

**The Fascist Jesus: Ernest Renan's *Vie de Jésus*
and the Theological Origins of Fascism**

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Ralph E. Lentz II
UWTSD 28000845



Master’s Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Abstract

My study of Renan and his *Vie de Jésus* is an attempt to answer the question of how the “quest of the historical Jesus” contributed to the formation of Fascist political theology. It is a study of why and how the “Academic Jesus” of scientifically trained scholars became the “Fascist Jesus” of politicians like Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. Through a detailed examination of Renan’s *Vie* and his other writings, I propose that fascism was not the result of an excess of irrationality, but rather an excess of Modern rationalism resulting from the late Medieval and early modern rejection of the ancient mystical epistemology and ontology expressed in both Socratic philosophy and Judeo-Christian theology. Second, I argue that Renan’s and other modern scholars’ (e.g., Jakob Hauer and Walter Grundmann) anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism did not stem from any *orthodox* Christian affiliation, but rather from their embracing of a revival of the Marcionite heresy and Enlightenment idealism. Taken as a whole, my work is an argument for viewing the problem of Christian theology, the “historical Jesus,” and the origins of fascism as the resurgence of a non-liturgical, neo-Sophism and its rejection of ancient mystical, participatory rationality centered in the Church’s worship of Jesus Christ. Positively, I am arguing that the orthodox ecclesial-mystical Jesus *is* the “historical” Jesus—and the only Jesus capable of restraining the monsters of Modern Western political science—whether of Fascism, or any yet to come; this is the only Jesus upon which a sustainable life-giving polity can be founded.

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Ralph E. Lentz II

University of Wales, Trinity St. David

Introduction: “A Great Mystery”: Christo-Ecclesiology and Political Theology

I.1. Ernest Renan, the Fascist Jesus, and the Mystery of Participation

Recollecting his decision in 1845 to abandon a vocation as a Catholic priest, Ernest Renan wrote in 1883 that he had been seized by the idea that by abandoning the Church, he could restore faith in Jesus. He added that had he been able to believe in apparitions, he would have seen Jesus say to him, “Forsake me to be my disciple.”¹ At the same time, Renan stated that he was still a Christian—but as “a professor of theology of Halle or of Tübingen.”² In the end, a *daimonion* (“*une voix secrète*”) commanded him, saying, ““You are no longer Catholic; your habit is a lie: Leave it.””³

Eighteen years later Renan would prove his devotion to the Jesus of his imagination with the publication of the *Vie de Jésus*, the most popular, scandalous, and important of the 19th century lives in the “historical quest of Jesus”.⁴ In the post-Enlightenment war to liberate the “historical Jesus” from the

¹Ernest Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, 28e éd. (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1897), 312.

²Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance*, 312.

³Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance*, 312.

⁴Albert Schweitzer noted that the *Vie* went through eight editions in three months, generated within France an academic and theological cottage industry of refutations, and was, in Schweitzer's estimation, “an event in world literature” which exposed the cultured masses to a generation of scientific theological criticism of Jesus and the Gospels. Significantly for this thesis, the *Vie* was quite successful in Germany both popularly and in academic circles (more so with Protestant critics); within a year of its publication there were five German translations. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, First Complete Edition, ed. John Bowden; trans. W. Montgomery, J. R. Coates, Susan Cupitt, and John Bowden (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 159, 165-67. H. W. Wardman likened the publication of the *Vie* to a grenade, rather than a bottle, tossed into the sea. In 1864 Renan published a popular version of the book for “the edification of the humble.” Wardman noted that many of the “humble” were not edified by the

“tyranny of dogma,” Albert Schweitzer identified two sources of inspiration: hatred and love, with the “greatest lives” having originated from hatred (e.g. Reimarus’, the Wolfenbüttel Fragmentist’s, and David Friedrich Strauss’).⁵ Yet Renan’s work of love—(“*But love works without faith*”—as Renan asserted in the Introduction to the *Vie*)—cast long shadows, well into the 20th century.⁶ And some of the shadows cast by Renan’s intellectual work were dark indeed: Benito Mussolini once referred to Renan as “one of the inspired pre-fascists”⁷ and “a great man.”⁸ In Renan, Mussolini found a fellow *avant-garde* intellectual who after the acute crises of war, (the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 for Renan and the Great War for Mussolini), called for all-encompassing “moral and intellectual reform”.⁹ Renan’s aristocratic ethics,¹⁰ disdain for “*le vulgaire*” masses¹¹ and “*matérialisme bourgeois*”¹² anticipated the same antipathies in Mussolini’s fascist political ideology and his desire to “combat every retrograde idea, technical or *spiritual*.”¹³ And these ideas were not only to be found in Renan’s many

book at all, and for the rest of his life Renan received a steady stream of letters of dis-affection from these faithful. See H. W. Wardman, *Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1964), 80-81.

⁵Schweitzer, *Quest*, 5-6.

⁶“*Mais l’amour va sans la foi.*” Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jésus*, neuvième édition, *Histoire des origines du christianisme, livre premier* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1863), lix.

⁷Benito Mussolini, “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,” in *My Autobiography with “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,”* former trans. Richard Washburn Child; latter trans. Jane Soames; (former New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928; latter London, W.C.: Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Hogarth Press, 1933; reprint, New York: Dover, 2006), 233.

⁸Benito Mussolini, *Mussolini as Revealed in His Political Speeches 1914-1923*, trans. and ed. Barone Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (New York: Howard Fertig, 1976), 55.

⁹See Ernest Renan, *La Réform intellectuelle et morale* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1871) and Mussolini, *Mussolini as Revealed*, xiv. See also the entirety of Mussolini’s “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism”.

¹⁰Cf. Renan, *La Réform*, 106-107.

¹¹Renan, *Vie*, 453, cf., 449.

¹²Renan, *La Réform*, 2; see also Part I, “*Le Mal*,” pgs. 1-57.

“secular” philosophical reflections (e.g. *La Réform intellectuelle et morale* of 1871), but also in the *Vie* itself. How could Renan’s work of “love” dedicated to a scientific understanding of Jesus of Nazareth contribute to a political ideology founded in so many hatreds? How could Renan’s portrayal of Jesus as the Jewish version of Socrates¹⁴ help, nearly 70 years later, to create the “Fascist Jesus”?

Some aid in answering this perplexing question may be found in turning to Socrates himself and the mid to late Platonic dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, for Renan’s 1845 confession and the *Vie* can be seen as a historical continuation of the debate between Socrates and Lysias concerning the nature of Love, Beauty, Truth, and Ethics as recorded in the *Phaedrus*.¹⁵ In the dialogue Phaedrus reads a speech by Lysias to Socrates in which Lysias argues that “beautiful ones” should confer their “favors” to “non-lovers” [*mē erōnti*] rather than to lovers [*erōnti*].¹⁶ After Socrates gently mocks the speech, Phaedrus challenges him to make the same argument better than Lysias. Socrates consents (on pain of Phaedrus never again sharing discourses with him if he does not), and calling on the Muses, makes the same argument as Lysias: non-lovers are more worthy of the favors of their beloved because *they are more reasonable* [*phronimon*] than lovers.¹⁷ This is because, as Socrates defines it, love [*erōs*] itself is irrational and leads to immorality—slavery to pleasure, selfishness, physical and moral destruction of both the lover and the beloved.¹⁸ Thus like Lysias, Renan’s turn away from

¹³Mussolini, “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,” 228, with my emphasis. See also *Mussolini as Revealed*, xix, and Ernst Nolte’s discussion of Mussolini in *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 158-159; 161-162.

¹⁴Cf. Renan, *Vie*, 49, 451-452, 455.

¹⁵See the subtitle to the dialogue—*Η ΠΕΡΙ ΚΑΛΟΥ· ΗΘΙΚΟΣ*—“Concerning Beauty, Ethics.” I am using Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 412. Here I am inspired by Catherine Pickstock’s *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998).

¹⁶Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 227, C; English, 415.

¹⁷Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 236; English, 439.

¹⁸Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 237-241; English, 443-457.

Christ and the orthodoxy of the Church in the service of reason and truth—and an ironic/oxymoronic *erotic non-love*—would seem to be on the side of Socrates, on the side of Philosophy.¹⁹ In actuality, Renan, like the misguided Phaedrus, had only made a turn to the non-truth of Sophism.

After reinforcing Phaedrus' acceptance of Lysias' argument, Socrates repents. He is convicted by his familiar *daimonion* that both his and Lysias' speeches were impious sins against the god Love [*ton Erōta*—for both speeches asserted that Love is evil.²⁰ To atone for his sin, Socrates gives another discourse on the *rationality and goodness of desire* [*erōs*] and the *divine madness* that it produces.²¹ Now speaking rightly, Socrates in a mythic dialogue between a pederast and a young lover declares that as with everything that is divine, the god *Erōs* is “beauty, wisdom, goodness, and all such qualities.”²² Being immortal, all souls once participated in this divine *Erōs*, but owing to the order of the universe, the souls fell into physical bodies (whether animal or human) which obscured their vision of the divine and turned them to physical lusts. But the souls never forgot their original vision of *Erōs*, Beauty, Wisdom, and Goodness. And some souls, who have been blessed to have fallen into wise and good men, whenever seeing an earthly beauty, are reminded of the heavenly Beauty. Socrates relates that the memory of the divine Beauty so agitates the soul that to external observers this man *appears* mad; and in reality he is seized by “a fourth madness” [*tetartēs manias*] sent by the gods to those who separate themselves from human concerns and who pursue the divine.²³ This is an un-qualified blessing according to Socrates: “. . .madness which comes from god, is superior to sanity, which is

¹⁹See Renan, *Souvenirs*, 319-320, and Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 16-25.

²⁰Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 242-243; English 459, 461.

²¹Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 244; English 465.

²²Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 246, D; English 473.

²³Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 249-250; English 483.

of human origin.”²⁴ Indeed, participation in the divine madness is supremely rational because it is indicative of the soul’s participation *in Beauty and God*. “My discourse has shown that this is, of all inspirations, the best and of the highest origin to him who has it or who shares in it, and that he who loves the beautiful, *partaking in this madness* [*metechōn tēs manias*], is called a lover.”²⁵ So too by the divine madness of the soul’s love for *Erōs* the lover participates in God [. . . *kath’ hoson dunaton theo anthrōpon metaschein*].²⁶

Socrates readily admits that all of this is highly mysterious. This is why the lover appears crazed and foolish, for to his friends and perhaps even to the beloved, the divine Love, Beauty, Wisdom, and Goodness which so animates the soul of the lover through the sight of the beloved’s physical beauty, *remains hidden*. Observers cannot see and therefore understand the wise lover’s right employment of the soul’s memories of its original divine vision. And it is through the correct practice of paying attention to the soul’s remembrance of this original blessedness that the divinely mad, rational lover becomes “initiated into perfect mysteries” [*teletas teloumenos*].²⁷

Through his myth Socrates brings Phaedrus to repentance—he comes to see that through a *mystical* (i.e. un-seen, hidden and super-rational) process of *participation in divine desire* [*erōs*], both the lover and the beloved become virtuous: good [*agathon*], self-controlled and orderly [*egkrateis autōn kai kosmioi*], and free [*eleutherōsantes*].²⁸ And it is by the same logic of the myth that Socrates also shows Phaedrus the poverties of sophism and writing in the second half of the dialogue. For what both lack is *participation* in the truth, the

²⁴Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 244, D; English, 467.

²⁵Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 249, E; English, 483.

²⁶Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 253, A; English 493.

²⁷Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 249, C; English, 483.

²⁸Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 253, C; 255 B; 256 B; 257 B,39; English, 493, 499, 501, 503, 505.

former through pride and wickedness, the latter through laziness leading to forgetfulness.²⁹

Thus in Socrates' estimation—and against his own proclamations to the contrary—Renan's "love *without faith*"—his love *without participation in the life of Jesus*—was only as a sophistic non-lover in relation to the object of his self-interested desire. Read in the light of Socrates' critique of sophistic non-participatory love and rationality, it could be argued that Renan's *Vie* does to Jesus' life what Lysias' philosophy does to the lover: it turns Jesus' life into a tool—(whether to gain the chair of Hebrew at the *Collège de France*, or to “revenge” himself against the government for losing the same, which were two of the many reasons for Renan's publication of the *Vie*).³⁰ And although the *Vie* had all the trappings of rationality—footnotes, appeals to the latest scientific, critical hermeneutics of German theology, exhaustive contextual references to the Talmud, Josephus, Philo, and others—for all of this, Socrates would say that Renan's writing missed the truth by *purposefully refusing* to participate in it. Such non-love had serious consequences:

. . . [T]he affection of the non-lover, which is alloyed with mortal prudence [*sōphrosunē thnētē*] and follows mortal and parsimonious rules of conduct, will beget in the beloved soul the narrowness which the common folk praise as virtue; it will cause the soul to be a wanderer upon the earth for nine thousand years and a fool below the earth at last.³¹

Given Renan's subject matter, perhaps a more pertinent warning of the danger of trying to arrive at the truth through non participatory love and rationality came later from a first-century Jew: “I tell you the solemn truth, unless you eat the

²⁹Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 260, C-D; 262, C; 268, A-269,C; 274, C-275 B; English, 515, 517, 523, 541, 543, 545, 563, 565.

³⁰Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 76, 80; on Lysias objectification of the lover, see Pickstock, *After Writing*, 5-9.

³¹Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 256, E-257, A; English, 503, 505.

flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, *you have no life in yourselves*” (John 6:53, NET³²).

Socrates repented of the epistemological *and ethical* error of the practice of rational, non-participatory love. Renan never did. Nor did the generation of Enlightenment intellectuals who, from the late 1700s to 1914, embarked on the “first” quest to discover through scientific means the Jesus *of Nazareth*, as opposed to the Jesus of the Church. The intellectual, ethical, and political results of their works—and particularly those of Ernest Renan—would have profound consequences in the first half of the 20th century, as Mussolini’s aforementioned praise of Renan in his 1932 article for the *Italian Encyclopedia*, “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,” indicates. Zeev Sternhell has noted in *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* that Mussolini’s article was an attempt to give fascist ideology *intellectual* respectability;³³ by claiming Renan and his work fascists were enlisting one of the giants in the project of creating a *new* Christianity and Church fit for Modernity. (Mussolini was an atheist who viewed the Italian Catholic Church as a useful tool in the Fascist project of fashioning a “modernity without fragmentation”³⁴ in Italy; he also believed that the only reason Christianity had survived into the modern world was because of its adaption by the *Roman* Empire.³⁵ As will be seen later, Renan’s scholarship provided “scientific” authority for both claims.) Twenty-one years after the catastrophe of the Fascist and National Socialist experiments, in 1966 Ernst Nolte in *The Three Faces of*

³²My emphasis.

³³Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder, and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 35.

³⁴Rainer Bucher sees this as one of the dangerous temptations of the political theology of Hitler; I think it also quite applicable to Mussolini’s fascist project in Italy. See Rainer Bucher, *Hitler’s Theology: A Study in Political Religion*, trans. Rebecca Pohl, ed. Michael Hoelzl (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), xi.

