Christian Life and Thought 1789 – 1921

Week 1: The French Revolution and its impact on religious life in Europe

Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe* 1789 – 1970 (1981)
Alec R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution 1789 to the present day* (1961; reprinted many times since)
Michael Burleigh, *Earthly Powers. Religion and Politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the Great War* (2005)
John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (1982)
Charles Tilly, *The Vendee* (2nd edition 1976)
Geoffrey Ellis, 'Religion according to Napoleon: the Limitations of Pragmatism' in *Religious Change in Europe 1650 – 1914. Essays for John McManners* ed. Nigel Aston (1997)
Sheryl Kroen, *Politics and Theater in Restoration France 1815 – 1830* (2000) – chapter 5.

1. Introduction

Whenever Christian theology deals with the history of Christianity, its present is at stake. This is because Christians of all times have asked similar questions about God, Christ and salvation; they have, in similar ways, attempted to find organisational models doing justice, as far as possible, to the ideal of the kingdom of God; they equally aimed at answering in their individual and communal lives to the demands of the Christian message. The answers given to those questions and their translation into social and political reality, and indeed failures to answer those questions or to live according to those answers, cannot therefore ever be irrelevant for us.

This insight applies in a special way, nevertheless, to that part of Church history that is closest to our time. For, while Christianity may always be concerned fundamentally with the same questions, this fundamental interest is always related to more immediate problems that result from a particular historical situation. Perhaps not the very substance of theological questions, but certainly the way these questions are being asked, is inextricably intertwined with the particular situation Christians find themselves in. Culture and society, political and economic situation, the general state

of education and knowledge determine how Christians articulate and how they answer questions fundamental to their faith and to a Christian existence. In this sense we are more closely related to Christian life and thought, to Christian existence and theological debates that share specific presuppositions of this cultural kind with us than to those which do so to a lesser extent.

In this sense, the history of Christianity of the past 200 years is specifically relevant for us. While during those 200 years many further changes, even upheavals took place, many fundamentals have remained the same. The late 18th century starts a number of developments which have radically altered European society and culture, and I just have to name a few of them and you will realise how familiar they sound. They have determined to a large extent the world we live in today.

- In the political realm there are the ideas of republicanism, of human rights, freedom, democracy, and nation, which brought down the feudal state and replaced it with the nation state, erected on the electoral mandate.
- Economically it is the rise and spread of capitalism with all its far reaching consequences for all parts of human life.
- In society it means the demise of the traditional, static order, in which birth determined to a large extent each person's place, and its replacement by an increasingly dynamic society in which differences are more due to economic success (which incidentally includes the rise of a hitherto quite unknown form of radical pauperisation).
- Knowledge is increasingly generated by science which, based on experiments, aims at a radical reformulation and re-evaluation of traditional insights. Lore, which had been accepted for hundreds or thousands of years, thus loses its

justification and relevance, while at the same time solutions are found to problems that had always been deemed beyond the reach of human beings.

- Finally, something like historical awareness develops which means that the past appears quite different from the own, present situation. This, probably, was not entirely separate from the plethora of radical changes which I have just hinted at. Whatever the reason, the result was that people at the end of the 18th century became much more aware than they had before, of just how different other times or cultures were. These differences affected, not least, moral and religious values thus raising the spectre of historical relativism. It became now feasible to realise with a shudder the ultimate strangeness of, say, the medieval world or the world of the reformation or even the world in which Jesus of Nazareth had trodden the earth, thus severing cruelly the bond that had seemingly united Christians with their historical points of reference. It became equally feasible to realise, with no less a shudder, that the wall of difference which past generations had erected between Church and heresy or even between Christianity and all the other, false religions was much less durable than had been assumed. Christianity suddenly became part of a history of religion within which it could hardly maintain its claim to uniqueness quite the way it had been used to doing it. Perceptions of what identity is, and what difference, were thus radically thrown into doubt.

All these changes had far reaching consequences for Europeans at the end of the 18th century. These consequences were deeply ambiguous, and it is this ambiguity which explains partly how European history has happened during much of the 19th and 20th centuries. On the one hand, all the new possibilities filled men (largely, I am afraid)

with an incredible self-confidence and self-reliance in their own abilities. On the other hand – and concurrently with the former – there is also the continuous worry about the loss of some tradition or other that had become dear to people over the centuries. Belief in progress is thus as characteristic of our period as radical scepticism and even pessimism; waves of liberalism are followed by periods of reaction. Freedom is as much the order of the day as its opposite: oppression, persecution, bloody excesses.

Given the close integration of the Christian religion into early modern European societies, it is not surprising that all these developments had a deep impact on Christianity. Political changes shook traditional state-church relations; economic and social changes affected the setting within which Christianity had been quite successfully inculturated. Scientific developments seemed to challenge traditional religious patterns of explaining the world. History threatens to redefine, as we have seen, Christianity's relation to its own (and other) traditions.

Perhaps no other event has become as emblematic for the ambiguity of those changes initiated at the turn of the 18th century as the French revolution. It symbolises both – the triumph of freedom and the excess of tyranny, the declaration of human rights and the guillotine. It throws the Church into a position it had not really experienced for a long time, but it also provoked reactions showing the surprising resilience of Christian, specifically Catholic traditions in France. It is therefore appropriate that our series of lectures starts by looking more closely at this particular event and at the impact it had on the fate of Christianity and the churches.

In order to understand properly what was happening in 1789 and how this affected religion we must go start with a brief glance at the prehistory. The 17th century had seen all kinds of religious conflict; the aftermath of the Protestant and Roman

Catholic reformations had continued to be worked out in wars and political strife. In France religious wars raged until end of the 16th century; then there was, across much of Central Europe, the 30-Years War, 1618-1648. We might also mention in this connection the English Civil War. In 1648 the Peace of Westphalia brought major interstate rivalries to an end in Central and Western Europe. Yet it created new potential for religious conflict as rulers were left to decide the fate of the religious minorities in their borders. Some were draconian; thus in 1731 the Archbishop of Salzburg gave all Protestants over 12 years of age 8 days to pack up and get out. 20,000 people were eventually resettled by the Prussians, one of the major beneficiaries of all those development.

By the end of the 17th century then, people were rather battle weary, and the notion of religious toleration was worked out intellectually by the likes of John Locke and practically – especially in England and Holland, both known for their principles of toleration. The 18th century is therefore seen as a watershed of rational religion, of deism and natural theology, and this picture is partly true. But it was also of course a time of immense religiosity, and of sometimes extreme reactions against that. It gave birth to what we now know habitually as atheism, which – we must not forget – had never really existed before. Christianity, and in particular the institutions of the church, were attacked by philosophers and radicals. Thus there certainly was intellectual disagreement about religion in the eighteenth century.

At the end of the eighteenth century, politics, social and economic circumstances, and religious and philosophical debate, as it had developed in the Enlightenment, not least talk of a more democratic order and an attack on hierarchy and privilege, developed into an explosive mix potentially causing tension and even conflict. This happened most famously in France, in the French Revolution.

2. The beginning of the French revolution and religion in France

The key point to note is this: the French Revolution *is* the great dividing line in the political history of Europe. The downfall of the Ancien Régime came to signify the end of one era and the beginning of another. The fate of the Church was inextricably bound up with this event; the Church had been an integral part of the old order. Once that regime had fallen and new structures were being conceived and built, what would be the place of the church?

Events happened very fast in France between 1789 and 1802. Before we look at those developments in some detail it is useful to attempt a sketch of the larger picture.

a) Different ingredients.

1) *The Position of the church*. In pre-revolutionary France the position of the Church was deeply ambiguous. In some ways it can be said to have been pre-eminent, in others its powers appear hollow. Since the reign of Philip the Fair (1285 – 1314), France was known as 'the eldest daughter of the church', and the French as God's chosen people. The Church and the French monarchy were closely linked. Kings were ordained by divine right; a chain of hierarchy extended from God down to the social and political order.

   Religion, in the case of France means mainly Catholicism. Officially, France *was* a Roman Catholic country. Catholics had the monopoly of worship. Protestantism which, of course, had existed in France in the 16th and 17th centuries, had no official place since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). In 1787, the Edict of Toleration mitigated some of its

effects, legitimising Protestant marriage, while still forbidding public worship.

The Roman Clergy were very visible. The rhythm of the church year was vital to rural and urban life. Priests were a significant part of the establishment. Thus, in the countryside, they relayed governmental pronouncements after the Sunday sermon, often translating elite French of officialdom into local patois. In many ways also, the Clergy were responsible for setting the moral tone.

Legally, the Clergy enjoyed some substantial privileges. Clerical estate (it had 130,000 members) was exempt from tax. The Church owned vast amounts of land; it had monopolised education and had its own courts. Wealth of the church, however, was unevenly distributed. Some bishops were very rich; others less so. There were also considerable variations in their workload. The real work was often done by the parish curates (*cures*) who were overworked and underpaid. Half of the French clergy were regulars (monks and nuns)

2) *Attacks on/criticisms of clergy and church.* As one can imagine, there was much resentment of the Church: of her wealth, specifically in light of the extremely uneven distribution thereof; of her role in a hierarchical and privileged ruling elite. This led to a *popular anti-clericalism* which would be harnessed at certain points in the revolution.

   On intellectual grounds, philosophers (*philosophes*) had attacked Christianity. Voltaire mocked its superstitions; deists attacked the institution of the church; censorship, controlled by the church (ferocious blasphemy and sacrilege laws) drew heavy criticism too.

Monks and nuns were frequently pictured as lazy or useless. By some they were regarded as leading psychologically and sexually deviant lives. (Diderot's *The Nun*). The reformation's criticism of the celibate, cloistered life was also revived. While these ideas were largely taken from England and Holland, they developed in France in a way much more aggressive and violent than it ever became in those Protestant and relatively tolerant places.

This is true especially of some of the central tenets of the Enlightenment, such as the rejection of claims that Xianity – or any other revealed religion – it offered an exclusive and conclusive knowledge of God or that nothing should be beyond rational scrutiny, including religion or again that the basic source of human misery was not to be found in original sin, but in ignorance – and therefore the answer to those scourges lay in reason, science, education. While these ideas could – and were – developed in a spirit in principle benign to religion elsewhere, they were given a decisively antireligious spin in 18th century France.

Nevertheless, the *philosophes* were interested in enlightened reform, not violent revolution. They were in many ways haunted by the bloodshed seemingly caused by religion in recent centuries and yearning for a political and social order capable of solving problems with different means. The best model for the good life would therefore be the good citizen, a parent, a loyal and responsible member of his community, tolerant and rational.

Remember though that dividing lines not always as clear as we might think. Different sorts of people – revolutionaries, clerics, aristocracy –

liked and read the same literature. Clerics were avid readers of the philosophes; The Jesuit journal carried admiring reviews of Diderot's encyclopedia.

To round up this general picture of French society and religion in the late 18th century one must finally mention a wide spread sense that the Church was spiritually moribund. The last great spiritual revival had occurred in the 17th century in the Jansenist movement. The Jansenists were austere and rigorous emphasising the need for sincere contrition. They read Scriptures carefully in the vernacular. They fiercely opposed the Jesuits and what appeared to them as a rather lax official Catholicism.

Jansensim acquired considerable political overtones, partly because it became popular with some lawyers in parliament, and partly because Jesuit and papal attempts to curb it could be interpreted as limiting the freedom of the Gallican church. It also attracted very talented people – Racine the playwright and Pascal the mathematician, philosopher and theologian. Religious dispute about Jansenism, then, became highly political in the 18th century. The Church tried to stamp out Jansenism which consequently became associated with sedition in the official mind.

b) What happened to the church in the revolution?

On 5 May 1789 Louis XVI convened the States-General on account of the financial crisis. They had not met since 1614; their gathering thus provided an opportunity for ventilating grievances. People at that point hoped for reform, not revolution. No one thought of abolishing either the Monarchy or the Church.

What happened was much more startling – a major transfer of power from the old, feudal aristocracy to the rising bourgeoisie. The Third Estate declared itself the National assembly. Nobles had to surrender their privileged position. The bourgeoisie took over, but initially this was regarded as quite gentle, and without fear.

The initial aim of this bourgeois-dominated revolution was not to destroy but to remake the church in its own image. Some people thought that the national assembly was doing the work of a reforming church council. Some clerics even posited that there should be a sort of national religion based on the union of a newly egalitarian church and a democratised nation. (e.g. advocated by the Abbé Claude Fauchet).

However, relations between the political regime and the church in France were not to remain amicable. The storming of the Bastille in July 1789 was a sign of things to come. In the first year of the revolution, clergy lost many of their privileges. Tithes were abolished. Church lands were expropriated. Monks and nuns were released from their vows. At this point, the Pope grudgingly accepted these measures. Yet this was soon to change.

In July 1790 the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was introduced. This provided for a new constitution of the Church in France as part of the overall reconstitution of her political system. Diocesan boundaries were rearranged so they became co-terminous with the civil departments. 57 dioceses were suppressed. State-salaried clergy were introduced, elected on the same basis as civil officials by the male property owners of the district. The Pope ceased to have any authority over the Gallican church though this was to be 'without prejudice to the unity of faith and the communion which will be maintained with the visible head of the universal church.' Religious freedom was granted – for Protestants, Jews, freethinkers.

When the Civil Constitution of the Clergy was introduced, its supporters hoped that religion would be a source of unity for the nation. By 1791, it was quite apparent that religion was one of the sources of disunity. One problem was that this civil constitution was presented as a ready-made package to the clergy whose ideas and opinions were ignored. The Pope issued his condemnation of the new religious order (along with denunciations of the egalitarian principles of the Revolution). Ironically, the King, a devout and conscientious Roman Catholic – who was still alive at this point and had no reason yet to fear for his safety, approved the Civil Constitution several months before the pope condemned it.

When the clergy were forced to take an oath of loyalty to the constitution, about half of them refused. Thus France had two opposing churches. This situation remained for the next ten years. Those who would not take the oath were known as non-jurors. Among them were many bishops, many of whom emigrated. Again there is a certain irony to the fact that one of the preferential places of exile became to London, not specifically noted for its attachment to the Roman Church. Those non-jurors who remained in France were at first allowed to carry on their ministry, but as the revolution passed into more violent hands, they were described as fanatics and counter-revolutionaries. They could say mass only in private at the risk of their lives, and many were killed.

With the abolition of the Monarchy in September 1792 the revolution entered into its violent phase. In the same month 200 priests were amongst the prisoners in Paris who were murdered. In the following year, France dissolved into civil war, and many more non-juring priests were killed. A new calendar was introduced in September 1792 counting the years from the establishment of the French Republic.

The latter half of 1793 then brought the reign of terror, the most radical phase of the revolution, and with it came campaigns of actual deChristianization and the attempt to introduce a new, republican, civil religion. In November 1793 the Cult of Reason and Liberty was introduced, superseded in May 1794 by the Cult of the Supreme Being. All over France Temples of Reason were constructed, and teenage girls of good republican families acted as goddesses of reason. Cemeteries were secularised.

This deChristianisation brought together the two different currents of anti-Catholic feeling that had existed in pre-Revolutionary France: the one drawing on the philosophy of the Enlightenment, the other stemming from traditions of popular anti-clericalism. The two streams were connected by a notion that Christianity nourished the forces of political reaction.

However, while the Revolution marked the dawn of a new era when "the transfer of sacrality onto political and social values was accomplished", it is also true that the cultural revolution of this period, epitomized in the festivals of the French Revolution and the symbols and rites of the new secular nation, was not an unqualified success.

3. Counter-revolution

This attack on Christianity did not go unchallenged. In March 1793, the peasants of the Vendee (in the west of France) rose against the Revolution, non juring priests at their sides, and badges depicting the sacred heart of Jesus on their jackets. This uprising was a serious threat to the Revolution. The peasants managed to control their own territory for 6 months, and remained a threat to successive political regimes in France for several more years.

