testament becomes unintelligible and Christianity becomes Gnosticism. To read the New Testament in light of the Common Documents is a responsible act of interpretation, not a claim that (for example) Isaiah had Jesus in mind in the passages dear to Christian hearts and ears. It is like Monty Python's use of the Gospels in *The Life of Brian*. People understand that Mark did not have Graham Chapman's portrayal of Brian in mind, and they can still understand what *Brian* has to say (a message, by the way, remarkably close to Mark's proclamation of a messiah come in weakness). But Christian readers have a hard time understanding typology in the use of Isaiah (and even more, the Exodus) in the Gospels. Jewish readers find this difficult also.

Christianity's loyalty to the Common Documents would be more credible if the Easter focus on the Exodus were unmistakable. Christianity is supposed to be a gateway for the gentiles into the covenant that originates in the Exodus. That is why the Easter lessons from the Common Documents are taken from the Exodus. Perhaps a little reminding of their significance would help. The covenant at Sinai is binding on Christians,

not as statute, but as history, as part of the Exodus rather than as detailed regulation of Christian life today. (The covenant in the text extends to a great deal more than just the Ten Commandments.) If Christians look to the Exodus as foundational, as I claim they should, then commemoration of the Exodus is appropriate. It would do a lot to prevent both Marcionite theology and anti-semitism, and to foster a sense of kinship with Rabbinic Judaism.

In *The Meaning of Revelation*, Niebuhr found the third function of revelation in an appropriation whereby new peoples enter the covenant and adopt its history as their own.¹⁰¹ Obviously, one group of Jews (the tannaim) is not responsible for how another (the Jesus movement) invites gentiles to do this. Rabbinic Judaism in a crotchety mood could say something like, "If you want biblical religion, why not adopt all of the written and oral Torah?" Indeed, such an attitude hovers over some anti-Christian polemic in Judaism. Each of us, having invented his own way to concretize and organize historical-covenantal religion, feels hurt, scorned, rejected, when our gift to the world is rejected. This happens whenever another group finds a way into covenantal (specifically biblical) religion without buying our own favored implementation of it. For Judaism, this is halakhah; for Christianity, Jesus. But if Judaism takes a stance that Christianity has nothing essentially Jewish in it, because it has itself defined the essentially Jewish to be observance of halakhah, this is to disinherit Christianity from the promises of the Common Documents. It mirrors Christianity's doctrine of the supersession of Judaism. This is not incidental; the mutual rejections feed upon one another. Residual Jewish polemic survives in the notion that Christianity is a new religion and Rabbinic Judaism is the simple continuation of Second Temple Judaism. This idea is sometimes found even in scholars otherwise totally friendly to Christianity. Christianity is not a new religion with Jesus. Both Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity are legitimate daughters of the Second Temple, and both are legitimate ways to continue the Exodus covenant after the disasters at the start of the Common Era. It is time to break one tradition of the Common Documents, the tradition in which only one of two sons of a patriarch inherits the blessing.

I criticize some Jews for these statements not because they are irritating, but because they feed into Christian anti-semitism, by way of fostering a Marcionite theology. I know well what is obvious, that Christian anti-semitism far outweighs Jewish anti-Christian polemic in its bitterness and depth and rancor and destructiveness. But it seems to me that Jewish talk that disinherits Christianity in the end reinforces the roots of Christian anti-semitism. If the basic premise of Christian anti-

¹⁰¹Niebuhr's three functions of history as revelation appear in section 5.5 above.

semitism remains undisturbed, even in Jewish rhetoric, namely, that only one daughter can inherit from Second Temple Judaism, then the seeds of trouble have been planted again. I would hope that Jews would say to Christians things which, if said to Jews in mirror image of their logic, would be anti-Jewish or anti-semitic.

It has to be possible to disagree without thereby being guilty of implying the grounds for bigotry or genocide. Jacob Neusner's appraisal of Aphrahat's anti-Jewish argument is not transparent to me. He considers Aphrahat a worthy and courteous opponent, but Aphrahat's arguments on behalf of Christianity are not convincing to me, for he argues from the Exclusive Or. What constitutes friendly disagreement for Neusner remains unclear. One sure way to trouble is to read history in a search for fault or justification. Another is silently or carelessly to presuppose more than continuity, a simple identity between Second Temple and Rabbinic Judaism. Companion to this assumption is a certain desire to have it both ways with regard to the Jewishness of Christianity: When the Jewishness of Christianity counts in favor of Judaism, Judaism is defined to be Second Temple Judaism, thereby locating the origins of Christianity in Judaism. When the Jewishness of Christianity counts against the apologetic of (Rabbinic) Judaism, Judaism is defined to be Rabbinic Judaism, thereby depriving Christianity of any Jewishness. One cannot have it both ways, treating Christianity as Jewish in order to ward off anti-Jewish polemic and Marcionite theology, but not Jewish, in order to deny it any inheritance from the Second Temple and the Common Documents. These attitudes are much less a problem than they used to be, and some Jewish comments have expressed affection for Christianity that is deeply moving even as it is not in agreement with Christianity. I have in mind Alan Segal's *Rebecca's Children* and the remarks in the end of Jacob Neusner's *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity*.¹⁰² One could doubtless find other examples, and I feel a large debt of gratitude.

The reader may be surprised that inheritance from the Common Documents matters more to me than non-Christians' (including Jews') eventual acknowledgment of Jesus as the messiah. It seems to me that it is not necessary for people to acknowledge Jesus as the messiah in order for the messiah to set things right and to open the covenant to gentiles. What is necessary is only that there be *some* form of making covenant concrete and of informing all of life with covenant. The problem is how to structure a life that participates in historical-covenantal religion. It matters more that people embrace exposure as it comes in life than that they ac-

¹⁰²Alan Segal, *Rebecca's Children; Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Harvard University Press, 1986); Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991).

knowledge exposure as incarnate in Jesus. Indeed, one may acknowledge exposure incarnate in Jesus and still claim an ecclesial vocation to some incarnation of responsibility other than that of the Christian Church. It is more important that there be some functional equivalent of embracing exposure (along with limitation and need), even in non-Indo-European cultures, than that Indo-European or specifically christological concepts be adopted. Contrary to the words put in his mouth by some of the evangelists, I don't think Jesus cared greatly about who he was or who other people thought he was. He did care greatly about what people did with their lives. Recent scholarship (more than a century of it) devoted to ascertaining who Jesus thought he was (as if that could answer how we should live our lives) strikes me as of dubious theological merit. It is made to serve yet another evasion of responsibility in history, and it has incidentally failed to achieve any lasting or solid conclusions.

The coverup of Christian responsibility for its own originating theological creativity required a delegitimation of Judaism in order to work. This has also meant a rejection of the needs of Judaism, and it has then as a further consequence made it very difficult to meet those forms of limitation that arise in historical relativity. Relativity is the locus of limitation: cultural relativity determines what a body responds to (and responds with), however creative it may be in that response. Exposure of a liberty of interpretation enables its exercise; covering it up in the past leaves it incapable of recognizing changed limitations in the culture of the present and future. In the conclusion of this chapter, I would generally agree with Rosemary Ruether that the consequence of anti-semitism has been opportunities increasingly missed over the course of the last millennium.

There has been no real ability to meet the challenges of the baroque and Enlightenment world, as that worldview lasts into the present. These are at least three: (1) the need to synthesize critical with confessional thought in theology; (2) the need to recognize non-covenantal religion in its unlabeled functional revivals today (not in order to wage polemic against them, but simply in order to articulate covenantal religion in a way intelligible to people today); and lastly, (3) the need to handle gracefully the tension between the universal and the particular in face of changed cultural circumstances today. To some extent, these are afflictions of faulty assumptions in philosophy of religion, what religion is and is about, and so appear even in Judaism; but the greater problems have appeared in Christianity.

Aquinas is almost legendary in the history of theology as an exemplar who synthesizes the critical and the confessional. In the thirteenth century, the critical challenge came from Aristotelian philosophy, and

the confessional defense from an Augustinian and Platonist position. Aquinas's synthesis became, whether in his own intention or that of later readers, a new confessional system, without an ongoing openness to critical challenges. Exposure and openness to exposure are at stake here.

The revival of non-covenantal life orientations in the modern world presents the face of need in a way different from that of Rabbinic Judaism, the sibling religion. One could hardly call some of the more florid lifestyles *religions*, but they function in the place of religion and fit my notion of life orientation quite well enough. The challenge is to speak intelligibly: that is, to say what covenantal religion entails in life, to distinguish it from the various mimetic and exilic options today, to make it a realistic offer to those outside the ambit of covenantal religion, and to be able to exercise some discipline and self-criticism within covenantal religion. Need is intimately involved with exposure, as one should not be surprised to find.

The tension of the particular and the universal today embodies the crux of limitation in its most excruciating way. This tension appears correlated with a sociological split. On one hand are the sophisticates, the party of critical thought, "liberals," open to change and adaptation in order to universalize the received tradition. On the other hand are the unsophisticates, the party of confessional theology, "Evangelicals" and other traditionalists, ever jealous for the integrity of the tradition in its rich particularity. There is here a certain similarity between the twentieth (and presumably the twenty-first) century and the first. First-century Judaism apparently supported just such rich pluralism and tensions between particularity and universalism, if the first-century witnesses are at all a reliable guide. The choice is between adaptation and universality, at cost of some confusion, or elaborating one interpretation of the inherited particularity, and leaving to others its generalization to other cultural contexts.

