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FORUM: HISTORY'S RELIGION

In the Christian Archives: Sacrifice, the Higher Criticism, and the History of Religion

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Much recent scholarship has shown just how indebted the secular sciences of religion were to the Protestant world from which they grew. Yet this "Protestant world" is typically described schematically, as if Protestantism offered a coherent worldview or even a consistent set of doctrines. A different picture emerges if we deepen our historical horizon, and explore the reflexes, aspirations, and norms that have found a home in the Christian (in this case, Protestant) theological imagination. This "Christian archive" was a heterogeneous place, with room for many things that we would now call secular or even profane. Protestant reform in fact began by condemning this heterogeneity, insisting that much of what the church had come to see was sacred was, at best, only and all too human. Yet centuries of conflict in Europe over the truth of Christianity only pluralized this archive further. The nineteenth-century history of religion grew less out of "Protestantism," in other words, than out of the sedimented mixture of theological, historical, philological, and anthropological materials inherited from these earlier moments. It was, moreover, also an intellectual project that discovered new uses for these materials and thereby opened new horizons of humanistic inquiry. This article makes this argument with reference to sacrifice —a theological challenge for Christian thinkers from the outset of the tradition, but especially for Protestants; a magnet for diverse historical, anthropological, and theological reflections; and a productive zone of inquiry for the nineteenth-century German philosophers, philologians, and "higher critics" of the Hebrew Bible who together helped create the modern history of religion.

> Hegel on sacrifice. The animal dies. The man becomes alert.
>
> Anne Carson[1]

In the deep time of the European West, history was something created by religion. God commanded Abraham to become someone new, to start a new story in a new place. In Abraham's call, as Nancy Levene writes, we find "history as the principle, also a value, that neither nature nor spirit alone is ruler of the world."[2] The call into religion, in this account, is the call into history. Abraham leaves the given behind, and makes something historically new, a people of God, "sojourners in a land that is not theirs" (Genesis 15:13). History has *also* long been something created for

[1]Anne Carson, "Beckett's Theory of Tragedy," in Carson, *Decreation: Poetry, Essays, Opera* (New York, 2005), 15.

[2]Nancy Levene, *Powers of Distinction: On Religion and Modernity* (Chicago, 2017), 101.

religion. Stories that trace the unfolding of human events in the aftermath of the Christian revelation are a staple in the earliest Christian writings. *Historia sacra* is what happens between then and the end of days, a way of telling the human story that advances the clock yet keeps revelation close at hand. And, finally and most recently, history has been something done *to* religion. From at least the Enlightenment onwards, history could, and often did, stand for a space *beyond religion*, a place of specifically human flourishing beyond the horizon of the apocalypse. To tell the history of religion in this final sense is to affirm human mastery over sacred affairs: the Abrahamic "go forth" no longer a divine command, but a human self-solicitation to leave nature in the name of an autonomous, open future. What emerged in the early nineteenth-century German lands as an intellectual *topos*, or proto-discipline, called the "history of religion" (*Religionsgeschichte*), took all of these views to heart. In the first instance, religion was discovered to be an agent of historical change, a dynamic engine of human transformation from the ancient world to the modern. Second, as a project, the history of religion was pursued in defense of "religion," at times in general, though more often of the Protestant Christianity native to German philosophical and academic culture. And third, the history that the history of religion took as normative was a *human* history, one that was, at times, given shape by divine oversight, but at others autonomous, a product of anthropology more than theology.

To speak in broad terms, then, the history of religion in its nineteenth-century form was intimately formed by Protestant Christianity. Broadly speaking again, this is no surprise. Secular historicity, as our forum introduction argues, emerged in a particular cultural and religious matrix in which Protestantism loomed large. Recent scholarship, including from authors in this forum, has shown just how indebted the secular sciences of religion were to the Protestant world from which they grew.[3] What seems important now, however, is to move beyond generalizations about "Protestantism," or even "liberal Protestantism," and its relation to the secular imagination. We might attend to the specific historical crucibles, for example, that transformed twentieth-century missionary Protestants into secular academics, as David Hollinger recently did, paying careful attention to what was retained and what abandoned in such transformations.[4] Or, as this article will argue, we can look more carefully at what came before such transformations, exploring with more care the reflexes, aspirations, and norms native to the Christian (in this case Protestant) theological imagination. This Christian archive, as I will call it, was a heterogeneous place, with room for many things that we would now call secular or even profane. Indeed, Protestant reform *began* by observing and condemning this heterogeneity, insisting that much of what the church had come to see was sacred was, at best, only and all too human. But then reformers proceeded to pluralize this archive even further in the subsequent centuries of conflict in Europe over the truth of

[3]See, inter alia, Yael Almog, *Secularism and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia, 2019); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, 2005); Robert Yelle, *Sovereignty and the Sacred: Secularism and the Political Economy of Religion* (Chicago, 2019); and more distantly Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, 1993).

[4]David Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, 2017).

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Christianity.[5] The nineteenth-century history of religion grew less out of "Protestantism," in other words, than out of the sedimented mixture of theological, historical, philological, and anthropological materials inherited from these earlier moments. It was, moreover, also an intellectual pursuit that discovered *new* uses for these materials, reorienting and transforming them in ways that would open new horizons for humanistic inquiry.

This article pursues this argument with special reference to sacrifice—a theological challenge for Christian thinkers from the outset of the tradition; a riddle for Protestants from the Reformation onward; a historically sedimented space of historical, anthropological, and theological reflection; and a productive zone of inquiry for the nineteenth-century German philosophers, philologians, and so-called "higher critics" of the Old Testament who together helped create a recognizably modern history of religion.

I

God first sent Abraham away from home and into history. He then sent Abraham on a darker journey, to the land of Moriah, to sacrifice his only son Isaac as a burnt offering. The history of religion as it emerged in the early nineteenth century was no less intimately bound to sacrifice than to the Abrahamic story. "Every uncultured people, and even the great majority among some cultured nations, have always believed," wrote Christoph Meiners in 1807, that "man must give to gods to get something back; that, the more richly one gives, the higher measure of their grace one obtains; and that piety above all consists in the offering of precious sacrifices and gifts."[6] A late member of the so-called Göttingen school of history—whose members included Johann Gatterer, August Schlözer, and others affiliated with the University of Göttingen's Royal Institute of Historical Sciences (1764–99)—Meiners wrote the first large-scale history of religion in the nineteenth century, the two-volume *General Critical History of Religion*.[7] In the work, Meiners took his lead from the "critical" perspective of Enlighteners like David Hume, whose 1757 *Natural History of Religion* sought the origin of religion in the darker corners of the human mind. A "true natural history of mankind," wrote Meiners, will show that "the lack of a correct knowledge of nature was the *sole* cause of the birth of religion."[8] This lack inspired "crude and limited nature-men [*Natur-Mensch*] to imagine and to worship higher beings."[9] And in its darkened state, humanity imagined these beings to be like itself, vengeful and greedy for the very things that man values most: his grain, his goats, his sheep, even his children.[10] History's religion, for Meiners, was the story of an error correctable, with luck, by time and reason.