In June of that year, many constitutional clergy were involved in the federalist uprisings against the authority in Paris that occurred in towns such as Lyon, Marseille,

and Bordeaux. As a matter of fact, the constitutional clergy (i.e. those who had taken the republican vow) also found themselves deeply unsupported by some parishioners. Bishops often met a rough reception in their dioceses – Bp Minee of Nantes was met by women crying, "Minee, you're a mouse, a mouse". Clergymen found that their bell ropes were cut, or the key to the church just went missing. In some parishes, people would not even sell them basic necessities. Interestingly, women were a key part of the counter-revolutionary support of the old religion. It has been pointed out that in areas where deChristianisation had seemed triumphant in Year II, women esp were demanding the reopening of churches and still illegal processions and pilgrimages were starting up again. Attacks on the church were seen by them as an attack on a world they had a space to escape from the control of their husbands.

In 1794 clergy were risking arrest for holding well-attended clandestine services. Where priests were not available (many after all had simply left) villagers broke into their churches and persuaded a schoolteacher of a farmer to say Mass. Such popular Catholicism increased in 1795 & 96 with famine and weariness with the Revolution. Bayeux – bread rioters – used the slogan: "When God was here we had bread".

The July ('Thermidore')-coup of 1794 brought the end of Robbespiere and installed a more moderate bourgeoisie into power. The Thermidorians were less concerned with moulding the new revolutionary man. On the religious side they introduced a formal separation of church and state. Freedom to worship behind closed doors was guaranteed, but there was to be no ringing of bells or bringing religion into the street. In some parts, people defied the laws and rang bells. By 1799 Corpus Christi processions were again being held in parts of the South.

What do these developments tell us? The forced deChristianisation failed to wean its millions of citizens from their 'superstitions' as the revolutionaries would have seen

it. In fact, it caused suffering and was largely counter-productive. It's not that deChristianisation was simply imposed from above – it wasn't always, and relied on popular anti-clericalism – accumulated resentment against the church and clergy amongst many sections of the pop. Yet not all was the same all over the country. The violent rejection of Christianity was primarily an urban phenomenon, while the events of the 1790s showed that there was fervent Catholicism and devotion, especially in rural areas. Interestingly, areas where there was a high proportion of non juring clergy then are still the areas of most Catholic devotion today. In those parts, the revolutionary events actually strengthened the religious loyalties of many.

This mirrors the wider appeal of the revolution. The group which was least devout – the bourgeoisie – were the ones who gained most from the it; the group which was most devout – the peasantry – gained the least.

The division between catholic France and anti-clerical France, which the revolution had opened up, continued as an important stream in French life throughout the 19th century.

4. Napoleon

The person who – at least for a while – cleared up the political and religious mess in the wake of the revolution was of course Napoleon – who seized power in November (Brumaire) 1799. Napoleon was convinced of the social utility of religion, and so he decided to restore the unity and the fortunes of the church even though many of his colleagues in the government were opposed to this. He also tackled the problem of split in the church characteristically insisting that the constitutional clergy and the non jurors should be made to work together in the same church.

The next step was to enter into negotiations with the Holy See for a religious agreement. Pope realised that it meant going back on all that had been said by the non

jurors about the constitutional clergy; but decided that it was a price worth paying for the restoration of the Roman Catholic church in France. The Concordat between Pope Pius VII and Napoleon was signed in 1801; it came into force in 1802. Through it the Church in France effectively became a department of the state. The Church acknowledged that it had lost its lands. In compensation the state paid the clergy. Bishops were to be nominated by the government, the clergy to be appointed by the bishops.

The motto of Napoleon's religious policy may be found in his words that "the people must have a religion; this religion must be in the control of the government". His was, in other words, a very pragmatic approach which was his way of winning people over to his way of doing things. In his exercise of authority, Napoleon was more papal than the pope. This was partly about his wish for control, but partly also about retaining liberties and privileges for the Gallican church as expressed in his 'Organic Articles' supplementing the Concordat, but not recognised by Rome.

In the long term, this policy did, however, have an unintended effect. The clergy became very dependent on the state, and so they turned more and more to the papacy for support against the domination of the state. Thus ultramontanism, loyalty to the pope, became a way for the clergy to assert their independence. This introduces a key theme of the nineteenth century, the development of centralised Roman authority – ultramontanism – over and against independence of national RC churches which were strongly encouraged by the rising nation states. In many ways, Napoleon set up the conditions for that tension in France.

With the abdication of Napoleon in 1815 the question arose as to how religion would develop? Should (and could) the clock simply be turned back and a Christian monarchy be restored? Under the Bourbon Monarchs (1815 – 1830) a religious

revival did indeed occur in France. It was supported by powerful nobles and clergymen. Missionaries travelled to all corners of the kingdom to reintroduce French subjects to the catechism and to deliver the sacraments. Yet while the Monarch officially sanctioned the religious revival, he did not give it public support. Religion in 19th century France was a major issue – not dissimilar to the way it happened at the same time in Victorian England. Various studies have argued that religious activity – in terms of mass attendance, baptisms etc. actually peaked in France in the latter half of the 19th century. Yet this may just show that the forced severing of the bond between Church and Ancien Regime in the revolution had positive effects on French Christianity that were not quite intended by those who introduced these measures.

5. Some Broad themes

- In many ways what happened in France was to become typical of 19th century developments elsewhere, if rarely in the same extreme radical way. There was of course always the question of how much individual states would return to conditions of the old regime or shape a new regime. This in itself became a persistent question in the 19th century.
- Given the close association of the Monarchy with the Church political attacks on the monarchy would inevitably become attacks on the church. Yet the Church was not only associated with the Monarchy; it was firmly integrated into the hierarchy of a social order which was crumbling which raised complex questions about her place in a new and different social system as well as the Church's attitude towards bringing such changes about. Yet the Churches also had the gospel teaching about equality, they had traditions that

chimed well with the better of the new ideas and could, indeed, be seen as their precursors.

- Another issue is the relation between religion and intellectual culture. The French Revolution implemented the thought of the philosophes featuring a sceptical approach to religion. It was said the soldiers of Napoleon's army in Spain carried the Encyclopedia in their knapsacks. Intellectual critique of religion became a persistent theme in the 19th century with an increasingly broad appeal.
- The French Revolution also gave birth to nationalism with religious overtones. The loyalty to the nation becomes a sort of secular faith whose extreme dangers became apparent only in the 20th century.
- While the revolution cherished the ideals of the Enlightenment and declared universal human rights it brought about incredible violence and, in many ways, a reversal of achievements of civilisation. Napoleon's troops might have carried the encyclopedia in their backpacks, but it was also known that when they came into town, they drank the communion wine, gave the host to their horses and sang blasphemous songs.

The French Revolution gave rise to troubled times, war in Europe. In 1819, Hegel wrote to a friend, "I am just fifty years old and have lived most of my life in these eternally restless times of fear and hope, and I have hoped that sometimes these fears and hopes might cease. But now I must see that they will go on for ever, indeed in moments of depression I think they will grow worse."

Week 2: Religious Thought at the threshold to the 19th century

a) Introduction

Let us return for a moment to the introductory remarks I made at the beginning of last week's lecture. I said then that Christian history of the past two hundred years is specifically relevant for us because in spite of all the changes in between a number of developments were started at the end of the 18th century that have remained dominant ever since. Last week we have seen how this was epitomized in the French revolution which seems to contain in itself the entire ambiguity of this process of modernisation: the coincidence of freedom and new, violent oppression; enlightened critique of past superstitions and the creation of new myths and ideologies; the birth of concepts such as 'nation', 'human rights' and democracy.

It suffers no doubt that these shifts had an enormous impact on Christianity and the churches. The violently antichristian attitude of the French revolutionaries meant that during its course it could appear as if the relation between Christianity and modernity would inevitably be of a purely antithetical kind; Christianity would merely been one aspect of the old world which modernisers strove to do away with; from the Christian point of view, modernisation would merely be yet another attempt of the eternally active forces of the great antagonist to overthrow the Kingdom of God. Yet once the fog of war had cleared it became evident that this was far too simple a picture. In the words of the Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor, one of the finest experts in our own day of those developments: 'modern culture, in breaking with the structures and beliefs of Christendom, also carried certain facets of Christian life further than they ever were taken or could have been taken within Christendom.'

This insight is not however new. If we look at the major theological developments of the 19th century to which we turn with today's lecture, we are able to discern at their very core precisely this tenet. Consequently, the attempt was made to formulate theology as a response to this specific challenge, and it is for this reason that not only Christian history in general, but more specifically the story of theology of the past 200 years is especially relevant for us. However much theology has changed in the meantime, it is not difficult to see that its main theme has remained the same during those 200 years. The task seemed this: neither to subscribe unconditionally to the developments of the day, not simply to reject them, but rather to show that, precisely on account of its deep ambiguity, modernity was in need of religion and that Christianity could, in its turn, deliver what was needed by modern Western society. We will see in the next few weeks how this has actually evolved during the 19th century. Today I will survey three pivotal phenomena which occurred at the very end of the 18th century and shaped, in many ways, the theological debates during subsequent decades. The first of those is the so-called fragments controversy involving the enlightenment playwright and theologian Lessing. It highlights the potential ramifications for traditional theology from biblical criticism and, more broadly, from historical thought. The second is Kant's philosophy. The third is the so-called pantheism controversy, in fact the first in a long chain of debates about real or fictitious "pantheists" and their perceived danger for Christianity.

b) Lessing and the fragments controversy

Literature: see slide

Lessing may not be known today to many non specialists, but he surely deserves a place in any history of modern theology. His interest in theology, even though it was

that of an amateur, lasted throughout his life, and his exceptionally sharp mind and his unrivalled literary abilities made him a champion of intellectual Germany in the late 18th century. What makes him interesting for us (and has made him interesting for other people surveying this particular period of transition, such as Barth), though, is primarily his apparent position between all the conventional battle lines of his time. He clearly saw, like other enlightenment figures, the frailty of theological orthodoxy; he was not either afraid of controversy against them, and we shall soon see that one of his crucial fights involved centrally a conflict with authoritative leaders of the orthodox party. Yet he was neither a partisan of theological enlightenment. He often came out criticising the 'modernising' theology of his day and was thus suspected by them of a surreptitious, clandestine alliance with the forces of theological reaction. Yet this is hardly accurate. We will be nearer the truth, probably, if we surmise that Lessing actually sensed the failure of those modernising theologians to offer some viable alternative to the system they went on to criticise. At one point he likened theology to a house that stands next to his own and is close to collapse. He, Lessing, would not mind, he said, if that neighbour decided to tear it down. He would be prepared to help him in that attempt. If the neighbour were to decide, however, to take measures against the impending collapse which are so wholly inadequate that they actually threaten his own house alongside, then he will do on his own whatever he can to make the situation more secure. This allegory captures nicely both aspects of Lessing's attitude to theology: his awareness of its impending crisis, but also his frustration with the modernising attempts by his contemporaries. In this sense, precisely, he is a forerunner of major figures in the 19th century who similarly felt the need to offer a better substitute for the defunct orthodoxy than the enlightenment had managed to do.

We see this dual interest in action in the 'fragments controversy' which I mentioned before. I start with a few words about its historical setting. Lessing had been appointed librarian in the famous library of the Duke of Brunswick at Wolffenbüttel in 1770. This library contained a wealth of unknown manuscripts and half-forgotten texts, so Lessing, who really was a bookworm, started editing a Journal within which he published interesting pieces he had discovered among the treasures of that library. Among these pieces he included, in the years 1774, 1777 and 1778 texts which he introduced as *Fragments from an unknown author* thus giving them the appearance of originating from the library. The truth was that they were taken from a manuscript written by a renowned Oriental scholar from Hamburg by the name of Reimarus who had died a few years ago. Lessing had befriended his family who confided to him these papers under the condition that he would under no circumstances reveal the identity of their author. Reimarus had concealed from the public that over the years he had come to doubt radically the accuracy of the biblical account of the life of Jesus and its theological interpretation. In fact, his manuscript contained the most radical attack on the historical credibility of the gospel narrative. Reimarus' family thought not without reason that the publication of this piece would cause a tremendous uproar and tarnish the reputation of their father. One must certainly admit that Lessing's decision to pass it on as a 'treasure' from the Wolffenbüttel library was an ingenious move and, indeed, the identity of the author was not revealed throughout the ensuing controversy.

As for the character of Reimarus' writing it is perhaps telling that Albert Schweitzer, in his famous survey of studies of the life of Jesus says that it has been written out of 'hatred'. He goes on to explain this as being not so much hatred against the person of Jesus, though, but against the supra-natural nimbus he has been given. Reimarus',

Schweitzer writes, wanted to 'strip from Him the robes of splendour with which He had been apparelled, and clothe Him once more with the coarse garments in which He had walked in Galilee' (p. 4). Because he hated, Schweitzer continues, he saw more clearly than all the others and rendered NT scholarship a massive service. It does not take much to see that this service was not immediately perceived though.

Lessing did two things. He published, as I said, excerpts from Reimarus' writing; and he also published a running commentary on it, which he called *counter-propositions*. This gave him the opportunity to express his own, far-reaching views about the matter under discussion. As the identity of Reimarus' was not known, Lessing himself became the very centre of a heated debate. One is tempted to think that this was really what he had intended for he used this occasion to publish a plethora of theological writings until the Duke of Brunswick, after all his employer, censured him in 1779.

The position taken by Lessing in his *counter-propositions* is quite characteristic. He makes it quite clear that he does not dismiss the historical claims of the anonymous author out of hand, and this was enough to secure him the antagonism of the powerful Lutheran orthodoxy of his day. On the other hand, he takes exception to the Deist position of Reimarus also. He raises more than answers a number of questions that really go to the heart of the matter. Thus he observes that both, the orthodox position and their critic take it for granted that the biblical accounts as historical accounts are foundational for the Christian faith. The difference is just that one side accepts the validity of those foundations while the other side does not. Lessing, however, expresses doubts that this is altogether a sensible presupposition. Can history, in any case, be the basis of faith?

"Miracles, which I see with my own eyes and which I have the opportunity to verify for myself, are one thing; miracles, of which I know only from history that others say

they have seen them and verified them, are another." (p. 51 Chadwick) No historical truth, Lessing says, can be demonstrated, i.e. conclusively proven, thus nothing can be demonstrated 'by means of historical truth'. To move from a historical insight to a doctrinal proposition always involves a leap for which he coined the phrase of the 'ugly ditch' across which, he said, he was unable to jump:

'That, then, is the ugly, broad ditch which I cannot get across, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make the leap. If anyone can help me over it, let him do it, I beg him, I adjure him. He will deserve a divine reward from me.' (55)

Historical truths, we read elsewhere, being always contingent, can never provide the foundation for the non-contingent truths of reason: 'Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason' (53) With these few sketches Lessing has effectively opened up the fundamental question of the relation between faith and history which continues to haunt theologians ever since. What was the answer: was there a way to reconcile them ultimately? Or should it be concluded that, after all, it is metaphysics, not history, that brings salvation? Is the core of the Christian religion a relation between the believer and God which is essentially unhistorical (and thus, who knows, at some point no longer in need even of the pedagogy of the bible), or is there a theory forthcoming which brings them together again, e.g. by offering an interpretation of history which overcomes its seemingly inherent 'contingency'? Or again, was it the main mistake to seek in the bible for historical facts? Is religion, perhaps, about something entirely different and, if so, about what? This, again, was to become a major topic of 19th century theology. Lessing did not give an ultimate answer to any of these questions. He deserves the merit of having formulated them and debated them in a way illuminating effectively the weakness of all the conventional answers given by the major parties of his time.