What if there were a split between universalists and particularists? Since I have questioned whether the acute evangelical reluctance to face critical history and its philosophical implications is really consistent with a covenantal openness to exposure, how much ammunition is there here for later readers' polemic in a war between Evangelicals and liberals? What could future hard words and actions do to make mine look evil? Doubtless too much. I shall have even harsher criticisms in *Action and Language in Historical Religion* for the liberals and their social ethics, though they look very good here, when the issue is critical history. What I hope for instead of a split is to see responsible social ethics and critical history hold together, openness to theological creativity in relativity accompanied by openness to criticism of the dysfunctional

behavior that liberal thought seems to foster so effectively. Both sides have strong and growing interests in preventing reconciliation, in order to protect each one's rejections of exposure. One side is threatened by exposure of irresponsibility in social ethics (the liberals), and the other by exposure of the responsible liberty of interpretation in covenantal history by critical history (the "conservatives"). Each accuses the other of fatally compromising Christianity, and the charges on both sides are somewhat exaggerated.

In such a dismal situation, the imagination turns to yet other what-if scenarios. When Christian anti-semitism looks particularly bad, one asks, after seeing what Christianity did with covenantal religion, if historical-covenantal religion were reinvented, would it fare any better? Covenantal religion, without halakhah, and adapted to Indo-European tripartite categories, would look more or less like Christianity, leaving open only the issue of the messiah/christ. If God acting in history at the inception of a non-halakhic but Indo-European historical-covenantal religion fits Reinhold Niebuhr's functional definition of a christ in the beginning of *Human Destiny*, then it would, within the limits of such a definition, look like Christianity. In this sense, the verdict on the history of Christian anti-semitism is one of conditional grace: there is hope, Christianity is not essentially depraved, its project is a worthy one, but in its historical particularity, its future depends on repudiating the anti-semitism in its past. How would the temptation to exilic religion come to such a reinvented historical-covenantal religion? If that temptation were described in ways that bracket Christian origins in Judaism and Jesus? If Christianity didn't exist, an Indo-Europeanized historical-covenantal religion would have been invented, making itself concrete in ways other than through halakhah, not because there is anything wrong with halakhah, but because there are other possible ways to make covenant concrete. It would need some standard by which to measure itself, without which it would degenerate into exilic or mimetic religion. If a new covenantal religion were invented, taking its inspiration from existing incarnations of covenantal religion, would it be historically candid, open, acknowledging its debt to history? This is necessary if it is to be a *historical-covenantal* religion. The alternative is to take offense at both its debt to history and its own originality, converting its origins into a pre-history, much as Christianity has too often done. If covenantal religion, radical monotheism, were re-invented, due in part to the inability of Christian particularity to universalize itself, would it be a tragedy? In no way. It would lead to more variety in culture, and it would open the way to real creativity in theology, not just sour rehashing of old problems. It probably would be *accompanied* by tragedy: estrangement, recriminations, and plenty of

hard words that could be used to license yet further estrangement. The grounds, opportunity, and excuses for estrangement are many: “conservative” inability to universalize, liberal blindness to the demands of a responsible social ethics.

Chapter 9

Returning to Troeltsch

9.1 History, Relativity, and Pluralism

In Part I, we explored the superficial anatomy of the faith that all of life is good, pains included. We began Part II with Heidegger's claim that human existence is at bottom historical. What makes people human is their potential for living in history. Problems arose quickly, for Ernst Troeltsch saw clearly that historical research and its methods were lethal to what was then the "traditional" Christianity. That "tradition" is not very old, I think, crystallizing into a spelled-out web of ideas only in the Baroque period. Nevertheless, Troeltsch's challenge is real, for the Baroque "traditions" are still very much with us. They probably represent an instinctive desire to escape from history, one that will always be tempting.

In chapter 5, the method implicit in historical thought and research seemed to Troeltsch to be a threat to every "traditional" form of Christian faith that he considered. Niebuhr, profoundly influenced by his study of Troeltsch in his own dissertation, found history to offer grace, albeit at cost of permanent openness to reform, but for a covenantal believer, that is a benefit and not a cost, a feature and not a bug. Issues of threat and blessing in history have been the theme of Part II.

In chapter 6, we looked at the alternatives to historical-covenantal religion: understanding life as just part of nature or as an exile from some original better state. There is also the possibility that covenantal religion can degenerate into or emerge from a henotheism.

In chapter 7, we looked at the role of analogy in support of faith across history. Typology is the central example of this, and typological

thinking is its extension. One act of faith calls out another, across history, even when their similarities are undertaken chiefly in the language of the beholder. Analogy bears within itself an inherent ambiguity that confers a liberty of interpretation on the believer, and this act of interpretation can be criticized as responsible or not in its exercise.

In chapter 8 we found a concrete example in application of the ideas of chapter 5 through chapter 7. The most conspicuous failed engagement in Christian history bears within itself both a promise of reconciliation to those wronged and also a gracious exposure of the recurrent temptation to become exilic religion and henotheism even within an officially covenantal religion. We ended chapter 8 with a sense of need to return to the problems of history and relativity on a level both deeper and more general than the particular issues of Christian anti-semitism. Relations between Christianity and Judaism are a particular and concrete example of a failed engagement with history and historical relativity. Today, they call attention to historical relativity in its own right.

The work of chapter 9 is to collect these themes and to open the way to *Action and Language in Historical Religion*, which will inquire into coherence in history from a slightly different starting point, the structure of human action. The plan of the chapter is in four parts. In this first section, I extend the claim that Troeltsch's apparent threat to theology and faith would better be taken as the basis of faith and the beginning of theology than as a threat to them. The canons of Troeltsch's historical method, criticism, analogy, and correlation, will lead us to a larger triad of apparent threats to religion: critical history, historical relativity, and religious pluralism. In the second section I explore flaws in Troeltsch's assumptions in his search for a constructive theology. Surprisingly, many come from perennial desires to escape from history. Troeltsch evidently inherited these presuppositions and implicitly considered them as essential to "traditional" Christianity; he was not able to recognize them as anti-historical nor as antithetical to Christianity construed as a historical religion. A good part of the work here will be to dismantle the falsely posed problem in Troeltsch's quest for absoluteness. Absoluteness will show itself to be deeply pathological, a way to avoid the responsibilities of a confessional stance, in the second section of the chapter. The third section will look at how a confessional stance might work. Troeltsch's own critical philosophy of history will provide resources for a constructive position. In the fourth section of the chapter, I turn to his focus on his concept of historical individuality. It is for the most part a shrewd and illuminating depiction of the logic of history. If the concept of a historical individual holds together the formal logic of history, one may then ask, what holds an individual together,

where the individual may be a tradition as much as a person? I shall claim that integral to historical individuality should have been a concept of analogy, taken in a constructive sense. His sense of analogy as a critical tool, were it also allowed a parallel in constructive thought, would have enabled him to move forward beyond the slim confessional position he took.

Critical history appears to bring only challenge for orthodox monotheism. I think it also offers grace, contrary to appearances. Most of the work of showing that history functions as exposure has been done already over the course of Part II. The fear of history comes from a deeper fear that biblical religion will not survive such exposure. Cultural and historical relativity are a form of limitation, but they nevertheless bring opportunity and permit a liberty of interpretation. Historical relativity is not a destructive or nihilistic relativism, as I shall argue in the next section. We have already seen that its exercise can be criticized as responsible or not. In the present section, I shall look at cultural relativity as it grows out of history, treating it as a form of limitation. Historical and cognitive relativity, the encounter of different communities, leads naturally to cultural pluralism. Yet different communities living in the same world need each other, and thus appears the third member completing the triad of history, relativity, and pluralism.

Let us look first at critical history as a species of exposure, one that by now we expect to be gracious. Its method has three parts: criticism, analogy and correlation. Troeltsch saw the method of historical thinking as threatening to Christian tradition in all its forms. Criticism destroys the kind of certainty that the baroque instinct seeks. Analogy rules out the kind of preternatural miracles that the Baroque period hears in the New Testament texts. Correlation rules out *apriori* the mode of divine intervention as it was in Baroque imagination. Yet H. Richard Niebuhr, who was hardly hostile to Troeltsch, saw history and its challenges positively, as bearing grace. Revelation appears in that moment in history which explains the rest of history: it makes the past intelligible, it exposes the buried sins of the past, offering reconciliation, and it opens the way for new peoples to enter the covenant community. It could seem that the American student and the Berlin master of historical thinking disagreed on whether history bears good news or bad news. I claimed in section 5.5 that each of criticism, analogy, and correlation bring good. Analogy, far from ruling out the saving acts of God, makes them intelligible and guarantees that they are relevant to the believer in the present. Correlation, rather than ruling out acts of God in yet a different way, protects the transcendence of God, and prevents God from being sucked into the world

on the world's terms as yet another intramundane efficient cause.¹ Criticism, while appearing to rule out sufficient knowledge for faith, leaves quite enough room for historical beings to function faithfully in history, *if* they are willing to be corrected and to own their own confessional commitments candidly.

Beyond critical history as exposure, we shall come in turn to historical relativity and then to cultural pluralism. Popular audiences, unfamiliar with philosophy of history, would never notice criticism, analogy, and correlation as the anatomy of historical method. For them, it is just history itself that is the threat: history brings uncertainty about the past, history brings trouble in the present, history brings nothing that one could stake one's life on in the future. Or at an even simpler level, it is the fear that the study of history will just prove that religion is wrong, its claimed origins are false. Yet Niebuhr in *The Meaning of Revelation* takes historical exposure as gracious with a winsome ease and fervor. The forgotten and buried and embarrassing past, in its sins, betrayals, denials, follies, what was denied and suppressed, gives way, in the conversion of memory, to the opportunity for effective action where there was frustration, for reconciliation where the past was denied, and for community where there was estrangement.² Niebuhr trusts that the pains of opportunity, reconciliation, and community will pale beside their blessings. He assumes that exposure in history is to be welcomed in any case, because it brings truth. Perhaps the pains can overshadow the blessings on first appearance. Niebuhr's outline of grace in history comes twenty years after Troeltsch's *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (1922), and forty after his programmatic essay (1898) in defense of criticism, analogy, and correlation as the responsible method in history.³ The attitude that Troeltsch argued against, claims of "absoluteness" for Christianity that are immune to all historical criticism, lives on in the present as I expect it will far into the future. It should go without saying that unburying the past is confession of sin, and confession and reconciliation and amendment of life are a duty for the covenantal believer. This duty is joyful in the end, even if painful in the beginning. There will always be an instinct that seeks to protect some core of the Church's life immune from criticism, not recognizing that to do so is to insulate it from correction by God.