[5]I will defend this argument at greater length in a forthcoming book entitled *Sacrifice: A History of the Secular Imagination* (Princeton, forthcoming).

[6]Christoph Meiners, *Allgemeine kritische Geschichte der Religionen*, 2 vols. (Hannover, 1807), 2: 39–40.

[7]On the Göttingen school see Martin Gierl, *Geschichte als präzisierte Wissenschaft: Johann Christoph Gatterer und die Historiographie des 18. Jahrhunderts im ganzen Umfang* (Stuttgart, 2012).

[8]Meiners, *Geschichte der Religionen*, 2: vi, my emphasis.

[9]Ibid., 1: 18, 20.

[10]Ibid., 2: 1.

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There were, however, *other* ways of relating history and religion in the early nineteenth century. Witness Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, also published in 1807. There sacrifice also starred in the drama of history's religion. Not, however, as error. Instead, sacrifice marked what the philosopher-cum-historian called "religion in the form of art," when "the self gives itself the consciousness of the divine Being descending to it from remoteness." In this moment, humans simultaneously recognize the otherness of the divine, and establish new ways to keep this divine close at hand. These ways Hegel called "cult," and the first act of cult is *sacrifice*: "the pure *surrender* of possession which the owner, apparently without profit whatever to himself, pours away or lets rise up in smoke."[11]

Like Meiners, Hegel was in dialogue with conceptual resources developed in the eighteenth century. The vernacular notion of "cult," for example, he inherited from Enlightenment comparative religion.[12] In the words of the Jesuit missionary and quasi-anthropologist Joseph-François Lafitau, cult named the "assemblage of duties by which man, recognizing the superiority of a God, makes Him a humble vow of dependence, by the homage rendered to the dignity of His being."[13] At the very heart of cult is sacrifice, "old as religion itself and as widespread as the nations subject to religion," Lafitau observed in 1723.[14]

Unlike Meiners, Hegel bent the intellectual priorities and semantics of the previous age to new historico-religious ends. At the beginning, he wrote in his distinctive philosophical idiom, "ordinary human life coincides with the cultus," which "does not constitute something distinctive, set apart from the rest of life."[15] Sacrifice is the first negation, in Hegel's vocabulary, of ordinary life. We are neither nature nor god, the first sacrifice announces—we *take* from nature and *give* to the gods, and establish our place beyond both. In this surrender, dramatically, we create the gods; for the first time, they assume distinct qualities and become "objective," in Hegel's story. In surrendering what is precious, moreover, we come to possess ourselves. A history that is distinguishably *human* starts here—sacrifice leaves human and divine beings each free to pursue their own distinct destinies. And finally, this history too culminates in sacrifice, the "Spirit" learning "how to sacrifice [it]self" at the end of its journey into self-knowledge. This sacrifice, the *Phenomenology* concludes, "is the externalization in which Spirit displays the process of its becoming Spirit in the form of *free contingent happening*," a final renunciation that

[11]G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford, 1977), 432, 434, original emphasis. Hegel's interest in sacrifice began early. See e.g. his "Tübingen Essay" (1793), in Hegel, *Three Essays, 1793–1795*, ed. and trans. Peter Fuss and John Dobbins (Notre Dame, 1984), 30–58.

[12]See Jonathan Sheehan, "Comparison and Christianity: Sacrifice in the Age of the Encyclopedia," in Renaud Gagné, Simon Goldhill, and Geoffrey Lloyd, eds., *Regimes of Comparatism: Frameworks of Comparison in History, Religion, and Anthropology* (Leiden, 2019), 186–7.

[13]Joseph-François Lafitau, *Moeurs des sauvages ameriquains, comparés aux moeurs des premiers temps*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1724), 151.

[14]Ibid., 178.

[15]G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vol. 1, *Introduction in the Concept of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart, with the assistance of H. S. Harris (Berkeley, 1984), 353.

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coordinates the Spirit with both nature and history.[16] The history of sacrifice, in an important sense, is the history of history itself.

Hegel's thought—that history, humanity, and the gods all begin and end with sacrifice—had an idiosyncratic grandeur. But it was of a piece with a longer Christian fascination and struggle with things sacrificial. This was especially visible in the post-Reformation era, when Lutherans, Calvinists, Catholics, and scores of smaller sects quarreled bitterly over the nature and form of proper Christian sacrifice. Much of the disagreement revolved around liturgical practices, the scene of the human ritual encounter with God. Put crudely, Catholics insisted that what they called the Mass was a sacrifice; Protestants that it was not, or at least should not be. That said, most Protestants—and Lutherans are most important for the story here—were also reluctant to give up on Christian sacrifice altogether, not least because of the abiding importance of Christ's atoning sacrifice, and the celebration of it in Christianity's oldest liturgical elements, the bread and wine, body and blood. So they found themselves defining some kinds of sacrifice as properly Christian—prayer and thanksgivings, for example—and excoriating others—blood and atonement—as alternately diabolical, or pagan, or Jewish additions to the properly Christian thing. From the early Reformation, in short, the question "What is Christian sacrifice?" became extraordinarily intractable.

This intractability proved a sharp spur to reflection. From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, an astonishing literature on sacrifice was produced and published in the Protestant (and to an only somewhat lesser extent Catholic) world. Learned antiquarian treatises on ancient sacrifice, polemical theological texts defending the sacrificial atonement, compendia of typologies drawn from the Old Testament: the works crossed genres and Protestant confessions, touched dozens of different topics, and took into consideration the religions not just of the Mediterranean, but indeed of the world as Europeans came to know it in the seventeenth century. By the middle of the eighteenth century, in Germany (and Europe more broadly) there was a rich, if ambivalent, archive of things sacrificial available to theologians, philosophers, historians, and scholars. This archive included over two centuries' worth of theological polemics between and among Protestants and Catholics, much of which was set into dialogue with historical and anthropological materials relating to practices of sacrifice more generally. To witness the diversity of this archive, one need go no further than the entries on sacrifice in the largest encyclopedia of the eighteenth century, Johann Heinrich Zedler's *Complete and Universal Lexicon of All the Arts and Sciences* (1732–54). There theologically orthodox Lutheran authors jostled with Christian Hebraists like John Spencer (*On the Ritual Laws of the Hebrews*, 1683), or Johann Lundius (*The Ancient Jewish Sanctuaries*, 1701); Jewish authors like Philo, Maimonides, and David Kimhi; and more general antiquarians like Samuel Bochart (*Heirozoicon, or Two Works on the Animals of Sacred Scriptures*, 1663) or even numismatists (!) like Louis Jobert (*The Sciences of Coins*, 1693). Sacrifice was *both* the religious act par excellence—that is, the most common and most elaborate devotional practice known to eighteenth-century scholars—*and* an act whose piety, from the Protestant point of view, could never easily be assumed.[17]

[16]Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 492, original emphasis.

