

Carlyle's Religion: The New Evangel

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Carlyle stands in a particularly significant relationship to religion, at an historical time and place of great turbulence and change. His situation in Scotland was especially challenging. He was brought up by highly devout parents whose Calvinist Christianity was marked by punctilious literalism. The looser, more permissive ambience of Anglicanism would not have been so challenging. In this home, however, literalism as to this prime matter was basic. His family recognized him as intellectually outstanding, they made financial sacrifices, and he went away to the University of Edinburgh on the assumption that he would take orders. But this is the Scotland of the Scottish Enlightenment, and so in time Carlyle at close quarters faced Hume's atheism. He read Gibbon and the French rationalists, working himself by degrees into terrible straits between an intellect he acknowledged to be God-given and the old impossible supernaturalist certainties of home with its circle of beloved faces. He found some relief in the study of mathematics and science, in which, as it were, his reason could move freely. But it was a terrible time of stress for him as he sought in all his reading for a way out. German thought seemed to offer some hope, and Carlyle the Scot was becoming a citizen of Europe, reading

Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (1810) and at last learning the German language and reading widely in German.

Hume was the supreme rationalist: all things were subject to universal and unchanging laws discernible by reason and science. But the very scrupulousness of his rationalism led to an odd turn in the matter of religion. He aimed from the first "To Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects"¹ and accordingly produced *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), "Natural History" being the equivalent of science today. In "Signs of the Times" Carlyle acclaimed Hume for seeing that in these days "Religion must have a Natural History"; that is, one must at last develop a science of religion. But Hume's values were all wrong: he "regards [religion] as a Disease, we again as Health; so far there is a difference but in our first principle we are at one" (76).

Hume was early translated and widely read in Germany. He had commented dryly in a famous passage that Christianity was from the first attended by miracles; and so it is now, too—whenever anyone believes in it. One of his readers was Johann Georg Hamann, "the Magus of the North," who observed that, *of course*, it is a miracle to believe in Christianity: "What is there in nature that is not a miracle for us?" (qtd. in Berlin 178). Right there one sees adumbrated Carlyle's religion of Wonder, his sense that the human being is the most marvellous thing in creation, that Science is vastly outweighed by "Nescience" (*Sartor* 169). In Hamann one also sees a theory of the immense power of language: metaphor is from the start a good part of it, and religion depends on metaphor. God is a poet.

In Germany, partly because of religious interests, scholarship had been moving apace. The Bible was being studied with new linguistic knowledge. Scholars discovered that the Old Testament had been written in widely varying times of history and that Moses could not have written all the Pentateuch, as pious tradition had it. Hence came the need to study history, geography, and archaeology for their evidence as to biblical meaning and, with a growing sense of the multiplicity and variety of cultures, to study what would eventually be called

anthropology for the cultural conditioning of this supreme document. So grew a general impulse toward learning and a movement toward “universal history.” For example, Johannes von Müller’s *Vierundzwanzig Bücher allgemeiner Geschichten* (Twenty-four Books of General [or Universal] Histories) (1810) made important forays into *Religionsgeschichte* (religious history). At times he seems to anticipate Carlyle:

The human spirit, which measures the distance of the stars, which separates the presumed elements, which embraces the knowledge of the whole past, determines the opinions and the fates of millions and affects the far distant future, where does it come from? Where does it go to? Man has appropriated the lightning from heaven, extended earthly rule over the sea, computed the tracks of comets, penetrated the high regions of air; and who are we? Whence? Whither our goal? Our minds are dumb on these things. Formulas for [various] abstract systems, are better or worse thought, said, compared, and nothing seems more certain than uncertainty. (Pt. 2, Bk. 9:95)

Indeed, Carlyle recommended von Müller to a friend in 1840: “He shadows out, with clearness and brevity, some of the best German ideas on the history of religion” (*Collected Letters* 12:120).