¹Thus ultimate reality transcends both nature and history, yet appears immanently in both without being an actor of the kind one finds in either. We shall return to this again in ALHR, chapter 15.

²Cf. MR, hardback, pp. 113–117; paperback, pp. 83–86.

³The 1898 essay is translated as "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology," in *Religion in History*, ed. James Luther Adams and Walter Bense, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). We shall come to *Der Historismus* below.

Critical history works as exposure in the present age, and it is particularly corrosive to the metaphysics, hermeneutics, and philosophy of history that arose in the Baroque period. Built into that baroque mindset is an anti-historical conception of religious truth, highly ironic in a historical religion. It conceives religious truth with an absoluteness whose principal feature is that it is immune to criticism, and in particular then, that it can be known without reference to history. Here revelation is a deposit of information, and its historical origins are incidental. This is surprising in a supposedly historical religion. In an age with anti-historical assumptions like this one, it is easy to see how historical criticism would be a threat, destructive exposure.

Critical history might not be painful exposure in every age, but it will always bear grace. I would like to expand some on the remarks in section 5.5 about how criticism, analogy, and correlation bring good for the believer. There is more here than Troeltsch himself realized or advertised. To begin with criticism, the 1898 article on historical method in theology focuses on the uncertainty about the past that is implicated in a critical method in present historiography. In a context where historical knowledge is of interest as it bears on religion, Troeltsch claimed that “in the realm of history, there are only judgements of probability.”⁴ This is true, in a sense, but the implications are easily distorted, and more importantly, I think the real challenge of a critical method is more radical than simply the necessity of adjusting to revisions in history. Sometimes people try to evade the challenge of history, especially as Troeltsch formulated it, in arguments about the nature of probability, certainty, and necessity.⁵ But this is to ignore the history of New Testament criticism and life of Jesus research. Not only does this history of revisions show no promise of ending soon, it would appear to testify to an inherent limitation of life in history. It is true both that history does not admit of an extra-historical certainty, and also that some facts of history are not open to reasonable doubt. This in no way contradicts an expectation that the past will appear differently in every successive age in the future.

People tend to think that Troeltsch’s principle of criticism undermines a kind of certainty that is necessary to faith. But why should I use a historical method that is shoddy or corrupt on the history that I really care about, when I routinely expect rigorous and impartial historical method for less important history? There is a certainty—but it is vested in the methodological commitments of openness to exposure. And as Alastair

⁴Cf. *Religion in History*, p. 13.

⁵For example, Peter Carnley, “The Poverty of Historical Skepticism,” in *Christ, Faith, and History*, ed. S. W. Sykes and J. P. Clayton (Cambridge University Press, 1972).

MacIntyre has amply explained, that method is itself something that lives only in a tradition-bound and tradition-constituted rational inquiry. Explanations of it are all relative to their own time, though what they explain transcends that time-boundedness.

This is to notice the second feature of Troeltsch's definition. All the attention has been on the "probability," and little or none on the implications of "judgements." More unsettling even than the uncertainties of history is to be exposed as beings who are responsible, who must judge. The uncertainties are bearable. The situation of a being who has to judge with respect to its own history and its own self is inherently precarious, for in the end, such a being is judged as much as judging.

Man as a historical being and as a historian is engaged in the process of knowing history as it works in the present. Knowledge of history is not just knowledge of the past, the past is always itself known relative to its applications in the present. It is then no wonder that knowledge of history, accounts of the past, will change in different centuries, just because of changing applications in the lives of successive generations. To know history is to know how it lights the present. The critic and his own times are illuminated by that light. The act of judging is in part an act of *ac*-knowledgment: what evidence does the historian acknowledge as reliable, how does he interpret it, and what does he acknowledge it as bearing witness to? When its witness illuminates the present, the critic is engaged not only in judgement, he is being judged. He has some measure of control, even if the evidence remains despite him. This is somewhat like an examination of conscience, and the penitent is given too much latitude and too much liberty of interpretation. Mercy and patience of this kind can be more than some people really want. Such mercy can be frightening.

The resistance to critical history comes from a desire to escape from history, or if that is impossible, to use the central events of history in such a way that they dispense one from the anxieties of history. The focus of resistance to critical history is usually on the New Testament "miracles," here taken in the baroque mind as exceptions to laws of nature, or something more or less like that. A more candid definition of exemption from limitation would be hard to find. "Faith" has here covertly attempted to control the encounter with God in the second function. But it is also a desire to use the "miracles" as *proofs*, thus exempting the believer from responsibility for his faith, and this is a first-function issue. If the miracle texts were taken as special effects, the way we understand special effects in movies and television, especially in advertisements, rather than as factual reports of events, then it might be possible to hear them in their real truth, that is, in disclosure of human existence in its precariousness,

and of monotheistic covenantal faith in its ironies and joys.⁶ Special effects are used to make the invisible (the existentially human) visible, and they can be used for quite various purposes, by covenanters and anti-covenanters alike. The real question is not whether they are “literally” true, although that question has to be faced honestly: if one’s culture gives one no alternative to literal belief, I suppose such belief is innocent (though some New Testament writers candidly disapprove of it in the form of “signs and wonders”). But if one’s culture imposes an obligation of skepticism toward such stories, then those who would make exception to the generally accepted canons of historical reason (and do so for their own interests), are inevitably going to appear corrupt in their reasoning. The real question is not “Are miracles ‘literally’ true,” but “What do these texts say about human existence, and is that claimed disclosure true?” Such a question has to be answered confessionally. Reliance on “miracles,” by contrast, is a way of evading confessional responsibility.

Turn now from critical history to historical relativity. It appears most prominently as *cognitive* relativity, limits on absolute claims for human knowledge. It is that, and it is more than that. Critical history shows us first the relativity of human knowledge in history, but that is merely knowledge of history. Historical relativity is more than just limits to our knowledge of the past. For a start, it is an intrinsic limitation to *all* knowledge. But it is equally a quality of limitation to human action and indeed to every possibility for being human. This is what I want to focus on, the historical relativity of the possibilities for being human. It is a commonplace to observe that the possibilities for being human, the possibilities for how we live our lives, are given to us in the circumstances into which we are born. They both limit what we can do and be, and also enable us. As limitation, they are of course potentially disappointing, but as limitation that is also enabling, they open the way to creativity and gratitude.

The principle of correlation in historical method is more than a method for getting to reliable knowledge in history, for it is based on a relationship of events to each other within history. This principle claims that events and individuals in history grow and develop and have their being always in relationship or correlation to other, neighboring, events and actors. As such, it is a condition of limitation. As a principle of historical knowledge, correlation ruled out the sort of divine “interventions” that the Baroque mind imagined, interventions that incidentally would draw God into the

⁶Cf. Edward C. Hobbs, “Gospel Miracle Story and Modern Miracle Stories,” in *Gospel Studies in Honor of Sherman Elbridge Johnson*, ed. Massey H. Shepherd Jr. and Edward C. Hobbs, *Anglican Theological Review*, Supplemental Series, Number Three, March 1974.

world on the world's own terms and so compromise the transcendence of God. Or better, "interventions" convert the immanent presence of transcendence into what is merely another intramundane phenomenon, not transcendent at all. As a principle of historical relativity, correlation tells us something about the limitations of living in history.

There can be no change at one point without some preceding and consequent change elsewhere, so that all historical happening is knit together in a permanent relationship of correlation, inevitably forming a current in which everything is interconnected and each single event is related to all others.⁷

How did we come to suspect those limitations, that historical relativity? A little knowledge of other times and other cultures is all it takes. How did we come to suspect the depth of relativity? With Kant, the relativity of knowledge to categories in the knower became apparent. This insight was radicalized in the century following. Karl Marx and the sociology that followed after him have exhibited that relativity in considerable detail. When the modern world has come to resemble the Hellenistic world, one in which cognitive and moral pluralism run riot, sociology becomes very believable. The relativity that sociology uncovers is visible in an everyday way in cultural pluralism in the West.

In effect, reality as it is experienced is in crucial ways a human construction. Not an arbitrary one, nor figmentary, not one that could be changed without restriction. Reality remains objective in the colloquial sense that it will object to the arbitrary and figmentary. Yet we never know it as it is *in itself*, but only as it is *for us*. But that distinction, so phrased, raises real problems, for it apparently presupposes that it would make sense to know the world as it really is, unmediated by our own cognitive faculties.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann could five decades after Troeltsch entitle a book *The Social Construction of Reality*, intending all the irony contained in such a phrase. They lay out the mechanisms by which a culture constructs the world it lives in. We need not go over those mechanisms in detail, but it is sufficient to notice that world-construction happens in a three-fold process of externalization, objectivation, and then internalization of reality. Surprisingly, it begins not with what's-so knowledge but with how-to knowledge. That is, what reality is perceived to be is actually grounded in the human practices that that reality was supposed to justify. Those practices in turn first appear (are externalized) in acts that are clearly free for their actors, and only over time take on an

⁷Troeltsch, *Religion in History*, p. 14.

objective character that can then be internalized by subsequent generations. In any particular time and place, newcomers inherit the fruit of past generations' labor as an objective culture. They can modify it slightly, but it is always the starting point for further action.

