

“Every Man Must Get to Heaven in His own Way”: Thomas Carlyle, *Frederick*

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It is perhaps understandable that most scholarship on Carlyle and religion has remained focused on early work, in particular his *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34). The early years possess the double attraction of Carlyle’s open philosophical struggle with faith combined with the lack of controversies sparked by his later descent into acerbity. However, in many ways *Sartor* is merely a beginning point for understanding Carlyle’s attitudes towards religion. The later years remain the *terra incognita* of Carlyle studies, in part because they have been deemed a period of darkness and vitriol but also because of what K. J. Fielding has identified as “the exhaustion which overtakes biographers of Carlyle well before they reach the later part of his life” (9). In addition to the biographical neglect of the later years, the critical obsession with Carlyle’s early interest in German idealism has made it difficult to sort out his beliefs, and Carlyle himself has not made this task easier. The slippery nature of his narrative schemes exacerbates the problem of discerning his real attitudes, especially in works such as *Frederick the Great* (1858–65), where the Editor, I, Smelfungus, Sauerteig, and Dryasdust compete for the reader’s attention in a virtuoso Bakhtinian symphony of heteroglossia in action. In contrast, when compared to the Baby-

lonic quality of his works, Carlyle in his letters is a model of rhetorical consistency. Thus, the combination of his work and his letters makes it possible to look through the glass of his many voices, albeit darkly, to see a palpable vision of what he truly and ultimately believed about religion, which was a combination of dynamic historiography and conventional Calvinism. Carlyle, no doubt, would approve of this effort, since so much of his work entails the recreation of the past and since he so often heartens his reader to the task—"Courage, dear Reader!" Regardless, the separation of Calvinistic wheat from irreligious chaff in Carlyle's attitudes towards religion in his mature years, beyond sensible, is an imperative task if one is to come to a better understanding of this most significant Victorian icon.

Before turning to the later years, it is important to outline conventional wisdom in terms of Carlyle and religion. James Anthony Froude, still the most influential of Carlyle's biographers, played a profound role in shaping and misshaping the legacy of Carlyle's religion. An early instance of Froude's shadow is found in William E. Gladstone's notes on Froude's biography held in Gladstone's voluminous papers at the British Library. While most of Gladstone's notes are simply transcriptions of what he must have felt were interesting or significant passages, he does comment on Carlyle's attitude towards religion, as represented in Froude: "when he writes to his mother he assumes the phraseology of a Christian. . . . This is no hypocrisy, but it is fiction; it is deception, beginning probably in self-deception" (Add. 44766 f. 196). The issues implied by Gladstone offer a central insight into the problem of Carlyle and religion: whether Carlyle's rather orthodox professions of Christian doctrine are merely examples of his artistic, Germanic meanderings in the realm of metaphor. In short, the challenge of tracing what Carlyle actually felt about religion is a matter of distinguishing between truth and fiction. Accomplishing this task, difficult in a body of work large enough to contain almost any view critics wish to find, is necessary unless one is willing to accept the conclusion that Carlyle is a victim of his own "self-deception."

In addition to Froude's portrayal of Carlyle as a purveyor of fictional religiosity, subsequent critical assessments of Carlyle's religious thought

by figures such as Friedrich Nietzsche have added to the height of the obstacles standing in the way of deciding which Carlyle to believe. According to Nietzsche, Carlyle was “an English atheist seeking to be honoured for not being so” (49). Perhaps it is simply a matter of semantics, but Carlyle was not English; he was Scottish. As he grew older, he no longer struggled with his faith, a crisis that had been an important aspect of his original attraction to German philosophy and formed the autobiographical center of *Sartor*. Later in life, rather than his faith, he more often seemed to struggle with the insistent association of the ideas he had expressed as a young, struggling, doubting, would-be writer with the mature, successful, confident, superstar intellectual. Those who later felt, as Arthur Hugh Clough did, that Carlyle had led them into the desert and left them there,¹ did so because Carlyle was no longer the person who wrote—having in some fashion experienced—the triadic, philosophical revelation so central to both *Sartor* and the generation of young intellectuals who grew up under its colossal influence. Carlyle had left the doubts of his youth behind and adopted the persona of a glowering similitude of Simon Stylites, sitting and shouting atop his pillar in the attic of Cheyne Row. Carlyle’s intellectual persona has added to the difficulty of discerning the difference between what he truly believed about religion and what was part of his prophet act.

The freeing of the thinking mind represented in Carlyle’s early philosophical move away from Calvinism to Transcendentalism helped to make him a celebrity by mid-century. However, doubts about himself and his faith dissipated in the face of his ascension to the pinnacle of London’s literary hierarchy, which in his less humble moments he surely viewed in Calvinist terms of election. As a result, the orthodox elements of his religious discourse become clarified especially in his letters but also in his works, particularly in *Frederick*. Thus, what Gladstone calls “self-deception” and “fiction” may more accurately be portrayed as a truthful affirmation of Carlyle’s honest beliefs, which were rooted in the Calvinism of his beloved Scottish heritage. It is perhaps this Carlyle whom Henry James would declare to be “no more a *thinker* than my blotting paper” but a “prodigious *feeler* and

painter; as a painter indeed, one of the very first of all" (3:51). Perhaps, then, one should turn away from Carlyle, the iconoclastic thinker, and look at him in more human terms as a "prodigious *feeler* and painter" of the past, which is to say as a Calvinist historian.