This proved immensely stimulating, and it is thus no coincidence that in various accounts written in the 19th century of this phase of the theological development he is given a prominent place. He set the scene for some central debates of the coming decades.

c) Immanuel Kant

Kant is another person who, though entirely a person of the 18th century (he died in 1804), was of fundamental importance for theological developments in the 19th century. His influence was largely due to his critique of the so-called proofs for the existence of God which he offered in his *Critique of pure reason* (1781). This criticism was soon accepted as ultimate and was a major cause for the sudden demise of 18th century fascination with natural religion and natural theology. It is quite characteristic for the 19th century to turn its interest rather much more to the historical, the so-called 'positive' religions, in other words religions that really existed or had existed. This shift of interest was, no doubt, related to a more general shift of interest at the turn from the 18th to the 19th century which gave birth to a fresh appreciation of anything historical thus leading to a hitherto unknown fascination for the history of art, language, architecture, literature, the law and so forth. Nevertheless the influence of Kant can hardly be underestimated whatever one thinks of the ultimate success of his critical arguments.

To understand the direction of this criticism we have to see Kant's own intellectual background. He was brought up in the rationalist tradition, associated with Descartes and, at that time, especially with Leibniz. It was characteristic for this philosophy to start from the inner experience and certainty of mental operations to proceed from there to the empirical cognition of the outer world. This meant that the most sensitive

aspect was the transition from inner to outer experience. We may know what the concept of a cat is for us, but how do we know that anything external corresponds to this concept. The key developed in the rationalistic school placed all the emphasis eventually on an *a priori* argument for the existence of God, the so-called ontological argument. It says that there is one concept, the concept of a perfect being, which includes its own existence, making this the most necessary being. Once this argument succeeds in showing the way from thought to reality, all the rest follows because from the existence and the perfection of the supreme being the principal agreement of the inner and the outer world, of mental insights and sense-perception could be deduced. We can see, then, that the ontological argument was in many ways the cornerstone of this entire philosophical system. It was this cornerstone against which Kant directed his main argument.

Kant, as I said, had grown up in this tradition. It became crucial for him, however, that he was exposed to the sceptical thought of David Hume who, as he remarked, roused him from the slumber of rationalist dogmatics by calling into question the correspondence between our concepts and the world of our sense-experience. Rightly famous is Hume's account of causation. What we call causation is something nobody has ever observed. What we see, rather, is the regular succession of two events from which we conclude that one is the 'cause' of the other. Kant accepts that such an empiricist reduction of our concepts would indeed follow *if* all our experience was based, as Hume thought, on sense perception. Was this, however, really the case? This was the task he set himself in his *Critique of pure reason*.

His result may be seen as some kind of *rapprochement* between the rationalist and the empiricist tradition (this, at least, was the way it was frequently interpreted). We need

both, sense perception and rational concepts for any kind of cognition. Against Hume, Kant argued that not even the simplest cognitive act could be based entirely on sense perception. We always make use of the rational categories of our mind. Against the rationalists he held that, equally, no cognition is possible that would not be based on sense perception. This is because, for Kant, the contribution of mental concepts is merely formal. They provide, as it were, the pattern within which we order the material our senses take from the world. This formal capacity, then, is always dependent on being fed, as it were, by the senses. Where this is lacking it leads us astray hopelessly. This, then, to skip hundreds of pages of argument in his 1000-page volume, is the downfall of the famous arguments for the existence of God (as well as those for other traditional metaphysical concepts). They rest ultimately on the doomed attempt to let our mind work in an area where there could never be (not even in theory) sense-perception. I here leave his actual refutations of the proofs to one side; many of you will have heard about them, and, what is more, once the epistemological foundation is accepted, which really is Kant's major concern in his first *Critique*, the impossibility of any successful argument for the existence of God follows anyway. The theological consequences of this were immense. We are probably inclined to think of them primarily in negative terms as Kant is the one who criticised a long and successful co-operation between theology and philosophy. In reality, and this is what we are concerned with here, things were slightly more complex. Rationalist philosophy, which, as I said, dominated continental thought up to the end of the 18th century, had championed its own version of natural theology. It had as little use of 'revelation' as deism, as it was optimistic enough to believe that with natural theology it could offer a full substitute for the dubious results of traditional theology on its own

turf. Whatever man needed to know about God, he could know on account of his own reason; anything else was either false or insignificant.

Kant's argument immediately caused the downfall of this rationalistic edifice of natural theology. The consequences, then, were similar to those of the 'fragments controversy' by turning contemporary interest back to questions that had been considered obsolete by enlightenment thought. The demise of natural theology reinforced the renewed interest in historical religions and their study. Could there be a third way of working with them, as different from their affirmation in traditional thought as from their (inadequate) critique on the basis of a concept of natural religion? Moreover, was not specifically the Enlightenment's interest in such an 'unnatural' thing as 'natural theology' an indication that in its heart of hearts it was not as detached from 'intellectualist' orthodoxy as they pretended to be? Perhaps pietism, with its emphasis on the affective side of religion had been dismissed to easily? Perhaps it had its particular truth in its criticism of a merely rationalistic, merely 'theological' view of religion. Was it not, actually, a lasting impulse of the reformation that faith is not a matter of accepting certain truths, but of some kind of internal commitment, of trust?

If Kant's *Critique* had such consequences, we must not overlook, though, that Kant did not draw these himself. In his own philosophy of religion, which he published in 1794, shows, he remained very much within the world of enlightenment thought. The more positive impulse his ethical theory could give to theology, on the other hand, was not really discovered until the latter half of the 19th century. I shall return to it, then, at a later stage of this lecture.

d) The (first) debate about pantheism

One final development must be mentioned which, in a way quite similar to the two we have looked at so far, set the scene at the close of the 18th century for 19th century thought. This is the suddenly growing interest in the thought of Spinoza. Baruch Spinoza, of course, had been long dead; in fact he had lived in the 17th century (1632-1677). His influence at that time, however, had been extremely limited. Even to the most broad-minded among his contemporaries, his philosophy had seemed like a poor joke. This changed all of a sudden at the end of the 18th century, and the person primarily responsible for this was by no means a friend of his philosophy. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743-1819) is often listed as a philosopher, but we probably understand him better if we consider him an early example of a journalist. He was extremely prolific; he could sense the relevance of a topic and was quite good at kicking of a scandal where he saw the chance of one. In 1785 he published a book in which he claimed to render a conversation with Lessing about Spinoza's philosophy, which was to have taken place in 1780. Whether this conversation ever occurred and whether Lessing said what Jacobi made him say, we will never know for sure, since Lessing had died in the year that discussion had been supposed to take place. Be this as it may, the upshot of that talk allegedly was that Lessing had expressed his admiration for the Jewish philosopher who at that time really was *persona non grata*. Jacobi, at the same time, offered a succinct account of Spinoza's philosophy backed up by lengthy quotations from his works. His own interpretation was more or less this: Spinoza's philosophy really is the perfected version of rationalism. He offers a more coherent system than either Descartes or Leibniz, a system in which all the salient features of their thought become clear. These features include the idea of total determinism, thus excluding the possibility of free will and, consequently, religion

and ethics. In the light of this, Jacobi himself advocated, incidentally, a leap into faith which he thus juxtaposed to reason.

From today's point of view it is hardly possible to gauge the uproar this publication caused. It was partly due to the topic, partly due to the high regard which the late Lessing commanded. His great friend, the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, was so upset that he composed a reply to Jacobi and then died, apparently out of frustration.

At the same time, however, and this proves Jacobi's, as it were, journalistic feeling for the story of the day, his book was read by a whole younger generation, from Goethe to Schleiermacher, for entirely different reasons. They were fascinated to learn about a philosopher who seemed, to them, not at all the horrid atheist of orthodox and rationalist heresiologies, but a fascinating thinker who offered a much more convincing approach to God and to his relation to the world, an approach which included a new possibility of appreciating the world as a being permeated by God. God, according to this approach, was not a being who may have created the world and given moral orders, but then somehow retired and left few traces of his later activities (except, perhaps, the occasional miracle). Rather, he is the one of whom St. Paul could say that 'in him we live, and move, and have our being' (Acts 17 : 28).

For most of those who became engaged with Spinoza's thought at that time, it is probably fair to say that eventually they moved beyond his identification of God and world towards something that may more aptly be called panentheism, and thus the unending controversy throughout the 19th century about the alleged pantheism of Schleiermacher and others was something of a red herring. Nevertheless, it is clear that the rediscovery of Spinoza was part of the dissatisfaction of a new generation

with the answers of the 18th century and reinforced attempts to rethink central philosophical and theological notions.

Week 3: Romanticism and Idealism (Schleiermacher, Hegel)

We now have to look at the theological contribution of two people who arguably influenced Christian thought throughout the 19th century and beyond more than anyone else. Both start from the situation I have sketched in last week's lecture. Their proposed solutions, therefore, share common features insofar as they can be understood as reactions to the same situation. At the same time, however, they represent, in many ways, antagonistic answers to the same questions; and it is this which makes them, taken together, of such far reaching importance.

Let us start with a brief look at Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher. He was born in 1768 the son of a reformed minister with strong Moravian leanings. He was sent to Moravian boarding school and, later on, seminary from where he dropped out, however, in 1787 deeply sceptical, at that time, about the accuracy of traditional Christian doctrine. He had come, at this point, under the influence of Kant and other Enlightenment authors. In a moving letter, in which he asks his father's permission to continue to study theology at the University of Halle, dominated by rationalist theology, he expresses his theological doubts in a way which he knew meant practically separation from his orthodox father: 'I cannot believe that he, who called himself only Son of Man, was true and eternal God. I cannot believe that his death was an atoning sacrifice because he never said so himself and because I cannot persuade myself that such would have been necessary.'

He eventually did study at university, and after graduating went for a while through the typical posts reserved for aspiring academics without a fortune: assisting a parish priest, teaching the children of aristocrats etc. In 1795 he picked up a job in Berlin where he joined a group of romantics. The major theological product of these years is

his seminal book *Speeches on Religion* which appeared in 1799. It turned into a great success, even though it was, and remained, controversial. From Berlin he moved back to Halle, where he became professor for the first time in 1805. His theological career was presently thrown into disarray, however, as Prussia was conquered by Napoleon the subsequent year. The university stopped working, and Schleiermacher moved back to Berlin where he joined now the intellectual forces of liberalism which combined an ardent opposition to French occupation with a keen interest in a thorough reform of their Kingdom. Schleiermacher, specifically, was instrumental in the creation of a new type of university in Berlin, which ultimately happened in 1810. Schleiermacher himself had argued forcefully that such a new university still needed a theological faculty and not only was successful, but actually became a founding professor of this new institution, a position he held to his death in 1834.

He was a man of surprisingly wide ranging interests and abilities – even by the standards of that time. We must consider him here primarily as a theologian, but should not ignore that he lectured on a wide variety of philosophical topics also. His lectures on philosophical ethics and hermeneutics, published posthumously, became actually quite influential for a certain time. He produced a translation of almost the entire corpus of Platonic dialogues into German. I have mentioned his political interests and activities during the years of Napoleonic occupation, but they actually went far beyond that. Not least, however, he very much was and remained throughout his life a man of the Church. He would preach regularly each Sunday, and his sermons were always attracting huge crowds. In an episode which is perhaps telling Ludwig Feuerbach, when he visited Berlin towards the end of his life and walked past Trinity Church (the place where Schleiermacher used to preach), remarked to his companion that even to this point of his life he had not forgotten the deep impression

Schleiermacher's sermons had always made on him when he heard them, decades ago.

For Schleiermacher's theological thought we have to look more specifically at two major publications. I have mentioned that in 1799 he published *On Religion. Speeches to its cultured despisers*. In 1821/22 he published *The Christian Faith*, a dogmatic theology albeit conceived in a radically original way. This work saw a heavily reworked, second imprint in 1830/31. The two works are in many ways quite different and have even sparked debates about their ultimate compatibility. The *Speeches* are the work of a youthful genius, at the height of the Romantic Movement. They are not so much an academic work as a piece of rhetoric; in fact they display a considerable literary talent. They are, moreover, apologetic in character. Their targeted audience is that of the 'cultured despisers' of religion, an educated elite which has grown accustomed to considering Christianity something traditional, something that is no longer in tune with the major recent intellectual developments and thus perhaps still useful for certain parts of the population, but no longer a serious contender for cultural relevance. *The Christian Faith*, on the other hand, is the product of Schleiermacher's mature thought. It has visibly grown out of his lectures on dogmatics from which it retained the division into short paragraphs with lengthy explanations. It is chiefly a writing for the professional theologian and thus tuned to his desire to see new ideas expressed in their relation to everything said or thought by earlier divines. So the common ideas, which indubitably inhabit the two works, are expressed in the most different setting imaginable.

Perhaps the most fundamental common idea in both works is contained in the title of the *Speeches*. They are said to be 'on religion'. This, for Schleiermacher, meant

nothing less than a Copernican revolution for theology, similar in scale to the one Kant had claimed to achieve for philosophy. It meant to make religion the subject matter of theology, rather than God. Religion is not here employed in the general sense in which theology has used it for a long time, but consciously for what we might call a cultural phenomenon. As such, Schleiermacher claims, it has any reason to claim the interest both of the educated public and of theologians. Why is this so? A number of reasons must be mentioned.

To begin with, Schleiermacher clearly reacts to Kant's critique. Even though he does not dwell on this extensively, it is clear that he accepts his conclusion that natural theology has failed to deliver what it promised because its claims could not possibly be met by human understanding. If it is true, then, that the human mind cannot reach the divine, theology, however, is an activity of the human mind, the consequence must be that theology cannot be primarily or directly about God. Instead, Schleiermacher argues, it is about human reaction to, and reflections about the divine, and this precisely is religion. Focussing on religion, then, the theologian chooses the path demanded by intellectual integrity and yet closest to his traditional pursuit (which often had been, in practise, study of human attitudes towards God also).

2) This is not yet, however, the full explanation of Schleiermacher's move. At the outset of the *Speeches* he asks his hypothetical addressees rhetorically why they despise religion. His intention is to demonstrate that what they despise is, in reality, the miserable products of popular theology and some other surrogates they are offered instead of the real stuff. In this rejection, he argues they are actually right. They are asked, however, to suspend their judgement, until he has shown them what religion really is. Schleiermacher clearly (and skilfully) draws on the changing taste of the time. 18th century fascination with the abstract truths of natural religion was over.

People wanted to see the concrete reality of life. Schleiermacher denies natural religion any birthright within theology in favour of what he calls 'positive', i.e. historical religions. The major stage of religion, he argues, is history, not nature. It is there, if anywhere, that we must expect to find revelation of the divine.

3) By focussing thus on religion, Schleiermacher, finally, intends to claim for theology its own topic, its own province clearly separate from those investigated by other disciplines such as philosophy. Kant had, rightly, shown that theology had to lose from its pact with metaphysics, but he had also, wrongly, proposed a new alliance, between theology and ethics. Religion, Schleiermacher argued, was neither a way of cognition, however, nor a way of behaviour, and therefore what was sauce for the goose of metaphysics, must be sauce for the gander, ethics. Religion thus must be understood in its own right, not without relation, of course, to metaphysics and ethics, but neither of the two disciplines would simply be able to claim a monopoly in its explanation.

What then is religion thus understood? Schleiermacher, in the *Speeches*, uses expressions like 'feeling of' and even 'taste for' the totality of the universe. This is partly due to the rhetorical character of this work. What he means is this. We always relate to the world. In our actions we relate to the world actively, in cognition we relate to it receptively, but there still is an element of activity involved because we construct what we see or hear into knowledge. But there is also something else, absolute passivity when we are merely impressed by the world, the 'universe', as Schleiermacher says, in its totality. This is religion. It is the impression created on us by the entire universe which is why 'feeling' or 'tasting' seem the most appropriate designations; they are meant to convey the wholistic aspect of this experience.

It is not difficult to see that Schleiermacher expresses here in a nutshell what later on will become, as religious experience, a major topic of philosophy of religion. One might even go as far as to say that 'philosophy of religion' – if that is to mean a philosophical reflection of this cultural phenomenon – took its starting point from Schleiermacher's concept.