[17]See Sheehan, "Comparison and Christianity."

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This deep background helps explain the ambivalence that Meiners evidently felt about sacrifice. Already in 1786, Meiners scoured early travel writers like José de Acosta and others for evidence of the disgusting habit of human sacrifice among peoples ancient and modern. Twenty years later, and with his copy of David Hume in hand, Meiners would echo the Scottish philosopher's sense that sacrifice grows from the superstitious hope that the gods might be "sensible, intelligent beings, like mankind; actuated by love and hatred, and flexible by gifts and entreaties, by prayers and sacrifices. Hence the origin of religion."[18] "As seldom do we find a people that does not offer sacrifices and gifts to the gods as we do one that recognizes no gods at all," a universality that comes not from the ubiquity of natural religion, but from the ubiquity of human ignorance.[19] This ignorance in turn produced the great variety of sacrifices found among different human peoples. In the beginning were forms of bloodless sacrifice, common among ancient Greeks and Romans, as well as Native Americans in Florida. Offerings of food, drink, fire, and smoke crowned the holiest altars of antiquity. Later came animal offerings, gifts from the herds that sustained nomadic and tribal ways of life. As social life grew more complex, so did sacrificial rites, entailing priests, special instruments, designated festal days, and choice victims. So too did the purposes sacrifices were meant to achieve: they were offered in thanks, for luck in battle, to predict the future, to ward off punishment, and more besides. Over a hundred pages, Meiners detailed the astonishing variety and ubiquity of human sacrificial practices.[20] And yet, at the root of all this creativity, as with Hume, remained things better left behind: human frailty, fear, pride, and weakness. For Meiners, the history of sacrifice was the history of a mistake, the telling of which might provide direction to humanity looking to make progress beyond the errors of its forebears. What Meiners called his "critical" history of religion was an effort to provide a kind of therapy against religious excess, emblematic of which was sacrifice.

Hegel too was ambivalent about sacrifice, but to altogether different ends. In the *Phenomenology* sacrifice no longer represented wasted human potential. Instead it contributed—precisely *because* of what Hegel called its "negativity," its constant failure to accomplish the pious ends to which it is set—substantially to the advancement of the human spirit. In fact, the negativity of sacrifice is one of the key engines of history for Hegel, catapulting humanity out of its animal dependence on nature into realms of religious, political, and philosophical transcendence. Like the many "free contingent happenings" of history, sacrifice enables and traces the philosophical history of the world, from earliest cults to the realization of Absolute Spirit. Along the way, sacrifice conceptually migrated from a primitive religious rite to a robust and rich platform for philosophical speculation. Indeed, for Hegel, the *cultus* of sacrifice offered a model for philosophical speculation *tout court*. That the "finite should be elevated to the infinite," that the "labor of religion" and the *cultus* we find a "pure *bringing forth* and … [a] *perennial*" effort to supersede mere finite purposes for something higher, that in this labor we find "the unity of finite and infinite," that in the negation of self we discover

[18]David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford, 1993), 159.
[19]Meiners, *Geschichte der Religionen*, 2: 1.
[20]Ibid., 2: 1–100.

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the "*action of spirit*," that in this renunciation we discover "ethical life": "to this extent," Hegel wrote in 1827, "philosophy is a continual *cultus*."[21]

In Meiners and Hegel, then, we observe completely different orientations of a Christian archive. Preserved in both was the sense of sacrifice as a complex phenomenon, one whose variety compassed a huge terrain of religious life: gifts, blood sacrifice, the burning of incense, prayers, thanksgiving, altars, even dancing. How sacrifice became such a complex inheritance for writers in the early nineteenth century is all too briefly summarized above. But minimally, sacrifice came to have a new kind of *history* in the decades after the French Revolution—the ambiguous legacy that led Meiners simply to dismiss it as a primal human error would, in Hegel's hands, supply a historical tension in which even sacrifice's most negative aspects created unexpected avenues for human development. In other words, when religion got a history, at least in Hegel's sense, sacrifice became something other, a recognizable inheritance of Protestant Christianity but now doing altogether unexpected kinds of speculative, philosophical, and historical work.

II

Hegel finished writing the *Phenomenology* in Jena in 1806, even as Napoleon vanquished the Prussian Army on its outskirts. In the same year, Hegel's university colleague and rival Wilhelm de Wette published his *Contributions to the Introduction to the Old Testament*. Like Hegel, de Wette too productively reoriented the legacies of Protestantism and the Enlightenment, refashioning sacrifice and the *cultus* more generally into key elements of the history of religion. In de Wette, and the nineteenth-century "higher criticism" of the Hebrew Bible, we can move down from Hegel's philosophical heights and see how the historical reorientations of sacrifice helped to transform Scripture, the Christian understanding of Judaism, and the nature of religion itself.

Like Hegel, de Wette was heir to an earlier critical project, one focused on the manuscripts of the biblical books, through which new histories of the Bible and the ancient world might be discovered.[22] The first phase of this project was, broadly speaking, compilatory. Eighteenth-century scholars like Richard Bentley, John Mill, Benjamin Kennicott, Johann Wettstein, and Johann Griesbach, among others, collected variant manuscript readings in the hopes of producing a better modern text. By de Wette's day, however, compilation had yielded to contextualization. Especially in the case of the Hebrew Bible (which, for obvious reasons, offered Christians far more latitude for speculation than did the Gospels), scholars discerned in the manuscripts different historical moments in ancient Israel. Already in 1753, for example, the French scholar Jean Astruc discovered in the book of

[21]Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 356–7, 446, original emphasis.

[22]See Kristine Haugen, *Richard Bentley: Poetry and Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2011); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, 2005); Thomas Albert Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: WML de Wette, Jacob Burkhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge, 2000); John W. Rogerson, *W. M. L. de Wette, Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography* (Sheffield, 1992); and Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1985).