³⁵On Mussolini and the Catholic Church, see Mussolini, *My Autobiography*, 223; on his atheism and sophism, see Laura Fermi, *Mussolini* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 74, 260-261, 268; and on his contention that Christianity only became a “world religion” via the Roman Empire, see Fermi, 218, 268.

Fascism pointed out Renan’s familial and intellectual connections to Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, whose *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines (An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races)* (1853–1855) was the first to assert the superiority of the “Aryan Race.”³⁶ Nolte also showed Renan’s explicit connection to fascism through the inspiration his works provided Charles Maurras, the French journalist who founded the first fascist political movement, the *Action Française*, in December 1898.³⁷ Most recently, Susannah’s Heschel’s 2008 *Aryan Jesus* has demonstrated a genealogy of “racializations” of the “historical Jesus”—(i.e. the *scholarly* deconstruction of Jesus’ Jewish identity and subsequent construction of Jesus as an “Aryan”)—beginning with Renan and continuing through the work of Professor Dr. Walter Grundmann and his “Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life” of the Nazi Reich.³⁸

My study of Renan and his historical Jesus of the *Vie* is an attempt to answer the question of how the “quest of the historical Jesus” could end up participating in the creation of the most pernicious political theology yet conceived in the West. Briefly, why and how did the *Academic Jesus become the Fascist Jesus?*³⁹ Why was it that the Jesus which fascists and National Socialists incorporated into their political theology was almost exclusively the product of scientifically trained scholars? Various researchers have offered answers to the question of the intellectual and cultural origins of fascism and National Socialism in general, and the theological problems associated with them in particular, and it is in this context that I wish to set my research.

³⁶Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, 43.

³⁷Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, 64, 66.

³⁸Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

³⁹In addition to Heschel’s work, my research also contributes to that of Karla Poewe in *New Religions and the Nazis* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), which examines the work of the German academic Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, founder of the “German Faith Movement” during the Third Reich.

Generally and broadly speaking, the problem of late 19th and early 20th century fascism has been understood in one of two ways. Scholars of the 1960s, such as George L. Mosse and Ernest Nolte, viewed fascism and National Socialism as a rejection of Modern rationality. For Mosse this meant a repudiation by German intellectuals of Rationalism, the Enlightenment, and Liberalism throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries in favor of irrational, mystical, and collectivist ideologies centered around the “*Volk*.”⁴⁰ Similarly, Nolte’s assessment of the various fascist movements was that they were, each in their own turn, a rejection of the Enlightenment and Revolutionary notion of “transcendence”—i.e. of humanity’s triumph over its basic physical needs and ascendance into the realm of *universal* human rights, freedom, and democracy.⁴¹ Conversely, more recent scholars such as Sternhell have viewed fascism *not* as a unique moment of post-Enlightenment irrationality, but as a fully intellectually and ideologically grounded cultural and political phenomenon that began with the late 19th century revision of Marxism by French and Italian syndicalists inspired by the writings of Georges Sorel. To be sure, Sorel’s turn to a cult of violence, heroism, vitalism, intuition, and “tribal nationalism” in the wake of the delay of the Marxist *eschaton*—(the universal proletarian revolution against the bourgeoisie)—was professedly anti-rational and anti-materialist.⁴² But it was at the same time a *fully rational and philosophical* rejection of eighteenth-century rationality. In its embrace of liberal market economics, capitalism, and technology it was also in a peculiar fashion a kind of “hyper-liberalism.”⁴³ Sternhell thus concluded that fascist ideology “represented a coherent, logical, and well structured totality. . .its theoretical content was neither less homogenous

⁴⁰See George L. Mosse, *The Crises of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964).

⁴¹See Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, Part Five, “Fascism as a Metapolitical Phenomenon,” 429-454.

⁴²Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 8-10; 24.

⁴³Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 7, 22-24; 28-29.

nor more heterogeneous than that of liberalism or socialism”⁴⁴—or, in other words, fascism shared the same aporias and antinomies that characterize Modern Western thought.

Similarly, scholars have been divided concerning the theological origins of fascism. Heschel’s *Aryan Jesus* is representative of scholars who have seen fascism and more specifically National Socialism as an outgrowth of the historical tensions between Judaism and Christianity, particularly the latter’s history of anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism against the former.⁴⁵ Stated bluntly, National Socialism is seen as coming out of a distinctly *Christian* intellectual, social, and political culture focused in (but not exclusive to) German Protestantism.⁴⁶ Other scholars such as Karla Poewe (*New Religions and the Nazis*, 2006) and Rainer Bucher (*Hitler’s Theology*, 2011) have challenged and qualified this view by focusing on the *heretical* Christian, neo-pagan, and pseudo-Hindu characteristics of fascist and Nazi theo-political ideology.

Through a detailed examination of Renan’s *Vie* and his other writings it is against this backdrop that I shall propose four main theses concerning the connections between the “quest of the historical Jesus” and the theological origins of fascism. The first foundational thesis I shall propose is that fascism was not the result of an excess of irrationality (Mosse, Nolte), but rather an excess of Modern rationalism (following Sternhell’s analysis) which also produced a

⁴⁴Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 8.

⁴⁵The distinction between “anti-Judaism” and “anti-Semitism”—and whether there *is* or *should be one*—is quite controversial. Heschel argues that the distinctions between *theological* anti-Judaism and *biological* anti-Semitism are too blurry to be parsed in both ancient and modern Western Christian thought and action; see *Aryan Jesus*, 20 and ff., and also her “Historiography of Anti-Semitism versus Anti-Judaism: A Response to Robert Morgan,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 3 (2011): 257-279. Robert Morgan’s substantial review essay of *Aryan Jesus* argues that there are important (if sometimes subtle) differences between theological anti-Judaism and modern biologically determined anti-Semitism that should be paid attention to. See his “Susannah Heschel’s *Aryan Grundmann*,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32, no. 4 (2010): 431-494. I shall examine this in relation to Renan’s work below in Chapters 2 and 3.

⁴⁶Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 7-11.

corresponding neo-pagan mystical political theology.⁴⁷ Second, I shall attempt to demonstrate the connection between the rejection of pre-Modern *mystical Christo-Ecclesiology* in both the study of the historical origins of the Church and political science as a foundation for the rise of fascism. Critics of fascism have from very early on recognized it as both a “spiritual” and social problem, but few if any have seen the parallels between it and the problem of the “historical Jesus” and the Church—e.g. the “historical Jesus” and his connection to the Church, the Führer and his connection to the State, and *who produces whom*. In the case of the scientific lives of Jesus, Modern mythological hermeneutics pioneered by David Friedrich Strauss’ *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1836) appeared to demonstrate that in fact, Jesus—or rather “the Lord Jesus Christ”—was a fiction of the early Church, based upon at least four other fictions—the Gospels. Strauss’ hermeneutical approach to the Gospels as myths also marked the beginning of the radical abstraction of Jesus from his Jewish and ecclesiological contexts which further amplified the dialectical conflict between Judaism and Christianity. As Heschel demonstrates, this produced disastrous results by the mid 20th century.

All of this was in the service of Modern, avant-garde scholars’ (e.g. Strauss and Renan) attempt to *re-present* and supplant pre-Modern orthodoxy’s understanding of Jesus of Nazareth and the social body he founded, the Church, through the positing of a “secular” messiah and de-mystified *ekklesia*. My third thesis will then be to argue for a reading of the scientific lives of Jesus as a response to acute crises of modernity in Europe, particularly the social and intellectual traumas caused by the transition from monarchal to democratic societies post-1789. In this light both Strauss’ and Renan’s historical Jesus may be seen as part of the process of trying to bring German and French society into Modernity. Both saw the Church and the Jesus whom it proclaimed as hindrances to this project. Hence another of the underlying theses of this study is that the 18th and 19th century “quests” of the historical Jesus were not due to the death of one

⁴⁷Here I am following the insights of “Radical Orthodoxy’s” critique of the Enlightenment project, especially as expressed by John Milbank in *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2006).

peculiar Jew some nineteen centuries beforehand. Rather, the quests were the result of the apparent death of the Church *as a real and viable social body* in the wake of Modernity. But the two deaths were inseparable: the *recent* death of the latter seemed to indicate the *certain* death of the former.

The standard narrative of the rise of the scientific approach to the life of Jesus has situated it with post-Enlightenment epistemology and hermeneutics. But my fourth argument of this study is to propose that the problem of the “historical Jesus” was first ecclesiological and liturgical—and not centered in the superiority of Modern rationalism. Thus, following Henri de Lubac’s insights in *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, I shall argue that the original quest of the historical Jesus may be found in the Eucharistic controversies of the 11-12th centuries—in the Church’s efforts to rationally determine and distinguish the “true” and “real” presence of Jesus in the Bread and Wine among the Body of the Church. And drawing from Ernst Kantorowicz’ classic study of early modern political theology, *The King’s Two Bodies*, I hope to point out the first political fractures caused by the Church’s loss of a liturgical, mystical Christo-Ecclesiology.

Taken as a whole, my work may be seen as an argument for viewing the problem of Christian theology, the “historical Jesus,” and the origins of fascism as the resurgence of a *non-liturgical, neo-Sophism*⁴⁸ and its rejection of ancient *mystical, participatory rationality centered in the Church’s worship of Jesus Christ*. Specifically, I am arguing that the orthodox ecclesial-mystical Jesus *is* the “historical” Jesus—and the only Jesus capable of restraining the monsters of Modern Western political science; this is the only Jesus upon which a sustainable life-giving polity can be founded. The road to the madness of fascism began whenever Western intellectuals began to believe that *love of the divine is irrational*, and that there can be *reason without love*. This madness can already be seen in Lysias’ sophism. I hope through this dissertation to demonstrate that

⁴⁸Here I follow Pickstock, *After Writing*.

both Socrates and Jesus—Philosophy and Faith—rather affirm that all true knowledge is *relational, passionate, and tied to the Divine Logos.*

* * *

To make these arguments, in Chapter One I shall trace 16th and 17th century Western intellectuals' rejection of an epistemology and ontology based on mystical participation in favor of one based on rationalistic abstraction which Michel Foucault revealed in *The Order of Things*.⁴⁹ Using insights from de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum*, I shall argue that this momentous shift in Western thought had already been anticipated in the crisis of worship centered around the Church's attempt to rationally determine the "historical Jesus" exact relationship to the mystery of the Eucharist and to contemporary worshipers. Indeed, I propose that this marks the beginning of the quests of the "historical Jesus" that were taken up with such scientific vigor in the 19th century. Broadly speaking, I view both the Church's loss of mystical, participatory (or liturgical) rationality and 16th and 17th century Western intellectual's rejection of mystical epistemology and ontology as types of iconoclasm—iconoclasms which post-Enlightenment researchers into the life of Jesus inherited. Thus in the second half of the chapter I treat three academically iconic lives of Jesus produced by Friedrich Schleiermacher, David Friedrich Strauss, and Renan during the course of the 19th century. Typically all three have been considered modern iconoclasts; however I shall try to demonstrate that Schleiermacher's scientific history of Jesus' life was the last attempt to maintain orthodox, mystical Christo-Ecclesiology while at the same time embracing Modern, critical sensibilities. Although not altogether successful, it was, as Johannes Hoff has stated, an "idol" used to try to prevent the idolatry of the emerging Modern false images of Jesus.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* trans. anonymous (New York: Random House, 1970).

⁵⁰I recall Professor Hoff's paradoxical insight from a conversation we had on 2 July 2012, at the opening reception of the Graduate Summer Residential at the University of Wales, Trinity St. David, in beautiful Lampeter.

In contrast, it will be seen that Strauss and Renan's *modern* iconic portrayals of Jesus were the first steps to the construction of the "Fascist-Jesus".

Chapter Two will consist of a critical analysis of Renan's *Vie* in light of the following discussions. It will be shown that the essence of Renan's Jesus is his (*both* Jesus' and Renan's) *modernity*: to Renan, Jesus anticipated the Enlightenment's dream of an *apolitical*, "religion-less" universal religion based on the "fraternity of Man" and individual free conscience by 1800 years. I shall also demonstrate that had Mussolini wished to do so, he could have found the core foundations for his fascist ideology in the *Vie*, particularly concerning the "will to power," the "*Führer* principle," and the conception of an *autonomous secular State* which actually dominates religion. In this chapter I will begin to examine the Enlightenment origins of Renan's anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism by analyzing his treatment of the Last Supper. This will reveal his anti-mystical and anti-ecclesiological biases through his (rather ironic) use of the Gospel of John to deny Jesus' institution of the Eucharist altogether, (via John's omission of the sacramental formula recorded in the Synoptics). Contrary to de Lubac's re-discovery of Pre-Modern mystical orthodoxy whereby "the Eucharist makes the Church,"⁵¹ Renan posits the heterodox idea that the "Church *made* the Eucharist." This is a consistent theme throughout the *Vie*—(and one missed by Heschel's reading⁵²): by replacing Jesus' vision with its own version of the old Jewish sacrificial rituals—most notably the Eucharist—the Church had delayed the coming of the true "religion of humanity" by nearly two millennia. I will argue that Renan's *Modern* anti-mysticism and ecclesiology is related to his anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism: reflecting his penchant for ancient pagan rationality over against Judaic supernaturalism, *Renan criticizes the Church because its liturgical practices are too Jewish.*

⁵¹Henri Cardinal de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 88.

⁵²I hope to supply here what Peter Head implies Heschel's that *Aryan Jesus* lacks—a critical *theological* analysis of Modern historical theology such as that given by Renan in the *Vie*. See Head's review of *Aryan Jesus* in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32, no. 4 (2010): 421-430.

Chapter Three will examine the evolution of Nazi political-theology through the academic work of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer (founder in 1933 of the “German Faith” movement) and Susannah Heschel’s treatment of Dr. Walter Grundmann’s “Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life”. Specifically, I will trace the extent of the influence of Renan’s “Liberal” Jesus to the development of Hauer’s, Grundmann’s, and ultimately even Hitler’s “Aryan” warrior Jesus. This will be accomplished through a reading of Renan’s treatment of the “opposition to Jesus” and to his arrest, trial, and death in the last nine chapters of the *Vie*. These chapters reveal Renan’s anti-Judaic (and following Said and Heschel), anti-Semitic reading of the Gospel accounts.