On October 15, 1853, a little more than two months before his mother's death, Carlyle received a letter from Sir James Stephen, a professor of modern history at Cambridge. Stephen asked Carlyle about his religious creed, since the book that he had been told contained the clearest expression of Carlyle's beliefs, *The Life of John Sterling* (1851), was the work of Carlyle's with which he was least familiar:

What your theological tenets may be, I do not . . . presume to enquire. I am told that they are more clearly expressed in your *Life of Sterling*, than in any other of your works. . . . I am also told that in that book you announce yourself as dissentient from the Christian Creed even in those articles of it which are accepted if not universally, at least generally, among the Churches into which Christendom is divided; or more briefly in those articles which are brought together in what is called the Apostles' Creed. (*Collected Letters* 28:294n.)

Carlyle responded to Stephen on October 18:

My "religious creed" is not stated there; nor, as you say, would it be easy to state;—and you must farther do me the justice to believe that it is not *skepsis*, or doubt, any more, for these last 30 years; but a *certainty* with me, for which I also am and ought to be forever thankful to the Maker of me. (28:294)

Carlyle is long past the suicidal doubt expressed in *Sartor* nearly twenty years earlier and much closer to the scathing attack on society in *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850). Conventional wisdom has characterized the pamphlets as the moment when Carlyle abandoned reason and became the glowering acerb, a persona that has defined the legacy of

his later years. But as Vernon Lushington warned at the time, “He would err greatly, who should infer that Carlyle has turned misanthrope” (qtd. in Fielding 8). Lushington recognized the distinction between Carlyle the artist and the person, a disparity that has become more difficult to perceive with the passage of time. Also in his 1853 letter to Stephen, Carlyle showed an obvious desire both to avoid a direct explanation of “creed” and to express his faith clearly, a faith that his mother had no chance of seeing, which helps to negate the views of Froude, Gladstone, and many others—that he wrote as a Christian in order only to protect his mother.

Almost three years after his mother’s death, Carlyle remained indignant about charges of irreligiosity and continued to articulate his faith overtly. For example, Mary Callan wrote to him on October 24, 1856, because public assessments of his lack of religiosity contradicted her own response to his work: “For years, I have habitually gone to you for courage and counsel— They tell me you are not religious. It is strange if true for you awake spirituality in me, more than any writer except perhaps Thomas à Kempis” (CL 32:47n.). Here is a clear illustration of the generally accepted public notion of Carlyle’s views on religion—that he was piously irreligious. This paradoxical view, however, directly conflicts with the personal experience of people such as Callan who turned to Carlyle for spiritual sustenance. In turn, Carlyle’s response to Callan on December 7 offers one of the clearest demonstrations of his religiosity: “Very kind of you to read in your own devout heart that I am not ‘irreligious.’ No; that is a most ignorant, dark, and nearly brutish accusation,—” (CL 32:47). Carlyle’s declaration of faith here is less explicit than the one he had made to Stephen, but it shares the quality of sounding more like honest truth than fictional self-deception. His expressions of faith are examples of the tireless devotion to veracity and openness that is so vividly apparent in his work, letters, and life. He was not piously irreligious; he was both pious and religious.

If the open sincerity of Carlyle’s statements of faith is accepted as truth in his letters, the evidence of religiosity in his work and the specific tenets of his creed remain mysterious. And so, enter the great

achievement of his later career, *Frederick the Great*. The vital beginning point for understanding *Frederick* in terms of religion, however, is *Sartor*. The father of Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, after all, is Andreas Futteral, the good Prussian keeper of an Orchard, who also happens to have served as “grenadier Sergeant, and even regimental Schoolmaster under *Frederick the Great*” (63), whom he calls “Fritz the Only,” and about whom he exclaims, “There is what I call a King.” Andreas and his wife Gretchen live, childless, in their figurative garden of Eden, “embowered in fruit-trees and forest-trees, evergreens and honeysuckles,” in which “a King might have wished to sit and smoke and call it his.” One night, “a Stranger of reverend aspect” (64) appears and deposits an infant wrapped in Persian silk and in the requisite Mosaic basket. The Stranger departs “once and always,” leaving behind “no Pitt Diamond or Hapsburg regalia” (65) but a roll of golden coins stamped with the image of *Frederick the Great*. The babe is, of course, Teufelsdröckh, who would go on in metaphorical terms to become the vehicle of Carlyle’s new mythos. The association is clear: Teufelsdröckh, the son of “Adam and Eve” whose “true Beginning and Father is in Heaven” (66), is an allegorical counterpart of Christ, the new Adam who also insists consistently—and to his own mother no less (Luke 2:48–49)—that his true Father is in Heaven. What role, then, for *Frederick*? Carlyle indexes this passage as “*Frederick the Great*, symbolic glimpse of” (620). *Frederick* is “Fritz the Only,” the representative King, which is to say, God. Thus, while it is significant that Carlyle was interested in *Frederick* as early as the genesis of *Sartor*, it is astonishing that he first conceived of him as a king in symbolic relation to the King of Kings. In *Frederick*, Carlyle would set out to give the world another symbolic glimpse of a representative King.

If *Sartor* sets the stage for investigating *Frederick* in terms of religion, a more direct exploration begins with the title page of the latter work, where its full title appears: *History of Friedrich II. Of Prussia Called Frederick the Great*. The full title is important because it offers insight into Carlyle’s approach to *Frederick*, suggesting that this is to be no heroic eulogy of a great man. He is “Called” *Frederick the Great* which does not explicitly mean that he is great, and in fact for Carlyle discovering

the reasons behind Frederick's ascension to "Great" serves as a main goal of the biography. Early on, Carlyle confirms the questionability of Frederick's status as hero:

Friedrich is by no means one of the perfect demigods. . . . To the last, a questionable hero; with much in him which one could have wished not there, and much wanting which one could have wished. But there is one feature which strikes you at an early period of the inquiry, That [sic] in his way he is a Reality. (12:14)

There is irony here, of course, in the contemporary view of Carlyle. There is much that he wrote and said in the later years and especially on racial matters that modern readers wish he had not.