This concept is not reductionist. As it assumes that in religion we are completely passive, it actually contains a strong notion of 'revelation'. The subject of this 'revelation', of course, is the universe, not primarily God. This is perhaps the clearest indication of Spinozist influence on Schleiermacher, an influence which is actually acknowledged in the *Speeches*. Where Schleiermacher develops his general theory of religion, in the 2nd speech, he is concerned to offer as broad a definition of religion as possible, including the possibility of religion 'without God'. It is not clear, however, that his intention even in the *Speeches* is fully relativistic.

The 5th and last of the speeches contains an investigation of historical religions, which is, for practical reasons, confined to Judaism and Christianity. Here, Schleiermacher broaches the idea, so influential later on, of an 'essence' of concrete religions, a formula which ought to be able to generate out of itself the major doctrines and rites of that particular religion. On the basis of this approach, Schleiermacher further ventures to argue, in a rough sketch, that there could be established a kind of hierarchy among religion thus defined with Christianity coming on top. The problems of this 'inclusivism' are now well known. They need not concern us here. It is important, however, to realise that Schleiermacher chose, in the *Speeches*, this approach to balance the broad, generic definition of religion, offered in the 2nd speech. He apparently vied for a procedure which first allowed all religions to be equal *qua* religions to be then followed by an internal ordering avoiding all-out relativism.

On the basis of these insights, we can easily see where Schleiermacher stands in his *Christian Faith*, provided that we keep in mind everything I said earlier about the differences in genre between the two works. In the *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher's fundamental intention is quite different from that of the *Speeches*. He wishes to give, as it were, an inside account of Christianity. This 'inside account' is purely theological which means, in Schleiermacher's understanding, that it is not philosophical at all. In order to be this, however, it needs as a kind of introduction a philosophical foundation, containing all the notions which Christian Dogmatics must use but cannot deduce of its own accord. The opening paragraphs of *The Christian Faith*, therefore, contain precisely such a foundation, and it is here that most parallels to the earlier argument of the *Speeches* are to be found. Schleiermacher makes it clear that for him any theology is essentially a reflection on what he calls now 'piety' which is characterised by the 'consciousness of absolute dependence'. This in many ways takes up his earlier definition of 'religion'. There as here the idea is that human beings are totally exposed to an external influence to which, therefore, they can only react passively ('absolute dependence'). The idea of God is that of the causal origin which we must ascribe to this experience, but it cannot be depicted in other than negative terms. At the same time, this 'feeling' or 'consciousness' allows for variations which Schleiermacher explores to offer a typology of religions. For example, he distinguishes between those religions that draw out the consciousness of dependence into a largely passive attitude of the world (he names Islam, apparently because of its belief in 'kismet') and those for which the feeling always translates into an activity. Christianity is of the latter kind. No thought or sentiment, he argues, would be religiously acceptable within Christianity unless they result in some action

aiming to bring about the kingdom of God. Thus Schleiermacher arrives at his famous formula for the essence of Christianity:

'Christianity is a monotheistic faith, belonging to the teleological (i.e. 'ethical') type of religion, and is essentially distinguished from all other such faiths by the fact that in it everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.'

This formula, it may be noted, is not yet, for Schleiermacher, theological. It is the result of what we might call a phenomenology of religion. It sets the scene for Christian dogmatics which then operates from within the community defined by this kind of religious consciousness. *The Christian Faith*, then, as its title promises attempts to mark out all the consequences what might be said to result if Christianity is indeed understood as this modification of religious consciousness. And, one might add, if this successfully reconstructs Christian doctrine, this might in turn support the validity of the initially offered definitional formula.

The book is thus a treatment of Christian doctrine, but in a radically new way. Schleiermacher undertook it to show that most of the traditional doctrines could be meaningfully reconstructed as expressions of the specific, Christian modification of the consciousness of absolute dependence. Is this radically modernist or, rather, a return to the doctrinal taste of an earlier age? Schleiermacher has been accused of both, and we can see why. On the one hand, the *Christian Faith* engages more seriously with all the details of traditional doctrine than most Enlightenment theologians had done during the past century. In this sense his theology marks the beginning of a dogmatic revival. On the other hand, however, this theology disposes much more radically with the traditional foundation of practically all theologies, including the natural theologies of the previous centuries. Perhaps it is precisely this ambiguity that made him the most influential, but also the most criticised theologian of his age.

I now move on to Hegel. Much like Schleiermacher Hegel too was versed in both theology and philosophy, in the widest possible sense of both words. And yet, while the former remained primarily a theologian for all else he did, the reverse might be said about the latter. Hegel's interests and achievements are no less wide ranging than those of his later colleague and rival in Berlin. It was always philosophy, however, which provided the widest frame for any of his interests. In fact, it may be called his major achievement that he specifically developed a kind of philosophy which made possible, and ultimately required, this kind of integration. So why is he a topic for a lecture on Christian life and thought in the 19th century? I think two answers must be given. First, whatever their ultimate, conceptual framework, his contributions proved extremely stimulating for theology. The relevance of this is often overlooked if, e.g., the interest in Trinitarian theology is seen as a genuine development of the 20th century, reacting against Schleiermacher's almost unitarian version of Christianity. The truth is that Hegel's interpretation of Christianity strongly emphasised the relevance of this particular doctrine, and his influence on figures such as Karl Barth, who have been credited with this 20th century 'trinitarian revival' is easily demonstrated.

The second reason is no less relevant. Even within its philosophical framework it is beyond doubt that Hegel's thought was crucially informed by Christian theology. He had started his career by studying theology, but it surely is not only this biographical oddity which caused theology to be of such continuing importance within his work. Whatever one thinks about Hegel's personal relationship to Christianity and, indeed, his ultimate judgement about the future of theology, reading his works from a theological point of view makes sense in so far as this reading reveals those works as

being permeated by patterns which have, explicitly or implicitly, their origin in Christian theology.

The feud between Hegel and Schleiermacher during the 20s is legendary and perhaps typical for the petty excesses of controversy entertained by intellectual giants at times. A year after the publication of Schleiermacher's theological *opus magnum*, *The Christian Faith*, Hegel contributed a foreword to a book by one of his students on the philosophy of religion. In this brief text he commented dryly that, if it were true that the feeling of dependence was the fundamental characteristic of religion, then his dog would be the ideal Christian. Whenever he comes to beg for his bone and is duly given it, he displays the perfect feeling of dependence. Schleiermacher, on the other hand, managed to use his influence to keep Hegel out of the prestigious Prussian Academy of Sciences to the end of his life.

Hegel fundamentally disagreed with Kant's reluctance to think God. For him, this meant that philosophy cedes crucial territory. In an early essay (*Faith and Knowledge*), he compares the current state of affairs to that of the middle ages where philosophy was said to be the handmaiden of theology. This was because the most important questions were reserved for the latter. In an ironic twist, he argues, philosophy is in a similar position now, but of its own making. The limitations forced on it by external forces in the Middle Ages, it now accepts voluntarily. It starts from a subjectivist, and at the same time an empiricist, prejudice and thus fails to consider the absolute, the one thing that is really worth understanding. But by stating that God is beyond human understanding, they actually do claim some kind of knowledge about the divine. He who is able to draw a borderline, Hegel says, must have an idea

of what is beyond it. The critical philosophy thus works with a notion which it claims not to possess and is thus exposed to a fundamental contradiction which necessitates its correction.

Quite typically, Hegel links this situation to the rise of Protestantism, the 'subjectivist' form of Christianity which is afraid to posit God objectively out of fear this might endanger the purity of pious adoration. He clearly sees the legitimacy of this 'subjective' turn, even though this cannot have the last word. Yet, a return to the previous situation is equally impossible. What, then, is to be done? It is characteristic, for Hegel's attitude to Christianity that he turns to its help for an answer. He finds it in, what he says is the central doctrine of Lutheranism, the death of God on the cross. It signifies the radical presence of God in the world in a way which, nevertheless, does not take anything away from his being God. Philosophy should try to understand for itself what it means that the infinite and the finite come together, that this entails a total self-emptying of the infinite, but ultimately not its demise, rather the deification of the world. The memorable phrase Hegel coins for this philosophical task is this: it ought to have it own, speculative Good Friday.

This is not a philosophy lecture, so we cannot go into the details of Hegel's attempts to solve the task he is setting himself here. What is crucial, however, is to see how closely both the formulation of the task and its proposed solution are connected with theological ideas. And the theological ideas Hegel finds fascinating are very different from those considered acceptable by most other philosophers. They are the central doctrines of the Church, the doctrine of the incarnation and the doctrine of the Trinity, precisely those elements of Christian teaching which had been ridiculed by most educated Europeans for generations and, actually, neglected by many theologians. Hegel finds that specifically these doctrines provide the major contribution of

Christianity to intellectual history. For they show the direction the human mind has to take in order to avoid the pitfalls both of traditional metaphysics and of the more recent empiricist and critical philosophies. The doctrine of the incarnation shows, as we have seen, the necessity to think the coming together of God and man, of the transcendent and the world. The doctrine of the Trinity provides the means to this end by offering a dynamic conception of God which shows that the true absolute cannot be what it claims it is unless it is seen in a movement. This starts from God's being what he is, continues with his becoming what is opposed to him, world, and leads to his becoming 'all in all' in the end. Only in such a history can the absolute be understood appropriately.

Philosophy thus takes its central clues from the heart of Christian theology. Is this, then, a vindication of orthodox doctrine? It is easy to see that the answer is ambiguous. Hegel certainly defends Orthodox doctrine against its critics, old and new. At the same time, however, there cannot be the slightest doubt that the basis from which he offers this defence is his own philosophy; the full truth even of the Christian doctrines becomes apparent only from the point of view of the philosophy of the absolute. This, however, presupposes in many ways an even more radical distance from Christianity than that found in any of Hegel's predecessors. His attitude, one might say, is that of an archaeologist who picks up the pieces of an old vessel admiring its beauty which has been misjudged by those who cast it away carelessly. But of course, he does not intend to use it himself for other than archaeological purposes. This ambiguity is clearly present in Hegel's work, and it is thus no surprise that in the 1830's and 40s it gave rise to two very different schools, of which one aspired the restoration of Orthodoxy on Hegelian principles while the other claimed to

fulfil his legacy by moving on to ever increased criticism of Christianity and, indeed, religion as such.

Week 4: Critique of Bible, Revelation, Religion (Strauss, Feuerbach, Marx)

The 19th century produced a large number of illustrious theologians, but even by the standards of this century, David Strauss was an exceptional figure. From a publisher's point of view, he was easily the most successful religious author of his time. His nephew, Emil Strauss, realised that and became a rich man by running a publishing company which had only one author – his uncle. Strauss proved for the first time in Germany the hunger of a reading public for books that deal with 'Christianity today', ideally from a non-orthodox position, and various authors to this day have followed in his footsteps in this regard.

Strauss became famous practically over night with the publication of his *Life of Jesus* in 1835, at a time when he was not yet 30 years old. The book was translated into English in 1846 by Mary Ann Evans, better known as George Elliot. Its fame was well deserved. The *Life of Jesus* is one of the most brilliant products of biblical criticism, written in an eloquent style and certainly quite readable which is an achievement most scholarly books cannot even remotely boast. Strauss manages to cover the four gospels subjecting them all, one pericope after another, to the same kind of criticism which is the more impressive as it rests on simple principles which are carried through consistently throughout the 1200 pages of the book. Strauss' work derives its fascination partly from its almost playful simplicity which renders its argument even more forceful.

Strauss takes as his starting point the assumption that, at his time, there are, essentially, two exegetical schools. One of them is orthodox or supernaturalist. The other is critical or rationalist. The former accepts the biblical narrative as historical, including its embellishment with miracles, the latter rejects miracles and tries to supplant them with natural explanations. Rationalist exegesis thus ventured to find the biblical text contaminated by the uneducated superstition of the witnesses. Here are a few examples of their famous substitutions of natural explanations for miraculous stories. People who were said to be raised from the dead (including Jesus himself) had only been seemingly dead. The feeding of the 5000 meant that those present were encouraged to share what they had brought along. The stilling of the storm was thought to refer to a sudden change of the weather which, it was claimed, happens frequently around the Sea of Galilee. The tongues of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost were an electrical phenomenon. Paul and Silas were freed from the prison by an earthquake. Approaching Damascus, Paul was blinded by lightning while the sudden impact of the cold hands of Ananias reversed that condition etc.

Strauss' procedure is this. For each pericope he first gives the orthodox exegesis, then the rationalist one. This is partly because he believes that the rationalists are right in refusing the orthodox view of the text. The obsolete nature of traditional exegesis is thus in many ways taken for granted by Strauss; the rationalists have done this destruction for him. There is a further reason, though, why Strauss prints the two contrary ways of understanding the biblical texts next to each other. He suggests that, while they are opposed to each other in their attitude to miracles, they also share an important presupposition. They both think that the gospel narratives are chiefly meant to be historical. Both, orthodox and rationalist agree, in Strauss' view, that the central

relevance of the biblical texts consists in the fact that they deliver an account of a story which actually happened. In other words, they ground faith in history. Here Strauss disagrees, and it is this disagreement which arguably makes for the most original aspect of his contribution. The meaning of the gospel stories is absolutely misunderstood, he argues, if they are seen as essentially historical, and it is this failure to recognise the true nature of those stories which has led the rationalists to all those seemingly 'natural' – and in reality highly artificial – explanations which Strauss finds ridiculous and actually frivolous.

What, then, is the meaning of those stories if they are not historical? Strauss writes, and apparently believed this still in 1835, that to realise the essentially mythical character of the gospels would remove the need to bend over backwards with the most impious explanations and open up, instead, a truly Christian, truly religious way of appropriating them. Their religious meaning is not contained in any claim to history at all, but in their expressing the most fundamental truths about God and humankind. This most fundamental truth is the insight that God and man are coming together, that man is reconciled to God and thus set on the path towards his unification with the divine.

Here Strauss is clearly inspired by Hegel, a fact which he acknowledges right from the outset of his book. Speculative philosophical insight, he argues there, helps him to let go of the letter that killeth giving him the inner calm and independence to accept the fragility of the historical basis of the gospel, thus liberating him to perceive the essential message of Christianity in its true, spiritual form.

Many of Strauss' exegetical arguments, which at his time caused an unprecedented uproar, have in the meantime become currency. And yet, one may ask whether his own claim that in his *Life of Jesus* he simply presents the results of disinterested,

historical study is quite accurate. Given his apparent belief that the true meaning of Christianity is ever more clearly understood the less it is associated with seemingly historical facts, one might feel that the result of his exegetical work was predetermined precisely by this theological conviction. It is well known that theological orthodoxy can influence biblical exegesis making it less critical than perhaps it ought to be. Strauss may be an early example of the reverse case – a critical theological attitude all but requires him to find 'historically' that the biblical stories have no foundation whatsoever in history.

As I said, public agitation was on an unprecedented scale. Hundreds of booklets, brochures, articles and indeed whole books were written, most of them denouncing the author as anything ranging from unscientific to blasphemous. Strauss became an outcast, his academic career was over before it had really begun. This reaction to his first major publication may partly explain why from there he moved to ever more radical positions. In 1837, only two years after the *Life of Jesus* first saw the light of the day, he replied to various writings directed against that book. In the course of this, usually brilliant, polemic he introduced incidentally what was to become the textbook classification of the Hegelian school into left, centre and right – based on their reaction to his landmark publication.

In 1841 he published his own *Christian Faith* in which he subjected traditional doctrines to the same kind of critical scrutiny which he had applied to the gospel narrative six years earlier – and with an equally disastrous result. The work marked his exit from the theological stage; his later writings betray an ever increasing estrangement from Christianity.