My conclusion will attempt to address (briefly) two underlying problems related to Renan’s “historical Jesus” and the construction of the Fascist Jesus: 1) the controversy of the Christian origins of modern anti-Semitism, and 2) Modern Academia’s complicity in supporting anti-Semitism through scientific research on Jesus’ life. To do this I shall offer a critique of Susannah Heschel’s *mis*-quoting and *mis*-reading of Renan in her *Aryan Jesus*. What she misses is that Renan’s *positive* portrayal of Jesus as an Enlightenment Liberal was just as dangerous as his revival of the anti-Judaic Marcionite heresy: *both* contributed to Renan’s anticipation of the later Academic-Fascist Jesus. I shall argue that one of the reasons why she misses this in her evaluation of Renan’s work is because of her lack of a *theological* reading of Renan’s history. And this points to the root of Modern academic theology’s cataclysmic failure in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in regards to the “quest of the historical Jesus”: its purposeful rejection of the pre-Modern notion of theology as “*faith seeking understanding*.”⁵³ This first rejection led to the intellectual miss-steps that produced the fiction of the Fascist Jesus. Following St. Augustine’s insights in *Against the Academicians* and *The Teacher*, I propose a return to the pre-Modern orthodoxy of mystical

⁵³This phrase is attributed to St. Augustine, and later to Anslem.

participatory rationality and love as the means of overcoming what Heschel aptly refers to as academic “desk-murder”.⁵⁴

The ground is now cleared for a discussion of the “mysteries” of “Christo-Ecclesiology,” the “Church,” and their relation to political theology in pre-Modern orthodoxy. Along with this, in the following chapter I shall sketch the loss of mystical, participatory rationality in the West from the 12th and 13th centuries through the 19th century, and what role Renan’s *Vie de Jésus* played in this dark and mysterious process.

⁵⁴Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 16-17.

Chapter 1: The Discarded Image: Strauss, Renan, and Iconoclasm in the Lives of Jesus

As in my Introduction, in this chapter I follow another dialogue about truth, love, and rationality, this time centered around the Jesus of History. Taking the place of Socrates, Lysias, and Phaedrus will be Schleiermacher, Strauss, and Renan. Before delving into Schleiermacher's, Strauss', and Renan's biographies of the Nazarene, however, it is also my goal to try to demonstrate the deep origins of the post-Enlightenment quests of the "historical Jesus." Following the work of Michel Foucault, I shall outline the dramatic shift in Western thought occurring between the 16th and 17th centuries from an epistemology and ontology based on mystical participation to one based on rationalistic abstraction. This shift may be seen as having been anticipated by the crisis of worship centered around the mysterious nature of Christ's presence in the Church which emerged in the Eucharistic controversies of the 11th-12th centuries, and which began the Church's own path to an increasingly rationalistic, rather than liturgical theology—a rationalistic theology that would contribute to the later Enlightenment search for the "true" Jesus of history. While it might appear that Schleiermacher, Strauss, and Renan were all similar in their iconoclastic adoption of the Enlightenment's post-mystical epistemology, Christology, and ecclesiology, I hope to show that in fact, only two of the three—Strauss and Renan—were true iconoclasts. Yet before these three scholars' works can be examined, it is first necessary to remember what has long been forgotten—the "mysteries":

1.1. On "Mystery," Christ and the Church, and the Hope and Threat of "Paradise Now"

The term "mystical" is derived from *mystērion*, meaning in biblical usage a "secret" or "mystery" of "something formerly unknown but now revealed."⁵⁵ In the New Testament *mystērion* is used in reference to the "kingdom of God/Heaven" (Mk. 4:11, Matt. 13:11, Lk. 8:10), to the proclamation of the

⁵⁵See the 2nd ed. of the Aland et al. *Greek New Testament*, 119.

crucified “Lord of glory” (I Cor. 2:7-8; 4:11; Rom. 16:25), to Israel’s temporary “hardening” before the *eschaton* (Rom. 11:25), and to Christ’s marriage to the Church (Eph. 5:31).⁵⁶ Following the Jewish apocalyptic use of *mystērion*, New Testament authors used it in reference to the universal resurrection and transformed physicality that will happen with the “royal appearance” (*parousia*) of Christ (Rom. 15:51), to the church(es) of the “last days” (Rev. 1:20), and to the eschatological evil that will finally be destroyed by Christ’s coming (Rev. 17:5-7; 2 Thess. 2:7).⁵⁷ Notably, these biblical (i.e. Jewish⁵⁸) usages of *mystērion* are fully consonant with the *philosophical* mysticism expressed by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*,⁵⁹ and point to a universal pre-Modern mystical epistemology, hermeneutics, and ontology which was “neither *specifically* Jew nor Greek”—(or Hindu, or Daoist, for that matter).⁶⁰ Rather, from China to Greece there was

⁵⁶See also the article on μυστηριον by Bornkamm in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV, ed. Gerhard Kittel; trans. and ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1967; reprint 1995), 817, 819-822.

⁵⁷Bornkamm, μυστηριον, 814-817; 822-824.

⁵⁸Though the New Testament is written in Greek, it is *thought* in Hebrew—and this is true even of Luke’s supposedly Hellenistic gospel. Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi library, and post-World War II re-appraisals of Jewish apocalyptic texts, there has been recognition of a deep store of *Jewish* mystical traditions from which early Christian authors could and did draw from, rather than from Platonic sources, as was supposed from the 19th century onwards. For instance, April DeConick points out the profound influence the Jewish mystical notion of YHWH’s “body”—His “*kavod*”—“glory”—had in the development of New Testament Christology. Hence Paul’s description of Jesus as the “image” or “form” of God (2 Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15 and Phil. 2:6); the Gospel of John’s depiction of Jesus as God’s *Kavod* descended to earth (1:14; 2:11; 11-40; 12:23, 28, 41; 13:32; 17:1-5, 22-23), and the imagery of Hebrews and Revelation of Jesus as the High Priest of the *heavenly* temple and the mystical Lamb of God. See April D. DeConick, “What is Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism?,” in *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 14. It could also be argued that Jewish mysticism, like the mystical epistemology and hermeneutics of Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, was also against non-participatory, sophistic writing and knowledge—see the imperatives to *eat* the scrolls in Ezekiel 3:1 and Rev. 10:9 (cf. Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, “The Temple Within,” also in *Paradise Now*, 147).

⁵⁹Cf. Catherine Pickstock’s *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford, UK; Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), Chapter 1, where she argues that Socrates was using a mystical epistemology to combat Phaedrus and Lysias’ commodified, sophistic, “demythologization” of the spoken word in favor of the fetishizing of writing.

⁶⁰Renan and other scholars of the 19th century recognized the ubiquity of “mystical” thought in the Eurasian continent, yet they tended to view it at the same time as a marker of almost hermetically sealed, unique cultures and races. Renan writes in the *Vie* in his conclusion on “The Essential Character of Jesus’ Work” that Jesus, like Buddha, Zoroaster, and Plato, conformed his teachings

widespread belief among religious and philosophical thinkers in *hidden but knowable realities through participation in divine grace*.

And so once, there was no “historical Jesus.”⁶¹ There was only the Invisible Eternal Word made visible and graspable—crucifiable—to the Church and the world (cf. John 1:1-4, 9-14; I John 1:1-2; Acts 2:22-36). There was only the Man who “amazed” (*ethambounto*) those who did not know him and terrified (*ephobounto*) those who did (Mark 10:32; cf. John 19:5, 8-10; Matt. 27:19). Moreover, in pre-Modern orthodoxy⁶²—(and even among the pagan critics of Christianity, e.g. Pliny the Younger⁶³ and Celsus⁶⁴)—Jesus was not separable from his historical ecclesial body on earth. Rather, there was only the inextricable oneness of Jesus, the Father, the apostles, and those who would believe the Gospels’ testimony concerning Jesus (cf. John 17:20-26). There was only the Jesus who was persecuted when his disciples were persecuted (Acts 9:4, 22:7,

to the “instincts and needs of the heart” of *his* people and *their* specific historical context, and that “One is from his age and his race, even when one reacts against his age and his race,” (speaking of Jesus’ conflict with Judaism). See Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jésus*, neuvième édition, *Histoire des origines du christianisme, livre premier* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1863), 454-455. Heschel’s research also points towards the radicalization of “mystical thought” in late 19th century German research on Jesus in her chapter on “Draining Jesus of Jewishness,” “The Buddhist Jesus,” pgs. 38-39. This was also a major part of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer’s development of the “German Faith;” see Poewe, pgs. 30-34. I argue, however, that “mystical” epistemologies cannot be ethnically, and certainly not racially characterized, but rather should be seen as expressive of *pre-Modern rationality*. (Cf. C. S. Lewis’ *The Abolition of Man* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996).) It seems to me that this would go a long way in solving the so-called “Hellenization” question in relation to developments in Judaism and Christianity—and could have prevented the more *artificial* dialectical conflict between Jewish thought and Christian thought.

⁶¹Cf. John Milbank in *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2006), 9.

⁶²As I hope my discussion of Foucault’s findings in *The Order of Things* will confirm, the non-qualified use of “pre-Modern orthodoxy” as a whole is justified because prior to the 16th century, no intellectuals in the West apparently even conceived of a “non-mystical” ontology. And I can think of no *orthodox* texts where data for the “historical Jesus” was not based on the Gospel traditions. For example, see below on page 39 Ignatius of Antioch’s statement on the “historical Jesus.”

⁶³See Pliny’s famous letter 97 to Emperor Trajan in Pliny the Younger, *Letters in The Harvard Classics*, Vol. 9, trans. William Melmoth, revised by F. T. C. Bosanquet (New York: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909-14).

⁶⁴On Celsus’ simultaneous criticism of Jesus and Christians’ beliefs about him, see John Granger Cook, *The Interpretation of the New Testament in Greco-Roman Paganism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 31, 35, 59-60; 85.

26:14). There was simply the “the great mystery⁶⁵” concerning “Christ and the Church” as expressed in the midst of the discussion of marital relationships in Ephesians 5. The unknown author of “2 Clement” sometime in the late first or early second century expressed the hidden yet real union between Christ and the Church in a remarkable passage in this way:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, if we do the will of our Father God we shall be from the first Church, the spiritual Church [*pneumatikēs*], created before the sun and the moon; but if we do not do the will of the Lord, we shall be from that church which was written of, saying, ‘My house has become a cave of robbers.’ Let us then choose to be from the Church of life [*ekklēsias tēs zōēs*], in order that we may be saved. Now I do not suppose you all ignorant of the fact that a living Church [*ekklēsia zōsa*] is Christ’s body, for the scripture says ‘God made Humankind male and female;’ the male is Christ, the female is the Church. Moreover the Scriptures and the apostles declare that the Church not only exists now, but has been from the beginning [*tēn ekklēsian ou nun einai, alla anōthen*], for it was spiritual [*pneumatikē*], as also our Jesus, but He was revealed [*ephanerōthē*] in the last days in order to save us. Now the Church being spiritual was revealed in the flesh of Christ [*tē sarki Christou*], and it is evident to us that if any of us keep her in the flesh and do not corrupt her, that one will receive her back in the Holy Spirit. For this flesh is a copy of the spirit; therefore no one who corrupts the copy will participate in [*metalēpsetai*] that which is real. Therefore, brothers and sisters, this is why it says ‘keep the flesh in order to partake of the spirit.’ And if we say that the flesh is the Church and the spirit is Christ, then the one who does violence to the flesh does violence to the Church. Such a one therefore does not partake of the spirit, which is Christ. (2 Clement 14:1-4⁶⁶)

⁶⁵I am emphasizing the article along with the demonstrative pronoun in the Greek: το μυστηριον τουτο μεγα ἔστιν, ἔγω δε λεγω ἔεις Χριστον και ἔεις την ἑκκλησιαν. (Eph. 5:32; see the 2nd ed. of the Aland et al. *Greek New Testament*).

⁶⁶My translation using the Greek from Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007). Cf. Bart D. Ehrman’s translation in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. and trans. Bart D. Ehrman (Cambridge, MA; London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2003), 187. I wish to thank my friend and Greek tutor John Ebel for his assistance with this translation. All imperfections are mine.

Still later St. Augustine expressed this mystical Christo-Ecclesiology as the triple mode of Christ's being as God, Incarnate, and "in the fullness of the Church."⁶⁷

These passages point to my use of "Church" as referring to the pre-Modern mystical conception of the worshippers of Jesus as *being* and belonging to a sempiternal, hidden and yet visible social body centered in the eternal and temporal Christ. This body was considered both universal and an *integral unity* of Christ and his worshipers, and of worshipers with one another—hence the original meaning of *katholikē* as first used by Ignatius of Antioch (d. ca. 107 C. E.) in Sm. 8:2: ". . .wherever Christ Jesus is, there is the catholic Church."⁶⁸ In contrast to pagan society, "the Church" was to be characterized by *homonoiā*—"unity of mind" or "harmony" originating from the mystical union with Christ.⁶⁹ This invisible reality was either confirmed or denied by the Church's visible actions—"Let the wise display wisdom not in words but in good works" (I Clement 38:2); "For when the [nations (*ethnē*)] hear from our mouths the [words (*logia*)] of God, they marvel at their beauty and greatness. But when they discover that our actions are not worthy of the words we speak, they turn from wonder to blasphemy, saying that it is a myth and a delusion" (2 Clement 13:3⁷⁰). That early Christians did not always attain this *homonoiā* is evidenced by Paul and Clement's letters to the Corinthians (and there are many other examples as well⁷¹). And yet in the face of such "objective" data to the contrary, New

⁶⁷Quoted in Henri Cardinal de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 126.

⁶⁸My translation using the Greek from Holmes, 254; see also the note on καθολικη on 255. Cf. Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 77.

⁶⁹ὁμονοια permeates I Clement, which was written between 80-100 C. E. in response to an apparent schism in the church at Corinth over the issue of displaced bishops. See for instance I Clement 51:2 (from Holmes ed., *Apostolic Fathers*).

⁷⁰I have slightly altered Holmes' translation as indicated by the words in brackets.

⁷¹See for instance Celsus' observation of the disunity of the Church: "'Since they have expanded to become a multitude, they are divided and rent asunder, and each wants to be his own party.'" (Quoted in Chadwick, *Church in Ancient Society*, 112.)

Testament and Apostolic authors held tenaciously to their belief in the mystical reality of the Church's essential unity and harmony which had "been so nobly and righteously handed down" to believers in Christ (I Clement 51:2).

These trans/extra-historical conceptions of Jesus and the Church were also related to pre-Modern Christians' *mystical political theology*. Thus the author of Ephesians writing to Gentile believers can speak of "the mystery of Christ" [*mystēriō tou Christou*] revealed "through the Church" to the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 3:4,10) as Christians live out their lives *in this world as citizens of heaven* in anticipation of the Return of the Lord (cf. Philippians 1:27, 3:20-21).⁷² At the center of this mystical Christo-Ecclesiology was a liturgical action—the celebration of the Eucharist—which weekly proclaimed Jesus' historical sacrifice and the promise of his future Return.⁷³ For nearly 1300 years, this rite served as an existential reminder to the Church and to the world of the un-calculable and thus un-controllable power of God's action in history through *both* Jesus *and* his community of believers, who, upon his Return, would be revealed at last as the true image bearers of God. From Jesus' era onwards the Eucharist was linked with the Jewish Passover (Matt. 26:17-30; Mk. 14:12-26; Lk. 22:7-20; Jn. 13:1-ff⁷⁴)—itself a liturgical meal fraught with political implications—especially vis-à-vis pagan empire. Lactantius' liturgical commentary on the Easter *pascha* from the early 300s expresses the inherent political threat that orthodox Christian eschatology has posed to all "secular" rule: "This is the night in which we keep vigil on account of the coming of our king and God. This night has a twofold meaning: in it Christ received life after death;

⁷²See especially Paul's use of πολιτευεσθε and πολιτευμα 'εν 'ουρανοις in Phil. 1:27 and 3:20-21.