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Genesis two textual layers distinguishable by the different names of God used by the historical communities that produced them. By century's end, this project had broadened to compass the entire Old Testament. In the preface to his *Introduction to the Old Testament* (2nd edn 1787), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn gave these efforts the name that remains today: "the higher criticism."[23]

For Eichhorn, the higher criticism was aimed *beyond* either textual variants or what he termed merely "religious ideas." Above all, it sought to reconstruct the "history of the culture and enlightenment of an ancient people" from its literature, this "flower of the oriental spirit," as he called it. The Hebrew Bible, in this view, was to be treated as the most important, indeed the *only*, textual witness to the collective life of ancient Israel before the Babylonian exile. As witnesses go, though, this text was an unreliable one. The disastrous destruction of the Hebrew state and temple meant the dispersal of what Eichhorn imagined was a coherent and robust literary tradition. What we know as the Hebrew Bible, then, is simply the "detritus" of this tradition, the "fragments" of the materials gathered in the wake of Israel's first destruction.[24] The compromised character of the Bible explained the many discrepancies and contradictions between the historical accounts that it contains.

The higher critic, in Eichhorn's view, must recuperate the history that Scripture obscures. Take, for example, the story of David and Bathsheba, one of the more imaginative and scandalous episodes in ancient Israel. It was a well-known problem that David seduces the wife of Uriah the Hittite only in 2 Samuel; the almost identical version of David's life found in 1 Chronicles makes no mention of it.[25] Eichhorn resolved this textual conflict briskly. Taking the unity of ancient Israel as axiomatic, he conjectured that there must have been a now-lost original source, a short and ancient life of David written before the Babylonian exile that omitted the Bathsheba incident. After the disaster of exile destroyed the Temple and its community, however, writers must have taken this book "as a baseline," adding to it whatever other materials seemed relevant to the characters involved.[26] In the case of Bathsheba, the Samuel author had added, perhaps from some lost oral tradition, a bit of ribald folklore to an otherwise dry history of conquest and battle. Because of their elaboration, in other words, we can feel reasonably confident that additions like the Bathsheba story came later than the core account. They thus tell us little either about the historical David or about the ancient Israel that he governed.

De Wette too was a higher critic. But he shattered Eichhorn's literary approach to the Hebrew Bible and, more crucially, the axiom of historical unity that sustained it. With special reference to Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, his *Contributions* began with the following observation:

[23]Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Einleitung ins Alte Testament*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1787), 1: vi. See also Thomas Römer, "'Higher Criticism': The Historical and Literary-Critical Approach with Special Reference to the Pentateuch," in Magne Saebø, ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 3/1 (Göttingen, 2013), 393–423.

[24]Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, 1: iii, iv, 15, 22, 21.

[25]Ibid., 2: 466. See also Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism*, 30.

[26]Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, 470.

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> The most important focus for the researcher of Israelite history must be the history of religion and piety [*Gottesdienst*]. Religion is the flower and the fruit of the entire history of Israel; through it, the insignificant nation of Jews elevated itself to a universal-historical rank and all the materials of their history at our disposal can only have religio-historical [*religionsgeschichtliches*] interest. But exactly with respect to religion and cult [*Cultus*], those descriptions [of Jewish history offered in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles] stand in contradiction with each other: the image that the one gives of the pious condition of the Jews is entirely different from what is represented in the other.[27]

To begin with, then, de Wette's higher criticism no longer sought to discern the "culture and enlightenment of an ancient people," that collective matrix of customs, politics, social life, and religion distinctive to Israel. Instead, the sole object worthy of interest was Israel's religion and piety, for these alone gave luster and significance. Exactly with respect to these things, however, books like Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles present unresolvable dilemmas, namely wildly different pictures of "religion and cult" in ancient Israel. Put briefly, the spiritual condition described in Chronicles is "entirely Mosaic–Levitical"; the books of Samuel and Kings by contrast offer "little or nothing at all of Levitical ceremonialism."[28] What we see in the Hebrew Bible, in other words, is radically *different* eras of historical life—the goal of the higher critic is not to unify, but to distinguish.

De Wette's approach would have a long afterlife. Not only did it supply the basic architecture of the nineteenth-century higher criticism of the Hebrew Bible, but it also sustained a remarkable set of speculations about the history of religion. First of all, that unity of Israel axiomatic to Eichhorn (not to mention centuries of biblical scholarship) vanished. There was simply no evidence for the lost "original" historical account that this unity demands, de Wette argued.[29] All we have are the books themselves, all written long after the stories they tell. Second, the *content* of these books is not in fact the history they appear to tell. The adventures of Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon are "myths," useless for any reconstruction of the secular history of Israel.[30] And third, consequently, the real history told in the Hebrew Bible is nothing more (or less) than the *history of religion*. For the ancient Jews, de Wette and his progeny would argue, "nothing was more important and noteworthy" than their "temple and cult." "Among the Jews everything focuses itself on religion": the histories are therefore just a mythical matrix for promoting the exclusive concern the Jews had with matters religious.[31]

As above, we can detect ancient conceptual elements of the Christian archive at work in the early nineteenth century. De Wette's alertness to (and disdain for) the "Levitical ceremonialism" of the ancient Jews was no great leap for Protestants, for example, who had spent nearly three centuries complaining about the

[27]Wilhelm de Wette, *Beiträge zur* Einleitung *in das Alte Testament* (Halle, 1806), 4.

[28]Ibid., 4–5.

[29]Ibid., 14–15.

[30]Ibid., e.g. 50–51; more generally on de Wette and myth see George Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago, 2004), 152–5.

[31]De Wette, *Beiträge*, 6.

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superabundance of priestly ceremonies in Judaism. Not for nothing was the higher criticism later dubbed the "higher anti-Semitism."[32] Its at best lightly concealed dislike of the Jewish priesthood and its legalities lined up with the (doubtless controversial) view that the Hebrew Bible had little to teach Christians anymore. One pioneer of liberal Protestantism, Friedrich Schleiermacher, polemically observed in his 1811 *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology* that "to include the Jewish codex within the canon means to view Christianity as a development of Judaism and contradicts the whole idea of the canon."[33] That he removed this observation in the 1830 edition would suggest that he had perhaps let his enthusiasm carry him away. But challenges to the Old Testament as a normative Christian text also recalibrated in complex, often negative ways relationships between Christians and Jews in Germany.[34]

However familiar anti-ceremonialism was in the Protestant playbook, however, it nonetheless served new purposes in the early nineteenth century. In the first instance, it was staged in a new context, where the Jews, rather than cast as the stubborn remnant who refused Christ and whose texts had been gathered into the Christian prophetic library, were now seen as a people whose special talent for religion lent them world-historical significance. Like others in his generation—the philosopher Friedrich Schlegel, for example, or the mythographer Friedrich Creuzer—de Wette saw the peoples of the East, among them the Hebrews, as especially gifted in matters of divinity. Israel in this regard could serve an alternative antiquity: philosophy belonged to Greece, law to Rome, but *ex oriente religio*, as the saying went.[35] In this context, then, "Levitical ceremonialism" would no longer, as it had in previous centuries, characterize the spiritual nature of Jews per se, but only a *late stage* of religion in Israel, when lawbooks and priests came to dominate her spiritual life.