Above all, Johann Gottfried Herder was important to Carlyle for the power and cogency of his writing and his great influence on Weimar humanism and Goethe. Carlyle’s reading of Herder can be traced in *Two Note Books* (1898). Herder’s acclaim of folk poetry, whether Germanic or Hebrew, was sympathetic to Carlyle, with his love of Scottish folk, Burns, and the Psalms. But all of Herder’s key notions are basic to Carlyle. Practically speaking, Herder invented anthropology. He understood that each country, each period, has its own culture and its own religion, and these are the varying clothes or vestures of humanity. No one form is final or right. He also understood religion to work by symbols or metaphors and never by absolute literalism. He had, further, a sense of the enormous importance of religion in a culture. “Cease, my much respected Herr von Voltaire,”

says the Professor in *Sartor*; “Shut thy sweet voice; for the task appointed thee seems finished” (144). His work, Carlyle would say, was to break down and invalidate all previous religion. In destroying the old, he assists in the birth of the new. Superstition passes away, extirpated by necessary atheism, leaving one free to search for the new evangel. Herder was the likely ground of that evangel. He is full of a guarded religious idiom, a sense of awe in the face of biology and history. He sees the spur, the trace of “the great Being, the invisible higher Genius of humankind” in the marvelous particularities and plenitude of history, of man’s arts and religion (Herder 18). He had an anthropological view of man’s realizing himself by his culture, as Carlyle recognized: “It is in Society that man first feels what he is; first becomes what he can be” (“Characteristics” 10). Herder’s expressionism, the notion that man makes his culture by his language, religion, and art, also influenced Carlyle—“It was because men first felt the difference between Good and Evil that Heaven and Hell first came to exist” (“Jesuitism” 334)—as did his pluralism or recognition of a potentially infinite variety of cultures, all autonomous and incommensurate with one another and succeeding each other in constant change (as in clothes). From Herder, too, came Carlyle’s sense of the development (*Entwicklung*) of humanity as infinite and likewise of the individual’s infinite capacities (*Bildung*).

Moreover, Carlyle knew well the important line of *Religionswissenschaft* (religious criticism) of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Lessing distinguished himself in both orthodox Christianity and rationalist skepticism by a respect for religious phenomena as such and by an objectivity in treating them. He published the *Wolfenbüttel Fragments* (1774–78), Hermann Samuel Reimarus’s sensational attack on miracles and biblical inerrancy and a landmark of the Higher Criticism; he himself wrote “Neue Hypothese über die Evangelisten als bloß menschliche Geshichtschreiber betrachtet” (New Hypothesis on the The Evangelists Regarded as Merely Human Historians); and most important of all, in *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (1780) he put forward historical development as the rule in religion as in other things. He regarded no dogmatic creed as final; every historical religion makes a contribution to mankind’s spiritual development. The French developed these ideas into Saint-Simoni- anism and Comtism; Carlyle owned a copy of *Die Erziehung* in a French

translation of 1830. Heinrich Heine, that valiant German soldier in humanity's war of liberation, viewed Lessing as "the second great liberator." Just as Luther freed people from the tyranny of Roman Catholicism, so Lessing freed them from the tyranny of biblical literalism, as the hull or husk of Christianity falls away to reveal and free the spirit, the *Geist* of it.²

Lessing was also a playwright, and his play *Nathan der Weise* (1779) was famous and available in French and English translations from the first.³ In a list of German books for Jane Welsh compiled in about 1821, Carlyle recommended *Nathan* as "easy and good" (CL 4:55); he was still recommending it in 1834 to Francis Jeffrey; and in a letter of 1826 Jane referred to "the last oracle of Nathan's" (CL 9:390). The "oracle" must be that famous Fable of the Three Rings. Lessing felt the play to be the crown of his career, and in a way the fable itself is the essence of the play's poignant plea for tolerance, the wise Nathan being modeled on Lessing's brilliant friend Moses Mendelssohn. The fable serves as a *Bild*, or image, of the comparative idea. Taking place in Jerusalem, it exhibits Christians, Moslems, and Jews: Saladin has asked the wise Jew Nathan which of the three great religions is the true one. Nathan promises an answer, and Saladin asks, when they are at last alone, "Now tell me—No one can hear us." Nathan answers, "It would be well if the whole world heard us" (III. vii).