At this stage, historical and cultural relativity are not just a phenomenon of limitation, as in a limitation that is imposed strictly from outside. They are a limitation, but one that human beings are both responsible for and incompletely conscious of, because they are products of human actions but not of deliberation or recognition or planning. In effect, a corporate body becomes responsible for institutions that it did not consciously or deliberately make—though it clearly did make them, if unconsciously. This kind of responsibility cannot be entirely comfortable.

There is an understandable desire to evade the disclosures of history and sociology, because they force people to confront both their responsibility and the risks of their social construction of reality. The discovery of social and historical relativity works to disappoint the yearning for absolutes and the desire to escape from the anxieties of history. Exposure and limitation are here intimately connected. Where there is some intuition of relativity and the uncertainties that inevitably come with it, one must feel a profound sense of risk. Only when the opportunities in a time of change are particularly clear can that risk seem safe. Benjamin Reist noted that the word "compromise," usually with negative connotations, has a very positive sense in Troeltsch's thought.

Compromise is the phenomenology of involvement. It is the necessary risk that must be taken if the gospel is to have concrete, historic effect. When the church has regarded the world positively enough to take the world's problems seriously and attempt to solve them, there it has become involved—there it has compromised—and there it has been extended by new insights and new relevance. Conversely, where compromise is either absent or rejected, there withdrawal and the lack of involvement are inevitable, and so, accordingly, is the lack of new insight and new relevance. Far from being the mark of deterioration, then, compromise in Troeltsch's sense of the term is the characteristic of authentic involvement in the world.⁸

In other words, and for the specific formulations of radical monotheism proposed here, it is all very fine to say that all of life is good, pains

⁸Benjamin A. Reist, *Toward a Theology of Involvement; The Thought of Ernst Troeltsch* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), p. 161 (Reist's emphasis).

included, but that way of living only achieves some concrete definition when it takes form in particular cultural and historical incarnations.

Reist continues, with a focus that turns to relativity when it becomes both visible and problematic:

The compromises of the past have been shattered by the arrival of a new context within which the achievements of yesterday's involvements in yesterday's world are no longer cogent or productive.

When the historical incarnation of radical monotheism from one age doesn't work in a later age, that monotheism loses some degree of plausibility. In such a situation, intense pressure is placed on the tradition to discern the new limitations and opportunities it has to live with. They can be exceedingly difficult to discern. And there will be no shortage of voices both for radical abandonment of a tradition and alternatively for simply stonewalling the new challenges rather than for a creative adaptation of tradition.

One asks next how need appears in the experience of history. We have seen how critical history works as exposure. That exposure uncovers historical and cultural relativity, a kind of limitation. Historical relativity is disclosed as much also by cultural and religious pluralism. Pluralism is the face of need. For in the relativity that it exhibits for all to see, it also discloses human vulnerability before a cosmos that doesn't care about us, and so also discloses human need of each other. Chaos is met in solidarity if it is to be met at all.

Ernst Troeltsch was quite perturbed by pluralism on one level, and quite open to it on another. It disturbed the necessity for absolute claims of the Christianity that the Enlightenment bequeathed to the modern world. Pluralism implicitly confronted theologians heir to the Enlightenment with a "show cause" order, one they could not satisfy. And yet, for one at home in modern culture, pluralism is the source of much of its richness.

We saw in chapter 3 that when need is embraced, it offers fellowship. And in chapter 5, in the initial encounter with H. Richard Niebuhr's account of the meaning of revelation, that history opens a community to new members. Clearly, just as need in an individual encounter can be less than welcome, need in the encounter of different religious groups can be profoundly unsettling. But the resources for meeting it are present in Troeltsch as much as in Niebuhr. In Troeltsch's canons of historical thinking, analogy plays this role. It would appear to manifest need only indirectly. But look at what analogy *does* for the historically conscious mind: it "makes differences comprehensible and empathy possible."⁹

⁹*Religion in History*, p. 14.

Troeltsch continues a few sentences later, “We have already seen that the importance of analogy as a method leveling all historical phenomena rests on the assumption of a basic consistency of the human spirit and of its historical manifestations.” Analogy makes it possible to understand across differences of culture, and closer to home, across differences between sub-cultures.¹⁰ We see this in pluralism. Where acknowledgment of relativity implies recognition of a responsible liberty of interpretation, the exercise of that liberty will result in plurality, and responsible exercise entails a pluralism in which the various parties accredit each other’s common participation in a covenantal outlook on life. Participation in a common project manifest in different ways can only be recognized on a basis of analogy. The history in the Common Documents shows different peoples with originally different religions coming together, and biblical monotheism emerging out of the synthesis.¹¹ Covenantal religion will always be transformed when a new group enters it, with new needs and new cultural assumptions.¹² Culture and religion are tied intimately together, and a new culture entering the house of covenantal religion will demand religious as well as cultural accommodations. What is appropriate can become a matter of some legitimate dispute. That there will be accommodations (if the assimilation is successful) seems inevitable. Those who would rather not make accommodations will of course want to reject the religious needs of the newcomers.

Benjamin Reist realized what Troeltsch apparently did not, that historical relativity points to pluralism as its inevitable companion.¹³ Certainly pluralism was a problem for Troeltsch, for he long sought to legitimate European Christianity against other cultures and their religions. I think pluralism was a problem for him because he could not give up the quest for absoluteness, a quest that would have been unnecessary if he had been comfortable with a confessional stance. Pluralism witnesses against absoluteness and discloses one’s confessional position, whether it is avowed or not. Only at the end, in 1923, did Troeltsch evince any willingness to embrace a confessional position, and for him, this was a reluctant retreat, not an advance. Real pluralism eluded him, in spite of a spirit that was at

¹⁰I don’t know whether Troeltsch thought that analogy means that all ages are alike and none historically more interesting than any other (a position sometimes attributed to Liberal Theology), or whether merely that it is always possible to construct a chain of analogies across differences from one age to another. The latter, weaker, version is sufficient for our purposes.

¹¹Cf. Edward Hobbs’ exposition of biblical pluralism, noted above in section 7.4.

¹²We shall come to this again, in the second half of ALHR, chapter 14, when we come to historical narrative, religious need, and particular other religions.

¹³Cf. *Toward a Theology of Involvement*, pp. 71, 84.

bottom open and generous.

His perplexity, and one bequeathed to us, arises from the tension between his uncompromising honesty and the assumptions about religion which he inherited from a past which commanded with all the authority carried in the word “orthodoxy.” It was only a Baroque orthodoxy, and it is the source of the quest for “absoluteness.” I shall contend in the next section that such a quest is deeply pathological; it represents a desire to escape from essential features of human life. Troeltsch, to his credit, saw that such an escape was impossible. He did not see how unnecessary it is.

9.2 The Neuralgia of Absoluteness

Troeltsch’s problems are nearly as real today as they were a hundred years ago. He inherited a belief that Christianity should be able to prove its validity “absolutely.” He sought an absoluteness that was taken for granted then, both in what it is and in its desirability. For the most part, we live without any absoluteness today, not because we know how to live without it, but just because pluralism is a fact of life. His perplexity arose from seeing clearly the implications of critical history: it leads to historical relativity, something quite incompatible with absoluteness. The experience of religious pluralism compounds the effect of historical relativity, further undermining any plausibility of absoluteness.

Troeltsch’s visible assumption that one must be able to show an “absoluteness” in order to participate in Christianity responsibly is accompanied by a tacit assumption that confessional approaches are somehow illicit. The radically confessional character of all basic life orientations is not seen, hidden by an assumption that religious dogma should be like physical theory—verifiable even by hostile investigators.

Absoluteness is more or less equivalent to certainty. For absoluteness gets one out of historical relativity, and historical relativity brings uncertainty. To get out of historical relativity is to achieve certainty. The problem arose in Germany also for Judaism, as the thought of Hermann Cohen attests. Troeltsch being the theorist of historical relativity, and also interested chiefly in Christianity, I shall focus, hopefully without loss of generality, on the Christian formulation of the problem. (We do not *always* focus on the Christian side; Joseph Soloveitchik, an Orthodox rabbi, will provide the essential insights in the pivotal logic of ALHR, Part III.)

The problems can be sorted out. Then Troeltsch’s legacy will take on a very different appearance, and one much more encouraging, if the

quest for absoluteness is simply abandoned. The result is not in the least a nihilistic or despairing relativism. In the last section of this chapter, Troeltsch's turn to historical individuality will become an opening and not an impasse for theology. If it is connected with his initial insights about analogy in history, there is real (and unexplored) potential for clarifying relations between religion and history.

The confessionality of human life-orientation is distinguishable from historical relativity, and when they are distinguished, they no longer combine to produce a vicious relativism. Then the quest for "absoluteness" will be seen to be deeply pathological.

Historical relativity is a fact of life, and this should be understood without longing for absoluteness. Contrary to the naive instinct that still pervades this culture, historical relativity is primordial. The quest for absoluteness is the attempt to abstract from *all* historically relative starting points. But people start by knowing something from where they are, not from any absolute reference frame (if such could exist). The relative is primordial, and absolutes are derived from the relative by suppressing or hiding the relativity of human knowledge. In a sense, for many purposes, this is both good pedagogy and a good strategy for clarity of thought. People learn about the world relative to their own culture and circumstances, and in these history will be active and at work whether it is recognized or not.

One expects almost inevitably to have mathematics cited as a counter-example. Yet even in mathematics historical relativity shows itself, if one has the wit and the will to see it. For example, the square root of two has been known to be irrational since the fifth century BCE, and there is no responsible prospect that I am aware of that it will ever turn out differently.¹⁴ For the Greeks, this is a property of geometry. In later ages, it is a property of the number system, but what constitutes a number itself changes for different ages and even for different subfields of mathematics. A number in naive experience can appear very differently in algebra, set theory, real and complex analysis. I remember when I first saw the construction of the numbers from set theory; marvelous as such a construction was, they did not at all appear to be the same numbers I knew from naive arithmetic, even though they functioned in the "same" way.