But the essential point of Frederick's status as "questionable hero" is of an absolutely religious nature. After announcing that the artistic and historical mission will be to capture the reality of Frederick, Carlyle turns to the possibility of resultant lessons: "How this man, . . . comported himself in the Eighteenth Century, and managed *not* to be a Liar and Charlatan as his Century was, . . . may silently have didactic meanings in it" (12:15). Few Victorians wrote or said more about silence than Carlyle, and his expression of it here recalls an earlier manifestation of the idea in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841): "The greatest of all Heroes is One—whom we do not name here! Let sacred silence meditate that sacred matter" (11). While the unnamed greatest hero is, of course, Christ, Carlyle's silence is truly fascinating. According to apRoberts, "'Sacred silence' is in fact a refusal to say whether one believes in a Personal God and biblical miracles" (69). Perhaps, but there is little reason to believe that Carlyle had any interest in a "Personal God" with whom one might have an intimate, perhaps even mutually satisfying, relationship. And one of the achievements of *Sartor* was that it eliminated the necessity of believing in biblical miracles by expanding the concept of the miraculous into natural supernaturalism. On another point, however, apRoberts is astutely correct: "The bold scheme of *Heroes* is essentially that the sacred and secular are all one" (78). If so, then any difference in the concepts

of silent “didactic meanings” and “sacred silence” is one of degree, not kind. Thus, through the re-creation of Frederick in language, Carlyle sets in motion a process that simultaneously issues a byproduct of silent “didactic meanings” that are inherently religious in nature. Further, both the invoking of Christ without naming him and the silent meanings produced by Carlyle’s search for the “Reality” of Frederick are examples of the miraculous, and both miracles are products of the narrative process. In other words, silence as the vehicle of meaning is both paradoxical and miraculous. Thus, “Silence is golden” and “eternal,” while “Speech is silvern” and merely “of Time” (*Sartor* 162).

The production of silent “didactic meanings” in *Frederick* implies a subject other than Frederick at hand. Such a strategy, writing about one subject in the interest of another, was familiar to Carlyle. For example, as pointed out by apRoberts (75–76), the lecture on Odin that became part of *Heroes* was in fact a lecture on Christ, the unnamed and “greatest of all Heroes” (11). Carlyle’s attempt to re-create Frederick’s “Reality” finds a striking parallel in the ongoing nineteenth-century project to historicize and thus to re-create Christ. The sheer amount of Frederick material made Carlyle’s task a decade-long immensity. Conversely, the paucity of historical evidence for Christ made that quest a two-millennia-long futility. Still, Carlyle was intrigued by the possibility that the historical Christ could be found: “I would rather have one real glimpse of the young Jew face of Christ than see all the Raffaels in the world” (qtd. in apRoberts 76n.). The distinction Carlyle makes here between particular and idealized representations of Christ would prove fundamentally important to the religious historiography at work in his biography of *Frederick*. The product of re-creating the “Reality” of Frederick will produce “silent meanings,” teaching the reader something beyond Frederick. In other words, seeing one person, Frederick, would reveal something universal.

This representative quality intrinsically links Carlyle’s quest for Frederick’s reality in the past to Carlyle’s present. For instance, at particular stake for him in the writing of *Frederick* is the proper form of government, a popular and central concern for Britain in the late 1850s and

early '60s: "To many it appears certain there are to be no Kings of any sort, no Government more; less and less need of them henceforth, New Era having come. Which is a very wonderful notion; important if true; perhaps still more important, just at present, if untrue!" (12:17). The New Era that Carlyle sarcastically announces is the result of the change from the rule of one (aristocracy) to the rule of many (democracy). The imbedded conflict between individual and universal in this vision of changing governmental systems is a key concept in understanding Carlyle's historiography in *Frederick*. He confirms this significance early in the work when he points out, "This was a man of infinite mark to his contemporaries" (12:4), which needs to be read in the context of his oft-stated complaint that the more he came to know Frederick, the less he liked him. The conflict between the individual (particular) and the masses (universal) is also evident in Carlyle's discussion of the human capacity to desire power:

Some men do cook enormously (let us call it *cooking*, what a man does in obedience to his *hunger* merely, to his desires and passions merely),—roasting whole continents and populations, in the flames of war or other discord. . . . [T]he appetite of man in that respect is unlimited; in truth infinite; and the smallest of us could eat the entire Solar System, had we the chance given. (12:15).

In a significant anticipation of Nietzsche, Carlyle here expresses the possibility that one individual can desire infinite power.

But Carlyle's program in *Frederick* is not to trace the limits of human desire for power; rather, it is to bring the past into relevant communion with the present in terms of an individual, Frederick. Thus, Carlyle declares, the "question of questions" is "[w]hat part of that exploded Past" will "be reshaped, transformed, that so, in new figures, under new conditions, it may enrich and nourish us again? . . . On one point we can answer: Only what of the Past was *true* will come back to us" (12:16). Certainly, this mission relies upon the cognitive processes of metaphorical tailoring and retailoring explicated in *Sartor*. That the "facts" of the past can be put into a new set of

metaphorical clothes and thus be brought to life in the present is not only an important aspect of Carlyle's theory of history, but it is also fundamental to his understanding of human perception and a significant tenet of his religious creed.