⁷³Cf. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (London: Epworth Press, 1971), 15 and passim.

⁷⁴John famously (or infamously) records Jesus' last meal with his disciples "before the Passover feast," as opposed to the Synoptics' record of it being on the same night as the Passover. John also does not mention Jesus' institution of the Eucharist. Renan makes much of this latter omission, and I shall deal with this below.

and in it *he will gain the kingdom over the whole earth.*”⁷⁵ The Eucharistic liturgy of the Syrian *St. Mark* is more explicit in the judgment of the nations that early Christians saw in the celebration of the Bread and Wine—“[we remember] ‘all thy saving dispensation for us. . .from thy life-giving death, three days’ burial, thy glorious resurrection, thy ascension into heaven and thy sitting at the right hand of God the Father, *and thy dreadful advent. . .*’”⁷⁶ Positively, the Eucharist was viewed as the inaugural of the joyous eschatological feast of all nations before YHWH as prophesied in Isaiah 25: 6-8, where in addition to “rich viands” and “choice wines,” Death itself would be gobbled up.⁷⁷ Thus a 4th (?) century Egyptian liturgy of the Eucharist could speak of the mysterious unity and universality that was believed to occur each time the sacrament was administered: “. . .as this bread was scattered on the mountains and gathered to be one, so also gather your holy Church out of every nation. . .and make one catholic Church.”⁷⁸

Following already well-established Jewish mystical/apocalyptic traditions, early Christians viewed the Eucharist as a means by which Divine Grace enabled them to participate in “Paradise *now.*”⁷⁹ And herein lies the political danger of ancient Jewish and Christian mysticism. The *belief and practice* that the universal justice, peace, and *homonoia* that comes through *God’s rule on earth*—(expressed in biblical language as “the Kingdom of God/Heaven”)—can be and is experienceable *now* (however inchoately), directly challenges and destabilizes every notion of polity and society based on “*esse in semet ipso*”—to “*exist in oneself.*” This, according to St. Augustine, was the original sin of humanity and

⁷⁵Quoted in Wainwright, *Eucharist*, 23, with my emphasis.

⁷⁶Quoted in Wainwright, *Eucharist*, 67, with emphasis in the original.

⁷⁷See Wainwright, *Eucharist*, 21, and the JPS and NET translations of Isaiah 25:6-8.

⁷⁸Quoted in Chadwick, *Church in Ancient Society*, 680.

⁷⁹See DeConick, “Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism?”, 1-24.

all the Cities of Man which followed (*Civ. Dei*, XIV.13⁸⁰). It was simply the sin of Pride.

Renan and the Enlightenment generation rejected the “mystical Christo-Ecclesiology” I have tried to sketch as the irrationality and/or madness (*hystérique, une maladie du cerveau, les accidents nerveux*⁸¹) of a pre-critical age. For Renan specifically, the survival of such irrationality in the orthodoxy of the Catholic church in France into the 19th century had had disastrous results. In his *La Réform intellectuelle et morale* of 1871, Renan cited Catholic orthodoxy as a main cause for France’s defeat at the hands of the Prussian army. “France has wished to remain Catholic; she now bears the consequences.”⁸² In its stubborn refusal to abandon “transcendent mysticism” and poisonous supernatural beliefs, Catholicism had brought France to a humiliating military defeat which had toppled the Second Empire itself.⁸³ And anticipating Stalin’s dismissal of the Papacy’s power before the Second World War,⁸⁴ Renan decried that “A student of the Jesuits will never be an officer capable to be opposed to a Prussian officer; a student of Catholic elementary schools will never be able to make intelligent war [*la guerre savante*] with perfected arms.”⁸⁵ This is a classic example of the “secularization of the European mind” which occurred during the 19th century, and indeed, Renan and the quest of the historical Jesus occupies an important

⁸⁰St. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 609.

⁸¹See Renan’s assessment of St. Theresa, St. Francis, and Pascal in his conclusion to the *Vie* in “The Essential Character of the Work of Jesus,” 452-453. Here he *seems* to agree with Socrates in the *Phaedrus*: “The words of the sane and the ill are all relative. Who would not love better to be ill as Pascal, than sane as the common heard [*vulgaire*]?” (453) I shall show later that Renan is actually being rather sophistic here.

⁸²Ernest Renan, *La Réform intellectuelle et morale* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1871), 97.

⁸³Renan, *La Réform*, 97.

⁸⁴Stalin’s response in 1935 to the French Prime Minister’s question as to how the Soviet Union might ameliorate the conditions of Russian Catholics so as to win the favor of the Vatican, was reportedly, “The Pope! How many divisions has he got?” See Churchill’s *The Second World War*, vol. I, (1948).

⁸⁵Renan, *La Réform*, 97.

chapter in that story.⁸⁶ As will be shown below, it also reveals the problem that orthodox Christianity appeared to pose to *avant-garde* Modernists who wished for a *world* dominated by *secular* Western civilization.⁸⁷ It is beyond the scope of this study to fully investigate the causes of this “secularization”; this is too great a mystery (for what are often taken as causes, e.g. the rise of the “historical Jesus,” or the new popular authority given to scientific rationality, are just as often affects of secularization).⁸⁸ However Michel Foucault’s “archaeological” investigation of the rise of the “human sciences” during the Early Modern era in *The Order of Things* and de Lubac’s historical theology in *Corpus Mysticum* provide insight into the pre-foundations of Enlightenment secularization, that is, the creation of realms—(both intellectual and political)—where Divine and liturgical participation are considered un-real and un-allowable. But this creation also marked a loss, and to this loss I now turn.

1.2. The Loss of Mystical, Participatory Rationality and the Corpus Mysticum

Foucault’s *The Order of Things* explores the shift in Western thought from a mystical ontology, epistemology, and hermeneutics of “resemblances” to a non-mystical rationality of “representations” based on precise analysis, synthesis, and taxonomies. Using various texts prior to the 17th century, Foucault showed that “Resemblance” worked as a viable epistemology and hermeneutics because of a mystical conception of the universe as being “folded in upon itself.” The earth was conceived as a great mirror of the heavens; human beings reflected the glories of the stars and vice-versa; plants and animals concealed secrets of the

⁸⁶See Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975), Chapter 8, “History and the secular” and his excellent consideration of Renan and his works.

⁸⁷H. W. Wardman in my estimation rightly characterizes Renan as a part of 19th century *avant-garde* intellectuals; see Chapter II, “1845-1849: The Revolution of 1848 and *L’Avenir de la science*” in H. W. Wardman, *Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1964). I shall discuss Renan’s shattered vision of French-German-Anglo domination of the world as he expressed it in *La Réform intellectuelle et morale* later.

⁸⁸See O. Chadwick’s Introduction in *Secularization* for the difficulty of this task, 1-20.

universe which were of great use to humans.⁸⁹ All things were viewed in *relationship* to every other thing, and everything *participated* in The Whole⁹⁰ in a great chain of being.⁹¹

In this system of thought there was no possibility of standing outside of The Whole. There was no possibility of achieving abstracted, detached, “objective” knowledge—no possibility of an all-seeing Subject that could obtain complete knowledge of a totally alienated and totally knowable Object. This is because things themselves were understood mystically, i.e., they were always *more* than what they *appeared*, containing *invisible* meaning(s) which pointed outside of themselves to other *hidden* meanings and relationships. Everything in the universe was conceived as a *hieroglyph*.⁹² The universal, participatory web of relationships itself was also seen to be mystical. That is, the *relationship* between things and other things, and all things to The Whole—and the relationship between things and the words which symbolized and signified them—were all perceived as being hidden, invisible. And yet, these concealed relationships were *revealable*, and in fact were constantly being revealed through hidden yet findable signs which in turn pointed to more mysteries. Thus the quest for knowledge, the pursuit of un-veiling the mysteries of The Whole was in-exhaustible.⁹³ Both words and the things they symbolized were understandable due to their ontological *resemblance* to one another—to “similitudes” mystically embedded into all of creation. These enabled the learned to “read the world” and produce encyclopedic (and oftentimes rather fanciful) texts.⁹⁴

⁸⁹Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* trans. anonymous (New York: Random House, 1970), 17.

⁹⁰I am inspired here by C. S. Lewis’ *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1967); *The Order of Things* confers from another perspective what Lewis saw in the Medieval mindset.

⁹¹Foucault, *Order of Things*, 18-19.

⁹²Cf. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 27.

⁹³Foucault, *Order of Things*, 30.

⁹⁴Foucault, *Order of Things*, 18-27.

Yet as early as the 16th century this mystical ontology, epistemology, and hermeneutics was already beginning to be super-ceded by a new “*mathēsis*.” Foucault noted the change in Western attitudes to the ancient mystical ways of knowing through post 17th century intellectuals’ increasing tendency to break apart resemblances and signs; things were “no longer anything but what they are”—they were losing their mystical content.⁹⁵ Moreover, the whole system of mystical resemblances was now associated with error, illusion, and the frontiers of madness. For instance, in *Novum Organum* (1620) Francis Bacon condemned the *episteme* and hermeneutics of resemblance as idolatrous fictions produced by the “peculiar nature” of the human intellect.⁹⁶ These fictions seduced people into seeing in nature “parallels, correspondences, and relations *that have no existence*.”⁹⁷ The greatest break with the mystical *episteme* of resemblances came with Descartes’ philosophy. Descartes rejected resemblance in favor of an *episteme* founded in terms of “identity, difference, measurement, and order.”⁹⁸

The shift from an *episteme* based on resemblance to one based on measurement and order was momentous. Through the system of resemblance, Western intellectuals sought to *un-veil* how the *world was ordered*; in the new *episteme* intellectuals used *thought*—“*ratio*”—to measure and thus *order the world*.⁹⁹ Unlike resemblance, which produced opaque, indistinct, and infinite *ignorance* (for things are always more than what they appear and always point to other epistemologically “open” creatures), the new rationality produced *certain knowledge* acquired through careful measurements and *analysis*—the “un-doing” [*analuein*] of a whole into its constituent parts.¹⁰⁰ Things thus measured and

⁹⁵Foucault, *Order of Things*, 47.

⁹⁶Quoted Foucault, *Order of Things*, 52.

⁹⁷Quoted in Foucault, *Order of Things*, 52, with my emphasis.

⁹⁸Foucault, *Order of Things*, 52.

⁹⁹Foucault, *Order of Things*, 54, 74.

¹⁰⁰Foucault, *Order of Things*, 55.

broken apart could then be precisely (but *abstractly*) *re-presented* in tables, lists, enumerations, in a plethora of *taxinomia*.¹⁰¹ Herein was the new *episteme*'s great power: in precisely re-presenting the world in equations, series, and tables of identity and difference, it simultaneously *ordered the world according to the ratio of the human intellect*. By means of representation it was now in the power of Man not just to know creation, but to *judge* it as well. Hence Descartes' judgment from the *Regulae*: "“Enumeration alone, whatever the question to which we are applying ourselves, will permit us always to deliver a true and certain judgment upon it.”"¹⁰²

There is not space in this study to go into further detail as to how the shift from “Resemblance” to “Representation” took place. However, it is important to note the shift in semiotics which Foucault found, and which echo Henri de Lubac's research into the transformation in the Church's understanding of the Eucharist in the 11th and 12th centuries. Foucault points out that since the time of the Stoics, the *system* of signs in the West had been ternary, consisting of the complex and mysterious resemblances between “the significant, the signified, and the ‘conjuncture’” which formed, in actuality, One—The Whole.¹⁰³ From the 17th century on, due to the new philosophies which emerged out of the Benedictine Abbe of Port-Royal, the ternary understanding was cast aside and replaced by a dualistic system of the significant and the signified. As early as the end of the Renaissance words were beginning to lose their meaning as ontological signs pointing to other ontological signs.¹⁰⁴ This shift marked a rupture: prior to the 17th century the question was how it was possible to know if a sign *truly* designated what it signified; after the 17th century it was asked how a sign was

¹⁰¹It is notable that *taxinomia* of the Gospels—(i.e. harmonization of similarities and discrepancies in the Gospel accounts, or “identity” and “difference” as Foucault would say)—have never been used *liturgically* by the Church

¹⁰²Quoted in Foucault, *Order of Things*, 55.

¹⁰³Foucault, *Order of Things*, 42.

¹⁰⁴Foucault, *Order of Things*, 42.

connected to what it signified. (Here is an echo of the late Medieval Eucharistic crises: how is Christ connected to the Bread and Wine? . . . And to the Church?). In short, words were no longer signs which pointed to and participated in a hidden (but yet discernible) ultimate reality.¹⁰⁵

So too de Lubac discovered a “certain kind of rationalism”¹⁰⁶ that *enabled* the fragmentation of the three bodies of Christ: his “*corpus verum*”—“true body”—the body in which Jesus suffered, died, and was resurrected, his “*corpus mysticum*”—his “mystical body” hidden in the Host and Wine of the Sacrament, and his ecclesial-social body, the “*corpus Christi*.”¹⁰⁷ De Lubac’s research demonstrated that prior to the great debate over transubstantiation which occurred in the 11th century, *all three bodies were considered mystical; of revealing an “ultimate and ‘solid’ reality while, as it were, waiting to be absorbed in it”*¹⁰⁸—(this may be seen as a premonition of what Foucault discovered in the pre-Modern mystical ontology of the cosmos, with the link being Christ Himself, as “all things are held together in Him” [Col. 1:17]). Moreover, all three of Christ’s bodies were considered “*mystikos kai nontos*”—“mystical and intelligible.”¹⁰⁹

With the debate over transubstantiation, however, a dramatic transvaluation of the theological concepts of “*corpus Christi*,” “*corpus verum*,” and “*corpus mysticum*” began to take place. Responding to teachings of Berengar of Tours and others who “tended to spiritualize and mystify” the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the Church began to stress the *real* presence of the *human* and divine Christ in the Sacrament, and hence the host.¹¹⁰ Thus a remarkable chiasmus

¹⁰⁵Foucault, *Order of Things*, 43.

¹⁰⁶Laurence Paul Hemming, “Henri de Lubac: Reading *Corpus Mysticum*,” *New Blackfriars* Vol. 90 (2009), 519.

¹⁰⁷See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 195-196.

¹⁰⁸Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, f.n. 101, 30-31, with my emphasis.

¹⁰⁹Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 6.