The author whose viewpoint Strauss adopted specifically from the 1840s was Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872). Unlike Strauss, he had said farewell to Christianity early on. Even though he too had theological schooling, the 1830s see him already as an ardent opponent not only to 'right wing Hegelianism', but more generally to organised religion. We consider Feuerbach here only as author of the *Essence of Christianity* which became a classic of atheist philosophy of religion.

Only in passing I may mention that, much like Strauss, Feuerbach exercised his freedom of expression at the expense of any academic (or other) career; he lived for the most part of his life on a modest fortune he had inherited.

The foundation of Feuerbach's argument in his most famous book is well known. Against the biblical word according to which God created man in his image, he sets his own version: man created God in his own image. His theory of religion, then, rests on the idea that religion is projection. The idea of God is nothing but the externalisation of something that human beings should, more properly, find within themselves. It is less often noted that the 'man' which is equated with the divine is not, according to Feuerbach, the human individual, but the universal man, one might almost say: some Platonic idea of man. But let us look somewhat more closely at Feuerbach's argument.

He starts from the anthropomorphic notion of God as we find it in all the religions. In this kind of account, God is indeed given all the predicates that human beings should, ideally, receive. While he is aware of theological attempts to purge this anthropomorphic language, he rejects those sharply, calling them 'a subtle, devious kind of atheism'. Is it then sensible to accept that, while all the attributes of God are human, their subject, nevertheless, is non-human? Feuerbach answers in the negative. Or can the divine subject be maintained while all its attributes are removed?

Feuerbach again rejects this possibility. The only remaining possibility, then, is that religion is the externalised interior of the human being:

'What is God to man, that is man's own spirit, man's own soul; what is man's spirit, soul, and heart – that is his God. God is the manifestation of man's inner nature, his expressed self; religion is the solemn unveiling of man's hidden treasures, the avowal of his innermost thoughts, the open confession of the secrets of his love.' (§ 2)

To see Feuerbach's writing in its historical context we must, however, focus on yet another feature. In Hegel, we had seen, religion was very much understood intellectually. Where religion came to its conclusion, it was closest to philosophy. Feuerbach disagrees again. For him the anthropomorphisms of traditional religion are an expression of the fundamental truth that religion is about man's wishes and desires, not his thoughts or ideas. The latter may be the theologians' wishful thinking, but their intellectual systems have nothing to do with religion. Religion is not about cognition, but about relish. The religious human being wants to bring into his own possession a good which is symbolised by the term 'god'. It is interesting that Feuerbach claimed that for this understanding of religion he had the support of Luther who had famously argued, in his Large Catechism, that 'that upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god'. While it is doubtful that Feuerbach actually drew on Luther when he developed his theory – he inserted this and other quotations only into the second edition of his work – those parallels were not without impression on theologians who read the book – not least on Karl Barth who accepted that theology had to be extremely careful not to step into this trap.

The 1830s and 40s saw a remarkable intellectual dynamism. The course of only a few years saw first the publication and rise of Hegel's system, then the first shock of

Strauss and the return of the spectre of historical criticism, only a few years later the publication of Feuerbach's major assault against the very foundations of Christianity and religion in general. The radical conclusions which the young Marx drew from all this, again, could be read within less than 15 years since the death of Hegel.

Marx himself, certainly, described these developments with an unmistakable air of mockery:

> As we hear from German ideologists, Germany has in the last few years gone through an unparalleled revolution. … It was a revolution beside which the French Revolution was child's play, a world struggle beside which the struggles of the Diadochi [successors of Alexander the Great] appear insignificant. Principles ousted one another, heroes of the mind overthrew each other with unheard-of rapidity, and in the three years 1842-45 more of the past was swept away in Germany than at other times in three centuries. All this is supposed to have taken place in the realm of pure thought.

We can almost see these academics debate speculative questions thinking they are actually changing the world while, in reality, they are only fighting imaginary, intellectual wars.

Marx takes the left-wing Hegelian critique of religion for granted, but is not satisfied with the framework those Hegelians are giving to their explanation of the rise (and the expected downfall) of religion. They tended to abstract their theory of religion from the real life of society and, for Marx, the real life of society for all practical purposes is the economic life. One might say that Marx is here effectively harking back to Hegel even if his view of the real life of society is quite different from that of the late Berlin professor.

In this sense, Marx does not actually add to the armour of critical arguments developed by previous thinkers against religion. In an introduction to a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* which he published in 1844, he starts with the observation that 'for Germany the criticism of religion has been essentially

completed'. Feuerbach is right in reducing it to its essence which is: 'man makes religion, religion does not make man'. What remains to be done is not so much further criticique of religion, then, but rather a better explanation of what 'man' is. 'Man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man – state, society.' In other words, Feuerbach is right to reduce religion to anthropology, but is mistaken in his actual anthropology which ignores the fact that human nature must be understood from its involvement with society. In his *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx writes in 1845: 'the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations.'

These social relations can be those of estrangement or those of reconciliation. This, again, is still Hegelian. Marx' own insight consists in the interpretation of this 'estrangement' as estrangement of men from the means of production, on account of their private ownership. This estrangement must be overcome in the first place, and this is to happen in a social revolution. Given the dependence of all social and political institutions on this basis, they will all fall into place after the economic estrangement is overcome. The liberation of the human being, that prized goal of all Hegelian theories, is to be actually achieved in this way, and only in this.

Ultimately, this anthropological realignment has consequences for Marx' understanding of religion also. It places religion in this dialectic of economic estrangement and reconciliation. Feuerbach's theory that religion is inverted consciousness, in which man produces his own God, is now explained as necessarily arising from an economic situation which does not enable man to be truly human:

'Religion is … the *fantastic realization* of the human essence since the *human essence* has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle *against that world* whose spiritual *aroma* is religion.'

In this sense Marx's atheism is militant; once the point of his theory has been understood it could not be otherwise. Yet, his theory of religion also allows for the insight that *in the inverted world of estrangement* religion is necessary and actually beneficial, at least partly. He writes:

'Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people.'

The last statement has, of course, become emblematic for Marxist criticism of religion thereby frequently losing the specific connotation it carries for Marx. He does not say 'opium for the people', meaning a drug delivered by mendacious priests trying to keep the lower classes in the dark. Opium here seems to be a medication which is really and actually needed in a sick world. It is even an expression of the real dissatisfaction of the oppressed with their situation, however inadequately conceptualised and expressed.

In spite of all this, it cannot be ignored that for Marx theological and religious questions were as such woefully inadequate. He does not only criticise particular theological answers or doctrines, but we might say the theological discourse as a whole. His influence on Christian life and thought is therefore largely indirect. The socialist and communist movement, with which he was (more or less successfully) trying to liaise, provoked a renewed reflection about the social responsibility of Christianity, even though this was often driven more by the fear that 'godless' socialists might gain too much influence over the lower classes if the Church appeared indifferent towards their plight.

Week 5: Religion in the 19th century. Secularisation and Revivals

1. Secularisation and religious revival in the 19th century

In this week's lecture we focus on some developments in 19th century individual and communal religiosity and piety. How did this fare throughout the century? The idea we often have primarily is that of secularisation. Now this has become, as a concept, the focus of intense debate in recent years, but without going into the details of these debates, it is clear that the 19th century certainly did see massive challenges to the traditional position of the churches in most European societies. Their close association with the state, which had been taken for granted for a very long time, began to crumble; religious freedom was espoused as a fundamental constitutional principle wherever constitutions were written. The increase of religious plurality in many countries meant that even political elites that would have wished to align themselves with one particular church realised that they couldn't really do this any longer in the way they had traditionally done this. Furthermore, there existed, with variations in different countries, an intellectual climate that contained – to say the least – elements of strong criticism of religion.

All this would not seem so surprising given what we have heard about the French Revolution which sounded, in many ways, the theme for things to come throughout ensuing decades. After all, an outbreak of radical hostility towards anything Christian had marked the very outset of the century. And yet, things are not all that easy. In order to perceive that this neat picture of antireligious revolution and conservative, return-to-religion reaction, of the process of modernisation as increasing secularisation is too simple, we simply have to recall that the idea of Establishment as it had existed in Europe ever since the 16th century had been as much a device to

curtail religiosity as it had been, perhaps, a measure to protect the churches. The latter might appear paramount in contrast to the excesses of the French revolution or to anticlerical political ideas of liberal reformers, but in actual fact, of course, the integration of the church into early modern regimes had been primarily an aspect of absolutism, of the notion that the political ruler within a given territory had the right to determine everything relevant within that land – you only have to think of Henry VIII's conflict with the pope to get the idea of what I mean. And this idea continued to dominate religious policy into the 18th century. Political rulers, whether conservative reactionaries or liberal reformers – and the 18th century saw plenty of both – took it for granted that they were entitled to meddle into church affairs whenever that seemed to serve their own political ends.

It is necessary to come to an understanding of the ambiguity of this situation in order to understand some major developments in the 19th century. What I mean to say is that the traditional arrangements of close integration of church and state were not only objectionable from the point of view of ardent secularists or neopagans as we saw in the French revolution, but also from the angle of the most faithfully devoted Christians. To give you just one example; in 1817, duly to mark the 300th anniversary of the reformation, the Prussian king, Frederick William III decided that Lutherans and Calvinists in his country were to form a union. His own reason for that was, not least, his frustration about the fact that, being reformed but married to a Lutheran wife, could never celebrate the Eucharist together with his spouse; on the other hand the idea that differences between the two main strands of reformation churches in continental Europe were not substantial enough to warrant continuing schism had been popular among liberal minded theologians and members of both communities for some while. Nevertheless, it is quite characteristic that the king felt it incumbent

on himself to urge that this organisational union (he wisely refrained from touching the confessional status) was to be accompanied by a change in the liturgical formula. This, predictably, proved highly controversial; in some places in Silesia police was called in to enforce the execution of the royal supremacy over the Church. A considerably number of Silesian Lutherans, who probably felt that they had not persevered in their faith under the fiercely Catholic Habsburg regime for centuries to be forced out of it by a Protestant king, eventually packed their belongings and emigrated to America.

This, I think, is highly relevant to understand the religious dynamic of the 19th century. Even the least educated Silesian farmer of the early 19th century certainly did not expect to find in the USA a paradise of Lutheran establishment; what they hoped to find, and actually did find, was, rather, a society which, precisely on account of the strict separation of state and church, which was beginning to be accepted from the early 19th century – think of Jefferson's famous 'wall of separation' letter to the Danbury Baptists in 1802 – offered a haven for the staunchly religious.

What is visible here as a contrast between religiously regulated Prussia and the freedom of America, becomes a recurrent theme throughout 19th century religious history within Europe itself. While it remained natural to support conservative or reactionary regimes for those Christians who happened to belong to the mainstream church, endorsed and protected by the state, those who did not, for whatever reason, could easily feel that the introduction of religious freedom, the abolition of establishment and overall the separation of state and church was actually advantageous for their own exercise of their religion. And they were, of course, the more actively religious; they were those for whom religion meant more than just a tradition to be adhered to or a matter of social or political expediency.

Thus there were good reasons for European Christians (and, incidentally, nonChristians, specifically Jews) to look at the impending loosening of ties between state and church which unfolded throughout the 19th century with mixed feelings, certainly with some worry, but also in realisation of the fact that such a development might eventually be beneficial for religious life generally.

And this latter assumption is to some extent actually born out by historical developments. This is the point where traditional narratives of secularisation in the 19th century need correcting. The loosening of the ecclesiastical regime of the state which had dominated European societies ever since the 16th century (and the absence of such constraints from the US) set loose remarkable religious energies which caused a string of religious revivals that few would have anticipated in the spiritual drought so characteristic of the late 18th century.

I shall presently give a few more details about some of those developments, but would like to emphasise once more the importance of seeing the coincidence of opposite developments as characteristic of the 19th century: it is the century of secularisation and of revival; it is the century of revolution and of reaction; it is the century of liberalisation and of renewed oppression, and whenever either element of those pairs is being discussed try not to forget that you are hearing about one side of this ever so paradoxical unity.

2. Religious revivals – movements, ideas, controversies

Let us now look more closely at the occurrence of revivals at the end of the 18th C and the first half of the 19th C. These decades saw a resurgence of popular Protestantism – especially – open air evangelism; this appealed to rural labourers, new industrial workers etc.

The phrase ‘religious revival’ was first coined in the 18th C. to describe a new phenomenon in which churches experienced an unexpected ‘awakening’ of spiritual concern, occasioned by a special and mysterious outpouring of God’s saving grace. This led to unprecedented numbers of intense conversions.

In the 19th century, the religious revival – deliberately orchestrated – now became a central instrument for provoking conversions, employing a variety of spiritual practices to initiate conversions, especially amongst the ‘unconverted’ youth.

a) England

Just a brief reminder, given that we are in Oxford, that in England the classical form of such a movement was Methodism. It had been growing since Wesley began field preaching in 1739. John Wesley, who had travelled literally thousands of miles on horseback to preach all around the country, emphasized the experiential nature of religious faith and the need to turn to Christ for salvation. He preached to people where they were – in fields or in the town square. Wesley went where no ‘respectable’ clergy went. Consequently, he won hearts and minds for Christ that the mainstream Church of England could not touch. Growth remained impressive:

1791 – 57,000 members

1801 – 92,000

1811 – 143,000

1850 – 489,000.

While Wesley himself had remained inside the Church of England, albeit on the margins, after his death in 1791 the movement continued outside the Church. This, incidentally, is a recurrent feature of all revivals; many or most of them are started

within a mainstream church, in an attempt to reform its frozen structures, to reinvigorate its spiritual life. This inevitably creates a tension which sometimes is resolved and in other cases leads to the foundation of a new religious group (church, 'sect'). The latter, of course, becomes much easier with loosening ties between state and particular churches and thus more common in the 19th century.

b) Scandinavia

Revival in the Scandinavian countries was especially initiated by the Lutheran lay evangelist Hans Nielsen Hauge who began his travelling ministry in Norway in 1796, after his own dramatic conversion on April 5 of that year. He describes his experience in a way which William James surely would have found fascinating:

> ...my mind became so exalted that I was not myself aware of, nor can I express, what took place in my soul. For I was beside myself. As soon as I came to my senses, I was filled with regret that I had not served this loving transcendentally good God. Now it seemed to me that nothing in this world was worthy of any regard. That my soul possessed something supernatural, divine, and blessed; that there was a glory that no tongue can utter...

Not only did he know for certain that he was saved from eternal damnation, but he felt a 'living faith' spring up in him.

The established Church disliked 'enthusiasts' and had forbidden all religious services except those under the supervision of regularly posted clergymen. Therefore Hauge spent several periods in prison. Nevertheless he travelled 10,000 miles in Norway and is regarded as the founder of Norwegian pietism. Norwegians immigrating to the USA brought that form of revival religion with them, influencing the shape of American Lutheranism.

At the same time there was an evangelical revival movement amongst the Protestant churches in France, where the theology had previously been rather 'rationalist'.

All of these movements emphasised the Word; the utter sinfulness of human beings and the need for conversion in which the person knew their sinfulness and was 'born again'. Such conversions often happened as a group experience in so-called revival meetings; I come back to that presently.

These movements continued to grow throughout the 19th century; they gave ordinary people the chance to read the Bible themselves. Without ignoring their more specifically religious relevance it is worthwhile pointing out that they supported emancipation in a broader sense: in chapels, a poor man (and sometimes even a poor woman) could become a class leader, Sunday school teacher or even a preacher. These people could even make trouble for the duly appointed minister, as they felt they had as much right as anyone else (including the minister) to interpret the bible for themselves.

It is also interesting to note that this was a form of religion in which experience, especially emotional experience, counted for more than learning and therefore appealed to smallholders in Sweden, Wales, and the Scottish highlands. Local ministers whipped their audiences into a frenzy of excitement in which they longed for the relief of a conversion experience.