In Carlyle's attempt to re-present the past his fundamental religious beliefs begin to reveal themselves. In the "Proem" of *Frederick*, he seeks to identify the qualities of an ideal historian and so brings poetry to bear, for poetry in Carlyle's historiography is synonymous with both history and religion: "all real *Poets*, to this hour, are Psalmists and Iliadists after their sort. . . . Likewise, . . . the highest Shakespeare producible is properly the fittest Historian producible" (12:18). Carlyle's definition of history completes the unification with poetry and religion: "the inspired gift of God employing itself to illuminate the dark ways of God" (12:19). He is suggesting that the process of re-creating the reality of Frederick serves as a microcosm of God's creative power. Further, although he had issues with Coleridge, Carlyle sounds very much like him in this equation of historic with divine creativity.² The creation of the world does after all begin with language and result in light; it is a creative process, similar in kind to the writing of history. Carlyle also employs a musical metaphor in his equating of historical with divine creation: "a perfected Melodious Truth . . . ; the essence of it fairly evolved from all the chaff, the portrait of it actually given, and its real harmonies with the laws of this Universe brought out, in bright and dark, according to God's Fact as it *was*" (12:20). Success in the re-creation of the past, therefore, brings into being the very music of the spheres, a finite order out of infinite chaos. According to Carlyle's historiographic creed, the processes of writing and reading the history of

²Ruth apRoberts notes that Carlyle blamed Coleridge for the Oxford movement and told Richard Monckton Milnes that Coleridge "had a whore of a soul, incapable of any incontinence" (65n). Frank Lentricchia points out the importance of poetic creation for Coleridge: "it is, finally . . . the poet's imagination, a process continuous with nature's creative principle, that has, in turn, intimate access to the spiritual ground which unites subject and object and which is revealed in the union of the finite and infinite" (38). Poetic creation, in other words, differs from creation in nature by degree, not kind.

this unheroic hero, Frederick, reinvests the world with an echo of both primary creative act and resultant light. In a sense, therefore, Carlyle is the instrument of a divine entity—namely, the God of History.

Carlyle returns to artistic metaphor as he reiterates the need for divinity to recapture the reality of the past. He complains that

the Berlin [art] galleries . . . contain . . . no Portrait of *Frederick the Great*; no likeness at all, or next to none at all, of the noble series of Human Realities, or any part of them, who have sprung not from the idle brains of dreaming Dilettanti, but from the Head of God Almighty. (12:373)

As here in the case of the artist, the historian also is vested with the task of serving as an instrument of God, in order, Carlyle continues, “to make this poor authentic Earth a little memorable for us, and to do a little work that may be eternal there” (12:373). The extent to which the historian is able to accomplish this brand of immortality, for Carlyle, relies both upon his sincerity and the grace bestowed by the God of History. Whether Carlyle’s belief in this god is orthodox seems rather beside the point, although this god is indistinguishable from the God of Calvinism, which is itself another brand of heterodoxy for some, including Frederick’s father. That Carlyle sincerely believed in the divinity of history and, further, that this entity would have been fully recognizable by his Calvinist mother seem both reasonable and true, for Carlyle worshipped at the feet of his god every time he put pen to paper and tried to bring the past into communion with the present, as he had not only in *Past and Present* (1843) but also in nearly every other work he published.

It is curious that Coleridge’s legacy retains a clear sense of orthodoxy at the center of his poetic vision, whereas those who study Carlyle have been largely unwilling to admit even the possibility. The reason may be that Coleridge professed a profound and explicit belief in the Trinity, the poetic manifestation of which is his concept of “*multēity in unity*” (“Principles” 369), for him the elemental principle underlying all of the fine arts, including poetry. Indeed, the day before

he died, Coleridge is said to have claimed that the Trinity was “the foundation of all my philosophy” (*Table* 302n.).³ Just as the Trinity reconciles Father, Son, and Spirit into one God, the process of human perception—recognizing, for example, the three sides of a figure as one triangle—is a process of reconciling multëity and unity. Walter Jackson Bate is correct when he recognizes “Coleridge’s life-long attempt to formulate a system which reconciles the universal and the particular, the One and the Many” (141). The outcome of Coleridge’s attempt, however, is a theory of poetic creativity that is, again, a microcosm of God’s own creative power. Thus, the goal of Coleridge’s system parallels the historical problem that Carlyle is attempting to overcome in *Frederick*, i.e., to combine an infinite chaos of facts into a visible portrait of a finite individual and thereby reconcile “the One and the Many.” By extension, therefore, both Coleridge and Carlyle see a reflection of their creative processes in divine creativity.

An explicit example of the tension between the particular and the universal in *Frederick* is evident in Carlyle’s description of the coronation of Frederick I, Frederick the Great’s grandfather. The fashionable Frederick I’s wife, Queen Charlotte, “cared not much about crowns, or upholstery magnificences of any kind; but had meditated of old on the infinitely little.” At the coronation she is seen, by the king himself, sneaking a pinch of snuff: “‘I have my snuff-box by me at least!’ Thou wearied patient Heroine; cognizant of the infinitely little!—This symbolic pinch of snuff is fragrant all along in Prussian History.” Carlyle interprets this dip of snuff as an act of “humble verity in the middle of all royal or other ostentations; inexorable, quiet protest against cant.” Her “symbolic pinch of snuff” is an important aspect of her being known as “something of a Republican Queen” (12:53), and the entire scene stresses the importance of particularity in Carlyle’s vision of history. Further, the particular moment of Queen Charlotte’s snuff immediately sends Carlyle back to the tenth century in an attempt to find the true beginning of Frederick’s narrative, the explication of