¹¹⁰Kantorowicz, *King’s Two Bodies*, 196; Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 9.

occurred in the theology of the Church: “*Corpus verum*,” “*corpus natural*,” or “*corpus Christi*” were now used to designate the *host*. And increasingly after 1150, “*corpus mysticum*” was used to refer to “the Church as the organized body of Christian society.”¹¹¹ More significantly, “*corpus mysticum*” was used to refer to “the body politic” or “*corpus iuridicum*” of the Church—i.e., “the gigantic legal and economic management” on which the Church in the *saeculum* rested.¹¹² I maintain that *here* is the first quest to discern the “historical Jesus”’ *objective* (in all post-Cartesian senses of the term) relationship to the contemporary Church. I also maintain that here may be seen the root cause of all the quests: *a crises in worship—a sundering of faith, love, and reason into distinct and fictional categories; an attempt to “understand before worshiping.”*¹¹³

In Berengar’s theology may also be seen the beginning of the Modern view of the mystical as irrational. The Eucharistic mystery was for him only a “type,” an “image” *without any objective reality*; the bread and wine were symbols—“mysteries”—that hid *nothing*.¹¹⁴ Hence for Berengar “mystical” was a hindrance to faith and understanding. Worse still, to combat Berengar’s heretical understanding, the proponents of orthodoxy adopted Berengar’s own dialectical reasoning. Gradually, over the course of the next two centuries of debate over the mystery of the Eucharist, the former orthodox understanding of theology as “faith seeking understanding” was replaced by “*understanding transcends faith*” and a “Christian rationalism” that believed in *provable faith* and *demonstrable mysteries*.¹¹⁵ The mystery of the Eucharist was now becoming an

¹¹¹Kantorowicz, *King’s Two Bodies*, 196.

¹¹²Kantorowicz, *King’s Two Bodies*, 197, 206.

¹¹³Cf. Augustine in *On Free Choice of the Will*, I.2; II.2 for a classic expression of the patristic formula, “I believe in order to understand” (stated positively); the basis for this formulation comes from Isaiah 43:10: “My witnesses are *you*—declares the LORD—My servant whom I have chosen. To the end that you may take thought, and believe in Me, and understand that I am He.” (JPS)

¹¹⁴Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 223.

¹¹⁵Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 238, 240.

object for analysis ““with its laws of interpretation, its ‘keys’ of explanation and its theory of numbers, which accentuated their rigidity.””¹¹⁶ In the shift from dogma and contemplation to dialectics and apologetics the first step on the road to the “historical Jesus” had been taken.¹¹⁷ So too the Modern notion that the mystical power of *the Church* constituted the efficacy of the sacrament of the Bread and Wine, rather than the mystical power of Jesus Christ working historically through the mystery of the Church’s *communion* with His Body as the basis for the Church’s *being*, entered into Church teaching.

Thus the new rationalism—whether of that of Berengar or of his orthodox opponents—ended up displacing the pre-Modern orthodox epistemology that synthesized faith with reason: “Understanding is the obligatory result and usual reward of faith.”¹¹⁸ Kantorowicz traced in *The King’s Two Bodies* how this long and obscure process of mystifying the Church *in opposition to Jesus* later led to the mystification of secular bodies—that of kings and of nations. And by the early Modern period the new mystical secular bodies were becoming so powerful that they could begin to create ecclesial bodies in their own image: Henry VIII’s “Church of England,” Louis XIV’s imperial Catholic church, or the various state churches of Post-Reformation Germany. Kantorowicz’s work stressed that the de-mystification of the Eucharist (and I would add Jesus) was central in this process. Yet what Kantorowicz’s study did not stress was that in pre-Modern orthodoxy the Eucharist was *the participatory* sacrament of the liturgy—not just a “reminder” of Christ’s historical sacrifice, but via a supra-rational practice a means of re-connecting believers to the trans-historical Jesus and Church—that Jesus and Church which is on pilgrimage in the world and which cannot be co-opted in false eschatologies (whether of universal democracy, universal capitalism, universal communism, universal fascism).

¹¹⁶Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 228.

¹¹⁷Cf. Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 240.

¹¹⁸Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 231.

Another major consequence of the rise of the new, anti-mystical rationality within the Church (particularly within Protestantism) by the 18th century was the de-mystification of the Gospels as icons. As with the Eucharistic confusions of the 11th and 12th centuries, the Enlightenment’s iconoclasm of the Gospels was also a crisis of worship. And it was this iconoclasm that gave birth to the 19th century quest(s) of the “historical Jesus”.

1.3 The Enlightenment Iconoclasm of the Gospels

When Marie-Joseph Lagrange, French Dominican and founder of the *École biblique de Jerusalem* wrote, “The Gospels are the only lives of Jesus that can be written. The only thing to do is to understand them as best we can,”¹¹⁹ he was expressing the Church’s ancient view of the Gospels as *icons*—*real images* that pointed beyond themselves to an even greater reality. (Hence Jesus’ words concerning the nature of the scriptures according to John’s Gospel: “You all search the scriptures, because you think to have eternal life in them; and they are witnessing concerning *me*,”¹²⁰). It was also an acceptance of what John’s Gospel un-ashamedly reveals about itself, but which is true of *all* the Gospels: “. . .these [signs] are recorded so that you all may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you all may have life in his name.” (John 20:30, NET¹²¹) In other words, Lagrange accepted that the New Testament witnesses (“martyrs”) *were not* neutral/objective observers of the life of Jesus, but were, in one way or another, *participators* in his life through the Church. Indeed, it was the *biased love* of years of *remembering* Jesus’ words and deeds that made the

¹¹⁹Quoted in Étienne Nodet, O.P., *The Historical Jesus? Necessity and Limits of an Inquiry* trans. J. Edward Crowley (New York: T & T Clark International, 2008), 192.

¹²⁰My very literal translation of John 5:39, to emphasize the nuance and emphatic nature of the Greek ἔειπεν αἱ μαρτυροῦσαι περὶ ἐμοῦ (see the 2nd ed. of the Aland et al. *Greek New Testament*). Jesus in verse 40 may be seen as being frustrated by “the Jewish leaders” (cf. John 5:16, NET) “representationalist” hermeneutics and pride which kept them from coming to him for eternal life.

¹²¹I have slightly modified the NET’s translation to reflect the second person plurals—πιστεῦσητε and ἐχητε—to emphasize that the author of the Gospel is addressing a community of believers as opposed to the almost automatic Modern reading of “you” to refer to an individual.

canonical Gospels worthy of liturgical use in all churches.¹²² Lagrange's statement was a remembrance that the Gospel portraits of Jesus were designed for lovers, not *voyeurs*.

Yet to assert that the Gospels are icons is not necessarily to discount their historical bases or historical worth.¹²³ For the two foundational theological claims painted by New Testament authors—Jesus' *human* and divine life, and his *death* and resurrection—are simultaneously *historical* claims that in some fashion *can be* portrayed—and *enacted*.¹²⁴ This latter possibility became important in the 8th and 9th century controversies over “the historical Jesus”—i.e., pictorial depictions of “the Word made flesh.” Arguing that no image made by human or angelic hands could *simultaneously* portray Jesus' divinity and humanity—for the latter could not be separated from the ineffable mystery of the former), iconoclasts like Constantine V saw the Eucharist as the only image which could be “one in being” with the actual Christ *of history*, and therefore appropriate for Christians:¹²⁵

It has been laid down for us that Christ is to be portrayed in an image, *but only as the holy teaching transmitted by divine tradition says: 'Do this in remembrance of me.'* Therefore it is evidently not permitted to portray him in an image or to carry out a remembrance of him in any other way, since this portrayal [in the Eucharist] is true and this way of portraying is sacred. (emphasis mine)¹²⁶

More recently, in his 2008 study of the historical Jesus, French Dominican historian Étienne Nodet emphasizes that the Gospels were written in the light of

¹²²See Nodet, *Historical Jesus?*, 7, 19, 68.

¹²³See for instance, N. T. Wright's concerns about perceiving the Gospels as icons in his *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. II, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 4-5; 8-10; 123-124. The use of the *Christ Eleemon* mosaic from Constantinople of the 11th and 12th centuries which portrays Jesus fully facing the viewer on the cover of the book points to Wright's own portrait of Jesus: pious *and* critical.

¹²⁴Nodet, *Historical Jesus?*, 4, 66.

¹²⁵See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries-Mary Through the Centuries* (New York: History Book Club, 2005), 86-87.

¹²⁶Quoted in Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries*, 87.

the Church's belief in, and reflection upon, the tradition of Jesus' resurrection. Nodet reminds his readers that the earliest writings of the New Testament—the epistles—and those of the Apostolic Fathers—“massively ignore” the “teachings and doings of Jesus” (i.e. the primary fodder for the “historical Jesus”) in favor of the proclamation of his birth, baptism, passion and resurrection.¹²⁷ Hence Ignatius of Antioch's (d. ca. 107) famous statement on the “historical Jesus” and the praxis of the Church:

Moreover, I urge you to do nothing in a spirit of contentiousness, but in accordance with the teaching of Christ. For I heard some people say, ‘If I do not find it in the archives, I do not believe it in the gospel.’ And when I said to them, ‘It is written,’ they answered me, ‘That is precisely the question.’ But for me, the ‘archives’ are Jesus Christ, the unalterable archives [*ta athikta archeia*] are his cross and death and his resurrection and the faith that comes through him; by these things I want, through your prayers, to be justified. (Philadelphians 8:2¹²⁸)

Only later did believers in Jesus create the series of “coordinated icons”—(what subsequent academic theologians and historians would distinguish as “tropes,” “logoi,” “myths/miracles”)—that make up each of the canonical Gospels and which taken together form a mosaic of Jesus.¹²⁹ This mosaic of four Gospels steadfastly refuses to be harmonized according to a post-Representationist, post-Cartesian analytical *mathēsis* or taxonomy. As Nodet points out, within the Church, the Gospels were valued *not* for their “verifiable exactness,” but rather because they testified to “the rule of faith” in Jesus as the Christ.¹³⁰ Unlike Greek plays or modern documentaries, the Gospels and the Eucharist *are not spectacles*, but were constructed as and taken to be “. . .the actualization of a historical act of God in ordinary time, by which a people or a community have been created and continue to be.”¹³¹ Thus within orthodoxy neither the “historical Jesus”—who

¹²⁷Nodet, *Historical Jesus?*, 66.

¹²⁸From Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*.

¹²⁹Nodet, *Historical Jesus?*, 18.

¹³⁰Nodet, *Historical Jesus?*, 42.

¹³¹Nodet, *Historical Jesus?*, 33-34.

was recognized as God—nor the Eucharist—which was recognized as the Mystery of God through Christ which “made the Church”—could be spoken of “in a univocal discourse *that compels reason*.”¹³²

If the Church’s understanding of Jesus of Nazareth was correct—that indeed he was the Mystery of God Incarnate, then Lagrange’s historical assessment is correct: the Gospels’ poetic¹³³ and iconic portrayals *are* the only lives of Jesus that can be written. For as Socrates tried to explain to Phaedrus, and St. Paul to the Corinthians, because the reality of the Divine is beyond human comprehension *esse in semet ipso*, it can only be known through the super-rational gift of Divine Madness (Socrates) or the Moronic Wisdom of God (St. Paul).¹³⁴ But of course, this is a matter of both historical debate and faith. The Gospels themselves recognize this, even after the resurrection: “So the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain that Jesus had designated. When they saw him, they worshiped him, *but some doubted*” (Matt. 28:16-17, NET, with my emphasis). By the 18th century some Enlightened intellectuals within the Church (e.g., Remarius) were taking this doubt quite seriously. This doubt is indicative of their desire for certainty; although the technology was not yet available, what Enlightenment-minded researchers into the life of Jesus desired was a photograph—a mechanically precise, fixed, and identically reproducible picture of the man from Nazareth. The pre-Modern (and orthodox) belief in Resemblances—the great chain of “images of the Image” which viewed humans as *images* of the Original Image Maker—which only received ontic being “by

¹³²Nodet, *Historical Jesus?*, 42, with my emphasis.

¹³³I am using “poetic” in the ancient sense of a work that is divinely inspired, and not the result of autonomous human reason. Cf. Plato, *Ion*, Greek, 530, E-531, D; English, 421, 423, in *The Statesman, Philebus, Ion*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹³⁴On the Socratic notion of divine madness, see *Phaedrus*, Greek, 249-250; English, 483 in Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966). For Paul’s understanding of God’s “Moronic Wisdom,” see I Cor. 1:25: ‘οτι το μωρον του θεου σοφωτερον των ‘ανθρωπων ‘εστιν, και το ‘ασθενες του θεου ‘ισχυροτερον των ‘ανθρωπων (2nd ed. of the Aland et al. *Greek New Testament*).

imitation” and participation in the Image of the Invisible God himself (the latter being the argument specific to Christian orthodoxy)—was no longer sufficient for knowing that man who claimed to be the Truth itself.¹³⁵ Thus the late eighteenth-century quest for the historical Jesus was in many ways a revival of iconoclasm and at the same time a turn to the idolatry of Berengarian rationalism.¹³⁶ This brings us then to a consideration of the academically iconic lives of Jesus authored by Schleiermacher, Strauss, and Renan in the 19th century.

1.4 An Idol to Prevent Idolatry: Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Life of Jesus*

Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)—whom the younger Karl Barth simultaneously praised and criticized as *the* titan of 19th century Protestant theology—has generally been seen as one of the well-meaning iconoclasts of the early nineteenth century’s attempt to produce a modern historical understanding of Jesus.¹³⁷ (“Well-meaning” in the sense that Schleiermacher’s philosophical theology was intended to strengthen orthodox Christian belief and practice in an “age of Reason”). While books on the life of Jesus had appeared prior to 1819, Schleiermacher’s lectures of that year at the University of Berlin began the academic attempts to historically reconstruct the life of the Nazarene. He delivered lectures on the life of Jesus four times between 1819 and 1832, and in 1864, K. A. Rütenik used Schleiermacher’s notes from the last presentation along with students’ notebooks to reconstruct and publish the lectures in book form as *The Life of Jesus*.¹³⁸

¹³⁵Cf. Foucault, *Order of Things*, chapter 2, “The Prose of the World,” pgs. 17-45; see also Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries*, 88-89. Pelikan points out that the logic of icons as being images of the Invisible Image of God—and not idols—was the basis of the pro-icon faction within the Church in the 8th and 9th centuries.

¹³⁶Cf. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 4-5.

¹³⁷See Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 411-415.

¹³⁸ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus*, Lives of Jesus Series, ed. Jack C. Verheyden, trans. S. Maclean Gilmore (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975); see lviii-lx for the history of Rütenik’s reconstruction of Schleiermacher’s lectures.