In this new context, sacrifice was also put to new work, both textual and religio-historical. Take, for example, the passage in 1 Kings 9:25: "Three times a year Solomon used to offer up burnt offerings and peace offerings upon the altar which he built to the Lord, burning incense to the Lord. So he finished the house." The passage completes the story of Solomon's building projects, among them the Temple and his palace. In 2 Chronicles, it reappears, but with greater detail:

> Then Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the Lord upon the altar of the Lord which he had built before the vestibule, as the duty of each day required, offering according to the commandment of Moses for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the three annual feasts—the feast of the unleavened bread, the feast of weeks, and the feast of tabernacles. According to the ordinance of

[32]Solomon Schechter, "Higher Criticism—Higher Anti-Semitism," in Schechter, *Seminary Address and Other Papers* (Cincinnati, 1915), 35–9.

[33]Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Richmond, 1966), 53 n. 2.

[34]See Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago, 1998).

[35]Guy G. Stroumsa, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, 2010), 32. More generally on this impulse in the early nineteenth century see Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge, 2009), 63.

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> David his father, he appointed to the divisions of the priests for their service, and the Levites for their offices of praise and ministry …

Much might be said about the differences between these two passages—the absence and presence of Mosaic law and its prescriptions, the different roles of Solomon, the sudden appearance of the priests and the Levites, and more. But if we wanted to know which of the accounts came first, how should we proceed? For de Wette, the answer was simple. Given that the Hebrews were above all concerned with matters religious, the author of the Kings passage cannot be supposed to have omitted anything of religious significance from this most important moment in the dominion of Solomon.[36] Evidently, then, the Levites and their rules came *later*, when the feasts, commandments, priesthood, and law were established facts of Hebrew religious life. Indeed, throughout the *Contributions*, de Wette marked the different eras of biblical text with attention to Israel's sacrificial practice. Thus, say, Jeremiah had no knowledge of the Mosaic legal prescriptions—above all, he was ignorant of Deuteronomy, the "book of the law" key to the seventh-century reforms of Josiah (2 Kings 22:8)—because in his prophecies, God "did not command … concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Jer. 7:22).[37] More generally, de Wette concluded,

> history shows indisputably that in the earlier period a complete freedom of worship dominated. As with the patriarchs and the Homeric Greeks, God's open heavens was his temple, every mealtime a sacrifice … David put on the ephod himself, and beseeched Jehovah, and dressed in the ephod, led the procession of ark of the covenant, made sacrifices, and blessed the people. That one should make sacrifices only in one sacred place, at the tabernacle or temple: no one had any notion of this.[38]

Whatever one thinks of de Wette's characterization of Levitical law, the creativity of his approach is clear. Just as Hegel made sacrifice a philosophically rich and historically significant concept, so too did de Wette find innovative uses for a concept with such deep roots in the Christian archive. He abandoned the older program of typology, in which the sacrifices of the Old Testament were taken as shades and prophecies of the true sacrifice of Christ.[39] Instead he set Hebrew sacrifice into a differentiated historical framework, the unified temporality of scripture segmented into layers indicated by different ages of ritual practice. The documentary hypothesis that de Wette helped to launch—the partition of the Hebrew Bible into, eventually, four different textual strata integrated over five centuries of Israel's history—would depend on this reorientation of sacrifice away from the typological

[36]De Wette, *Beiträge*, 53.

[37]Ibid., 184. For the various ways de Wette discusses this see ibid., 55, 89, 99, 103–4, 107–9, 112, 184–5, 195, 227, 248–9. Here see Römer, "Higher Criticism," 398–9. Also John W. Rogerson, "Protestant Biblical Scholarship on the European Continent and in Great Britain and Ireland," in Saebø, *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, 203–22, at 206.

[38]De Wette, *Beiträge*, 255.

[39]More generally on the decline of typology see Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, 1974).

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and toward the temporal. From the nineteenth century onward, the collection "Old Testament" would be understood by many scholars as a composite text whose layers evidence different eras of religious life.

III

De Wette and many of the higher critics who followed his lead never gave up their vocations as members of Protestant theology faculties. Indeed, as Thomas Howard has argued, nineteenth-century German higher criticism and the history of religion were typically aimed at building a normative Protestant project appropriate to the modern age.[40] History was the very horizon, in this view, inside which Christian theology must operate. "Whosoever misconceives and scorns religious ideas, will find nothing but opinions and fantasies in the history of religion," de Wette wrote in his 1815 *On Religion and Theology*, but "whoever accepts historical and religious tradition as a factual and given matter of faith, will find it impossible to grasp the living spirit of religion."[41] On the one hand, history shows the futility of a dogmatic orthodoxy; on the other hand, it also stages the vitality of religious life and ideas.

That Christianity, like the phoenix, would rise ever stronger from the ashes of time—the vision inspired legions of learned Germans from early nineteenth century onward. From Schleiermacher to Ernst Troeltsch, what would come to be called liberal Protestantism put history to work for Christianity in creative and variously successful ways.[42] The "history of religion" was an essential companion of these more general trends in nineteenth-century theology and biblical scholarship. With the domain of the higher criticism, for example, next-generation scholars like Heinrich Ewald, professor at Göttingen and Tübingen, and a dominating voice in Bible scholarship from the 1830s to the 1860s, would publish works characterized as much by their tremendous learning as by their commitment to the creation of a new Protestantism. "Only in the course of history," Ewald wrote in 1848, "do we see the striving for this perfection [of the relationship between man and God]; and just this striving, as serious and as all-consuming as it was in Israel, affords the firm foundation for progress toward the true religion."[43] Research on the history of the ancient Jews thus lets us see the necessity of Christianity as a perfection of the human spirit as it moves through time.

It is tempting, in this light, to see this history of religion and its views of sacrifice as *just* an effort by liberal Protestants to repackage theological commitments as scientific truths. We should be cautious about such quick judgments. For one thing, a concept is not a "package" easily transportable from one intellectual framework to another. Concepts modulate as they are made to answer new questions and to do new intellectual work. This modulation, in turn, reshapes the horizon of imaginable answers and opens new vistas of inquiry. In this regard, it is instructive to look at the case of Julius Wellhausen, the Greifswald and later Göttingen professor whose

[40]Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, 68.