³Carlyle’s friend John Sterling told their mutual friend F. D. Maurice that Coleridge had made this pronouncement to J. H. Green (*Coleridge Table*

which requires the digestion of all particulars in the interest of achieving a single, unified, truthful portrait of an individual, Frederick. Carlyle's attempt to take an infinitude of particular facts and mold them into a single portrait is itself reflected in the achievement of Frederick. Carlyle comes to conclude, at least in one sense, that Frederick is heroic because he had found a way to establish what Morse Peckham calls "an island of social order" in the "chaos of the eighteenth century" (201). Frederick's ability to transform infinite chaos into finite order makes him heroic, just as the successful attempt to write Frederick's history, fashioning an infinite chaos into one, ordered vision of the king, makes Carlyle heroic, just as the creation of the finite world from the infinite chaos of the universe makes God the Hero of heroes. The process of Carlyle's transformation of multēity into unity is, therefore, the nuclear unit of both his historiography and his religion, which is why it makes sense to identify the god that rules over this process as the God of History.

The reason for Carlyle's tedious recounting of the dark, unknowable past, beginning in the tenth century, is that it is relevant to creating the reality of Frederick. Carlyle plods through a seemingly never-ending list of ancient figures, such as Henry the Fowler and Saint Adalbert, until he comes to Conrad of Hohenzollern, the first person to emerge from the shadows as a historical reality. Conrad represents the move into the world of light because he possesses a direct and confirmable connection to Frederick: "He is the lineal ancestor, twentieth in direct ascent, of the little Boy now sleeping in his cradle at Berlin" (12:81).⁴ This is a moment of the past's connection with both Carlyle's present and the reader's future, for the effect of Frederick's presence is singularly undiminished when read in the twenty-first century. He sleeps in his cradle still. As Carlyle reaches back in search of Conrad of Hohenzollern, therefore, he finds the beginning of Frederick's narrative. Further, according to Carlyle, the direct connection

⁴Carlyle recounts the history of the Prussian royal house in the presence of Fritz in his cradle elsewhere in *Frederick* (12:87, 90). He also uses Frederick's sister Wilhelmina as a historical register and refers to her "now prattling

between Conrad and Frederick is again miraculous: "A man's destiny is strange always; and never wants for miracles, or will want, though it sometimes may for eyes to discern them" (12:81). While this passage represents an important manifestation of natural supernaturalism, it is also a significant moment in terms of the idea of predestination. The discourse among Conrad, Frederick, and Carlyle creates a remarkable microcosmic parallel among the past, present, and future of the universe whose book has been written already by the greatest historian of them all, God. In other words, this is an instance where Carlyle's Calvinism comes shining through in the process of reanimating Frederick, and it offers another compelling reason for calling this god the God of History.

In addition to its sense that Carlyle is aware of the entirety of Frederick's narrative as he writes it, the presence of Frederick in his cradle as Carlyle recounts the dark past is an extremely Blakean moment. Carlyle's friend, Allan Cunningham, had hinted that Blake was a madman because he claimed that figures such as Lot would appear to him and sit for their portrait ("Last" 235), and yet, as Carlyle recounts the origins of the Hohenzollern line, Fritz is in his cradle, a silent witness to Carlyle's journey into the past and back again. Carlyle remarks on the reality of the past in his essay "Biography": "The thing which I here hold in my mind did actually occur; was, in very truth, an element in the system of the All, whereof I too form a part; had therefore, and has, through all time, an authentic being; is not a dream but a reality!" (54). Frederick in his cradle in Carlyle's present is neither apparition nor moment of imaginative fancy. He is in fact a real and miraculous presence both for Carlyle and, remarkably, for Carlyle's reader.

If the reality of Carlyle's vision of Frederick invokes Blake, so does the tension between universal and particular. David R. Sorensen claims that "Carlyle's refusal or inability to 'think' in universals . . . enabled him to write one of the great histories of the French Revolution" (Introduction 30). A similar rejection drives the genesis of Carlyle's biography of Frederick, but there is also a Blakean aspect to his rejection of the universal in the interest of the particular. Blake, after all, was the quintessential promoter of the particular, the most famous

statement of which appears in his “Annotations to Sir Joshua Reynolds’s ‘Discourses’”: “To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit” (451). To what are perhaps the two greatest generalizations in British Literature, Blake adds, “Strictly Speaking All knowledge is particular” (459).⁵ Of course, there are universal themes in the works of Blake, just as there are in Carlyle’s biography of Frederick. For both of these figures, however, the work of the universal was always accomplished by the artist’s engagement with the particular. Blake conjures up the biblical Lot and strikes his portrait, not as a universal representation but as the real, individual person. Similarly, Carlyle does not seek to render an idealized portrait of Frederick; he conjures up the reality of Frederick in his cradle and thereby produces silent, universal, “didactic meanings,” which are intimately related to the sacred silences associated with the unnamed Christ in