What happened at a revival meeting? At the beginning there would be groans from men and women as they realised they were sinners, followed by an atmosphere of tension as they realised they needed God's forgiveness, and finally relief and whoops

of joy and even rolling on the ground as they turned to Christ and felt their sins forgiven.

c) USA

Nowhere is all this clearer than in the religious revivals which spread across America in the nineteenth century. In the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield and the Tennant brothers had led a series of revivals (mostly with Calvinist theology, emphasis on utter sinfulness). 19th century brought a new kind of revivals that were much more self-consciously wrought. These revivals show – and to some extent established, the deep connection between religion and society in the US. Essentially, evangelicalism helped to build that still young nation's social and intellectual culture. On a passing note it may be mentioned that contrary to long-standing opinion the US have not just always been deeply religious – ever since the Pilgrims Fathers, as it were. A number of more recent studies have all come to the conclusion that in many ways the US was much more secular, much less religious at the end of the 18th than at the beginning of the 19th century or indeed today. In other words, the developments we sketch here have been truly formative within the process which is now regularly called 'the churching of America' (cf. J. Butler, *Awash in a sea of faith. Christianizing the American people*, Cambridge 1990).

Evangelicalism stressed the need for moral choice and the capacity of redeemed individuals to create their own nurturing communities. These ideals contributed to the formation of a new nation and its identity. Evangelicalism, in that sense, helped make the new democracy work. People had a sense of their own inner resources and moral legitimacy enabling the new social structures to survive and flourish. They helped

create a powerful myth about America as a place of effort and accomplishment, virtue and autonomy, national prosperity and progress.

However, within this powerful story (or myth) about progress, linked to the rise of evangelicalism, we have to take account of the very specific question African American Christians.

Late 18th – early 19th century – black Americans, slave and free, Southern and Northern, began to convert to Christianity in larger numbers than ever before, especially to revivalistic, experiential and biblically oriented forms of Christianity. Black evangelicals, no less than whites, sought conversion, attended revivals, and viewed their lives in biblical terms. The difference of course was that the latter would actually use their religion, the bible in particular, to justify slavery while it existed. Congregations also were segregated; thus in spite of outward similarities in the type of religion that was predominant, the black experience of evangelical Christianity was quite different from white experience of it.

The existence of slavery in a nation that claimed to be Christian and the use of Christianity to justify enslavement confronted black evangelicals with a basic dilemma. This consisted of questions:

1. What meaning did Christianity have – if it was a white man's religion – for blacks?
2. And why did the Christian God permit blacks to suffer so much?

1. Xianity as a white man's religion? White ministers preached to slaves on plantations with an emphasis on obedience in this world and salvation in the next. But such control is never total.

Once slaves were given the tools of Christianity they adapted the religion to their own understanding. Very soon, an underground slave Christianity developed which understood Paul's more egalitarian statements, such as that in Galatians 3:28 –'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Jesus Christ.' – to hold the promise of liberation from their present condition in this world. The Exodus story was passed along in oral tradition, and in slave songs and spirituals. A master might be happy that slaves were singing while they worked, but he might not have been so happy if he had heard what they were singing: songs which were 'pervaded by a sense of change, transcendence, ultimate justice, and personal worth,' which married African musical and cultural forms to an emancipatory Christianity.[1] The read and sang about the stories of freedom in the Bible in terms of their own circumstances. It was illegal for slaves to learn to read and write, but secret night-time meetings organised by the slaves themselves served as opportunities for the preaching of their own Christianity and the teaching of basic literacy skills to one another.

By the 1830s, there was a new generation of black preachers who took it upon themselves to convert their own people. They developed their own styles of preaching as well as singing. Separate black churches sprang up, especially Baptist and Methodist. To deny African Americans the possibility of preaching or gathering for religious meetings would have violated the tradition of gospel freedom as understood by evangelical Protestants.

[1] Lawrence W. Levine, "Slave Songs and Slave Consciousness: An Exploration in Neglected Sources" in *African-American Religion. Interpretive Essays in Religion and Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) p. 76.

Black churches became a power base – the only one African Americans had – for the emancipation of slaves in the nineteenth century; churches were the place where they had self governance and learnt to organise. This remained important up until the civil rights movement (1960s – Martin Luther King a Baptist minister).

Christianity therefore was no longer a 'white religion'. Black minister a very important part of any community. Church a central gathering place and the platform from which African Americans could speak into the public sphere.

2. Strong sense of distinguishing between 'true' and 'false' Christianity. Evangelicals have always done that. African Americans gave this a particular interpretation – holding a fellow Christian in bondage was a blatant violation of the fundamental spirit of Christianity. They suggested that white claims of moral superiority and white norms of morality collapsed in the context of slavery and would point to the religious hypocrisy of whites (esp. in the white justification of slavery – that blacks were enslaved as a result of the curse for the sin of Ham). Indeed, they developed their own rhetoric about the importance and place of African Americans in the development of America – "the descendants of Africa should multiply and increase in virtue in America." (American Moral reform Society 1837). Some more radical preachers even suggested that white Christianity was so corrupt that it was black Christianity that would prevail in an age when Christianity would be practised not just preached.

d) Roman Catholic Revivals in Europe

We change tack completely now and go back to Europe to look at RC revivals, especially around the revival of Marianism and apparitions of Mary.

Apparitions of Mary were the most spectacular sign of a religious revival within Roman Catholicism. Apparitions of Mary were always a feature of Roman Catholicism so in a sense there was nothing unusual when, after the French Revolution, a series of apparitions began to be reported. However, clearly something new was going on in the 19th century – especially because there were more children and women as the visionaries of the apparitions, a very particular feature of modern apparition stories. Also cults based on the apparitions themselves (rather than on relics and cultish objects which was more common in the middle ages).

France was the first place where these apparitions began to take place.

1830–1: a novice nun called Catherine Laboure saw a series of visions at her convent in the Rue du Bac in Paris. The virgin asked her to have a special medal struck to depict and commemorate the apparition.

1846 – two young cowherds (14 and 11 yrs old) reporting seeing a vision of Mary in an Alpine village. Mary apparently reported God's anger at the impiety of the region.

1858 – the most celebrated case – at Lourdes, when the young shepherd girl, Bernadette Soubirous, saw a figure in a grotto in a town in the Pyrenees. She saw 18 separate apparitions, and the figure, announcing itself as the Immaculate Conception, directed Bernadette to a healing spring, and ordered that a chapel be built on the site.

At Lourdes, all the elements of the classic modern apparition story fused: humble visionary (female and young); delivery of a message; scepticism of parish priest initially; hostility of civil authorities; claims of miraculous cures; finally the deliberate creation of an official cult by the church, and creation of a pilgrimage site. This last point was key: the visions at Lourdes obtained official (church) approval.

1862 – the pilgrimage received official recognition an a church built above the grotto;
1883 – 1901 – magnificent church built there;
1891 – local feast (saint's day) on Feb 11 made universal by the pope (though since 1969 its observance has been optional!)

The church gave its stamp of approval to other apparitions : Pontmain in France (1871), Pompeii in Italy (1876) and Knock in Ireland (1879). But there were many more apparition claims – hundreds – throughout the century – in Spain, other parts of France, Bohemia and Poland.
Sometimes there were conflicts with the civil authorities, e.g. in 1876, when three eight-year old girls picking blackberries in the Prussian village of Marpingen had an apparition of a woman in white who described herself as "the Immaculately Conceived". Within days, reports of the apparition had drawn thousands of pilgrims and there was the hope that Marpingen would be the German Lourdes. But the state had declared a cultural war vs. Roman Catholics (more on church and state next week); Marpingen was occupied by a Prussian army, and the three young girls were charged with disturbing the peace and placed in a reformatory.

Why did these apparitions lead to revival in piety and pilgrimages? The visionaries themselves – often young and female, had outsider status, or some experience of emotional vulnerability with which people could identify or which identified them. For example, Catherine Laboure, the nun in Paris, had been bereaved when young; her mother had died when she was 9, she climbed onto a chair to embrace an image of the Virgin in the dead woman's room and 'take Mary as her mother'. Again, Bernadette Soubirous had had a quarrelsome and bitter family life, her mother seems to have neglected her; in 1857 she was sent to work for her former foster mother where she was ill treated and overworked as a shepherd and farm worker. Mary McLoughlin, the priest's housekeeper in Knock, was talked about in the area for her 'little fault' with the bottle.

One might go on to argue in terms of a psychological explanation here that the apparitions provided emotional consolation for the visionaries themselves, but more importantly it appears that ordinary people could identify with those visionaries precisely on account of their experienced hardship. In Lourdes, it was the poor, beggars and servants who were the first to believe Bernadette's account. In fact, ordinary people often believed while priests and authorities were initially sceptical.

Ordinary women were seen to have a particular authority because they were regarded as 'empty vessels' through whom encounters with the divine could more easily happen. They were blank slates to whom the Virgin could appear, it was thought; they were simple and humble and couldn't make it up!

Also feminisation of religion in the 19th century – women and children vital to these apparitions and the movements which grew out of them.

Many more women entered religious orders; women formed larger proportion of church attendees as the line between practising and non-practising Roman Catholics was drawn more sharply. Men left religious matters to their wives and daughters. Religion was coming to be seen as a women's sphere.

Place of female visionaries important here. In a male-dominated, hierarchically organised church, what role were women going to have? Women parishioners were formally powerless (unlike at least some of the protestant counterparts who increasingly had formal influence in their churches).

Another aspect was the re-casting of Virgin Mary as a symbol representative of this feminisation – albeit in a more domesticated form. She remained, however, ambiguous (like all symbols) and open to interpretation.

But – also – church = place of respite for women, and escape from husband and family. Women travelled together to pilgrimage sites. Creation of female sociability and female networks.

Female religious had degree of autonomy and power.

Tapped into peasant religion – the intercession of the virgin was often sought in times of hardship, famine, or epidemics of cholera and smallpox which swept through nineteenth-century Europe. Could also be linked to particular political upheavals.

e.g. first apparitions in France in aftermath of the French Revolution.

Marian apparitions etc. were reported in Italy in 1790s during Napoleonic campaigns there.

1860s and 1870s – creation of new states in Italy and Germany redrew the map of Europe. E.g. – struggle for Italian unification was accompanied by a series of

apparitions especially in the difficult years 1870 and 1871 when the papal states were invaded by Victor Emmanuel.

Individual belief in the intercessionary power of the virgin and a collective faith in apparitions = key.

These apparitions and revivals often seen in terms of a fossilised religion on the defence in a secularised world. Not exactly – more that peasant belief remained vibrant and modern Catholicism tapped into that and was able to evolve and develop. Remarkable Roman Catholic revival in an age when people thought the church was bound to wither in the face of education and science.
Remember the state of Roman Catholicism in the French Revolution and its aftermath – persecution of priests, dislocation of church's pastoral authority, sale of Church lands etc. No one could have imagined the immense pilgrimages to Lourdes that would occur in the 19th century.

And yet, maybe the developments of the late 18th and early 19th century prepared the way for this revival of Catholic piety. The losses of church land made the national churches more dependent on Rome. Authority of pope within the church therefore increased, and was connected to a revival in piety. (Ultramontanism – more next week). Rather like the 16th century – Protestantism weakened Papal authority initially but drove Roman Catholicism to reform its spirituality and devotional life.
19th century – more zealous clergy, revival of old teaching orders and founding of new ones (many devoted to the Virgin), emergence of new congregations, merging of popular piety with new forms of devotion.

The changed tenor of RC devotions created an atmosphere in which apparitions might be more likely to happen, and vice versa – apparitions contributed to new spirituality. Institutional church harnessed energy and spirituality of the piety associated with apparitions; Lourdes = great example of institutionalisation of that. Organisation = key. Nineteenth-century church clamped down on too much spontaneous religion, but also controlled it. E.g. At Lourdes, pilgrimages (esp with overnight stays) had to be undertaken with the leadership of a parish priest. After initial period of unorganised pilgrimages to Lourdes, observers were soon commenting on the way in which priests led their flocks to the site with almost military discipline. A special hymn was adopted in 1873; priests became obsessed with the management of crowds.
Golden age of mass pilgrimages.

Also copying of Lourdes grottoes all over Europe and even America, and development of religious souvenirs – bottles of Lourdes water etc.
Commercialism harnessed to revival in piety.

Week 6: Constructing modern theology: Baur, Ritschl, Troeltsch

We had seen that and how some people, taking their cue from Schleiermacher and Hegel, moved to an ever more radical criticism of theology, Christianity and religion. How was Christianity to react? There were those, of course, who would opt to hold steadfastly to traditional orthodoxy, emphasising its correctness ever more strongly in the face of such 'devilish' opposition. It certainly would be wrong to underrate this conservative group. In the 1850s especially they were extremely influential given the conservative, even reactionary mood that dominated much of European society following the failed revolutions of 1848. Liberalism, it seemed, had eventually revealed its true, antagonistic character, its ultimate denial of authority, earthly as well as divine. The answer to its advances, then, ought to be a resounding no, a return to the old truths and insights vouchsafed by the monarchy and the Church.

And yet, this period did not bring forth lasting, major theological achievements on the European continent. This only happened when all the doubts about theological liberalism returned in double strength after WW I.

The major development in European theology in the mid-19th century, to which we have to turn now, is in continuity with the impulses that we have studied so far. It is an attempt to offer a reconstruction of theology that makes allowance to all the more recent insights, historical and philosophical, but nevertheless does not give up the essential basis of Christianity. It is thus indebted to Schleiermacher's idea of an 'essence of Christianity' as well as to the pungent questions about religion and history asked by Lessing earlier on. At the same time, this school of theology is very much a product of the modern research university where scholars collaborate due to the complexity of the subject matter. It is thus typical that we deal here with two 'schools'; this is indicative of the fact that the project their founders engaged in was

too vast to be worked out by even the most erudite and the most industrious single academic. These projects are so complex because they attempt to do historical and theological work in unison, establishing a valid view of the history of the church, especially its beginnings, while at the same time developing the tools for its appropriate interpretation. Underlying this is the hermeneutical idea that the study of history and its interpretation must go hand in hand as there is no 'knowledge' of history available that would not, at the same time, be an interpretation of it. Thus there can never be historical insight without the right 'key', be it philosophical or theological, to its understanding.

Philosophical or theological insights, on the other hand, can never be gained without the help of history, as they all are, in practice, expositions of texts which we read properly only if we place them into their historical context. This means, however, an extension of the theological task in yet another direction. For, historical understanding must always transcend traditional boundaries. We understand a text historically if we place it into its context, the wider the better. To understand a religion, such as Christianity, properly we have to see it, ultimately, as part of the history of religions in the broadest possible sense. The person who first undertook precisely this, a re-evaluation of theology on the basis of the now newly available historical methods and philosophical principles geared for its interpretations, was Ferdinand Christian Baur. In his earliest published monograph *On Symbolism and Mythology*, an attempt to understand mythology in the framework of the history of religion which appeared in 1824, he claims that, in principle, there are only two roads which the study of the history of religion can follow: 'either that of a completely analytical splitting up of phenomena which, ultimately, leads to atomism, fatalism and atheism, or that in which we perceive the intellectual life of the nations in its coherence as one great

whole, thus obtaining an ever more sublime idea of the divine. … I am not scared of the well-worn charge of mixing philosophy and history. Without philosophy, history for me is dead.'

Ferdinand Christian Baur was born in 1792, died in 1860 and lived the exemplary life of a scholar. He never ventured beyond his native country of Swabia where he was a professor of theology at the local university in Tubingen from 1829 until his death. In an obituary, his son in law, Eduard Zeller, described Baur's daily routine in the following way:

'through summer and winter he would get up at 4 am. In the winter, he worked normally for some hours in the unheated room to spare the servants, even though, as would happen in particularly cold nights, the ink in his inkpot might be frozen. From then, regular walks after lunch and in the evening were the only lengthy interruptions of his learned pursuit'.