An absolute—were there such a thing—that is not known relative to history would be useless; unable to relate it to the circumstances of human life, there would be no way to tell what it meant in any particular

¹⁴It is remotely possible that experience with the finite-precision arithmetics of computers could put the real number system in a different light, but unlikely that such experience could really overturn it.

setting. For historical beings, all knowledge and action are necessarily relative to their own world. To ask for knowledge of a truth that is known simultaneously in every possible historical locale is to ask for more than what is necessary, more than mortals are given, and to ask out of history. Relativity is the condition of human existence; the quest for absolutes is an attempt to escape from essential features of life. As such, this quest is functionally gnostic, even if it appears in an otherwise historical-covenantal life-orientation.

We have seen in the last section that the triad of critical history, historical relativity, and cultural pluralism are respectively instances of exposure, limitation, and need. As such, they ought to bear blessings of some sort, in the pattern that we have become familiar with. Why were they not recognized and welcomed as providential when they appeared, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? Why was absoluteness sought instead? I think the craving for absoluteness came from different parts of the faith of radical monotheism set at war with one another. There were both essential misunderstandings and also unseen compromises of that radical faith.

In contemporary language, one would say that historical relativity was thought to foreclose any possibility of responsibility in theology. That is, on assumptions inherited from the Enlightenment, historical relativity makes it impossible to discharge the theologian's obligation to justify his religious commitments. To be responsible, one must then base a life orientation on truths of reason that are absolute (i. e., not relative to history) and deductively certain. "Responsibility" was not a term used much in the debates at the end of the nineteenth century; it is my term, taken from H. Richard Niebuhr. Now as I understand it, the concept of responsibility has a large measure of historical relativity built into it. For one becomes responsible by discharging the obligations and answering the questions incumbent on a reasonable member of the community. Those obligations and questions are, of course, a product of history and culture. Inasmuch as the obligations of a responsible interpreter change in history, the standard of responsibility of past ages, even of recent times can seem hopelessly naive and mistaken. It is not surprising then that the Enlightenment did not see a historically relative concept of responsibility as very attractive. It sought escape from these features of history, on the theory that they were not features at all, but bugs. Here, limitation was rejected in its manifestation as the limitations of historical relativity that shape and condition all human knowledge.

But if limitation was rejected, exposure was embraced, at least in principle. For the Enlightenment sought and honored nothing so much as getting the truth out. Its idea of the truth was often highly questionable,

but its zeal for truthfulness really did have roots in radical monotheism, whether those roots were recognized or not. It is the obligation to come clean before exposure that is at the core of responsibility. It was the obligation to come clean before exposure, a love of truth regardless of the cost to received truths, that animated research in science and history alike in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and continues to do so today. Not that such a motive was new in the Enlightenment, though Enlightenment figures often thought themselves the authors of it. Zeal for truth is all too easily subverted by the illusion (or delusion) that one has a monopoly on it.

It was this same loyalty to truth that animated Troeltsch's defense of the historical method of criticism, analogy, and correlation. He saw, correctly, that such a method was inimical to the received "orthodoxy." His objections to orthodoxy were in fact loyal to radical monotheism as I understand it here, and the apparent orthodoxy was not. Troeltsch did not see this. The apparent orthodoxy sought to evade the challenges of history, in ways that we have seen already in section 7.3. It was a combination of literalism, messianism, and eschatology that neatly excused the believer from the challenges and anxieties of living in history in the present. If the classical apologetic was not defensible, some sought to craft an apologetic on other grounds. Troeltsch was quite aware of an evolutionary apologetic for Christianity, one crafted in the nineteenth century out of materials taken from Hegel. Its prospects were not really credible, and he dismissed it along with the older apologetics.

In these circumstances, openness to exposure would indeed seem inimical to the received monotheism. It is not hard to understand why critical history has received such a chilly reception in the twentieth century. The notorious denial and hostility to critical history of some has eclipsed the much more widespread lack of enthusiasm for it in other places where one would expect it to be taken to heart. Critical history has been tolerated in Liberal Theology, where history is thought not to matter enough to threaten Christianity. Those who took critical history seriously have subsisted on the margins of Liberal communities, but their work has not been embraced by the general community of believers. It has not extended much beyond the history itself, leaving the philosophical implications of critical history poorly explored.

One may well ask why and how this pattern has unfolded. To be sure, there are regrettably many ways to evade history, as we have seen in section 7.3. Motives have not been lacking. But it usually takes more than just a desire to turn on covenant on such a widespread scale; some real misconception is necessary. That took the form of a misunderstanding of the believer's responsibilities. The Enlightenment thought the believer

obliged to *prove* rather than just confess the faith. What could not be proven could not responsibly be believed. The roots of responsibility in a community of judgement rather than in absolute standards were not seen. Absolute standards of truth were presupposed, standards open and accessible to all, and that presupposition implied that proof was possible in matters of religion.

Never mind the fact that Thomas Aquinas, centuries before, had enjoined against trying to prove what cannot be proven. That only brings the faith into ridicule, and then, when its unstated presupposition of provability goes unquestioned, undermines the faith of the faithful. This is exactly what has happened since the eighteenth century. There were numerous attempts to prove the truth, or even merely the reasonableness, of Christianity. Robert Boyle's endowment for lectures to prove the truth of Christianity began an entire genre of apologetic literature.

It is now possible to see that the quest for absoluteness is deeply pathological. Since the seventeenth century, people over-awed by the appearance of certainty in the sciences have sought in absoluteness a corresponding certainty in theology. Troeltsch inherited this assumed need for an absolute character of Christianity, and his career was shaped by a struggle with it. The quest for absoluteness to me seems highly ironic. It sought a starting point that could be taken for granted as beyond question, in analogy with the apparent research methods of the natural sciences. In its attempt to abstract from human interests, it was a quest for escape from historical relativity. It thus completely obscured the possibility of a confessional starting point. But confessionalism in historical religion does not reject historical relativity, it embraces historical relativity, because historical relativity is not an evil to be avoided, but rather the essential condition for a solution to the problem. A confessional stance in historical religion affirms life in history, with all its relativity. The quest for absoluteness was a search for a responsible method of living in history, and it ruled out at the start the one approach that could enable such responsible living.

It is as if one sought an understanding of human life in the universe that would also be valid for the plasma-wraiths of Deneb and Rigel. It is a little known fact of astrophysics¹⁵ that intelligent life subsists as an epiphenomenon on plasma instabilities in the upper atmospheres of certain supergiant stars. Such beings do qualify as life in a Heideggerian sense—beings whose being is an issue for themselves—and they do understand the world around them. But their understanding of the world is quite different from ours. Un-ionized gas is just a theoretical possibility for them, a region of the universe that is barred to them. The liquid state is

¹⁵And one yet to be discovered.

so extremely difficult to conceive that it will be some time before they discover it, and the solid state and all the phenomena that come with it are quite literally unthinkable. Yet the Enlightenment and its heirs sought some a-historical un-relative truth that would be valid for everyone, at all times, and everywhere. This is preposterous. It is not necessary to do theology for the ionized gas wraiths of Deneb and Rigel; it is merely necessary to do a responsible job in theology for one's own time and place, giving responsible answers to the questions posed by one's neighbors and one's tradition.

In the last stages of his work, Troeltsch moved toward recognition of confessionality as a feature of human religious orientation, but it was never a happy recognition, always wistful, even reluctant. Troeltsch ruled out a confessional starting point on grounds that are essential to radical monotheism:

All limitation to a particular race or nation is excluded on principle, and this exclusion illustrates the purely human character of its religious ideal, which appeals only to the simplest, the most general, the most personal and spiritual needs of mankind.

A little later,

It [i. e., Christianity] owes its claim to universal validity not to the correctness of its reasoning nor to the conclusiveness of its proofs but to God's revelation of Himself in human hearts and lives.¹⁶

This was the first of the lectures prepared for a trip to England in 1923, lectures that he did not live to deliver. In the end, he accepts a confessional starting point. "Thus the naive claim to absolute validity of Christianity is as unique as its conception of God. It is indeed a corollary of its belief in a revelation within the depths of the soul It is from this point of view that its claim to absolute validity, following as it does from the content of its religious ideal, appears to be vindicated."¹⁷

Yet the doubts return:

My scruples arise from the fact that, whilst the significance for history of the concept of Individuality impresses me more

¹⁶*Christian Thought; Its History and Application* (University of London Press, 1923), pp. 19–20. A reprint edition is available from Hyperion Press.

¹⁷*Christian Thought*, p. 20. Troeltsch's location of certainty within the soul rather than in the orientation of a life lived out is an index of my further differences with him at a peripheral point in the account.

forcibly every day, I no longer believe this to be so easily reconcilable with that of supreme validity. The further investigations, especially into the history of Christianity, of which I have given the results [in my *Social Teachings*, 1912] have shown me how thoroughly individual is historical Christianity after all, and how invariably its various phases and denominations have been due to varying circumstances and conditions of life.¹⁸

It is here that Troeltsch appears to reject the idea of truth claims that transcend time. One and the same idea can show itself in different ages only if it is granted that one occurrence of it is the same as another by analogy, i. e., that the analogies are real. It is analogies of this sort that constitute the identity of historical individuals across time, whether individual persons, ideas, or institutions. Such analogies are basic to historical religion, as Part II of this work has remarked often. In the end of the last section, it became apparent that Troeltsch applies the concept of analogy selectively, that is, invoking it chiefly when it was destructive to the traditions as taken conventionally in his time, but less eagerly when it could work for the recovery of tradition on a basis other than the then received conventions. And he frames the concept of analogy in terms that tend to give it a univocal core; such a position inevitably unravels when the particulars of history show no such core, but only more analogy across history in the structure of historical individuals.