[41]De Wette, *Über Religion und Theologie* (Berlin, 1815), 144.

[42]For an admittedly jaundiced view of this see Karl Barth, *Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zurich, 1947).

[43]Heinrich Ewald, *Die Alterthümer des Volkes Israels* (Göttingen, 1848), 5; published separately as an appendix to his *Geschichte des Volkes Israels*, vol. 2 (Göttingen, 1848).

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version of the documentary hypothesis came to epitomize nineteenth-century higher criticism of the Hebrew Bible. In 1878, Wellhausen published his *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, the first (and only) volume of his projected *History of Israel in Two Volumes*. This work became the gold standard of Hebrew Bible text criticism, establishing the J (Jahvist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomic), and P (Priestly) as the key layers whose integration over five centuries would yield the Old Testament. Wellhausen's principal interest was not, however, in the history of the biblical editors. Rather, he came to his discoveries via a more capacious concern for the "history and development of Israelite religion," and more specifically the place of the Law in the longer sweep of Israel's religious life.[44]

This concern was evidently a personal one. At the beginning of the *Prolegomena*, Wellhausen confessed that as a young man he had especially enjoyed the prophetic and historical books of the Hebrew Bible, but that the Law—the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers—had made him uneasy and confused. It was like a "ghost, around somewhere, but invisible," a dark presence that "spoiled the pleasure" of the texts he had loved. This sense of confusion increased as his studies progressed. He found solace only when he realized, after reading the work of the biblical scholar Karl Heinrich Graf, that "Hebrew antiquity could be understood without the Torah," namely that the Law came only *late* to the picture, more a closed door than a window open to the historical religion that had entranced the young Wellhausen.[45]

Like de Wette, Wellhausen found the "Levitical ceremonialism" of the Hebrew Bible unpleasant. Small wonder that a son of a Lutheran pastor and student of theology would feel the Christian antagonism between Law and Gospel, an antagonism that could lend his descriptions of post-exilic Judaism an acerbic tone. As Jon Levenson has remarked, this hope to secure the inheritance of Abraham without the burdens of the Mosaic Torah had deep affinities with a "Pauline archetype" in which exegesis was "converted … into historical categories, producing critical history that witnesses to the truth of salvation history." In this sense, one is tempted to conclude, Wellhausen's "deepest instincts remained profoundly Lutheran."[46]

If this was "Lutheran" scholarship, however, it was a peculiar form of it. On the personal side, by the time he published the second edition of the *Prolegomena* in 1883, Wellhausen had abandoned the faculty of theology. Already in 1879, he wrote to fellow orientalist and former adviser to the Prussian Ministry of Education Justus Olshausen that it seemed "like a lie, that I should educate servants of the evangelical church, to which in my heart I no longer belong."[47] The years it took to make this transition were evidently difficult ones, both professionally and personally. Confusion, sadness, and ironic detachment combined in equal measure, for example, in this 1885 letter to the New Testament scholar Friedrich Spitta:

[44]Ernest Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford, 2002), 3. On Wellhausen see also Rudolf Smend, "The Work of Abraham Kuenen and Julius Wellhausen," in Saebø, *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, 424–53.

[45]Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin, 1883), 3, 4. All citations will be to this text, technically the second edition of the *Geschichte Israels* (1878), though published with a new title.

[46]Jon Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* (Louisville, 1993), 14.

[47]Julius Wellhausen, Letter 65, dated 9 Feb. 1879, in Wellhausen, *Briefe*, ed. Rudolf Smend (Tübingen, 2013), 55.

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> I'm conservative out of resignation in these matters; if you tinker with a pot eaten away with rust, it breaks in half; so long as there isn't a new one, you have to hold on to the old. I know well what a gift the Gospels are. But I don't believe that return to the Gospels can help us. Historical scholarship doesn't help at all; what has living force, works without it … About the *ethics* of the Gospels I have strong reservations, not about self-denial, but rather about the universal love of humanity … Concerning the Lutheran liturgy, it is a castration of the Mass.[48]

Wellhausen was apparently uninterested in a public break with the church—"the worst thing would be, if someone were to make me into some kind of tender martyr," he complained to his friend William Robertson Smith in summer 1882, shortly after the Scottish biblical scholar himself escaped conviction for heresy in Edinburgh—and he had an abiding affection for Christ and the Gospels.[49] But he was at best in "disequilbrium" with the world of faith, to use Henning Trüper's apt word; he was someone for whom "scripture appears to have the primary purpose of making things difficult."[50] Serious scholarship and ironic distance were constant companions for Wellhausen, who, unlike most of his fellow higher critics, was unconvinced that the work of the historian could do little more than *diminish* the value of theology.[51] The faith of a Hegel, or a Schleiermacher, in the revelatory possibilities of history was, for Wellhausen, simply inconceivable.

Even discounting its irony, Wellhausen's scholarship was positioned awkwardly vis-à-vis normative Christianity. We can see clearly when we consider, once more, the work that sacrifice does in his story. As with de Wette, Ewald, and other higher critics, Wellhausen saw sacrifice as key to unlocking the redaction history of the Hebrew Bible. Put schematically, the story was a series of contrasts: (1) in the beginning was a "naive" sacrifice, later a "legal" sacrifice; (2) in the beginning was an offering in the form of a "meal prepared in honor of the Deity" in which the "altar is also called a table"; later came the "bloody offering" in which atonement was achieved through "the vicarious power of the life destroyed"; (3) in the beginning were "thanks-offerings," gifts to God in recognition of his blessing; later came the "burnt offering" in which the whole victim is destroyed in his honor; (4) in the beginning was the "covenanted community" established both between God and the guests at the sacrificial feast and among the guests themselves; later "compulsory" sacrifice was made under the exclusive oversight of priests; (5) in the beginning worship arose "from ordinary life," celebrated "earthly relationships," and created lateral social bonds among the Israelites; later there was "a manifoldness of rites" dedicated to atonement for felt sins, a culture of guilt overseen by a priestly caste. In short, "before the cult was spontaneous; later it became statute." The "before" Wellhausen found in parts of Exodus, the books of Samuel and Judges, and prophets like Hosea and Amos. The "after" he found above all in

[48]Julius Wellhausen, Letter 239, in Wellhausen, *Briefe*, 185, original emphasis.

[49]Julius Wellhausen, Letter 133, in Wellhausen, *Briefe*, 107.

[50]Henning Trüper, *Orientalism, Philology, and the Illegibility of the Modern World* (London, 2020), 197–8. For Wellhausen as ironist see esp. Ch. 4.