⁵The possibility of a significant relationship between Blake and Carlyle has long been dismissed on the grounds of Carlyle’s lack of interest in the poet. However, that Carlyle was exposed to Blake, and often, is simply undeniable. Although Miriam M. H. Thrall has argued that it is unlikely that Carlyle wrote “The Last of the Supernaturalists,” which is largely a review of his friend Cunningham’s biography of Blake (267–68), it is almost certain that Carlyle at least read it. The most compelling exposure would have come from Carlyle’s neighbors, Alexander and Anne Gilchrist, authors of *Life of Blake* (1863). After her husband’s death in 1861, Anne Gilchrist was left the task of finishing the project, which she did with the help of William Michael and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. She asked Carlyle to write a preface to the biography, but he declined, encouraging her to write it herself. During his research for the *Life*, Gilchrist had attempted to find out why several of Blake’s manuscripts had been destroyed. One theory was that Frederick Tatham, a friend of Blake’s and an ardent follower of Carlyle’s friend Edward Irving, claimed that he had been induced to destroy them because they were inspired by Satan. Anne Gilchrist reports that “Carlyle says he is quite certain that Irving himself never had anything at all to do with this” (131). Clearly, Carlyle had knowledge of Blake, and, given that fact, it seems reasonable that he would have been familiar with some of Blake’s basic beliefs, including the importance of particularity and the professed reality of his visions. Regardless, the intertextual connection between their shared views that the particular was more important than the universal remains a fascinating point of connection

Heroes (11). For both Carlyle and Blake the process of pursuing the particular leads to the universal divine, and thus the process of creation in their art is a fundamental aspect of their shared and fervent religiosity.

However, if Carlyle's religious belief is related to the philosophical poetics of Coleridge and the mystical revelations of Blake, it also remains inherently Calvinistic. Rodger L. Tarr avers that "the role that Calvinism plays in *Sartor Resartus* is difficult to overstate" (xxxv). His assertion serves equally well for *Frederick*. Again, that Carlyle has knowledge of the end of Frederick's story as he investigates the beginning of it creates a connection with the Calvinist concept of predestination. This relationship is made stronger when Carlyle mentions the concept explicitly:

The heresy about Predestination . . . according to which a man is preappointed from all Eternity either to salvation or the opposite (which is Fritz's notion, and is indeed Calvin's, and that of many benighted creatures, this Editor among them) appears to his Majesty [Friedrich William] an altogether shocking one. (13:330)

Sorensen asserts that this is Carlyle's first open endorsement of the doctrine and brings him closer to Froude's assessment of him as a "Calvinist without the Theology" ("Tyrannophilia" 22). But it is surely as a historian that the doctrine of predestination makes the most sense to Carlyle the artist. If he is performing what Peckham calls "the drama of an historian struggling to learn how to read his documents" (214), then he is doing so in the interest of creating a truthful and accurate portrait of Frederick, whose destiny rests in Carlyle's hands. Knowing the story is not enough; Carlyle must present Frederick not simply in the best light but in the true light, "according to God's Fact as it was" (12:20). Carlyle's biography of Frederick, therefore, is not so much a matter of Calvinism without theology as it is Calvinism with historiography.

Carlyle's depiction of Frederick's resistance to conventional religion is also significant in reconstructing Carlyle's religious creed from *Frederick*. David Fraser discusses the importance of Frederick's relationship

with Voltaire, who “was exactly the hero Frederick felt he needed—a brilliant intellect, a rebel against past conventions and in particular the conventions of religion” (qtd. in Sorensen “Tyrannophilia” 24). As Sorensen points out, Carlyle shares Fraser’s view of Voltaire’s function to the young Prussian King: “The Frenchman is the relentless foe of ‘Anarchy in the shape of religious slavery’” (“Tyrannophilia” 24). It is reasonable to conclude that Voltaire’s secularization of Frederick’s world view parallels Carlyle’s own project in this area. However, it seems just as reasonable and perhaps more accurate to argue that this moment of iconoclasm serves an important religious function. In spite of Frederick’s move away from orthodox custom, or perhaps because of it, he is a rather unlikable fellow under the influence of ideas of the French Enlightenment who remains blessed by the God of History. Once grace is bestowed, it cannot be removed; Frederick will be called Frederick the Great. In such a reading, Carlyle remains steadfastly and conventionally Calvinist. The idea that, once elected by grace, Frederick cannot fall from it is, after all, one of the basic tenets of Calvinist doctrine. Thus, it is possible to read Frederick’s history in terms of Calvinism because its author is essentially a Calvinist historian.

Voltaire’s effect on Frederick also strikes another interesting note in terms of Carlyle’s iconoclasm. In an important exchange between John Tyndall and Carlyle, the prophet complained to the scientist about the lack of religious fervor in Britain. Tyndall responded with an assessment of Carlyle’s influence on the best of “a younger generation than your own”: “if one writer more than another has been influential in loosing them from their theological moorings, thou art the man!” (376). As Voltaire had done for Frederick, Carlyle demonstrated to an entire generation in Britain that it was possible to be religious without suffering the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of formal, doctrinal religion. Carlyle, however, never did loosen himself from the moorings of his own Calvinist heritage, compelling evidence of which is the physical and emotional burden of writing *Frederick*, which was for him a task which he neither enjoyed nor valued, one from which he suffered Job-like distress, and yet one which he would push himself beyond nerves and exhaustion to complete. The writing of *Frederick* was the price Car-

lyle paid for believing in and serving faithfully the God of History.