The work did not fare well. Schweitzer wrote that when Schleiermacher's life of Jesus was finally published in 1864, it arrived "as an embalmed corpse" on the battlefield of New Testament studies.¹³⁹ In Schweitzer's judgment, the essential flaw of Schleiermacher's biography was that it was "disingenuous."¹⁴⁰ In it Schleiermacher sought to serve two masters—Science and Faith—while masking the latter.¹⁴¹ Later, Schleiermacher's project was also found wanting from the perspective of Karl Barth's post-World War I "crises theology."¹⁴² Within this context, the early Barth maintained that the historical "Lord Jesus" was for Schleiermacher "a problem child" which was difficult to accommodate within his sermons, philosophy, and theology.¹⁴³

And yet, later in life, Barth questioned his early critique and understanding of Schleiermacher's theological project in a way that is especially pertinent to the subject of this study. Musing on the political responsibility of many of his own theological teachers for giving support to the Kaiser's push for war in 1914, Barth wrote in his "Concluding Unscientific Postscript" (ca. 1960) that he did not believe that Schleiermacher would have lent *his* support.¹⁴⁴ A fresh reading of Schleiermacher's "*Life*" within the context of his philosophical theology (as expressed in *The Christian Faith* [1821-1822]) provides insight into both Barth's reappraisal and the political significance of Schleiermacher's historical Jesus.

¹³⁹Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, First Complete Edition, ed. John Bowden; trans. W. Montgomery, J. R. Coates, Susan Cupitt, and John Bowden (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 60.

¹⁴⁰Schweitzer, *Quest*, 57.

¹⁴¹Schweitzer, *Quest*, 59, 60.

¹⁴²See Richard R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion* (London: SCM, 1964), 176 and ff. for an excellent discussion of the effects of Barth's reading of Schleiermacher for modern day interpreters.

¹⁴³Barth, *Protestant Theology*, 447.

¹⁴⁴Karl Barth, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher," in *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923/24*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 263-264.

First, it is important to appreciate (as Schweitzer did, howbeit disdainfully¹⁴⁵) that technically, Schleiermacher’s lecture series was *not* a “life of Jesus.”¹⁴⁶ In his introductory lecture Schleiermacher made it clear that what he was trying to do was provide a historical biography “of *Christ*.”¹⁴⁷ Such a task necessitated great care, and thus Schleiermacher spent his first seven lectures exploring and justifying the possibility of his project. Schleiermacher’s solution to the problem of the possibility of a *history* of the Christ came from *The Christian Faith*: a history of the *Christ* was in fact possible *if* one grasped the nature of what Schleiermacher called “the feeling of absolute dependence” and the “God-consciousness.” In *The Christian Faith* Schleiermacher carefully defined his conceptions of both terms. By “feeling” Schleiermacher did not mean either physical sensations or emotions, and for this reason he linked “feeling” with “immediate self-consciousness.” The former term, “*Gefühl*,”¹⁴⁸ might better be translated as “attunement,”—and in Schleiermacher’s usage, attunement *to the objective reality of God*—and one’s absolute dependence on God for *their* being—and ultimately the being of the universe.¹⁴⁹

The key to Schleiermacher’s history of the Christ, then, was his understanding of what made Jesus unique—his Divinity or “*absolute* God-consciousness.” This was an *internal* uniqueness which distinguished Christ from all other historical figures, but which also produced a *human being* whose life and personality was a *unity* expressed over a natural lifetime which could be

¹⁴⁵See Schweitzer, *Quest*, 64.

¹⁴⁶My guess is that Rüttenik chose the title *Das Leben Jesu* to capitalize on the publishing frenzy of 1864—a year in which more than 24 books were published on the “historical Jesus.” See Schleiermacher, *Life*, xv, f.n. 7.

¹⁴⁷Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 1, pg. 3, with my emphasis.

¹⁴⁸A key insight provided by Dr. Johannes Hoff while at the University of Wales Trinity St. David.

¹⁴⁹See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, vol. I, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, anon. trans. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928; reprint, New York: Harper Torchbook, 1963), §4, pg. 12. For the extension of the “feeling of absolute dependence” to that of the universe itself, see Niebuhr, 186.

understood historically.¹⁵⁰ Thus in his later lectures on the life of Christ, Schleiermacher argued that because of Christ's uniqueness, the historian could not "calculate" him and "reconstruct" his life in the same fashion that one might be able to reconstruct Caesar's career in Gaul. Such a reconstruction of Christ's life would place the historian *above* Christ; ". . .but *in the instance of Christ we must admit that during Christ's life no one was in a position to calculate him.*"¹⁵¹ As the Gospels plainly and often painfully show, the disciples did not understand Jesus or his inner nature during his lifetime. Their subsequent understanding, Schleiermacher pointed out, was only due to *Christ's own influence on them*:

The relationship to Christ which the disciples assumed *was his work; it was the first fruits of his directing influence.* The first result of this had to be that such a picture of Christ gradually took shape within them and by no means set them over him: and if a complete knowledge of his life would enable us fully to calculate him, once we had achieved this goal we should *not stand above him, for it would be his work.*¹⁵²

In sum, Schleiermacher argued for the possibility of a scientific or critical history of the Christ, but not a *secular one*: ". . .*for only those enlightened by him can calculate him.*"¹⁵³ The historian, vis-à-vis Christ, *could not* produce an accurate history of Jesus' life through a (fictional) objectivity and willful *apathy*.

In addition to his Christology, Schleiermacher's ecclesiology also served as a foundation for the possibility of treating the life of Christ historically. The basis of the Church according to Schleiermacher was "neither a Knowing nor a Doing, but a modification of Feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness" which served as the basis of the Church's ethical life.¹⁵⁴ The Church was the community where this "immediate self-consciousness" was lived out in the real

¹⁵⁰Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, vol. II, §97, pg. 409.

¹⁵¹Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 3, pgs. 17-18, emphasis in the original.

¹⁵²Schleiermacher, *Life*, 18, emphasis in the original.

¹⁵³Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 2, pg. 8, with my emphasis.

¹⁵⁴Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, vol. I, §3, pg. 5.

world of politics, science, and philosophy.¹⁵⁵ According to Schleiermacher, both God's divine action and the Church's reception of the God-consciousness through Christ and the Holy Spirit were historical phenomena which were fair fields of inquiry for "the leaders of science."¹⁵⁶ Thus in Lecture 5 of *The Life*, when he argues for the possibility of an orthodox and at the same time scientific history of Christ, Schleiermacher posits the history of the Church and the role of the Holy Spirit in determining its *external*, historical actions. No one could deny the full humanity and the *human actions* of members of the Church; members, who, according to orthodox belief, are filled with the Holy Spirit—the same divine spirit which filled Christ and was the source of his God-consciousness.¹⁵⁷

And so Schleiermacher's philosophical theology created the groundwork for his scientific history of Christ: Jesus' *inward* divinity would not prevent the scientific inquirer from probing any of the Gospels' relations of *external* events concerning him. To conclude this sketch of Schleiermacher's *Life*, I will now briefly examine his analysis and historical judgments on the last week of Jesus' life and the Gospel reports of the resurrection and ascension. For in the 19th century, the interpretation of this last week and its aftermath not only determined (or sought to determine) the validity of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxis, but also the fate of Judaism among its "cultured despisers."¹⁵⁸

Schleiermacher's treatment of the Gospels' record of Jesus' *liturgical* and *mystical* investment of *meaning* to his passion—the Last Supper—was critical. One could not be certain of the historicity of Christ's institutional words at the Supper for the Gospels' records of them were all different. Some questions could be raised as to whether or not Christ intended the Supper as just a commemorative

¹⁵⁵Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, vol. I, §3, pgs. 5-6.

¹⁵⁶Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, vol. I, §3, pg. 6.

¹⁵⁷Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 5, pg. 34.

¹⁵⁸I am here playing off of Schleiermacher's famous *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, and am thinking of Renan, Hauer, and Grundmann as the "cultured despisers" of Judaism.

rite of his disciples, or for the entire “Christian church.”¹⁵⁹ Most significant was the problem of John’s complete omission of the Last Supper and unique emphasis on Christ’s washing of the disciples’ feet.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, the Church’s early adoption of the Eucharist (as evidenced by Paul in I Corinthians 11) was conclusive evidence for Schleiermacher that the disciples (and hence the Gospels) had in fact correctly interpreted Christ’s words and actions on the night of his betrayal.¹⁶¹ Significantly, Schleiermacher concluded that the Last Supper demonstrated that Jesus’ was in no way in doubt about the permanency of the Church which he had founded:

The act, then, was a symbolic institution that was in a special way to bind the participants together and all the participants with him and his unique life. This shows that at the time when he was certain of his impending death he had no doubt at all of the continuance of the community that had scarcely been founded by him but whose first foundations he had laid. This continuance for him was assured and firm.¹⁶²

Thus after subjecting the New Testament accounts to scientific criticism, Schleiermacher ended up affirming an orthodox Christo-Ecclesiology.

Unlike Renan’s treatment of Jesus’ arrest and trial, Schleiermacher did not posit Jewish *hatred* as the ultimate causation of Jesus’ death. The unique mention in John 18:2-24 of Jesus’ pre-trial interview by Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest Caiaphas, was puzzling historically for Schleiermacher; he concluded that the Synoptics had simply omitted this, and that John’s account was the most accurate.¹⁶³ This is all Schleiermacher has to say about Annas and Caiaphas’ role in Jesus’ death. As will be seen in Chapter 3, Renan singled out both Caiaphas and Annas for special responsibility, and in fact puts *them* and the entire Jewish

¹⁵⁹Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 58, pgs. 392-393.

¹⁶⁰Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 58, 393.

¹⁶¹Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 58, 392-393.

¹⁶²Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 58, 394.

¹⁶³Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 58, Lecture 59, pgs. 395-398.

theo-political hierarchy on trial. Both Matthew's account which implied that Jesus was abused by members of the Sanhedrin at his trial (26:66) and Luke's report of Herod's mocking of Jesus (23:6-12) were troubling to Schleiermacher. Concerning Matthew's report, Schleiermacher concluded that Jesus must have been struck and spit on by servants of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin itself, was, in Schleiermacher's estimation, "governed only by concern for what Christ's activity might do to the general situation [i.e. the Jews' relationship to Roman authority]" and was not motivated by any "personal passion" on their part.¹⁶⁴ One gets the sense that Schleiermacher understood the Sanhedrin's actions as stemming from a *legitimate* concern for the public welfare of the Jewish nation vis-à-vis Roman imperium. Their problem was that they totally misunderstood what *type* of Messiah that Jesus claimed to be, and therefore erroneously charged him before Pilate.¹⁶⁵ Herod's behavior was "quite unworthy" of his status as a king, and not finding Jesus guilty of anything, he should have released him instead of sending him back to Pilate. In Schleiermacher's estimation Herod was guilty of impropriety and lax administration of justice, but not personal malice towards Jesus.¹⁶⁶

Such a generous judgment could not be granted to Pilate. Historically speaking, as the Roman imperial authority, Pilate had the final word on whether or not Jesus lived or died (cf. John 19:10).¹⁶⁷ Schleiermacher condemned Pilate's actions as being both cowardly and motivated out of a *personal* interest in the affair. Pilate was a coward in that he feared the *Sanhedrin's* appeal to

¹⁶⁴Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 60, pg. 402; cf. also Lecture 61, pg. 409, where Schleiermacher states that the Sanhedrin had accused Jesus of claiming to be the king of the Jews against Roman authority to let Pilate know that "they had acted out of concern for public order and in order to avoid all breeches of public peace."

¹⁶⁵Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 60, pg. 402.

¹⁶⁶Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 61, pgs. 408-409.

¹⁶⁷Schleiermacher does not treat Jesus' historically troublesome statement to Pilate that "You would have no authority over me at all, unless it was given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of greater sin." (John 19:11, NET) This verse was used to implicate "the Jews" as ultimately responsible for Jesus' death.

Caesar's authority (John 19:12) more than concern for truth and justice, and thus fearing for *his own political position*, violated his own conscience and consented to what he knew was an unjust verdict, thus condemning Jesus to death.¹⁶⁸ In contrast to Renan, Schleiermacher does not one-sidedly blame the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem for Jesus' death, but rather sees what the Gospels seem to portray: that both "Jew" and "Gentile"—i.e. *all* descendents of Adam and Eve—were responsible for the crucifixion of the teacher from Nazareth.

Schleiermacher's treatment of the Gospels' resurrection accounts was critical, scientific, and yet ended up confirming orthodoxy. He viewed Luke's account of Jesus' post-resurrection life in the gospel and Acts, and John's "eyewitness" accounts, as the most historically reliable.¹⁶⁹ The Gospels' contradictory accounts of the resurrection did not argue against the reality of what occurred on the third day after the crucifixion, but in fact was one of the chief reasons why Schleiermacher was convinced that the resurrection of Jesus *was* historically true. Such contradictions pointed to the actual eyewitness character of the accounts; *real* eyewitnesses often tend to perceive things differently—hence the "contradictions" in the Gospels' accounts of Jesus' resurrection.¹⁷⁰

Concerning the Gospels' post-resurrection accounts of Jesus, Schleiermacher once again acknowledged their contradictory nature. On the one hand, the Gospel narratives portrayed the post-resurrection Jesus as fully and normally human; as eating, drinking, talking, and walking with his disciples in the same manner as he had before the crucifixion. At the same time, however, the

¹⁶⁸Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 61, pg. 410.

¹⁶⁹ Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 65, pgs. 434-435. Schleiermacher did not deny the historicity of Matthew and Mark's accounts, but because the sources for their accounts could not be known, their accounts were secondary to those of Luke and John. (passim.) As with much of his other thought, Schleiermacher's high assessment of John, which was rejected for much of the late 19th and 20th centuries, is now being reassessed and vindicated—at least by such scholars as Craig L. Blomberg, and Richard Bauckham; see *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (2001), and *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (2007), respectively.

¹⁷⁰Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 65, 432-433; 436.

Gospels also portrayed the resurrected Jesus as *being* quite different from before; as appearing and disappearing at will, and as apparently not being bound by Newton's universal law of gravity as evidenced by Luke's account of his ascension.¹⁷¹ Of the two portrayals, Schleiermacher preferred the former as the correct understanding of Jesus' post-resurrection physicality, contra a docetic view.¹⁷² In the end, Schleiermacher viewed Jesus' post resurrection appearances as "an orderly continuation of his life and work, for he continued to teach and commission as he had done during his lifetime."¹⁷³ This was not a diminution of Jesus' resurrection, but rather indicative of Schleiermacher's understanding of the extraordinary nature of Jesus' *entire life* on earth:

If we hold fast to what Christ himself said [i.e. Luke 24:39—where Jesus tells his disciples that he is not a spirit], admitting that not all historical statements are clear. . .we see that nothing incomprehensible remains, except Christ's resurrection itself. *However, the same thing is true of Christ's whole appearance upon earth. His coming was a miraculous act, but all that followed it was wholly natural.*"¹⁷⁴

It also reveals that Schleiermacher had not totally succumbed to the Representationalist belief that science could absolutely calculate the entirety of reality.