[51]See especially his Letter 419, to Smith, in Wellhausen, *Briefe*, 296–7.

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Deuteronomy and Leviticus.[52] Left in this schematic way, then, we might feel some sympathy for a critical literature that regards Wellhausen as no better than a shill for liberal Protestantism, with its anti-ritualism, anti-legalism, and anti-Judaism.[53]

Wellhausen's schematism was hardly innovative, to be sure. But what *were* innovative were the modalities of his reasoning, now shorn of faith in the redemptive potential of history. As should be clear by now, it had been a commonplace at least since the eighteenth century that sacrifice was an immensely complex ritual form, diverse in its mode, place, time, and purpose of performance. Wellhausen's genius was to give this structural complexity a history by seeing his subjects—the Israelites—as *themselves* energetic makers of their own past. Sacrifice, for him, thus shed light on a general question: what happens when a people (Jew or Christian, ancient or modern) shoulders the responsibility for the past? When we start living in relationship to memory, tradition, and history?

In the earliest "naive" stage, in pre-exilic Israel, as Wellhausen told it, sacrifice was performed unencumbered by history. The form of the cult was simply how everyone in the ancient world worshipped their gods. At this point in time, Israel was distinctive for *whom* it worshipped, not for how. When a prophet like Jeremiah, whom Wellhausen regarded as pre-exilic, railed against Israel's attachment to sacrifice, it was therefore not an attack on priestly legalism (as most Christians would traditionally understand it). It was instead an effort to reorient the ordinary practices of worship toward a God who, in Jeremiah's words, "did not command [your fathers] concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices" (7:21). The Mosaic legislation was as yet unknown, in other words, and so Jeremiah had no need to confront it as prophet to Israel.[54] Instead he simply admonished Israel to remember *its own* God, the God who did not (unlike other gods) command sacrifice.

After the exile, however, Israel was burdened with the duty to remember not just God, but also its *own past*. The writings of Ezekiel, the first post-exilic prophet, imagine the future of Israel now in relationship to a world—a cult, a society, and a polity—destroyed by Babylon. "As long as sacrifice continued as a praxis," Wellhausen wrote, "no one dealt with it in theoretical fashion, nor was there any cause for codification."[55] But once this praxis was interrupted, sacrificial ritual became a form of memorialization. Sacrifice was offered to God, but the *way* it was offered recalled the past of Israel that must be retained and defended. Ritual became "legal," in other words, by first becoming historical.

The path to history began, in fact, already before the exile in the so-called "reformation" (*Reformbewegung* or *Reformation*, as Wellhausen called it) of Josiah documented in the book of Deuteronomy. Driven by "concern for strict monotheism and for the elimination of popular heathen elements from worship,"

[52]Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 64, 65–6, 72, 74, 75, 79, 81.

[53]Some of the most trenchant recent versions of this argument would include Robert Yelle, "From Sovereignty to Solidarity: Some Transformations in the Politics of Sacrifice from the Reformation to Robertson Smith," *History of Religions* 58/3 (2019), 319–46; Susanna Heschel, "German Jewish Scholarship on Islam as a Tool for De-orientalizing Judaism," *New German Critique* 39/3 (2010), 91–107; John Milbank, "Stories of Sacrifice: From Wellhausen to Girard," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 12/4 (1995), 15–46.

[54]Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 58, 61.

[55]Ibid., 62.

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this last great king of Judah before its destruction undertook a project of religious consolidation in Jerusalem. The book of Deuteronomy was fundamental to the effort, describing the norms of worship and religious life to govern the community of Judah. This reform was *not*, however, couched or justified in historical terms. As Wellhausen memorably wrote, "the idea as idea is older than the idea as history." Although Deuteronomy put its reforms "into the mouth of Moses," it did so in a self-conscious fashion, well aware that it was not so much preserving the past as creating a future.[56] Codification began in the manner of a constitution, framing itself in the language and rhetoric of the past, but never losing sight of the community it was hoping to build.

The constitution of Josiah was short-lived, however, destroyed by Babylon *c.*597 BCE. After the return from exile sixty year later, moreover, Israel was left with *nothing but* its past. Jerusalem was destroyed and Judah dispersed: in this context, Israel inherited not the living community that Josiah sought to build, but solely the legacy of codification and the memory of a Temple destroyed. Those who emerged from exile rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem and reinvented its elaborate sacrificial codes in a massive project of memorialization organized and overseen by an ascendent priestly caste. Wellhausen called this process "denaturalization"—the rites and actions that had emerged in a spontaneous fashion in the early life of Israel were frozen into prescriptions whose authority depended exclusively on the power of an imagined and binding past. Sacrifices, festivals, ceremonies: these were the institutions of a people that now saw itself living a kind of afterlife. "Shadows," Wellhausen called them, mere pendants on a past world of vitality, truth, and revelation.[57]

The past as fetish—this was something that the priestly Levites shared with Wellhausen's own theological ancestors, not to mention the many university historians and philologians who made up his intellectual world. Indeed, the higher criticism itself depended on it, for without the fetishized past, there would be no Hebrew Bible. That is, the redactors and editors, whether in the kingdom of Josiah or in the theocracy that arose after the exile, so venerated the received texts that they revised them only lightly, and kept even the texts that did not conform to their new religious reality. Prophets, wrote Wellhausen, live in the "storm of world history, that sweeps away the institutions of man"; they have no need for a historical pedigree. But the priests that come after turn the prophets into institutions, turn the voice of prophecy into written canon. Deuteronomy was written "to acquire public authority *as a book*," Wellhausen remarked.[58] Just this codification created the rich set of documents so prized by later Jews and Christians alike, not to mention nineteenth-century academics like Wellhausen.

There was a bleakness in Wellhausen's views of the Levites, then, but no less of his own scholarly enterprise. For him, unlike so many of his liberal Protestant colleagues, history was no friend of piety. This was true as a matter of historical fact. When sacrifice came to have a history, when its performance was forced to align with the remembered and written past, it lost those features he regarded as

[56]Ibid., 37.
[57]Ibid., 105, 106.
[58]Ibid., 422, 427, emphasis added.

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essential to a pious life: spontaneity, celebration, and communal affection. And it was true as a matter of method. If historical scholarship "doesn't help at all," as Wellhausen remarked in his letter to Spitte above, if the past and its texts are just dead monuments to once cheerful and lively faiths, then why study them? Small wonder that he not only left the theology faculty, but also largely abandoned the study of the Old Testament as he did so.