Troeltsch's insufficiently developed concept of analogy manifests itself both in the understanding of historical individuals and in the problem of absoluteness, hiding the opening offered in a confessional stance. A confessional stance leaves one vulnerable and exposed, and analogy in the same way leaves one with no coercive power over one's debating partners, but only the appeal that confessional analogies make by themselves. Such a stance can appear to leave one in a position of irresponsibility, and it was on this ground that I think Troeltsch tried to reject confessional methods as a valid way of proceeding in theology. Others, notably in the development of the distinctions between *Historie* and *Geschichte* that came into widespread discussion around 1900, reveled in confessionality, and for some of them, it excused the believer from the obligations of responsibility, rather than providing a way of being responsible. The distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* was for them a way of avoiding or evading exposure and risk, rather than of expressing and embodying it. For fear of such irresponsibility, that is, for fear of evading exposure, I think the logic of Troeltsch's position moves toward construing expo-

¹⁸*Christian Thought*, p. 22.

sure and responsibility as they are in the sciences—there, every claim is open to inspection by hostile critics. It is not seen that the only hostile voices admitted to the bar of criticism in the sciences are themselves competent scientists, and so are partisans of the common underlying confessional commitment to the intelligibility of the natural world.¹⁹ In the natural sciences, the confessional commitments necessary to do science were not well spelled out, or were obscured by being taken for granted. (This was sixty years before Thomas Kuhn.) One could then think that openness to criticism was “absolute,” i. e., not relative to any confessional commitments. It was this sense of security that theology in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has sought, a security apparently not liable to the obligations of analogy, nor vulnerable to the depredations and taunts of cynics, skeptics, and other confessional outsiders. The very quest for a responsible starting point was framed in terms—as a quest for “absoluteness”—that made its achievement impossible.

We take up confessionality in the next section, with the work of Alasdair MacIntyre as our guide, and analogy in the last section of this chapter, returning to Troeltsch himself as guide.

9.3 A Confessional Stance

At this point, one may well ask, what would it mean to embrace limitation as it comes in the form of historical relativity? And with it, to embrace the exposures of critical history and the need carried in religious pluralism? To embrace these features of modern life would be to undertake a kind of responsibility, a commitment, and one that is open-ended. Such a commitment presupposes that exposure, limitation, and need, disappointing though they sometimes are, nevertheless bring the means of grace within themselves. They bring their blessings internally, one is redeemed in them, not from them. This is to say in more familiar language that a posture of trust in history, relativity, and pluralism is one of trust in grace and not in works. It will require one more thing, namely, some way of identifying what one trusts in in a way that is trans-historical. Analogy will play that role, and we come to it in the next section.

Why did Ernst Troeltsch not see these things himself? There are two answers that I can see. He did not have resources that we have today.

¹⁹The first two chapters of Pollard’s *Physicist and Christian* amply bear this out. Hostile critics from outside one’s own confessional commitments do have to be listened to, as H. Richard Niebuhr has noted in *The Meaning of Revelation*. When one is vulnerable before their criticisms, it is still necessary to be open and honest.

First, we know a lot more about biblical history, and for us it should be a lot easier to locate a confessional stance in Israelite religion as it emerged from the surrounding nature religions. Second, the anatomy of tradition-bound rationality is now sketched out in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre. We have a sense of how a confessional stance actually works that Troeltsch did not have.

All this became visible only slowly, and though much of it predates Troeltsch, it was only after him that one could see how it all fits together. It began in the nineteenth-century German universities, and it was made possible by the contrast with the eighteenth century's revolt against tradition. The Enlightenment defined responsibility as rationality, and defined rationality as independence from history in order to combat a particular disliked tradition. But one of the meanings of *ratio* is proportion or relationship, and both responsibility and rationality could better be defined as being in proper relationship to one's own history.

When only one tradition is known, history and tradition do not become visible in and of themselves. When several traditions are known to one another in the same culture, or one culture comes in contact with another, and there are live options for members of a culture, the natural question which arises next is, Which history? Which tradition should I be in proper relation to? And how? In the title of Alasdair MacIntyre's book, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*²⁰ I bring MacIntyre to Troeltsch, because they both face the same problem, and its treatment has advanced considerably in the interval between them. Troeltsch's dogmatic writings focus on miracles, revelation, the incarnation, christology, and theological cosmology. Troeltsch worked through the problem of historical relativity in the historical investigation of social ethics, a problem similar to MacIntyre's project, despite the considerable differences of temperament and approach. Troeltsch's interest in doctrine is refracted through the lens of his historical experience in writing the *Social Teachings*. In the eighty years between 1910 and 1990, a better sense of the dynamics of tradition-maintenance has been achieved. The problem of analogy in language and philosophy of history today gets some of the attention that it merits, but it has yet to see any comprehensive solution. Perhaps a solution is not possible, and one may hope only for advances in understanding of analogy, thus enabling progress in other areas.

MacIntyre's chosen task was to illustrate the processes by which traditions develop and maintain their integrity, not only in the dynamics of issues raised internally, but especially in the face of challenges raised by external and competing traditions. It is here, in such encounters, that

²⁰University of Notre Dame Press, 1988. We return to MacIntyre in section 15.2.

historical relativity becomes a problem for the members of a tradition. The liberal anti-historical tradition of the Enlightenment assumed that nothing reliable could be known from history. The consequence, if the only knowledge possible is from history, was that there is no reliable knowledge.

But historical relativity does not mean that nothing means anything; it is quite compatible with ample means of criticism and enforcement of responsibility. This enforcement of responsibility can happen only within the discourse of a particular tradition, according to its own tradition-defined canons of rationality. MacIntyre's solution is to demonstrate responsibility *within* historical relativity. Exposures will come from time to time, as he said, when one tradition encounters challenges from another that have to be responded to, even with acknowledgment that the other tradition has a better understanding of one or another area of life. Some cultures have acquired the ability both to see and be open to this sort of exposure, where others have not.²¹

It is possible, with some considerable effort, to understand another tradition. One must learn to speak the language of the other tradition as if it were a first language, that is, "from scratch," rather than by translation from one's own. That is, one must be able to *think* fluently in the other language, without the slightest reference to one's own mother tongue. One must at least imagine "acting" beliefs that one does not in fact hold, the beliefs of the alien tradition, in order to understand how they really work. This can be done. Conflicting traditions are not totally unintelligible to each other's members, and therein lies the possibility of conversation, even when translation is not entirely possible. It may be that partisans of one tradition can understand the failures and successes of another better than the members of the other tradition itself can. They will then be justified in concluding in favor of their own.²² Though the others are unlikely to be convinced in a methodical way, they may convert. More interesting is the case when partisans of one tradition, encountering another, come to criticize and amend their own in ways that would not have been possible without encountering the other tradition. MacIntyre's

²¹Alasdair C. MacIntyre, "Relativism, Power, and Philosophy," in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 59 no. 1 (1989 September) 5. The essay appears also in K. Baynes, J. Bohman and T. McCarthy, eds., *After Philosophy* (MIT Press, 1987).

²²This formulation was worked out in somewhat more detail in his later paper, "Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians about the virtues," in Eliot Deutsch, ed., *Culture and Modernity; East-West Philosophic Perspectives* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991). Even that paper did not work the position out thoroughly, but a nimble reader can fill in much of what is missing.

argument does not use the term “responsibility,” nor the term “openness to exposure,” but those terms nevertheless well describe the stance he advocates as a way to transcend historical relativity without denying it or attempting to step outside of it.

If one is to examine a tradition of rationality in its history, one must become able to look at the history of a tradition as one of development, and one of conversation (albeit often hostile) with alternative traditions. The meaning and content of a doctrine are always a matter of their history.²³ It does not follow, as MacIntyre continues, that no claims are being made for timeless truth. Instead, truth claims are advanced for doctrines whose formulation is time-bound. This is to invoke, without the name, a doctrine of analogy. Analogies are the essential ingredient that holds the ideas of a coherent tradition together across time. The Enlightenment, with its hostility to analogy, makes this impossible, and has to turn instead to “timeless truths of reason” that are univocal and independent of their historical origins.

Confessional choices can, however, be responsible, insofar as they can be made explicit and owned candidly. It is analytic that a starting point in logic has no prior justification in logic. But a starting point in logic assumes that the situation *in life* has been appraised and characterized adequately. For covenantal religion, at least, there is responsibility because there is exposure, and what exposure exposes, among other things, is the adequacy of the characterization of covenantal living that a covenantal tradition uses to articulate its life and faith. Exposure is itself a historical process, a process of getting the history out in the open. Exposure occurs both in the labor of the historian, to ascertain the best way to narrate what happened in the past, and also, more radically, in the events themselves, because those events cast a light that shows what has been happening into the present. Rational justification is a matter of narrating how the argument and the events have gone so far. The principles of rationality are the outcome of such a history, not something self-evident to all rational inquirers. Standards of rationality are part of a tradition, quite the opposite of the Enlightenment’s dogmatic definition, wherein the rational is such by virtue of being abstracted from the history of all traditions. Inquiry is rational when it can transcend and correct the errors and limitations of its predecessors within the same tradition.²⁴

It is no surprise that the confessionality of life-orientation can produce acute anxiety when it is seen, because acknowledging it entails an openness to exposure, and more poignantly, to unspecified future exposures that will come when the unseen assumptions of one’s own age are

²³*Whose Justice?*, p. 9.