A great deal of the world did hear the story that Nathan proceeds to tell. There was once a man who possessed a wonderful ring that made its owner beloved of God and man. As he grew old, he was troubled to decide which one of his three equally beloved sons should inherit the ring. He called in a jeweler and ordered two exact replicas of it—and the jeweler succeeded so well that even the owner could not tell the rings apart. When in due course the man died, each son received a ring, and each thought he had the original. Lessing borrowed the story from Boccaccio and developed it with great wit and delicacy.

²As Heine comments, "Nachdem Luther uns von der Tradizion befreyt, und die Bibel zur alleinigen Quelle des Christenthums erhoben hatte, da entstand . . . ein starrer Wortdienst, und der Buchstabe der Bibel herrschte eben so tyrannisch wie einst die Tradizion. Zur Befreyung von diesem tyrannischen Buchstaben hat nun Lessing am meisten beygetragen" (3).

³See Wilhelm Todt.

The point is, of course, that whether one is Moslem, Jew, or Christian, one had better respect one's two brothers, for one of them may have the *real* thing. Hereby was inculcated, for many, an eloquent lesson against Christian provincialism.

But to Goethe Carlyle owed the real resolution of his religious questions. Herder remained a clergyman, but Goethe considered himself constricted by mere Christianity and felt a definite distaste for gruesome aspects of the New Testament, such as the crucifixion; with Olympian grandeur he participated in world religion, just as he envisioned world literature. Herder envisioned embracing all varieties of human phenomena, and Goethe did so. When Carlyle wrote to Goethe on May 23, 1830, sketching out his projected (but never completed) history of German literature, he explained,

Under you and Schiller, I should say, a Third Grand Period had evolved itself, as yet fairly developed in no other literature, but full of the richest prospects for all. Namely a period of new Spirituality and Belief, in the midst of old Doubt and Denial; as it were, a new revelation of Nature, and the Freedom and Infinitude of Man, wherein Reverence is again rendered compatible with Knowledge, and Art and Religion are one. (CL 5:106)

Carlyle treblely acknowledged Goethe's account of the "three reverences" in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821) as *locus classicus* for the comparative idea. Knowing it intimately from having translated it, Carlyle quoted and acclaimed it in 1828 in "Goethe" for giving "in poetic and symbolic style a sketch of the nature, objects and present ground of Religious belief" (234), referred to it in 1840 in his Odin-Hero lecture, and years later in 1866 in his inaugural lecture as Rector at the University of Edinburgh paraphrased it at length, noting that "it has dwelt in my mind as perhaps the most remarkable bit of writing which I have known to be executed in these late centuries" ("Inaugural" 473).

So venerated a text merits close consideration. *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (or *Travels*, in Carlyle's translation) is Goethe's late addition to the early novel, the considered product of his *gebildet* (cultured and educated) serene old age. One can read it conveniently in Carlyle's own

translation, thereby getting a personal perspective on it. In chapters ten and eleven Wilhelm comes to visit the educational establishment in which he has placed his son Felix; he learns that there are three religions to which Felix has been exposed. The first, “[t]he Religion which depends on reverence for what is above us, we denominate the Ethnic; it is the religion of the nations and the first happy deliverance from a degrading fear: all Heathen religions, as we call them, are of this sort, whatsoever names they may bear” (267). One hears here the Herderian note of the cultural comparative anthropologist: the Judeo-Christian line may be seen as more *entwickelt* (developed) than others and yet still one among others, all of which do reverence, in various myths and polytheisms, to powers they cannot control, forces that are “not we.” The second religion, the social one, is denominated “the Philosophical; for the philosopher stations himself in the middle” and is wise insofar as he is cognizant of all that is above and below; “Here, as he surveys with clear sight his relation to his equals, and therefore to the whole human race; his relation likewise to all other earthly circumstances and arrangements necessary or accidental, he alone, in a cosmic sense, lives in Truth” (267). The third religion—this time of the earth—is Christian, for the Christian religion *best* manifests this reverence although it is by no means exclusively the property of Christianity. It consists in being “patient with Earth”—that is, one must accept one’s earthly lot and also

recognise humility and poverty, mockery and despite, disgrace and wretchedness, suffering and death, to recognise these things as divine; nay, even on sin and crime to look not as hindrances, but to honour and love them as furtherances, of what is holy. Of this, indeed, we find some traces in all ages: but the trace is not the goal; and this being now attained, the human species cannot retrograde; and we may say that the Christian religion having once appeared cannot again vanish; having once assumed its divine shape, can be subject to no dissolution. (267)

Here is a developmental, Herderian concept of history and a highly unorthodox doctrine related to it: Christianity is but a state of human history, back from which one cannot retrograde but forward from

which one is bound to progress in the direction of Carlyle's anticipated "new evangel." Having surveyed these "reverences," Wilhelm inquires of his instructors, "To which of these religions do you especially adhere?" "To all the three," they reply, "For in their union they produce what may properly be called the true religion" (268).