It is worth noting at this point Schleiermacher's thoughts on Judaism and his relationship to important Jewish intellectuals in Berlin in the early 19th century, for both distinguish him from Strauss and Renan. Joseph W. Pickle has concluded through an analysis of Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* and *The Christian Faith* that Schleiermacher attempted a positive theological critique of Judaism that took it seriously as a religion *on its*

¹⁷¹Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 68, 444. This was to Schleiermacher's great consternation—the ascension was very problematic for him; see Lectures 70-71. Schleiermacher ultimately concluded that "the story of the ascension must be accepted as a fact." (Lecture 71, pg. 474.)

¹⁷²Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 67, pg. 447.

¹⁷³Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 69, pg. 463.

¹⁷⁴Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 66, pg. 445, with my emphasis.

own terms and not simply as a stepping stone to Christianity, or “*preparatio evangelii*.”¹⁷⁵ One reason for this, Pickle asserts, is Schleiermacher’s close relationships with Markus and Henriette Herz, and Dorothea Mendelssohn Veit, who were a part of the Jewish Enlightenment or “*Haskalah*” centered in Berlin. Pickle argues that Schleiermacher’s controversial statement in the *Speeches*—(later echoed less polemically in *The Christian Faith*)—that “. . . Judaism is long since dead. Those who yet wear its livery are only sitting lamenting the imperishable mummy bewailing its departure and sad legacy”¹⁷⁶ was actually a widely held view of *Haskalah* intellectuals, and indeed may have been the source for Schleiermacher’s own view.¹⁷⁷ *Haskalah* intellectuals, in an almost exact parallel of the general Enlightenment critique of contemporary Christianity, believed that the rational teachings of Moses and the prophets—the original foundation of Judaism—had long since been corrupted by “accretions of legalism, mysticism, and superstition” so that *contemporary* Judaism bore almost no real connection to its original sources.¹⁷⁸ Basically this is what Schleiermacher stated polemically in the *Speeches*, and Pickle notes that it apparently gave no offence to any of Schleiermacher’s Jewish friends.¹⁷⁹

In sum, Pickle unveils that while his treatment of Judaism was ambivalent, “race” itself was irrelevant in Schleiermacher’s theology and in his own personal and professional relations. Pickle notes that he was invited to visit the services at the main Reformed Temple in Berlin, and to mentor young rabbis in their

¹⁷⁵Joseph W. Pickle, “Schleiermacher on Judaism,” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 60, no. 2 (April 1980): 115-137. In his rejection of the Old Testament as a *preparatio evangelii* Schleiermacher was abandoning the Pauline reading (cf. Gal. 3, especially 3:23-24) and much of pre-Modern orthodoxy. From the viewpoint of my thesis, this is problematic.

¹⁷⁶Quoted in Pickle, “Schleiermacher,” 119. Pickle also quotes Schleiermacher’s similarly disturbing statement in the Introduction to *The Christian Faith*: ““On this highest plane, of Monotheism, history exhibits only three great communions—the Jewish, the Christian, and the Mohammedan; the first being almost in the process of extinction. . .” (133).

¹⁷⁷Pickle, “Schleiermacher,” 137.

¹⁷⁸Pickle, “Schleiermacher,” 122.

¹⁷⁹Pickle, “Schleiermacher,” 119, f.n. 16.

preaching, contact which appears to have made some considerable influence on later Jewish reformers.¹⁸⁰ Schleiermacher's "historical Christ" is "rooted in the life of his people"—i.e. fully Jewish and yet original in *his* development and expression of the "God-consciousness."¹⁸¹ Unlike Renan and later German scholars of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Schleiermacher did not problematize Jesus' race.

In this regard Schleiermacher's life and work may be one of the best arguments against Susannah Heschel's insistence upon the lack of distinction between "anti-Judaism" and "anti-Semitism."¹⁸² For while the charge of "anti-Judaism" *might* well be leveled against Schleiermacher, he can in no way be considered an "anti-Semite." Around 1799-1800 when there was talk in the Prussian government of granting Jews Prussian citizenship upon condition of conversion to Christianity, Schleiermacher vehemently opposed the *condition* out of concern for the purity of the Church: faith could not in any way be coerced. Positively, Schleiermacher did support citizenship for Jews *as* Jews, with their own state-sponsored religious communities (like that of Reformed and Lutheran congregations).¹⁸³

From the perspective of pre-Modern mystical Christo-Ecclesiology Schleiermacher's adherence to Enlightenment "historical-critical understanding"—whether from the *Haskalah* or from German philosophy—does make his life of Christ somewhat suspect. But Schleiermacher's work was judged even harsher by Modern critics. Both Strauss and Schweitzer weighed Schleiermacher's Christology and found it wanting theologically and historically. The problem was that in their estimation Schleiermacher's theology and history were lukewarm: *his* Jesus fit neither in the 1st century (he was either too

¹⁸⁰Pickle, "Schleiermacher," 136.

¹⁸¹Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lecture 2, pgs. 8-15.

¹⁸²Susannah Heschel, "Historiography of Anti-Semitism versus Anti-Judaism: A Response to Robert Morgan," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 3 (2011): 257-279.

¹⁸³Pickle, "Schleiermacher," 129-130.

rationalistic or psychological—the great defect of “the God-consciousness”), nor in the 19th century (he did rise from the dead, ascend to heaven, and would return). Thus Schleiermacher’s historical Jesus had justly been spit-out of the mouth of modern theology.¹⁸⁴ What Modern critics rightly sensed (and what Barth himself later came to sense, if at least *in potentia*) was that Schleiermacher’s philosophical theology did not make human feeling supreme over God, Christ, or Grace, *but rather emphasized the reality of human dependence upon all three*.¹⁸⁵ As Niebuhr pointed out, Schleiermacher’s theology was essentially “Christo-morphic,” “person-forming,” and “person-building” (all terms that Schleiermacher himself used)—and thus the opposite of Lysian “objective non-love”.¹⁸⁶

Read in this light, Schleiermacher’s theological and historical projects may be seen as being much closer to pre-Modern orthodox Christo-Ecclesiology than to the Enlightenment. He certainly was no iconoclast. Martin Redeker relates in his biography of Schleiermacher that on his deathbed on Wednesday, February 12, 1834, he called his family and friends together for a celebration of the Lord’s Supper. One of his friends recalled Schleiermacher’s words before the bedside rite: “Whoever like myself seeks salvation, believing in Christ’s redeeming death, will enjoy the Holy Supper with me.”¹⁸⁷ I maintain that it was this fundamental attachment—“attunement”—to orthodoxy that prevented Schleiermacher’s life of Jesus from slipping into the emerging neo-pagan anti-Judaism of the late Enlightenment. This also provides some insight into Schleiermacher’s political theology—of why, as Barth mused, he would not have supported the German Reich’s disastrous push for war in 1914, and certainly not

¹⁸⁴cf. Revelation 3:15-16.

¹⁸⁵See Jacqueline Marina’s “Christology and Anthropology in Friedrich Schleiermacher,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Marina (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 151-170.

¹⁸⁶Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ*, 212-215.

¹⁸⁷Quoted in Martin Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, trans. John Wallhausser (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1973), 213.

the Nazis' demonic and delusional eschatology of a "thousand-year Reich." Schleiermacher's faith in the Resurrection and Return of the Christ enabled him at critical times to resist state authority, such as the above mentioned resistance to the forced conversion of Jews to Christianity in exchange for citizenship, and towards the end of his life, to King Friedrich Wilhelm III's imposition of his own national liturgy of the Eucharist against that of local church congregations.¹⁸⁸ For the core insight of his philosophical theology—"the feeling of absolute dependence"—can in no way support the Enlightenment's notion of an autonomous secular State. In Schleiermacher's theology, the State, as with all other human creations, "has no life in itself" (cf. John 6:53).

1.5 Strauss' *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*: Seeds for the Fascist Jesus

Two years after the publication of his *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1836), David Friedrich Strauss boasted of his prize winning essay for the faculty of Catholic Theology at Tübingen on the resurrection of the flesh, written in the early 1830s: "With complete conviction I proved the resurrection of the dead by exegesis and natural philosophy, and as I made the last point it was clear to me that there was nothing in it at all."¹⁸⁹ It was a classic statement from the man whom Barth believed was himself the incarnation of the typical *un-believing theologian* of the 19th century.¹⁹⁰ It may also be read as a revelation of the sophists' talent for viewing probabilities as more estimable than truths, of those who "make small things seem great and great things small by the power of their words, and new things old and old things the reverse—" (*Phaedrus* 267, A-B).¹⁹¹ Certainly this was the effect that Strauss' *Life of Jesus* had within the sphere of European academic theology. For according to Barth, Strauss' *actual* goal and

¹⁸⁸See Theodore Vial, "Schleiermacher and the State," in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Marina (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 276.

¹⁸⁹Quoted in Barth, *Protestant Theology*, 532.

¹⁹⁰Barth, *Protestant Theology*, 528-29; 533.

¹⁹¹Plato, *Phaedrus*, English, 539.

success in the work was *not* in fact to de-mythologize and de-supernaturalize the Gospels in order to arrive at the historical Jesus, but rather to reveal that the “historical sources” for Jesus were overwhelmingly mythological. Strauss did not thereby deny the historical existence of Jesus, but rather called into question modern theologians’ reliance on *history* as a basis for their theology, and hence claims of “knowing Jesus.”¹⁹² It was intended to undermine orthodoxy’s conviction that the *Word* had been made flesh. Strauss’ methodology may also be viewed as indicative of the Modern *mathēsis* and its proclivity to destroy or hollow out traditional knowledge and replace it with new, transformed models. In Strauss’ case, his new mythological hermeneutics prepared the ground for the *construction* of an abstracted, *ahistorical* christology and ecclesiology that could lend itself to the birth of a new Jesus—a fascist Jesus.

Strauss defined what he meant by “*mythi*” based on the works of Eichhorn, Gabler, Schelling, Bauer, and others. A *mythus*, he explained, “is the representation of an event or of an idea in a form which is historical, but, at the same time characterized by the rich pictorial and imaginative mode of thought and expression of the primitive ages.”¹⁹³ More specifically, Strauss defined the “*evangelical mythus*” as a narrative directly or indirectly about Jesus produced by his earliest followers which expressed *their ideas* about him, and not actual facts.¹⁹⁴ The *evangelical mythus* had two sources: 1) Old Testament *mythi* concerning the Messiah, and 2), the *effect* that Jesus’ own personality, actions, and death had on his earliest followers which then modified their beliefs about the Messiah. In order to get behind what was concealed by myth, Strauss took two basic approaches, one negative, the other positive. Any narrative that violated the universally known laws of science and nature—and the Enlightenment’s conception of history as an *atheistic* closed system of natural causes and effects—

¹⁹²Barth, *Protestant Theology*, 546.

¹⁹³David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, Vol. I, trans. Marian Evans, (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1860; reprint, St. Clair Shores, MI: Scholarly Press, 1970), §8, pg. 28.

¹⁹⁴Strauss, *The Life*, vol. I, §15, pg. 69.

was automatically to be declared un-historical.¹⁹⁵ Any accounts which were contradicted by other Gospel accounts, or which were internally inconsistent with themselves, were also to be deemed as unhistorical.¹⁹⁶ Positively, one needed to recognize both the content and the *form* of a myth—“If the form be poetical, if the actors converse in hymns, and in a more diffuse and elevated strain than might be expected from their training and situations, such discourses, at all events, are not to be regarded as historical.”¹⁹⁷ In other words, any *liturgical* passages were automatically deemed as irrational and un-historical. Through this hermeneutic Strauss hoped to provide a new approach to interpreting the historical Jesus, one which would replace both the “antiquated systems of supernaturalism and naturalism” prevalent in the early 19th century—and also what he deemed to be the hybridization of the two as represented by Schleiermacher’s Christology and history.¹⁹⁸

However, his treatment of the Gospels’ account of the Last Supper is similar to Schleiermacher’s in its critical approach. Strauss spends much time pointing out the problem of the disagreement between the Synoptics and John’s Gospel as to when the Last Supper took place (the Synoptics describe the meal as having taken place on the Passover, whereas John’s Gospel places it the night before).¹⁹⁹ Like Schleiermacher he notes John’s omission of Jesus’ words over the bread and wine in favor of a description of Jesus’ foot-washing of the disciples. Unlike Schleiermacher, however, his conclusions here are much more radical. The foot-washing scene in John is probably totally fictional—a legendary construction of a synoptic teaching on humility.²⁰⁰ Strauss found the different

¹⁹⁵Strauss, *Life*, vol. I, §16, pg. 71.

¹⁹⁶Strauss, *Life*, vol. I, §16, pg. 72.

¹⁹⁷Strauss, *Life*, vol. I, §16, pg. 72.

¹⁹⁸Strauss, *Life*, vol. I, 3.

¹⁹⁹Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §121.

²⁰⁰Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §122, pg. 707.

confessional understandings of Jesus' words at the Supper—"this is my body. . ."—whether Catholic or Protestant—as “obsolete” in the Modern age, and really a product of the misunderstanding of the “ancient oriental” by the “occidental mind.”²⁰¹ The more important and “interesting” question was whether or not Jesus intended the meal as simply a last demonstration of his “attachment” to the disciples, or if he intended it as the disciples’ perennial commemorative celebration of him. Strauss concluded simply that both “supposed cases” were true of the Last Supper.²⁰²

If it was Schleiermacher’s orthodox love for Christ combined with the spirit of Enlightenment toleration which kept him from any anti-Semitic polemics in his historical treatment of Jesus, it might be argued that it was Strauss’ anti-orthodox zeal to reveal the mythological character of the Gospel narratives which kept him from doing the same. Unlike Renan’s approach, Strauss does not place the Jewish hierarchy or “race” on trial for Jesus’ crucifixion. Only the Gospels themselves are judged and found wanting by Strauss. It is true that Strauss does mention the “hatred of the enemies of Jesus,” but only twice and in the context of discussing the Gospels’ *portrayal* of Pilate’s actions in Jesus’ trial compared to the *depictions* of the Pharisees and Sadducees’ actions.²⁰³ In sum, Strauss believed that the Gospels’ account of Pilate’s hesitancy to condemn Jesus was the product of later Christians who were suffering persecution at the hands of Jews and was intended as a stinging taunt: even a Gentile could see that Jesus was righteous.²⁰⁴ Likewise and significantly, Strauss viewed the infamous statement of “the *people*” [*ho laos*] (as opposed to “the *Jews/Judeans*” [*hoi Ioudaioi*] of John 19) who cried out before Pilate concerning Jesus, “Let his blood be on us

²⁰¹Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §124, pg. 716.

²⁰²Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §124, pgs. 716-718.

²⁰³Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §131, pgs. 767 and 768 respectively.