From this work emanated, from the late 1820s an incessant flow of groundbreaking publications including seminal works on all New Testament writings which, perhaps for the first time ever, aimed at producing a consistent picture of primitive Christianity in its historical setting, giving due weight to the fact that the texts we possess are both our sources for that period and also its products. Simultaneously, Baur covered the history of doctrine by devoting entire monographs to the development of particular doctrines throughout history.

We cannot dwell here on the historical side of his work. Looking at the (more properly) theological side of it we may start from Lessing's observation about the 'ugly broad ditch' separating historical and theological truths. Baur's attempt at an answer is based on the assumption that this ditch can be bridged once we have established a philosophy of history which provides us with a referential framework to

interpret single and singular historical events. How does he understand this task? Let us take religion, for example. For Baur religion is essentially about salvation, more properly, reconciliation. Religion is there to solve the fundamental ambiguity of the human being who finds himself at the same time as part of the material world ('nature') and not as part of it, as body and soul, nature and spirit and so forth. On this basis, Baur would classify religions generally into two groups, those that identify God with the material world in one sense or the other ('nature religions') and those that identify him with the otherworldly, spiritual, transcendent principle. Neither of those, however, can solve the principal task of religion fully and properly. For, any variant of 'nature religion' will not take into account sufficiently man's spiritual aspect, while the religions of a purely transcendent deity draw man away from his corporeal state, thus leaving him equally estranged, alienated from his actual condition. A solution can only be achieved by a religion which binds the two ideas together, and, perhaps not surprisingly, this is the essence of Christianity which contains, in the doctrine of incarnation, precisely this insight, the coming together of God and world, nature and spirit and thus the ultimate notion of salvation for the human being.

Such an exposition puts the incarnation right at the centre of Christian theology. Yet, in order for Baur's theory to work, incarnation must have been real, not only an idea. It is not enough for Christianity to have the notion of a god-man, it must have the certainty that the god-man really trod the earth. For it is the property of any human being to be part of history, to be 'historical' in a strong sense of that word, and thus the god-man was either, as such, historical or he was not what is claimed he was. Any historical truth about Jesus can only be established, however, by historical research (just like any other historical truth), and thus theology cannot, by definition, do without history. It is important to see this; for Baur his own, historical approach to

theology had an intrinsic theological justification. As the religion of the incarnation, theology could not be 'mythology', but had its proper framework within history.

Yet, this had a further consequence, of which he himself was well aware. Exposing Christianity to historical research in this way meant, of course, to allow all the uncertainty characteristic of historical knowledge into the very heart of theology. What, if historical research came to different conclusions about Jesus of Nazareth; what if it was unable to supply the evidence Baur expected to find for the truth of the incarnation? Well, it would crumble, or else the credibility of him who attempted this reconstruction would. In any case, the justification of his own method depended on its success; only the proof that the incarnation *was* actually a historical coming together of God and nature would eventually justify his own version of 'historical theology'.

It is surprising, then, to notice that Baur is far from acknowledging such a success in any of the authors he covers. Rather, they all, from the early Gnostics to Schleiermacher and Hegel, fail to give the appropriate historical account of the absoluteness of Christianity. Is this because Baur thinks that the real answer has been waiting for him to be uncovered? The answer is, again surprisingly, no. Rather, he seems to be, in spite of his idealistic, Hegelian leanings deeply 'historicist'. He often summarises the failure of other authors to achieve a sustainable solution to the dilemma of faith and history in a way that may be called almost disingenuous. Thus he takes Schleiermacher to task for failing to offer a proof that Jesus actually was this ideal of perfection while at the same time stating that

'Between the one who is best, relatively, and the one who is absolutely perfect there is a gulf which history can never cross.'

Baur is here clearly begging the question. He himself had set out to prove this premise wrong by working out a framework within which such a statement might become

feasible. It now turns out that he did not believe in the very possibility of such an attempt in the first place.

Where does this leave us? Baur's work is deeply ambiguous. In his dual role as historian and as a philosopher of religion he seems to be torn between a genuine optimism to discover the point where history is transformed from the realm of human confusion to that of divine ordination, and the relativism so characteristic of most historical thought. Given that this ambiguity is apparent already in his earliest publications it is all the more remarkable that he managed to press on with his work for 30 more years without being able, or prepared, to compromise in either of the two positions.

It is at this point that his most important student, Albrecht Ritschl, becomes interesting for us. Ritschl was originally part of the Tubingen School, and studied the emergence of the early Catholic church (i.e. church history from 50-150 AD) in the framework of this school. This historical work led him to doubt some of the fundamental articles of faith of that School, however. He became convinced that it was possible to assign an early date to practically all the NT writings which would make them historical sources for the apostolic age. In order for this correction to have serious theological consequences, Ritschl introduced yet another correction to Baur's thought. He perceived that the latter's relativistic tendencies had to do with a view of history as an absolutely continuous process, an ever flowing river as it were. Ritschl argued that history itself in such a conception was fundamentally misunderstood. History must be seen to form clearly distinguishable units which cannot entirely be explained from its interdependence with other units or events. As a human individual cannot be understood as what it is, an individual, if it is seen in total continuity with

its environment, so history contains 'quasi-individuals', which have their own organising principle, their own immanent teleology. Ritschl employed here theories of history which were at the time quite popular among post-idealistic philosophers. For them, as for Ritschl, they served as a means to work 'historically' without losing sight entirely of meaning, identity and values, which people hoped to gain from a study of history.

In 1856, Ritschl published his study on the Early Catholic Church in a second, revised edition, which marked his breaking away from Baur and the Tübingen School. He was now sure that the NT offered him the basis for the establishment of an early phase of Primitive Christianity which had ended some time around the turn of the first century. The ensuing rupture was, in Ritschl's view, closely connected with the loss of an adequate reading of the OT which had enabled Judaic Christianity to form a proper understanding of the notion of 'Kingdom of God' so central in the preaching of Jesus. Ritschl thus vied for a 'biblical theology' on historical grounds as the Christian Bible had its origin in this particular, historical phase which could (and should) be seen as being of lasting, normative relevance for the Christian religion.

What, then, is this proper understanding of the 'Kingdom of God' and why is it of such central importance for Christianity? For Ritschl, the 'Kingdom of God' is, first of all, the most comprehensive term for salvation. When Jesus announced the coming of this kingdom, he meant to give his hearers the direction, or *telos*, of human development. At the same time, however, he also reveals the true nature of God; for this kingdom is at the same time the *telos* of the divine will. God wills our salvation; indeed, this will is essentially all we know of God. This is how Ritschl understands the word that 'God *is* love'. To ask any other questions about God (for example about his 'being') is metaphysics and, as such, an aberration for theology. To Christians,

God is revealed as the loving father who wishes to conform us to his will by including ever more human beings in his kingdom, which is a community based precisely on the principle of mutual love.

In this sense, Ritschl's understanding of salvation is 'reconciliation' much as it was in Baur and Hegel. Salvation means that the gap between God and man is bridged, that the destiny of the human being is fulfilled by a new kind of community which is established between himself and God. This new community has as its historical starting point the life of Jesus Christ and the community of disciples he assembled around himself. In this way, Jesus can be said to be the originator of the 'kingdom of God' which is thus as much present as it is a future reality (exegetically, Ritschl draws on the organic metaphors of the parables which compare the kingdom of God, e.g., with a mustard seed).

Unlike many other modern Protestant theologians, Ritschl has a strong notion of the Church. Religion is always a practical, and thus a communal affair, and so is Christianity. Salvation for the Christian is only possible within such a community. At the same time, Ritschl sharply rejects interpretations of the kingdom of God which see this in a kind of juxtaposition to the existing society. If the Christian task is understood as the foundation of special circles, as among certain evangelicals, or as the search for some utopian society, as in religious socialism, the message of Jesus is distorted. What is demands is that this kingdom becomes reality within our normal world. While we pursue our professions, while we live with our families or friends, while we engage in business or in scientific research, we ought to strive for this kingdom as a transformation of this world. This happens by substituting the egotistic principle by the altruistic one of mutual love.

This mutual love, as may be gathered then, is not so much a romantic notion in Ritschl (who was perhaps the least romantic of all the 19th century theologians). Love for him is much more an ethical concept, strict altruism, and, as such, the opposite of our natural inclinations. Thus, in spite of all the allusions to traditional doctrine, we can see how Ritschl's theology was very much suited to the bourgeois world of the late 19th century. Its message was this: be holy within your daily life, and this is achieved if you follow the prescriptions of this life in the spirit of Christ who was faithful to his own calling even in the dreadful fate that occurred to him.

On the more academic level, the fascination of his theology consisted in his ability to offer a framework for solid historical work which would, nevertheless, usher in a 'real' theology that was capable of integrating much of its classical heritage, not least from reformation thought, while being clearly and unmistakably 'modern'. This mixture proved extremely attractive, and Ritschl whose personality was difficult, nevertheless became the focal point of a school comprising the most gifted theologians of the last generation of the 19th century – not least Adolf Harnack must be mentioned here. Harnack's landmark works in church and doctrinal history, including his famous *History of Dogma*, are in many ways inspired by Ritschl's theology and an attempt to carry his theological impulse through in the field of history.

Perhaps the major systematic theologian among Ritschl's students was Wilhelm Herrmann whose influence on both Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann is obvious and acknowledged by both.

More interesting, though, for the purpose of this overview may be Ernst Troeltsch who was perhaps the maverick member of (and later on clearly a dissident from) the Ritschl School. Troeltsch can be seen as bringing back all the unresolved problems

about faith and knowledge, theology and history, Christianity and the modern world which several generations of scholars were convinced they could (and had) overcome. Troeltsch argued forcefully that they had not. He was very much an aporetic thinker; his questions and his criticism of existing solutions were far more interesting than his own, relatively timid, attempts to offer original answers.

Troeltsch has written an incredible lot, but not really one major work. He wrote a bulky study on the social doctrines of the Christian churches and sects which contributed crucially to the sociological study of religion. In this interest he was influenced by his great friend, Max Weber, whom he influenced in turn. (At one time, the two families actually occupied one large house together in Heidelberg.) Yet it would be a mistake to think of Troeltsch mainly as a contributor to this particular discipline. His importance, rather, lies in a plethora of essays which he wrote on numerous aspects of theological and wider issues.

Troeltsch considered faulty the very foundations upon which modern theology had been erected by the likes of Ritschl. He saw modern historical thought as a destructive force from which traditional, dogmatic Christianity could not escape and with which it could liaise only to its peril. In one of his best known essays, *On historical and dogmatic method*, written in 1898, he names three fundamental assumptions which, he claims, everyone who studies history would have to subscribe to. The first he calls the principle of criticism. Whatever I know historically is and will always be open to criticism; there is at best a 'most probable' account of any event to be had which could at any point be corrected by a better one, if such is at hand. The kind of certitude which faith demands cannot therefore be backed up by historical knowledge, however substantial.

The second principle is that of analogy. We always understand on the basis of similarity; we reconstruct events from what we know about other, related phenomena. Uniqueness, which seems required by Christian doctrine for the Christ event, cannot, therefore, be claimed on the basis of historical knowledge.

The third principle is that of correlation. It states that, whatever happens can be related, in principle, to everything else. There is no possibility, within history, to cordon off a particular area, a specific sub-set of events. This, then, prevents effectively the assumption of a special history of salvation within history. The (historical) study of Christianity can only be conducted within the framework of the history of religions and, ultimately, universal history.

All these theses were, in the first place, directed against the fundamentals of Ritschl and his school. Theologians after Ritschl had largely returned to the traditional business of dogmatics on the basis of Ritschl's historical arguments. Troeltsch was very much the provocative maverick within their circle. There is a famous scene when he was invited to give a speech at the yearly meeting of the Ritschlians in 1901. He spoke about *The Absoluteness of Christianity and the History of Religions*, arguing that such an absoluteness, which had been the Holy Grail for theology ever since the days of Hegel and Baur, could never be maintained as a historical insight. At one point he shouted into the room: 'Gentlemen, everything is shaking'.

This meant that the bond between history which generations of theologians had tried to establish, had been radically cut. Effectively, Troeltsch returned to their point of departure, Lessing's categorical verdict about the impossibility of marrying the two. Troeltsch is not so far away from those insights which were exploited only 20 years later by the young Karl Barth in his rejection of 'liberal theology'. Yet his conclusions are radically different from those Barth was to draw. For Troeltsch, there is no escape

from historicism. It is so much the mark of the age that any attempt on the part of theology to circumvent it could only result in failure. Theology has to expose itself to the battering of this onslaught; its restoration can only be found beyond this ordeal. Does it have any chance of a renewal? Troeltsch thought it might – in a new alliance with philosophy. Such a metaphysics remained, however, elusive; Troeltsch's work shows few traces of success in this quest. His unresolved questions were passed on, however, to major theologians of the 20th century, the most well-known probably being Paul Tillich who owed much to Troeltsch.

On a final note it may be mentioned that after the end of WW I Troeltsch was one of a small number of German intellectuals to accept the new, democratic state. He took on a position in the Ministry for Culture and Education. In 1923 he was invited to give lectures here in Oxford and in Edinburgh on his life's work. The invitation was largely due to Friedrich von Hugel, the major figure in modernist Catholicism in this country with whom Troeltsch had corresponded for a long time. Troeltsch would have been one of the first German scholars to visit England after the end of the Great War, but died shortly before he commenced the journey. They lectures he meant to deliver were edited by von Hugel in the same year as: *Christian Thought: Its History and Application*.

Week 8: Forebodings of things to come (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche)

At the end of this series of lectures we must consider how the 19th century ended, specifically for Christianity. It is customary now, and rightly so, to consider the 19th century as a 'long century' lasting effectively from the French revolution in 1789 to the outbreak of WW I. The Great War did indeed bring to a decisive close developments that we now consider of crucial relevance for the 19th century. A world which, as is often pointed out now, was largely globalised allowing people to travel without a passport through much of Europe, a world which believed in ideas of progress in all aspects of life, was plunged into the most savage conflict, and their entire cultural and technical sophistication seemed not to matter – except, perversely, where they actually supported the war. This, however, sealed their fate in the eyes of shocked onlookers. Thus, Karl Barth could mock in his famous exchange with Adolf Harnack – the icon of theological liberalism – in 1921 that he could not see any cultural advances in more recent religious life except for the fact that, arguably, savage people had not produced quite such an elaborate 'theology of war'.

This, of course, harps back to the notorious war time commitment of religious leaders and theologians most of whom had, like the vast majority of intellectuals all across Europe, lent their voice to the national cause. Quotes from war-time sermons today send a shudder down the spine of most listeners. Harnack himself was knighted after he drafted the speech the Kaiser gave 'To the German People' at the opening of the War in August 1914. It is now often pointed out, rightly, that the picture of 'liberal theology' supporting the war unreservedly is in many ways a polemical construction of Barth and his school to back up their own theological opposition against the generation of their teachers. Indeed, soon after the outbreak of the war, which caused

patriotic outbursts all over Europe, Harnack and others could be seen as returning to more sober assessments of the situation and campaigning for political positions that would have made an earlier, and less dramatic, end of the war feasible. Be this however as it may, the fact remains that WW I marked a rupture for Europe generally and not least for Christianity and for theology. While it may be legitimate to debate the fairness of the judgment, passed at the time being over the pre-war era, the fact of this backlash remains and its force has made history. For quite some time, the ideals of the 19th century remained, to many in Europe, tainted by their association with the eventual catastrophe.

In the field of religion, this concerned specifically the association established between religion and nation and between religion and culture. With hindsight, there is little doubt that these two associations were entered into largely as a means to counter the growing tide of secularisation. As a concept, secularisation is as regularly used as it is criticised. Its conceptual difficulties need not, however, concern us here. Suffice it to say that there can be but little doubt that throughout the 19th century a process gained in speed which separated the Christian religion from ever more areas of life with which it had been closely linked for centuries. The debate I mentioned is chiefly about the problem of whether this effectively meant a retreat of Christianity, possibly the beginning of its end, or whether it was rather part of a more general development which can be called compartmentalisation of society. The former view, clearly, impressed itself on most observers at the time – quite independently of whether they liked, or disliked, this tendency.