If Carlyle subverts organized religion in *Frederick*, it is difficult to measure if it exists at all. Sorensen considers the charge of historians that in *Frederick* Carlyle “celebrates ‘Protestant tyrannophilia.’” According to Sorensen, Carlyle’s affirmation of Frederick as “‘the chief Protestant in the world’” relies upon Frederick and Voltaire’s shared “‘profound disgust with organized religion for its craven efforts to conceal the iniquities of Europe’s rulers from the masses. If they share a ‘faith,’ it is grounded in their contempt for spiritual ‘shams’” (“Tyrannophilia” 25). The “they” in this passage is purposefully vague, for the implication, as Sorensen argues, is that Carlyle shares with Frederick and Voltaire this contempt for organized religion. There is, however, another way to read the passage. What makes Frederick the “chief Protestant king” is his absolute horror at the church’s machinations in the interests of power politics. One is reminded of Christ’s admonishment to “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s” (Matt. 22:21). Christ implies here the necessity for a division between church and politics, in which the church has always failed to adhere. Christ, Voltaire, and Carlyle share a profound hatred of the political church, and in doing so they express the teachings of Christ, if in a rather non-doctrinal way.

Sorensen goes on to discuss Carlyle’s disapproval of organized religion in terms of Frederick’s leniency to Catholics. He describes the moment that Frederick encounters monks in Cleve who are making “‘considerable revenues’” for praying for wealthy souls. Frederick merely “laughs at them and it” and allows them to continue; Carlyle then asks, “‘Meseems a heavier whip than that of satire might be in place here, your Majesty?’” (qtd. in Sorensen “Tyrannophilia” 26). Sorensen concludes that “[y]ielding to a dark sense of fatalism, Carlyle sees the French revolution as marking the arrival of ‘the heavy whip’” (“Tyrannophilia” 26). While this is true, the heavy whip had also come much earlier with Christ’s attack on the moneychangers in the temple (Matt. 21:12–13), the single most violent act by Christ in the New Testament, what many scholars believe to be the act that led directly to the crucifixion and certainly one that represents Christ unorthodox if not heterodox in terms of his Ju-

daism. But, as Carlyle declares, “King Friedrich is not the man to wield such whip. Quite other work is in store for King Friedrich; and Nature will not, by any suggestion of that terrible task, put him out in the one he has. He is nothing of a Luther, of a Cromwell” (14:347). He is not, in other words, a Christ clearing the temple of moneychangers. There are other tasks in the future for Frederick, and if there is fatalism here, it lies in the context of Carlyle’s position as a Calvinist historian, again, one who knows the outcome of his story and one for whom grace is unavoidable.

Another Calvinist moment in the history of Frederick is the outcome of his conventional religious training and education. As Carlyle puts it, Frederick’s father insisted that he receive an education that held a “[r]uthless contempt for Useless knowledge; and passionate insight into the distinction between Useful and Useless” (12:39). This aphoristic approach to education seems Carlylean indeed, until one appraises the tenets being put forward by Friedrich Wilhelm. First, Frederick is to have “a proper love and fear of God” with no Atheist, Arian, Socinian, or Papist doctrines interfering with the basic Protestant doctrine that “Christ died for all men.” Second, he is “to learn no Latin.” Third, he is to “learn Arithmetic, Mathematics, Artillery,—Economy to the very bottom.” Fourth, and as the years pass to an increasing degree, the young prince is to learn “War-Sciences,” so as to instill in him “a true love for the Soldier business” (12:388–90). Frederick’s training sounds like a to-do list for turning a boy into a great man. Carlyle, however, is not arguing that it would benefit society to install this kind of disciplined training. On the contrary, Friedrich Wilhelm’s treatment has quite the opposite of the intended result: “the Boy does not take to hunting at all, likes verses, story-books, flute-playing; seems to be of effeminate tendencies, . . . affects French modes,” and “combs-out his hair like a cockatoo” (12:422). His father’s solution to the problem is to have his son’s hair cut, which brings the boy to tears, although this fate is avoided through the ingenious combing of his barber, Chirurgus. Ultimately, the abuse of his father causes Frederick to attempt an escape for which he is imprisoned and court-martialed as “a Deserter from the army, a rebel against the paternal Majesty, and a believer in the

doctrine of election by Free Grace” (13:333). After a year in confinement, he works his way back into the good graces of the king, in no small part by denying the heterodoxies of Calvinism. The “Editor,” however, relates no change of heart and thus presumably remains a believer in Calvin’s heterodoxy. In the misfire between Frederick’s training and its result Carlyle points to the non-predictive quality of historical events. His effeminate, flute-playing youth does not predict Frederick’s adulthood. Although the boy is able to escape the fate of Chirurgus’s scissors, the man is unable to escape the larger, true destiny of becoming *Frederick the Great*. This reading in terms of the non-predictive quality of history is counter-intuitive unless viewed within the context of Carlyle’s historiography, which in turn must be seen in the context of his Calvinistic belief in inescapable grace.

This necessarily cursory look at religion in *Frederick* at the very least demonstrates that Carlyle was more of a conventional Calvinist than critics have admitted. Even his less conventional approach to divinity in the process of writing history does not necessarily contradict the general tenets of Calvinism, for the God of History in dominion over this process is envisioned by a Calvinist historian. Visions of humanity incapacitated by sin, of election as a requirement for salvation, of inescapable grace, and of predestination seem to permeate much of Carlyle’s work, but they do so especially in *Frederick*. Such a Calvinist reading seems to make audible what Carlyle tried so hard to keep silent, a statement of his creed. As he describes the ascension of George I to the British throne in *Frederick*, Carlyle speaks of the changes in religion that the country was then facing: the

English Nation, having flung its old Puritan, Sword-and-Bible-Faith into the cesspool,—or rather having set its old Bible-Faith, minus any Sword, well up in the organ-loft, with plenty of revenue, there to preach and organ at discretion, on condition always of meddling with nobody’s practice farther. (13:104)

All of the classic symptoms of his later ferocity are present in this passage. He bemoans the fall of Cromwell and the subsequent rejection of

Puritanism as well as the rise of Anglican comfort and complicity with laissez-faire utilitarianism. But he also implies that discipline, sincerity, and morality are necessary obligations and functions of a church that aspires to be truly religious, a Calvinist notion indeed. As in the case of Frederick's early education, however, which was founded upon discipline to the point of abuse, historical events are not necessarily predictive.