Along the way, though, Wellhausen *transformed* his theological archive. Doubtless Wellhausen was indebted to the history of Protestant exegesis that elevated into theoretical importance distinctions like bloody versus bloodless sacrifice, meals versus atonement, priestly versus popular sacrifice, gifts versus destruction, and so on. But we also observe that sacrifice became something different when it exited from the schematism of "ritual" into the self-reflection of history. To understand sacrifice now demanded attention to the operation of cultural memory, the nature and function of codification, and the authenticating and politically constitutive power of history itself. Whatever the shortcomings of Wellhausen's model, in this way, at least, he would help make sacrifice into a new kind of intellectual object for the later nineteenth century.

One example of the new horizons the *Prolegomena* opened in the late 1880s, then, comes from the iconoclastic philologian-cum-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. Marginalia and repeated underlinings reveal the debt his 1888 *Anti-Christ* owed to Wellhausen, the latter's laconic criticisms now turned into a blistering (if, again, endlessly witty) polemic against post-exilic Judaism and the Christianity to which it gave birth.[59] "All things of life are so ordered that the priest is *everywhere indispensable*," Nietzsche railed against Second Temple Judaism; "at all the natural events of life, at birth, marriage, sickness, death, not to speak of 'sacrifice' (meal-times), there appears the holy parasite to *denaturalize* them—in his language, to 'sanctify' them."[60] In the face of "the radical *falsification* of all nature, all naturalness, all reality," the older system of "festival worship" collapsed. And "the same phenomenon again and in unutterably vaster proportion" took place in the Christian Church, which destroyed everything that was life-affirming about Jesus Christ.[61] Whatever nobility His death on the Cross might have had, "the deranged reason" of the early church betrayed with a "downright terrifying" idea:

> God gave his Son for the forgiveness of sins, as a *sacrifice*. All at once it was all over with the Gospel! The *guilt sacrifice*, and that in its most repulsive, barbaric form, the sacrifice of the *innocent man* for the sins of the guilty! What atrocious paganism! … All at once the Evangel became the most contemptible of all unfulfillable promises …[62]

[59]See Andreas Urs Sommer, *Kommentar zu Nietzsches Der Antichrist, Ecce Homo, Dionysos-Dithyramben, und Nietzsche contra Wagner* (Berlin and Boston, 2013), 129–36.

[60]Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London, 2003), 150 (§26), original emphasis.

[61]Ibid., 146 (§24), original emphasis.

[62]Ibid., 165–6 (§41), original emphasis.

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The vigor of Nietzsche's attack—on Judaism, on Christianity, on theology, on Germany, on philosophy, and more—could hardly have been anticipated by the scion of the German philological sciences. And yet Wellhausen had sharpened the knives that Nietzsche cheerfully applied to so many of the idols of the nineteenth century. The language of denaturalization, the historical critique of biblical sacrifice, even the ironic mode in which sober philological learning was put to new ends: these were as much Wellhausen as Nietzsche.[63] In the coming years, sacrifice would become a new kind of conceptual object, whether in biblical studies (William Robertson Smith), anthropology (Marcel Mauss), folklore (James George Frazer), sociology (Émile Durkheim), comparative religions (George Dumézil), and beyond. Wellhausen surely didn't make this object by himself, but he helped to dislodge it from its scriptural framework and open it up to new kinds of inquiry.

IV

To conclude, then, with a few methodological observations. First, what I have been calling the archive of Christianity hosts a dynamic set of resources. On the one hand, there are ideas and practices, like sacrifice, that energize reflection, stabilize values, structure worship, establish hierarchies, and cement communities. These are, however, historically mobile: in Christianity (indeed all "religions") there are few, if any, periods of significant permanence. Some changes are obvious and self-conscious, as when the early Jesus movement declared itself under a new sacrificial dispensation after the crucifixion, when a robust cult of the martyrs emerged around the graves of the special dead, or when sixteenth-century reformers rejected the sacrificing priesthood and the Catholic Mass. Some of these changes are less so, as when seventeenth-century Protestants labored to defend a version of sacrificial Christianity against critique from within. But they are all recursive—that is, the new is formed in agonistic dialogue with concepts and practices seen either as past, or as belonging to others for whatever reason excluded from the religious community-in-formation.

Second, it might be said that many of the most important resources in the Christian archive do not really "belong" to Christianity, or religion, at all. Certainly sacrifice, for example, does not belong to any particular religious tradition or even to any particular historical incarnation of a religious community. Sacrifice was as fundamental to ancient forms of political association (from kingship to republic) as it was to any form of religious association, however one might want to distinguish the two. The history of Christianity is, in a sense, the history of a struggle over what kind of sacrifice belongs to it, and what belongs elsewhere, either in another religious tradition, or outside religion altogether. At a more abstract level, to the extent that there is such a thing as *homo religiosus*, or that "religion" is a truly distinct domain of human life (tendentious propositions, at best), still they would have to traffic in concepts that, by nature, migrate across cultural, intellectual, and political space.

Third, finally, these suggest a more general point: that what Christianity calls "theology" cannot guarantee the integrity of its own concepts. The view of secularization as "the distribution of the former estate of theology among a family of

[63]On the ironies of philology, Nietzschean and otherwise, see Trüper, *Orientalism*, Ch. 1.

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quarreling heirs," as our forum introduction describes it, is misplaced not least because it sees theology as *having an estate* in the first place, a relationship of ownership to the concepts with which it traffics. The great secularizations of church land, whether in the Reformation or the Revolutionary era, do not offer useful metaphors for intellectual transformation, in other words. Nor is it particularly useful to describe Wellhausen and his contemporaries as captured by a Protestant "ideology."[64] The latter affords too much coherence to the intellectually heteronomous tradition called "Protestantism." Theology does not offer a worldview, as those of us in the secular academy seem doomed ever to relearn. We give Christianity too much credit, for example, when we are surprised (as we so often are) that the Sermon on the Mount has not finally vanquished Christian nationalism, racism, or the prosperity gospel. But we also give it too *little* credit when we overlook the space for innovation that heteronomy allows. As important as it is to reveal the normative religious commitments that orient the work of ostensibly secular science, it is essential to recognize the fractiousness of religious traditions and the difficulty with which they control their own concepts. In Hegel, de Wette, and Wellhausen, we can see how the different potentialities that sacrifice possessed within a broadly Protestant theological archive could be energized in altogether unexpected directions. Indeed it was precisely *because* sacrifice was such a complex theological (not to mention political and anthropological) inheritance for writers in the early nineteenth century that it would become such an important theoretical object for disciplines like the higher criticism, and the "history of religion" that it helped to pioneer.

[64]See, e.g., Yelle, "Sovereignty to Solidarity," 328, 344.

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