According to the latter view, it is a major element of modernisation that areas of society which had previously interacted closely, became more detached from each other. In the pre-modern era, politics, law, economics, science, and religion would, in

this view, have been tied up into one integral whole. Thus the mere idea, for example, of a 'separation between state and church' would have been impossible; in a sense an entity like 'religion' did not yet exist properly as it was just an inextricable part of social life. The ensuing process meant, then, that this complex reality was disentangled (which perhaps is a misleading term, as it presupposes that the more recent state is more 'natural') into more separate entities. In brief, for religion this would mean that, what was felt as an ever increasing retreat of religion from an all-embracing reality of individual and social life, was less a crisis than a change of religion.

Specifically for the 19th century, much can be said in favour of this view. In particular, it would seem to make good sense of the ambiguity that, while religion as part of public life did clearly recede (in various degrees all European states introduced secular constitutions; civic participation became ever less tied to religious affiliation etc.) religious attendance and religious commitment became in many ways stronger than ever.

And yet, people did feel that religion had lost its traditionally unquestioned framework within public institutions, partly because these institutions themselves had been abolished or were being changed radically. How could the lasting relevance of Christianity for society as a whole be expressed? How could religion be described as the bond that was still necessary to hold the nation together? This is where the two concepts I mentioned came in handy. Nation and culture: both were becoming ever more central in the European search for identity. Whereas right into the 18th century countries had been founded on their dominion by certain families, this became ever more untenable; and the backbone of statehood in the 19th century very much is the idea of the nation state. This is what fuels all the various nationalist movements, in

Italy, Germany, but also in the Slavonic peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. A nation appears to be a kind of community, formed by history, but what exactly makes it a unit? In many cases language would play an important part. Yet, for not so few European countries what actually mattered was a common religion. This is most obvious, of course, in cases such as Belgium which consisted of a population united by practically nothing except their Catholicism. The connection between the growth of nationalism in the 19th century, however, and traditional religions is apparent all across the continent. Instinctively, religious leaders realised that in some ways nationalism might be a rival for traditional religion, a fear which later was realised. For the time being, however, it led major figures in Church and theology to press the case of religion as the uniting bond for the nation, emphasising the mutual dependence of the two. This happened not least in Germany where the Lutheran Churches saw the additional advantage of thus securing the long sought domination over Roman Catholicism within a country whose population was almost evenly distributed between the two denominations.

And – to cut my long digression short here – it is this very identification of religious and national concerns, fostered for a long time by Church leaders and theologians in what was thought to be the self-interest of Christianity, which makes the vociferous support for frequently the most extreme goals of their nations by numerous theologians more than a historical accident. Without subscribing to the all-out propaganda of Barth and his friends against theological liberalism, it is difficult to deny that they had a point in their observations.

Yet, for Barth and others the issue was much less one of nationalism; it was the broader issue of culture. What had caused, in his view, the deplorable blindness of leading theologians towards a relapse into barbarism was, ironically, their zeal to

marry Christianity and contemporary culture. The connection between a theological interest in culture and any support for any war is, arguably, elusive, but what Barth clearly saw was the fascination of long tradition of theologians with a programme of synthesising Christianity with the ideals of the current age. Culture was simply the broadest term describing this overall tendency he perceived at work. From this angle, then, attempts to construct a historical and philosophical framework for biblical and theological traditions were, ultimately, not so different from the establishment of a connection between religion and nation.

Few would perhaps contradict the assessment that the major rupture caused by WW I within the development of Christian life and thought is this, that all those programmatic attempts towards a synthesis of Christianity and culture, in the broadest possible sense, lost much of their attraction. Put simply, while they might be seen as boosting the prospects of Christianity as long as those cultural values commanded high acceptance, they might acutely endanger Christianity once those values lost their currency.

It would be wrong, however, to think that this problem became apparent only after the catastrophe happened. Rather, there had long been those who had protested against those ‘syntheses’ partly on behalf of what they took to be genuine Christianity, partly because they were able to see the fragility of the seemingly well-greased machine of modern society. All those authors were, understandably reread with renewed vigour after WW I, while, certainly in some cases, they had been passed over during their lifetimes and become meanwhile half-forgotten.

2. Soren Kierkegaard

The first person to be mentioned here is Soren Kierkegaard. He lived from 1813 till 1855; thus we see that with him we are back in the former half of the 19th century. Kierkegaard was a contemporary of Baur and Strauss, born in the same year as Marx, but due to his early death his life really is confined to the former half of the century. Kierkegaard is one of those individuals whose work cannot really be appreciated apart from the person who produced it. His own, extremely ambiguous personality seems indubitably of paramount influence on his work even though (or, perhaps, paradoxically because) he chose to publish the majority of his books under a complex system of pseudonyms.

Kierkegaard never managed to blend into the society of his time; throughout his life he remained an outsider, fascinating but also suspicious, ultimately quite lonely. He was born into a family that had entered into wealth and combined the extreme frugality typical for this situation with an equally strictly Lutheran piety. Kierkegaard never needed to earn his own living. Nevertheless, at the age of 17 he went to study theology at the University of Copenhagen and, for some time, apparently planned to graduate and work as a vicar. Instead he lived for year in the Danish capital the life of a dandy. His literary production passed either altogether unnoticed or it caused uproar. In one case he managed to attract the hostility of some kind of Copenhagen tabloid which, consequently, made him their preferred object of ridicule for weeks. In another, on a more serious note, he published, shortly before his death, an extremely vicious attack against the late Bishop Mynster accusing him of watering down and, effectively, betraying Christianity. This finally damaged his relationship with the Danish Lutheran (State) Church beyond repair. Noteworthy (and in fact notorious) is also his unfortunate engagement to one Regine Olsen, an engagement he undid because he felt he was unable to be a good husband. Overall, Kierkegaard appears as

a man of supreme wit and intelligence who nevertheless – or perhaps therefore – never manages to come to terms with his own life and that of others. He passes extremely acute, even malicious judgements over his contemporaries – the only justification perhaps being that he is equally ruthless towards himself. Kierkegaard appears to have been filled with deep suspicion towards about anything people of his time liked, believed in or considered important. This deep-seated refusal of the bourgeois world of his time may be the ultimate reason why he exerted so much continuing fascination and influence so much later on.

Kierkegaard's contribution to Christian theology is manifold and fundamental. Within this lecture I focus my attention on one important aspect which may be able to show both his relation to major issues debated throughout the 19th century, but also his individual, and quite specific angle of approach.

Like Schleiermacher and Hegel, Kierkegaard tried to understand what religion was. And unlike Hegel, who overall is the main foe, the real heretic in the Kierkegaardian universe, (but like Schleiermacher) he intends to show that religion cannot be equated with other major functions of the human mind, such as cognition or ethics.

Kierkegaard's approach finds its classical form in his theory of three forms of human existence, the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious, which he expounds in his *Fear and Trembling*. The first stage, the aesthetic, is quite straightforward. It is the kind of philosophy which makes a human being susceptible to anything he may encounter; he is doing whatever he feels up to as long as it brings him pleasure or entertainment. He has no firm convictions but is blowing with the wind.

The second form, the ethical, is equally straightforward. Here, the human individual searches for his own, inner self. Where the aesthetic person goes for the next best fun thing, the ethical one seeks constancy. He considers his own, ideal self as his image in

which he ought to form himself. This search for the own self is not, however, purely subjective. The ethical person, rather, finds himself always in company and being social, having a profession, a family, friends, is, thus, an essential part of ethical existence. This really is the ideal of his age – and Kierkegaard is not necessarily ironic or scathing here. The ethical existence is the kind of person we all would like to meet and have as a friend.

Kierkegaard, clearly, would be misunderstood here if one were to assume that he wishes to criticise or deride this kind of existence. And yet, he raises the question which eventually is crucial, is this kind of existence complete as it is; is it as 'autonomous' as it persuades itself of being – or does it really rest on a kind of existence that is yet again quite different, but foundational for ethical existence? Kierkegaard of course thinks that this is the case, and tries to explain it in his account of religious existence. In order to be quite provocative he uses the example of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. This, he observes, is frequently cited by preachers as the prototype and the exemplar of a Christian life. Yet, do they really know what they are talking about? We only have to imagine a person, listening to such a sermon on Gen 22 and, on his return home, doing what Abraham did to his own son.

'If a certain preacher learned of this he would, perhaps, go to him, he would gather up all his spiritual dignity and exclaim: "'Thou abominable creature, thou scum of humanity, what devil possessed thee to wish to murder thy son?"'

And, within the ethical realm he would be absolutely right in being abhorred. Yet, this only shows that he never thought what it really means to call Abraham an example for our faith. What, then, does it mean? Strictly speaking, according to Kierkegaard, there is no explanation. This is because explanations follow rules, such as exist within ethics. The case of Abraham, however, is different. He acts out of an 'immediate

relation with the absolute' which is without an analogy and, therefore, without proper explanation. He acts when and because he hears the voice of God. This is all there is to it. The only further thing we might do is try to identify with Abraham and thus understand what it meant for him to be in this situation – a situation of infinite loneliness, leaving behind anything he could have counted on, laws, morality, to commit something which from the point of view of human insight and human morality is nothing other than – murder.

Kierkegaard wishes to point to this transgression of the ethical. Needless to say, his point is not that God necessarily commands a murder. He is deeply sceptical, however, towards any Hegelian attempt to integrate the absolute into our own systems of speculative thought. If we encounter God this happens in a way which invalidates any rules that human beings might have agreed on. In this sense, religious existence is as starkly removed from the ethical as the latter is from the aesthetical. A Church, such as the Lutheran State Church of his time, which tends to identify religion with a moral life, fails therefore to appreciate what religion really is about. In truth and reality, morality is founded on religion, not – as Kant would have it – the other way round: 'The individual determines his relation to the universal in the light of his relation to the absolute, and not his relation to the absolute in the light of his relation to the universal.' Therefore, the case is always conceivable that the individual gets into a situation within which he has to decide against what law and morality tell him. We may feel reminded of such words from the Gospel as: 'Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead' (Mt 8, 22).

If Kierkegaard thus turns the attention away from the universal truth of idealist speculation and finds religious truth at the bottom of individual existence, Friedrich

Nietzsche finds the social foundations of modern society alarmingly instable. And while the consequences of his analysis extend far into the social and political realm, Christianity is bound up with his analysis, as he sees it at the root of the most devastating deviations.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Nietzsche was born in 1844 into a family of Lutheran ministers. As a child he was clearly precocious and, after some university studies he was offered, and accepted, a chair in classical philology at Basle at the age of 24. At that time also Nietzsche, who himself was musical, befriended the composer Richard Wagner; this friendship later on turned into a bitter feud, however, and over time Nietzsche became arguably the most forceful and perceptive critic of Wagner's music.

University life for Nietzsche was, all in all, a disappointment. Given that he was appointed without any major publication, the appearance of his first book was eagerly awaited, but *The Birth of the Tragedy*, which appeared in 1873, showed too little regard for classical scholarship to be acceptable to his colleagues. Due to health problems he permanently retired from his post in 1879. During the 1870s he had written some incisive works on culture, one of them, *Unfashionable Observations*, containing a scathing attack on David Strauss – as you may recall something of a scientific best selling author of the time.

From 1879 till 1880 Nietzsche moved from place to place between residences in Switzerland, Germany, France and Italy. During those years he produced crucial works, notably *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887). In January 1889, in Turin, Nietzsche suffered a total breakdown which left him invalid for the remainder of his life.

While Kierkegaard did not mince his words in his criticism of the Church of his day, but saw 'real' Christianity as denied, not confirmed by it, Nietzsche's criticism is crucially directed against the latter. For him, as we shall see, criticism of Christianity is inextricably bound up with his deep uneasiness at the state of modern culture as he saw it in Europe and, specifically, in Germany at his time. This is the more remarkable once we remember that he wrote not after WW I, when this world lay in ruins, not even at the *fin de siècle*, but during those years surrounding the founding of the new *Reich* in 1871, years in which to most contemporaries things in central Europe seemed to go tremendously well.

Nietzsche is perhaps most famous for diagnosing that God is dead, but the systematic relevance of this word within his oeuvre is far from clear. Much more obvious, and of the utmost importance within his work and beyond, is his concept of resentment. Nietzsche picked up the word from the French translation he read of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* ('ressentiment'). What it means is the feeling of suppressed anger and hatred nurtured by someone who suffers chronically from underachievement and lack of recognition. The permanent repetition of this experience (consider the 're') engrains it deeply as a character trait, thus creating a whole class of people who just wait to take their revenge on anyone near. This revenge is near as soon as this group gathers together – in principle they are always in the majority – and is thus able to superimpose their own values on society at large.

It is not difficult to perceive, and certainly no unkindness to say, that Nietzsche was deeply elitist. So is his theory just its own form of an elitist resentment? There may be some truth in that, but things are not quite so easy. At bottom, Nietzsche distinguishes two ways humans can create values (for Nietzsche, they always *make* them): they either genuinely produce them, out of creativity, or they adapt them by twisting the

values of someone else into their exact opposite. You may be genuinely enthusiastic about sport, but you can also make a philosophy out of disliking it. This sounds like two formally absolutely equal attitudes, but they are not, as the latter is parasitic on the former. This latter, reactive way of value production, Nietzsche thought, is much more common, but, because of its parasitic character, it is deeply problematic. People who are accustomed to it need others they can react against. Their inability to have 'their own' values binds them together with those they really and fundamentally hate (incidentally, this is not so very far from Hobbes' view of society).

In principle, Nietzsche thinks, the inferiority of such 'reactive' value production ought to be apparent to everyone. Why then do they stay acceptable? This is because a number of very powerful ideas have been invented over the centuries to protect and justify them. One of those, which I can here just mention, is the entire set of 'ethics', chiefly the notion of justice which Nietzsche thinks is little more than an ideology. The other, and ultimately more devastating and more powerful force is the Jewish-Christian tradition. Why? Because it invents a God who appears to endorse precisely this parasitic, reactive value production. To call the poor blessed may be one thing. But to say that a camel goes through the eye of a needle more easily than a rich man enters into the kingdom of God – this is the spirit of resentment. All the miserable of this world, Nietzsche argues can now feel not only, not primarily, that their misery is acceptable, but that, in the eyes of God, it is actually more desirable than the most admirable human achievement.

We have to break off here – it has become clear, I hope how for Nietzsche again the marriage between Christianity and culture was as fundamentally questionable as it had been, a generation earlier, for Kierkegaard. Unlike the latter, he saw little within Christianity to fall back on; and this lack of a real alternative is perhaps the most

apparent failure of his philosophy, the one failure which made this philosophy later on susceptible to the most ridiculous adaptations by extreme nationalism, even fascism. Ridiculous and deeply ironic these were since even from the few observations we could make here it ought to be apparent that any of those movements was driven precisely by 'resentment' – and Nietzsche was well aware of this. The most trenchant remarks about this were, incidentally, excised from his Collected Works, edited by his sister who wished to make him the hero of the German nationalist movement. This, however, is part of a different narrative.

For us, it is crucial to see that we have, in a way, come to this end of a phase of Christian history within which it lost, but proved in a surprising way resilient. For observers at the beginning of the 20th century it was evident that WW I had proved Nietzsche and Kierkegaard right and Schleiermacher and Hegel wrong, but we may now be in a position to see achievements and failure in a more balanced way. The challenge for Christianity to exist in the modern world continues and some of the most powerful and, rightly, most enduring impulses for how this was possible and ought to be approached were developed during the 19th century and, while we should not forget what prevented their all-out success, we should by mindful of what they still have to tell us.