²⁴*Cf. Whose Justice?*, p. 7-8.

seen and relativized in the hindsight of another. Openness to exposure is also an openness to responsibility, and with it a certain loneliness that always accompanies responsibility. It was the loneliness out of which the Israelites cried asking whether the God would be *with* them, in their midst, a question of pivotal importance, as John Courtney Murray instinctively understood. Openness to exposure and responsibility then entails a tremendous insecurity, an insecurity before God that theology has always known at some level, even as it sought to neutralize and contain it where possible. Some cultures in some ages are homogeneous in their life orientation, where others are polymorphous in the extreme. We live in one of the latter, and our murmuring and complaining in face of our own anxiety has become audible. It is not surprising that people have tended to assign to historical relativity all of the effects that distressed them. Relativity was visible; philosophy has been in denial about confessionality, preferring to retreat into positivism, and to deny cognitive status (the right to speak truth at all) to anything that does not fit the positivist canons of reason. The denial of confessional truth claims continues even as positivism has been abandoned, in some currently fashionable movements that have attracted the reputation for asserting variations on the idea that a text can mean anything at all, there is no such thing as responsibility in interpretation, and only power relations are left.

An example may help. Imagine someone who tries to *prove* that the natural world is intelligible to human reason in the scientific endeavor, or who thinks that one must prove this before one can do science. Such a person is seriously confused. Intelligibility of the natural world has to be assumed in order to do science; it is not proved at the outset, nor must one obtain permission from such a proof before embarking on scientific research.²⁵ Here, I think people understand a confessional commitment and would never fall for the category mistakes that are made all the time in philosophy of religion. This is because they are so solid in the confessional commitments required for science that they know without having to spell it out that to question an assumption that one has already made irrevocably is the doorway into a “reason” that is utterly unreasonable and hopelessly dysfunctional. If there were significant dissent from scientific confessional commitments in this culture (and there is not), then they would appear much more problematic, simply in the existential sense of the cognitive dissonance created by that dissent. Traditions in good working order have presuppositions that remain tacit, as is true of science today. When in trouble, or facing opposition from other traditions, their

²⁵William G. Pollard, in *Physicist and Christian* (Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1961), offers a compelling description of this feature of scientific life.

presuppositions come to light.²⁶ There has always been enough that is currently unexplained by science so that cynics and skeptics can find ample grab-handles to which to attach their disbelief in the entire scientific enterprise, but they have not constituted a serious alternative tradition, and failing that, they could not become a serious challenge to science in the modern world. There are both problems in the Christian traditions' sense of their own rationality and also serious challenges from alternative traditions. Christian presuppositions accordingly have attracted much attention, and, as remarked in chapter 8, they can appear very badly in a partial state of exposure.

9.4 Analogy and Historical Individuals

The concept of the historical individual is the thread that Troeltsch himself saw running through his research, in the end governing every other concept. His strengths and his weaknesses come together in this concept, and if the weaknesses were repaired, the resulting understanding of human life in history could be strengthened considerably. A historical individual is a phenomenon that stretches across some span of time, and accordingly manifests a course of development. Development raises questions about what holds an individual together in a coherent whole. The questions become most pressing when the individual is not a person, a human actor in history, or a formally constituted institution such as the British Empire, but ideas that animate a culture, such as the Roman Empire, or renaissance, capitalism, and feudalism; or trust and distrust of language, or changing moral anthropologies and constellations of virtues, to cite Troeltsch's examples and then some. These historical beings emerge and manifest themselves from the phenomena only by dint of the historian's ability to conceive and isolate and demarcate them. Their existence is problematical in ways that human actors are not, yet they are the crucial concepts by which people can live in history and history can be understood. One necessarily asks how such universal concepts work, and how they can be made to work responsibly. An adequate treatment of the argument in *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* is quite beyond my powers and would constitute a digression larger than this book. Fortunately, some of Troeltsch's problems have been solved in the interim, as may be seen from Alasdair MacIntyre's reflections on the history of traditions of moral reasoning.

What is under question is the logic of faith across history. As a starting definition of this logic, let us say that

²⁶Cf. *Whose Justice?*, p. 7-8.

partisans of covenantal religion believe in the embracing of all of life as good, including its disappointments, exposure, limitation and need, *in analogy with the events that they cite as historically constitutive and exemplary*, and they trust that the reality manifest in the blessings born in embracing exposure, limitation and need as it shows itself in history will continue to manifest itself at work in the future in ways analogous to what they have seen already.

Niebuhr, it will be recalled, produced an anatomy of faith in which its components are acknowledgment, loyalty, and confidence. I have crafted this definition of the logic of faith in history to display all three parts of Niebuhr's more general definition of faith. Loyalty appears in the embracing of all of life as good, and this is meant to be an active commitment. Confidence is present in the trust that the blessings will continue in the future as they have appeared in the past. Acknowledgment appears in the history that is confessed and in the analogies by which it is appraised and applied to the present. It is those analogies we are interested in, and Troeltsch is a most astute observer of their structure.

One should be able to see some continuity across history, both in events and in a religious community's teaching on faith and morals. Problems arise for Troeltsch when he attempts to follow this continuity. He complains that only historical individuality is left, and even it has barely the sort of continuity that could satisfy a hostile critic. In this section we look at Troeltsch's delineation of historical individuality, which really was a significant advance, and at his brief remarks on analogy, whose weaknesses explain the impasses his thought became mired in. The performative character of analogy appeared in section 7.2, in its ability to challenge and exact responsibility both of its speakers and its hearers.

Der Historismus moves quickly to the formal logic of history, a section that outlines the conceptual features of history and history-writing. Benjamin Reist has called this the nerve-center of the book, and it focuses the issues we are interested in.²⁷ Troeltsch is at pains both to lay out the character of historical existence and to distinguish his own position from two others. Though a neo-Kantian in at least some of his conceptual origins, he nevertheless held significant disagreements with other thinkers of that movement. And he was implacably opposed to any attempt to reduce history to nature, in particular, by explaining human historical acts solely on the basis of psychology. The disagreement with other neo-Kantians was more a question of how to construe the historian's

²⁷Benjamin Reist, *Toward A Theology of Involvement*, p. 50.

activity in forging the concepts of history than whether to do so. Some would deny that a good historian brings anything substantive or synthetic to history at all. Troeltsch on the contrary saw in the historian a mind quite active in the formation of concepts. The only question is how to do so in a way that is responsible. This was always the issue, but never named or recognized. "Responsibility" is Niebuhr's term, and I use it to understand the thought of the turn of the century, when the problem of responsibility had not been recognized as an interesting problem but was already manifesting itself dimly in the perplexities of that time.

Individuality is the pivot concept in the formal logic of history, and its dual concept is development; these two begin and end the list of categories in that section of *Der Historismus*. An individual totality in history both stands out from the welter and confusion of events, and is called out and isolated conceptually by the historian. Among Troeltsch's examples are family, race, class, conditions of time, spiritual situation, collective individualities, states, classes, castes, cultural epochs, cultural tendencies, religious associations, complex occurrences of all kinds, such as wars, revolutions, etc.²⁸ Concrete examples to make clear what sort of problems arise are easy to find. The doctrine of the Work of Christ manifests such varied forms through history that it can become quite a conceptual challenge to connect its successive stages together in one whole. Or the history of the constitutional law of the First Amendment religion clauses in American jurisprudence displays inversions of sense in the late twentieth century that all but defy any sense of continuity. In concrete examples such as these, one may appreciate Troeltsch's concerns that the particularity of the historical individual can overwhelm any continuity it may have. A concrete universal, another name for a historical individual, is one realized in various interrelated acts. The manifestations of an individual are in some way conceptually connected to one another. The historian's thinking both recognizes and participates in the conceptual connections, and their constitution includes both the phenomena themselves and the historian's work. How this may be can become problematic when one looks closely enough at the phenomena of history. It is as if one looks at the newsprint reproduction of a photograph too closely, and then sees only dots, and not the face visible from a distance.

As the formal logic of history unfolds, nine of the remaining categories follow almost as corollaries to individuality. The individual is always original and unique, and not an instance of laws at all like laws of nature. It is picked out by the historian in an act of narrow selection, keeping only its central marks without all its details. It is represented by

²⁸Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme, Gesammelte Schriften* (Aalen: Scientia, 1961), vol. 3, p. 33.

the historian in a way that awakens in the mind the complex of details that comprise the phenomenon. This representation is not remotely the same thing as the natural scientist's subsumption of phenomena under laws. The individual phenomenon has a unity of value and meaning, one that is not psychological but comes from the phenomena themselves in their own inner necessity. It carries within itself a tension between general and particular spirits. Historical individuals act without knowing all of their own assumptions, and without knowing the consequences and ramifications of their acts. This is not a psychological unconscious, but an inability to see all the connections of history when one is in the middle of them. The creative in history transforms its possibilities. It is the appearance of the new in history, inexplicable by any science; what is not contained in preceding elements of history, but appears as change from them. This does not mean a suspension of historical causality, but rather that historical causality is something different from causation in engineering or physics. Historical causality is quite compatible with human freedom. Lastly of the corollaries, chance and accident in history operate when something is "produced by the intersection of different heterogeneous systems of laws, which do not possess a common root."²⁹ Troeltsch would prefer that accident not be construed as providence, but cannot rule such out. The logic of speaking of providence is not explored. Troeltsch had no distinction such as that between internal and external history that could undergird a sense of responsibility in the language of providence.