To trace Carlyle's reading and his writing in essays is to trace his pursuit of the most important subject of all to him—religion: "A man's religion is the chief fact with regard to him" (*Heroes* 4). It is persistently his chief topic. At the same time he wanted to be as ever trusted and read by that circle of beloved ones at home, his mother above all. Carlyle's mother was extrapolated onto a host of mothers and other worthy pious literalists, whose faith should not be disturbed. At times the doubleness of metaphor is not equal to the pressure, and Carlyle uses a kind of evasion: in his *Lectures on the History of Literature* (1892) that is really a history of religion, he professes that "it is not our part to touch on sacred things, but . . . in another point of view"—the non-sacred-point of view, presumably, or the intellectually respectable point of view—Christianity is the revelation of eternity in time: "This truth, whatever may be the opinions we hold on Christian doctrines, or whether hold upon them a sacred silence or not, we must recognize in Christianity" (58). "Sacred silence" is in fact a refusal to say whether one believes in a personal God and biblical miracles. The odd locution is useful again soon after in the Odin lecture.

But the whole problem is triumphantly solved in *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34) by the beautiful subterfuge of masks, of metaphors in the larger sense of fiction or myth and in the smaller sense of incidental figures—a style flashing with metaphors. How to say it? Say that Christianity is merely one myth among others, that Jesus was a mere man, that biblical miracles never happened. Have someone *else* say it: Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, *man* in all his ambiguity, both excrement of the devil and God-born, fallible, lovable, *worshipable* man. Have him say, in sum, that Christianity is a myth, but that myths are infinitely precious survival systems for man in a phantasmagorical chaos of sensations; have him say that Jesus was a human being, but that the sublimity of his preaching and the example of his life are instances of human potential

before which, astounded, one must be struck with reverence; have him say that biblical miracles are fairy tales but symbols of infinite significance, signifying that man has recognized the mystery that his finite intelligence cannot master and the much greater miracles of being, of the sky above, and of the moral law within. Have him *introduced* by someone, an *Editor*, for the mission of an editor is to present everything objectively and, uncommitted, to become a personification, a metaphor for the *Entsagen*, the *Selbsttödtung*, the renunciation of certainties, the open mind. Let the Editor intrigue and implicate the reader with Swiftian, Sternian, Jean-Pauline games so that the reader is at least ready to *play* at foregoing his own certainties. Let the biography of Diogenes Teufels-dröckh be such that his anguish is proved in the reader's pulses; and let his discovery of salvation through the whole German school come before the reader in passionate imagistic metaphorical mode that can make otherwise difficult concepts at last accessible. Let his discovery come by means of a pretended *treatise*, a metaphor for the whole post-Kantian-Herderian-Schillerian-Goethean school of thought; and let that treatise be on *clothes*, the metaphor for all the varied, changing, wearing out, repaired, replaced, expendable, and provisional institutions of culture and for culture itself as society makes itself in it and as people make themselves in their society, for the metaphors people live by and for metaphors about metaphors. Let man be the *tailor*, *Sartor*, himself ever being patched, cobbled, remade, *retailored*, *Resartus*, the culturemaker remaking himself in his own culture. Let there be a game of teaching German, for teaching is painlessly done by games: and so let there be pretense to *translate* from Professor Teufelsdröckh's clothes-philosophy with the German frequently interpolated in parentheses after the translation. This will give *vraisemblance* to the pretense of translating; for the learned, moreover, it will explain the actual provenance of these German ideas and terms; for the hungry mind, it will be solid nourishment; the indolent can simply skip the German without losing the thread. So was performed a unique pedagogical service to a whole society that affected the thought of all contemporary writers (as George Eliot said),⁴ that was a survival manual for countless thinkers in crisis, and that perhaps more

than any other single volume changed the course of intellectual development in England. Thus, that change—*Entwicklung*, development, becoming—became the ground of being, the metaphor of relativity, by which, more or less, people still live and move.