The problem with recognizing Calvinism in Carlyle is that it helps to bring his biographical legacy into the shadows of the sect's gloomy severity. The Carlyles' actual lives, however, speak volumes in response to the glowering Puritanism of Carlyle's complaint about Britain's abandonment of a "Sword-and-Bible-Faith." Their friendship with Gerald Blunt, the rector of St. Luke's, Chelsea, which he reports in his *Memoirs* (1911), offers representative moments. It included many dinners, Jane Welsh Carlyle's presence at the rectory, the stabling of Carlyle's horse Noggs, what Carlyle called "the daily recurring miracle" of milk from the rector's cow (89), Jane's making marmalade in the kitchen of the rectory just two months before her death, Carlyle's signing "a barrow-load" of autographs for a charity sale in 1874 (92), and a memorial sermon in Carlyle's honor delivered by Blunt at St. Luke's the day after Carlyle's death. These are all instances that suggest a significant level of participation and compassion in both Carlyles' association with their Anglican parish church. Although it is difficult to reconcile the glowering Puritan with the participatory compassion traced in Blunt's *Memoirs*, it may well be that the idea of a compassionate Calvinist is oxymoronic because the widely accepted but reductive sense of Calvinism is jaded by an obsessive focus on the jeremiad rhetoric of the sect. If Perry Miller demonstrates that there was much more to Puritans than funny hats and witch hunts, then perhaps the lesson in Carlyle's brand of religion is that there is more to Calvinism than grim fatalism. Certainly, the contradiction between Carlyle's humane behavior and his Puritan rhetoric does not mean that his expressions of religiosity were a fiction, for they were not.

There were two people present when Carlyle died on February 5, 1881. During his last days he was attended by William Allingham, a

poet, and Helen Allingham, an artist who drew many remarkable pictures of him in his late years, including two pencil drawings of his head just after he died. Is it ironic that of the last two people to see Carlyle on this earth one was a poet and the other an artist? Conventional wisdom teaches that Carlyle thought little of art beyond portraiture and much less of poetry. There is, however, another possibility in the interpretation of this death scene, one that renders the irony itself ironic. Although there was much that he disliked in terms of art, poetry, and conventional religion, there was just as much and perhaps more that he adored and in which he believed deeply. One instance of such a possibility is expressed in *Frederick*, and it is a fundamental element of Carlyle's creed. For him, all three—art, poetry, and religion—are synonymous with history. Subsequently, because the process of writing history is a microcosm of the divine creative power, all four—art, poetry, religion, and history—are equally divine. It is not ironic that Carlyle was accompanied at the last by a poet and an artist; it is utterly fitting.

J. A. R. Munro provides one of the last descriptions of a visit to Carlyle, which he made with his younger brother on May 18, 1880. He reports that near the end of the meeting Carlyle “strongly exhorted us to be always perfectly true and open. He then went on As for me ‘I am near the end of my course, and the sooner the better is my own feeling’” (qtd. in Macdonald 32). In 1892 rector Blunt was asked by the *Standard* to comment on the unveiling of a Carlyle bust at the Chelsea Public Library. His remarks inexorably turned to Carlyle's thoughts on religion: “Mr. Blunt concluded by some further references to Carlyle's religion, which Carlyle had summed up to him in the remark that a man's religion consisted not in the many things about which he doubted, but in the few of which he had no doubt” (qtd. in Blunt 97). Carlyle was ever and always reticent about the “few” religious beliefs “of which he had no doubt.” However, whether these beliefs were orthodox, that he believed is beyond question.

Soon after the young Frederick became king in 1740, he received a letter that charged a Catholic school with “seducing Protestants into Catholicism” (14:290). As in his later treatment of the monks in Cleve, Frederick refused to take up the “heavy whip” (14:347); instead, he took up his pen and wrote in the margins of the letter a pronouncement of religious tolerance: “in this Country every man must get to

Heaven in his own way." Carlyle calls them "[w]onderful words," and one of the "acts of Human Improvement" for which Frederick should receive credit. But time and "general circulation" have tarnished the luster of Frederick's initial benevolence, and thus, Carlyle complains, "[a]ccount should be held; and yet it is not possible, no human imagination is adequate to it, in the times we are now got into" (14:290). His lament is painfully relevant, and "in the times we are now got into," people would do well to remember those "[w]onderful words" of Frederick, albeit in more politically correct terms. In reading *Frederick*, one encounters an overwhelming sense that the beleaguered, falsely accused self-deceiver and irreligious heterodox still sits alone with the God of History in a garret study from which they look down on this neon Jerusalem and weep. In writing *Frederick*, Carlyle clearly enacted his belief that the process of re-creating the past in the present was a microcosm of God's divine creative power. This process was shaped by the Calvinistic elements that brought conventional authority to the achievement of representing Frederick, an accomplishment that makes this most undervalued work a masterpiece of what may be called the religious historiography at the center of Carlyle's theology. In addition to remembering Frederick's "[w]onderful words," one would also be well advised to note the final lines of "The Last of the Supernaturalists," an essay Carlyle might have written, as well as those of an essay he did acknowledge as his own, "The Life and Writings of Werner": "Cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote of thy brothers eye" ("Last" 235; "Life" 145; cf. Luke 6:42).

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