The eleventh category, development, gets more space than all the others. It is more than just a corollary, it is the second of two poles holding together the formal logic of history, the first being the concept of historical individuality. Phenomena like Christianity, the Renaissance, capitalism, and feudalism require an understanding of development to make sense of their course through time. With development comes a historical concept of time that is different from that of the natural sciences. In nature, time is related to space and movement and corresponding causality; in history, time is related to inner sense and memory, with both spatial and non-spatial components, and it works to orient the present and future. In nature, temporal connections are local; in history, they are temporally global, intentionally spanning great stretches of time or even spanning universal history. The past and future are constituted within each other. The concept of historical development is equivalent neither to progress in history nor to evolution in nature. Progress in history is the secu-

²⁹Cf. *Der Historismus*, p. 51. The full text reads, "Der Zufall immer etwas ist, was aus der Kreuzung verschiedener, heterogener, keine gemeinsame Wurzel besitzender Gesetzssysteme hervorgeht."

larization of the Christian notion of eschatology, or more accurately, of providence. But providence is a concept accessible only to faith, and progress is only visible in rising periods. Historical development is just change in history, evidently without the evaluations implicit in a notion of providence. One can see the differences between Troeltsch's position and that of H. R. Niebuhr (also a Neo-Kantian). The distinctions between internal and external history in *The Meaning of Revelation*, missing in Troeltsch, give Niebuhr's position a reach far beyond Troeltsch's at this point. The typical individual in history has an organic unity, with continuity of meaning, a unity by which, in memory, past and present may be united. When the individual in question is not a human being, one turns almost instinctively to John Henry Newman's marks of genuine development of doctrine as a concrete test of the coherent growth of an individual in history: preservation of type, continuity of principle, power of assimilation, logical sequence, anticipation of future, conservation of past, and chronic vigor. The meaning of history is of course different for those who make it and those who write it; it is different even for the makers and their heirs. Troeltsch does not attend to these differences or indeed to the constitution of historical meaning as meaning *for* someone. The question of human involvement in the constitution of history appears less clearly in Troeltsch than in the hermeneutics of Heidegger, Gadamer, or Niebuhr. Still, one can see the beginnings of their thought in many places in Troeltsch's work. This is hardly a surprise, as they all stand in the same post-Kantian tradition.

The formal logic of history at the end of Troeltsch's career grows to fill a role far beyond that of the concept of analogy that appeared in the beginning, but I think it works as a functional expansion of the older notion of analogy. Needless to say, this is an analogy that cannot be confined within the narrow rubrics of a scheme of proportionality taken from mathematics. It is instead the idea of a family resemblance among related individuals, or continuity of character in one historical individual. This is as broad a definition as one can make short of (in my own definition) collecting under the phenomenon of analogy every act of seeing one part of life in the light of another. On that broader definition, all knowledge is at bottom analogical, though sometimes one can abstract from analogy or restrict its application in ways that render language univocal.

Look again at Troeltsch's earlier remarks about analogy. Analogous occurrences furnish the key to historical criticism. Illusions, distortions, deceptions, myths, partisanship in the present help us recognize the same things in the evidence and texts from past history. Agreement with the normal, the customary, the frequently attested is the criterion of prob-

ability for all events that historical criticism can recognize as actual or possible. Analogies between similar events in the past enable one to estimate their probability, and sometimes to infer what is unknown about one by reference to another. In its original context, analogy worked with a critical function. It appeared incognito twenty-four years later in *Der Historismus* with a constructive function, in the formal logic of history. One could exhibit the working of analogy in all the categories of the formal logic of history, but the fourth, representation, shows it in an exemplary way. Historical description represents numerous details by the characteristics contained in them, and these can be recognized only by analogy in its synthetic function. In the visual arts, this is familiar when an artist can show a quite recognizable face from only a few details; the viewer's synthetic imagination is quite capable of filling in the rest and of doing so in ways that are reliable and not capricious or fanciful. This depends on the ability to recognize a "family resemblance," in the phrase that Wittgenstein used to evoke the structure of analogical categories that have no common or univocal core. In Troeltsch's example, to explain Caesar's career as a military dictatorship founded on democracy that then becomes an oriental hereditary divine kingship, does not explain by subsumption under notions of species or of law but rather awakens in the mind of the reader of this history the complex of details in their interrelationship as a coherent whole, an individual that transcends laws. A few details presented in a representative way can do this, but they connect to the rest by an analogy that is well described as a family resemblance, and not as an instance of any sort of historical laws. The mind moves from representative details of history to the collective historical individuals because the mind can appreciate such individual totalities, and does so by a faculty that cannot be reduced to application of laws. If there were any doubt about the working of analogy here, Troeltsch continues:

The supplementing imagination of the reader is always assumed and cannot be limited on principle; therefore a certain measure of intuition and ability to form analogies is always assumed, but there reveals itself also an ineradicable source of errors and of faulty combinations.³⁰

The power and risks and responsibilities of analogy are here named explicitly. The virtues of the historical mind that appear next (tact, a

³⁰“Die ergänzende Phantasie des Lesers ist immer mit vorausgesetzt und läßt sich grundsätzlich überhaupt nicht begrenzen, wodurch stets ein gewisses Maß von Anschauungen und Fähigkeit der Analogiebildung vorausgesetzt, aber auch eine nie zu beseitigende Quelle von Irrtümern und Fehlkombinationen eröffnet ist.” *Der Historismus*, GS III, p. 41.

certain educated experience, guessing, and intuition) show how little is law involved in history, and how active is the historian's intellect in the knowing of history.

Troeltsch never relents in his polemic against the insidious tendency to assimilate historical reasoning to the logic of the natural sciences. But even he himself fell victim to it in places, for his definition of analogy is susceptible to a reading on which it has a univocal core: "[T]he analogical method always presupposes a common core of similarity that makes differences comprehensible and empathy possible."³¹ If this core of similarity is not itself analogous but univocal, then, while a so-called analogy could still function in a critical way, analogy could not really function in a synthetic or constructive way in the understanding of history, and the structure of the formal logic of history would be undermined. Failure to see this and to pursue it trapped him in the impasses in which he ended. If it were seen, it would raise further questioning especially into how analogies can be responsible and how they can exact responsibility. To posit a univocal core to analogies is a mark of a nominalist cast of mind.³² But Troeltsch is at most ambiguous, and the choice between limited or full development of analogy is never clarified, though his later research works to develop it in ways that go far beyond anything that could reduce it to something built on a univocal core. What I take to be a nominalist assumption of univocity in the beginning is at hidden war with the concept of the historical individual that comes out later, and which in the end prevails over all other considerations, as it should.

The question can be framed as one about the knowledge of the believer: What can he assert in regard to history, and how? Responsibly? When he speaks in analogies in order to articulate his basic life orientation in terms of history? I have no exhaustively complete explanation of how analogies work, how we see one part of life and history in the light of another. But some closing observations can be made about the character of responsibility in drawing analogies across history. Let me only say that *irresponsibility* in historical-covenantal religion often takes the form of trying to protect one's account of history from criticism, or of trying to protect one's account of covenant from acknowledgment of its risks.

³¹*Religion in History*, p. 14.

³²One picks this up in various places. I found it in Anthony Kenny, "Aquinas and Wittgenstein," *Downside Review* 77 (1959) 217, esp. pp. 220–226, but his treatment is specialized to a particular problem. It appears also in the disagreement between W. Norris Clarke and Kai Nielsen, in *The Thomist* 40 (1976) 32 f. and 61 f. It appears also in George Lakoff's and Mark Johnson's work on conceptual categories in natural language.

When analogies are drawn across history in regard to its meaning (a question of internal history, in Niebuhr's distinctions of historical understanding), it is not as if the believer can simply posit an analogical interpretation and then hold to it, ignoring facts or criticism. Several features of the believer's position should stand out. First, he has no power to coerce those who refuse his analogies. The analogies by which he orients his life may nevertheless challenge others, by their power to disclose (and expose) possibilities for living that the other would prefer not to see. Loss of the coercive power of logical proof in no way renders analogical and confessional discourse powerless. Secondly, insofar as his view of life is constituted in analogies, he really does have a life orientation that will carry across different cultures, different historical eras, different philosophical assumptions. One can say—in an analogous way—that a few features of human life in history appear the same across time and culture, because those features appear in analogous form in all cultures and all times. Analogy gives a life orientation a universal aspect and also undergirds its quite variable particular inculturations in different historical circumstances. Thus, he can say that human existence in tension with disappointment is universal, and that the disappointments take the form of exposure, limitation, and need, and he can further avow that they bring blessing. They will be seen in quite different aspects in different cultures, and indeed, not always organized in this tripartite system, though connections are recognizable even where some other conceptual system organizes the experience of life.

A confessional stance, one that embraces exposure, is implicitly willing to be shown wrong in the particulars of its life, and to change accordingly.³³ Some degree of openness is necessary for responsibility in any community of judgement, though the commitment is radical in a monotheistic one. Responsibility within a community of judgement takes a form different from its shape with respect to outsiders. Within a community that has standards of rationality, one can proceed more or less methodically, according to whatever constitutes method in that community. Between communities and traditions, openness to criticism takes a different form. One can only ask which community's conceptual apparatus discloses the real human situation more effectively. The answer is a confessional one, to be sure, made in opting for one or another community of faith. But a community in the covenantal tradition, one that

³³What it is *not* willing to be shown wrong in is its commitment to openness to exposure. It is not at all clear what it would mean to show that openness to exposure is "wrong." (The same goes for limitation and need.) The *formulation* and understanding of openness to exposure are themselves open to correction. They are history-bound.

professes to treat exposure as gracious, is bound by its own commitments to make those commitments open to exposure. MacIntyre's standard of rationality is itself grounded in tradition, but the tradition which grounds it is the broad confessional tradition of covenantal monotheism.

We are left with confidence that the analogies of history disclose the human situation. They do so in disclosing the careers of historical individuals—concrete universals, personal and otherwise. This takes us to the doorstep of the problem of *Action and Language in Historical Religion*: How does a historical individual hang together as a coherent whole? How would one know?

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