In *Sartor* Carlyle refers to Novalis's idea of man himself as the "Messias of Nature" (163), and in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) he develops this concept. One does not need miracles; *natural* supernaturalism is astounding enough, and real life provides examples of *heroes* who are quite worshipable enough—Dante, Shakespeare, Johnson, Luther, Calvin, Napoleon, Cromwell, and the great Goethe. But Carlyle's first two heroes are surprising: Odin, "The Hero as Divinity," and Mahomet, "The Hero as Prophet." Both are much to Novalis's point. As for Odin, Carlyle had been reading much Norse lore, and it is on display here, but there is much more here than Norse mythology. For his lecture in the spring of 1840, the choice of Odin seems both a stunning *coup de théâ tre* and a well considered strategy. One imagines the run-of-the-mill lecturegoer's first reaction to "The Hero as Divinity"—Divinity?—with a frisson of shock: but Jesus Christ is *the* example of divinity; how unorthodox to treat him as a *hero*—Ah, it is *Odin* as divinity—something new from Norse mythology. In fact, that original shock was the appropriate reaction. For the whole lecture on Odin is a disguised account of the nature of Christ and the early development of Christianity in terms as rationalist and non-supernaturalist as those of D. F. Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* (1835–1836), which was being read and reviewed by the cognoscenti in England in 1838 and 1839. Strauss applies myth theory to the life of Jesus, denies the historical basis of supernatural elements in the Gospels, and assigns them to an unintentionally creative legend ("myth") developed between the death of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. He underwrites the theory called "Euhemerist." Euhemerus, a Greek philosopher, saw the gods of mythology as deified human heroes.

"The Hero as Divinity—Odin" in *Heroes* concerns the "oldest primary form of Heroism" and can be read to refer all the way through to Jesus.

⁴According to Eliot, "There has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been different if Carlyle had not lived" (1035).

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. "This paganism—that is, supernaturalism—is a strange-looking thing these days," Carlyle says, "almost inconceivable to us . . . [a] bewildering, inextricable jungle of delusions, confusions, falsehoods and absurdities covering the whole field of life." One is filled with astonishment,

Almost, if it were possible, with incredulity. . . . That men should have worshipped their poor fellow-man as a God . . . and fashioned for themselves such a distracted chaos of hallucinations by way of Theory of the Universe: all this looks like an incredible fable. . . . Nevertheless it is a clear fact that they did it. . . . This is strange [yet] such things were and are in man; in all men; in us too. (5)

One sees here an experiential approach like that of William James. Religious experiences are one's facts. They are, Carlyle would say, emblems of man's infinite capacity. And so pagan religion (continue to read *Christianity*) is not "mere quackery, priestcraft, and dupery"; paganism and all other *isms* "have all had a truth in them, or men would not have taken them up" (5). He calls Christianity *Christianism* to enforce the parallel here. In a comparative way he cites the "Lamaism" of Tibet as another example of the need for a "greatest" man to revere.

There is a theory, he says, that these things are all allegory, "a play of poetic minds," a "shadowing-forth . . . in personification and visual forms, of what [is] known and felt of this Universe. . . . What a man feels intensely, he struggles to speak-out of him . . . in visual shape . . . as if with a kind of life" (7). But the allegory theorists do not have the whole secret, though they are on the way toward truth. The fact is that allegories cannot *precede* belief. Belief must already exist, and there was belief in the "miracle" of nature and the universe, "beautiful, awful, unspeakable": "Hardened round us, encasing wholly every notion we form, in a wrappage of traditions, hearsays, mere words. We call that fire of the black thunder-cloud 'electricity' and lecture learnedly about it" (9), forgetting the marvel and unknown of it. In Odin's time there were no "hearsays" to chain up experience, and so men were open to worship the transcendent unknown:

Science has done much for us; but it is a poor science that would hide from us the great deep sacred infinitude of Nescience. . . . That great mystery of *Time*, were there no other . . . on which we and all the Universe swim like exhalations. . . . This universe . . . a Force . . . a Force which is *not we*. . . . In such a time as ours it requires a Prophet or Poet to teach us, namely, the stripping-off of those poor undevout wrappings, nomenclatures and scientific hearsays,—this, the ancient earnest soul, as yet unencumbered with these things, did for itself. . . . All was Godlike or God. . . . But now if all things whatsoever that we look upon are emblems to us of the Highest God, I add that more so than any of them is man such an emblem. You have heard of St. Chrysostom’s celebrated saying in reference to the Shekinah, or Ark of the Testimony, visible Revelation of God, among the Hebrews: “The true Shekinah is Man!” . . . we are the miracle of miracles,—the great inscrutable mystery of God. (9–11)

Spinoza, too, said something similar. But Carlyle finds it prudent to cite the saint, not Spinoza, teacher of the Germans, whose name carried still an aura of fearful heterodoxy. He continues in a Herderian historicist vein:

The young generations of the world, who had in them the freshness of young children, and yet the depth of earnest men, who did not think they had finished-off all things in Heaven and Earth by merely giving them scientific names . . . they felt better what of divinity is in man and Nature. (11)

If there was meaning even in the worship of a star, how much more in the case of man:

Hero-worship, heartfelt prostrate admiration, submission, burning, boundless, for a noblest godlike Form of Man,—is not that the germ of Christianity itself? The greatest of all Heroes is One—whom we do not name here! Let sacred silence meditate that sacred matter;

you will find it the ultimate perfection of a principle extant throughout man's whole history on earth. (11–12)

By his “sacred silence” Carlyle avoids committing himself on the divinity of Christ, and at the same time he invites meditation and recognition that Christ is the subject of this lecture. The bold scheme of *Heroes* is essentially that the sacred and secular are one—reverence for Dante, Shakespeare, Johnson, Luther, Knox, Napoleon, Cromwell is one with reverence for Mahomet the prophet and for Odin/Christ—“from Norse Odin to English Samuel Johnson, from the divine Founder of Christianity to the withered Pontiff of Encyclopedism [Voltaire, that is], in all times and places” (14). In fact, Carlyle's taking a “god” as hero is in itself a bold step and clear statement against supernaturalism.

In old paganism, then, Carlyle finds “truth, only under an ancient obsolete vesture, but the spirit of it is still true” (15); *vesture* recalls *Sartor*, and the principle applies equally to Christianity. Norse poems

have a *truth* in them, an inward perennial truth and greatness,—as, indeed, all must have that can very long preserve itself by tradition alone [read Christianity]. . . . They seem to have seen . . . what Meditation has taught all men in all ages, that this world is after all but a show,—a phenomenon or appearance, no real thing. All deep souls see into that,—the Hindoo Mythologist, the German Philosopher [Kant and his *Phenomena*],—the Shakespeare—“We are such stuff as Dreams are made of!” (32)

This last line captures for Carlyle his sense of metaphor—dream-stuff, *unreality*, and yet the most real thing that makes self and society. Norse mythology is marked, he continues, by “impersonation of the visible workings of Nature” (figures and metaphors, characteristic of scriptures, one can add) that are “simple recognition of . . . Nature as a thing wholly miraculous, stupendous and divine” (16).

Out of Eastern interests stemming from German biblical scholarship there developed a great wave of Orientalism. The Germans were producing fine translations of Persian, Arabic, and even Chinese verse. Goethe's Orientalism, above all in his great late poetry, the *Westöstlicher*

Divan (1819), was supremely important to Carlyle. The East was where all three great religions originated, where—in Goethe’s phrase—God was received, *Himmelslehr’ im Erdesprachen*, or “Heaven’s lore in speech of earth” (“Hegire” l. 11). Goethe had much interest in Mahomet. Scholarship had been turning away from the old idea of Mahomet as impostor. Carlyle knew George Sale and his translation of the Koran, his life of Mahomet, and his history of Islam, which all had been well studied by Herder. Orientalist scholarship was flourishing. Goethe envisioned world literature and its concomitant, world religion, and Mahomet was part of it. Thus, for his second hero Carlyle takes the “Hero as Prophet”—Mahomet.

Carlyle’s sense of the word “prophet” does not mean someone who predicts the future; the word carries always the primary Old Testament meaning of someone “possessed”—either by God or the truth. He proceeds with an accurate and sympathetic account of Mahomet’s life and works. He takes up the principle of Islam as submission to the will of God, quoting Goethe’s *Divan*: “If this be Islam, do we not all live in Islam?” (49). He recalls his favorite book of the Bible—Job—as coming from much the same area, and he expatiates a little on it (43). Though throughout Carlyle’s writings biblical echoes abound, perhaps more than with any other writer, Job of course is his favorite, for the point of Job is that man’s knowledge is limited. Job is the very text of “Nescience.” In the Mahomet lecture he insists that man must “cease his frantic pretension of scanning this great God’s-World in his small fraction of a brain” (49). Man must not question but submit. On the touching faith of Mahomet’s good wife Kadajah, he quotes Novalis: “Is not Belief the true god-announcing Miracle?” (50)—an idea, as noted above, derived from Hamann by Hume. In sum, the Arabicist W. Montgomery Watt says that Carlyle’s great achievement in historical context was the definitive reversal of the medieval world’s picture of Islam as the great enemy (254). In *Heroes*, then, these two introductory lectures set the stage:

A great change: what a change [From Odin to Mahomet] and progress is indicated here! . . . The hero is not now regarded as a God among his fellowmen; but as one God-inspired, as a Prophet.

It is the second phasis of Hero-worship: the first, or oldest, we may say, has passed away without return; in the history of the world there will not again be any man, never great, whom his fellowmen will take for a god. (37)

And so after Mahomet, one can turn to the other “heroes,” each in his way a marvel, a “Messias of nature.”

Such was the long way Carlyle had traveled from his early Calvinist days at home in Ecclefechan. From here on, he was utterly consistent: neither he nor Jane would have any truck with supernatural supernaturalism. Both avoided church services of all stripes. An early disappointment took place with Edward Irving, his early friend in Scotland who introduced him to many books and to Jane Welsh. Irving went to London as an evangelical preacher; when his congregation took to speaking in tongues, Carlyle and Jane were horrified and withdrew their friendship. (Irving actually died in disgrace, expelled from the Kirk of Scotland as a heretic.) Carlyle did have various clerical friends, such as Frederick Denison Maurice, the Christian Socialist, with whom he often differed. He was happy to be a friend of Bishop Connop Thirlwall, a great scholar and translator of German. Staying with him at St. David’s in Wales, he found himself going so far as to attend chapel service (CL 16:284). The bond of scholarship between them was stronger than their religious differences.

An odd little practical matter comes up in his letters. He had an urge to end letters with “God be with you” but was mostly too punctilious to mention God and so wrote, “Good be with you.” One is afraid that as he often indulged in inventive linguistics, he might have thought the words were related. At any rate to his mother he wrote, “God,” while mostly to everybody else he wrote, “Good”; and to him they meant the same.

One can trace in all of Carlyle’s later works this same concept of religion. He is perfectly consistent. *Sartor Resartus* is its best statement, and it remained the basis for his later thought, though the ending of *Past and Present* (1843) contains a slight variation:

melodious Voices from the eternal Heart of Nature once again.

. . . A French Revolution is one phenomenon; as complement and spiritual exponent thereof, a poet Goethe and German Literature is to one another. . . . Touches there are, be the Heavens ever thanked, of new Sphere-melody; audible once more, in the infinite jargoning discords and poor scrannel-pipings of the thing called Literature; —priceless there, as the voice of new Heavenly Psalms! . . . Literature, like the old Prayer-Collections of the first centuries, were it “well selected from and burnt,” contains precious things. For Literature, with all its printing-presses, puffing-engines and shoreless deafening triviality, is yet “the Thought of Thinking Souls.” A sacred “religion,” if you like the name, does live in the heart of that strange froth-ocean, not wholly froth, which we call Literature. (236–37)

Or, as he states in *Sartor*, religion is ever “weaving for herself new Vestures” (179). Goethe had led the way for Carlyle to reaffirm religious faith, and Carlyle in turn led the way for countless English readers.

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