²⁰⁴Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §131, pg. 767.

and on our children!” (Matt. 27:25, NET), as “in the highest degree suspicious.”²⁰⁵

Strauss’ combination of negative criticism and positive analysis of the Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus is most forcefully seen in his treatment of the accounts of Jesus’ death and resurrection. In §134 Strauss—(like Schleiermacher)—affirmed the death of Jesus and saw the centurion’s wounding of Jesus as recorded in John 19 not as a cause of his death, but as a confirmation of it. *Unlike* Schleiermacher, Strauss ultimately questioned the historicity of the spearing of Jesus altogether. By the end of §134 he concluded that the story—which is only found in John, and thus without any other historical corroboration—was a legend meant to attach the Old Testament prophecies of Zechariah 12:10 (“they will look to me, the one they have pierced”) and Exodus 12:46 (prohibition of breaking any bone of the Passover lamb) to Jesus’ death.²⁰⁶

Strauss found the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ post-resurrection body and life the most difficult to take seriously as historical and scientific. He particularly focused on Mark 16:12—“After this he appeared in a *different form* [*en hetera morphē*] to two of them while they were on their way to the country” (NET), citing the “in a different form” of Mark 16:12 five times in §139. For Strauss, Mark’s language pointed to the disciples’ ultimate conception of Jesus’ post-resurrection body and life as a supernatural existence. This was evidence that the resurrection accounts could not be considered historical. Thus the Gospel’s accounts of Jesus’ post-resurrection existence met both of Strauss’ negative criteria for being un-historical. In the end, the Gospels’ blended portrayal of Jesus’ post-resurrection humanity—his ability to eat, drink, and to be embraced, along with his “supernatural” qualities—his ability to appear and disappear at will, and to “ascend to heaven,” simply were not acceptable in the modern world according to Strauss: “It is quite another question, whether on our *more advanced*

²⁰⁵Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §131, pg. 768.

²⁰⁶Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §131, pgs. 798-99; NET trans. of Zech. 12:10.

position, and with our *more correct knowledge of nature*, those two different classes of particulars can be held compatible with each other.”²⁰⁷ Moreover, the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ resurrection were not based on reliable witnesses—the disciples were not *impartial, objective* informants.²⁰⁸ Thus, as with Celsus, the great pagan critic of Christianity in the second century—whom Strauss subsequently cites—Strauss determined that Jesus’ resurrection was a fiction.²⁰⁹ And unlike Schleiermacher, Strauss did not struggle with Luke’s report of Jesus’ ascension: dead men neither rise again nor fly away.²¹⁰

In the conclusion to his *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined* Strauss proclaimed his victory over the orthodox, iconic portrayal of Jesus in the Gospels:

The results of the inquiry which we have now brought to a close, have apparently annihilated the greatest and most valuable part of which the Christian has been wont to believe concerning his Saviour Jesus, have uprooted all the animating motives which he has gathered from his faith, and withered all his consolations. The boundless store of truth and life which for eighteen centuries has been the alimant of humanity, seems irretrievably dissipated; the most sublime levelled with the dust, *God divested of his grace, man of his dignity, and the tie between heaven and earth broken.* . . .²¹¹

But next, Strauss sought to solve the very problem that his withering attack on the historical Jesus had caused: how to re-establish Jesus as a dogmatic foundation for the Church.²¹² His solution to the irrational, dishonest, and ultimately impious Christologies of orthodoxy, neo-supernaturalism, and Rationalism was his own mythical/ideal Jesus. Strauss’ modern icon of Jesus offered the possibility of a new, *powerful* Christianity in which *humanity* was Lord. In this

²⁰⁷Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, 841, with my emphasis.

²⁰⁸Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, 845.

²⁰⁹Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, 846.

²¹⁰Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §143, pg. 861.

²¹¹Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §144, pg. 867, with my emphasis.

²¹²Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §144, pg. 867.

way, Strauss unknowingly prepared a seedbed for the beginnings of a fascist-christo-ecclesiology.

Strauss maintained that his early philosophical studies—particularly of Hegel—had liberated him intellectually and emotionally from “certain religious and dogmatical [sic] presuppositions”²¹³ and had enabled him to see the true Jesus—the mythical Jesus. It was *this* Jesus that could liberate Modern Man and his Culture. All the contradictions and falsehoods of ancient and modern conceptions of Christ were abolished when *humanity* took the place of the *ideal individual* represented in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Echoing Hegel, Strauss stated: “*Humanity* is the union of the two natures—God become man, the infinite manifesting itself in the finite, and the finite spirit remembering its infinitude; it is the child of the visible Mother and the invisible Father, Nature and Spirit. . .”²¹⁴ Hence Strauss’ ideal and mythical Jesus completed the *telos* of Enlightenment thought—the deification of humanity:

By faith in *this* Christ, especially in his death and resurrection, man is justified before God: that is by kindling with him of *the idea of Humanity, the individual man participates in the divinely human life of the species*. Now the main element of that idea is, the negation of the merely natural and sensual life, which is the negation of the spirit, (the negation of negation, therefore,) is the sole way to true spiritual life.

This alone is the absolute sense of Christology. . .”²¹⁵

Contrary to Orthodoxy and Rationalism’s weak Christologies, Strauss’ ideal and mythical christology—where an ideal christ = the historical human species—provided Modern Man with real power—power that manifested itself over nature:

[Humanity] is the worker of miracles, in so far as in the course of human history the spirit more and *more completely subjugates nature*, both within

²¹³Strauss, *Life*, vol. I, preface, 4; see also Schweitzer, *Quest*, 75.

²¹⁴Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, § 151, pg. 895, my emphasis.

²¹⁵Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, § 151, pg. 896, with my emphasis.

and around man, *until it lies before him as the inert matter on which he exercises his active power.*"²¹⁶

Indeed, this seemed especially true in Strauss' day, when man was daily gaining "almost incredible dominion" over nature; when ideas of "irresistible force" were conquering all "unintelligent matter."²¹⁷ Strauss' conception of the dead, mythical Jesus may be the earliest and most potent expression of what Barth referred to as the Eighteenth Century's ideal of "absolute man". The mythical Jesus of Strauss removed the impediment of the Lordship of the Christ of history and thus enabled humanity to realize "its own authority and power, which [it] can therefore set in motion in all directions and without any restraint. . ."²¹⁸ Such a conception of humanity could easily lend itself not only to the mastery of nature as so much dead matter, but also over other human beings. And indeed, it could be argued that Strauss' deification of humanity at the expense of Christ and the Church opened very important theological and philosophical doors for the idea of the Totalitarian State of the twentieth century.

For example, the similarities between Strauss' mythical christo-anthropology and the fascist statist-anthropology later expressed by Mussolini are striking. Strauss described the proper understanding of the importance of his "historical Jesus" in which

[Humanity] is the sinless existence, for the course of its development is a blameless one, pollution cleaves to the individual only, and does not touch the race or its history. It is Humanity that dies, rises, and ascends to heaven, for from the negation of its phenomenal life there ever proceeds a higher spiritual life; from the suppression of its mortality as personal, national, and terrestrial spirit, arises its union with the infinite spirit of the heavens.²¹⁹

²¹⁶Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §151, pg. 835, emphasis mine.

²¹⁷Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §151, pg. 896.

²¹⁸Barth, *Protestant Theology*, 22.

²¹⁹Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, §151, pg. 896.

In 1932, Mussolini wrote “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism” for the *Enciclopedia Italiana* and there described the fascist conception of the state:

Fascism conceives of the State as an absolute, in comparison with which all individuals or groups are relative, only to be conceived of in their relation to the State. . . *The State, as conceived of and as created by Fascism, is a spiritual and moral fact in itself*, since its political, juridical, and economic organization of the nation is a concrete thing: and such an organization must be in its origins and development a manifestation of the spirit. . . *And the State is not only a living reality of the present, it is also linked with the past and above all the with the future, and thus transcending the brief limits of individual life, it represents the immanent spirit of the nation.*²²⁰

Both Strauss and Mussolini’s idealized anthropologies obliterated individual, real, lives—including Jesus of Nazareth’s—as “merely natural and sensual” lives.²²¹

It could be argued that one need only substitute “State” where Strauss uses “Humanity,” “Christ” or even “spiritual” to arrive at a fascist anthropology, though this of course was not his intent. And yet, Mussolini’s article offers an intriguing possibility of a theological genealogy of fascist thought that runs from Strauss to Renan.

Arguing against Liberal Democracy, Mussolini quotes a long passage from one of Renan’s “philosophical meditations” to support the Fascist belief in political inequality among individuals. (It is in this context that Mussolini refers to Renan as “one of the inspired pre-Fascists”—among other French intellectuals of the 19th century—Sorel, Peguy, and Lagerdelle).²²² The passage from Renan that Mussolini uses points back to Strauss’ anthropology—an anthropology that sacrifices individuals to the whole. Thus Renan, quoted by Mussolini, states:

²²⁰Benito Mussolini, “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,” in *My Autobiography with “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,”* former trans. Richard Washburn Child; latter trans. Jane Soames; (former New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928; latter London, W.C.: Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Hogarth Press, 1933; reprint, New York: Dover, 2006), 236-237, with my emphasis.

²²¹Strauss, *Life*, vol. II, § 151, pg. 896.

²²²Mussolini, “Political and Social Doctrine,” 228, 233.

The principle that society exists solely through the well-being and the personal liberty of all the individuals of which it is composed does not appear to be conformable to the plans of nature, *in whose workings the race alone seems to be taken into consideration, and the individual sacrificed to it.* It is greatly to be feared that the last stage of such a conception of democracy. . . would end in a condition of society in which a degenerate herd would have no other preoccupation but the satisfaction of the lowest desires of common men.²²³

Mussolini, Renan, and Strauss were all convinced that they were a part of an *avant-garde* intellectual elite called to save the vulgar masses from themselves. All three suffered from the great danger of non-loving philosophy and intellectualism: the sin of pride.

And yet it is important to emphasize that Strauss was no monster. Barth actually saw in his anti-historicism a gift to modern theology: rightly understood it pointed out the fallacies of “Absolute Man’s” hubris in trying to rationalize God’s Revelation.²²⁴ The un-happy fact was that neither Strauss nor his readers could perceive this. In the end Barth concluded that Strauss was neither an Antichrist nor Prometheus; he found him nothing more or less than “a Central European rejoicing in his learning, but not, unfortunately, quite content with himself and the world about him.”²²⁵ Barth speculated that had Strauss been able to obtain “a respectable professorship somewhere” that he would very likely have come to very different theological conclusions.²²⁶ Faced with the opportunity of a professorship in Zurich, he revised his *Life of Jesus* (the 3rd edition) to be more amenable to (at least) liberal academic orthodoxy. When conservatives in Zurich protested and caused him to lose the position, he promptly rescinded his revisions and returned to his more radical conclusions.²²⁷ Strauss’ work might be best

²²³Mussolini, “Political and Social Doctrine,” 233.

²²⁴Barth, *Protestant Theology*, 551-552.

²²⁵Barth, *Protestant Theology*, 534.

²²⁶Barth, *Protestant Theology*, 532.

²²⁷Barth, *Protestant Theology*, 532, and see Peter Hodgson’s introduction in Strauss, *Life*, xxxvi-xlvii.

characterized as that of an un-happy sophist. And this might in itself be even more disturbing than if Strauss *had been a monster*. For it points to a similar conclusion concerning the *banal* nature of evil and its effects as that found by Hannah Arendt. One need only consult her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

1.6 Renan's Laboratory: Orientalism and the *Vie de Jésus*

In May 1845, while wrestling with his un-belief at the St. Sulpice seminary, Ernest Renan made his first attempt to construct a “historical Jesus”—to analyze Jesus Christ as “‘a psychological and historical fact’.”²²⁸ At stake was the validity of what Renan called the “theological hypothesis,” of whether or not Jesus was truly divine. At the end of the work Renan questioned Jesus directly:

O Jesus, enlighten me, you who are the truth and the life. I suffer, O Jesus, from having raised your problem. It is too heavy for me, for I am nothing but a man, but you *were* something more. Oh! Tell me then that which you *are*! My God, am I in good faith? Purify me, and once and for all, tell me yes or no!²²⁹

“But Jesus gave him no answer.” (John 19:8, KJV) By August 1845 Renan's decision to leave the Church was final. In his “resignation” letter to the Abbé Cognat, Renan explained that God had *betrayed him*: *He* had placed within him “a miserable faculty—this fatal critique” of reason, and when Renan made rational inquires into whether or not Jesus was divine, God refused to answer.²³⁰ Renan in good conscience could not follow a faith which violated the judge of all his other “faculties”: Reason.²³¹ Rejected by God, by orthodoxy, by “the rule of faith,” Renan consecrated himself to the search for truth through science.

²²⁸Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 19. Renan's work was posthumously published as *Essai psychologique sur Jésus-Christ*.

²²⁹Ernest Renan, *Essai psychologique sur Jésus-Christ* (Paris: La Connaissance, 1921), 90, with my emphasis.

²³⁰Ernest Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, 28e éd. (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1897), 316, 318.

²³¹Renan, *Souvenirs*, 318.

The science that Renan first turned to was the science of words. He had fallen in love with the study of Hebrew while at St. Suplice, and after leaving the Church dedicated himself to the academic mastery of the language. By 1847 he had distinguished himself in this study by winning the Volney prize for linguistics for his “Historical and theoretical essay on the Semitic languages in general and the Hebrew language in particular.”²³² It is ironic that a scholar whose future reputation would rest upon his studies of the historical Jesus should win a prize named for one of the first scholars to suggest that there *was no historical Jesus*—that he was a purely mythological construction of later Christians.²³³

Or maybe it is not. The heart of Edward Said’s damning critique of the connections between 19th century academics’ study of “Semitic” language and culture and Western imperialism is that Western “Orientalism” was a *fictitious construction* of an inferior “Other” facilitated by the abstract *mathēsis* made possible by the non-participatory epistemology of Representation. The new science of philology (developed in the late 18th century) was the principle laboratory in which Western intellectuals invented the “irrational,” “fanatic,” “sensuous” “backwards” “Semite” and “Oriental.” Said points out that Renan was one of the foundational doctors in this laboratory, and that the *Vie de Jésus* was one of the most popular productions.²³⁴ Thus Renan’s winning of the Volney prize was not ironic in any sense. Volney had proposed the fictitious nature of Jesus and Christianity; Renan *appeared* to propose a historical Jesus and

²³²Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 26.

²³³Constantin François Volney (1757-1820) was one of the first “Orientalists” in France. He had traveled to Syria in the 1770s, where he first began to study Arabic. In 1794 he took a position as a History lecturer at the newly formed secular state university in Paris, *L’Ecole Normale*. It was in his *The Ruins, or Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires* (1787) that he argued that the Gospels were actually allegorical and mystical descriptions of the sun’s journey through the zodiac, with Jesus as Son/Sun and the Virgin Mary—(i.e. the constellation Virgo)—playing the central roles. (*Les Ruines, ou Méditation sur les Révolutions des Empires, Œuvres de C. F. Volney, tome I* (Paris: Parmentier, 1826), Ch. XXII, “*Origine et filiation des idées religieuses*,” section XIII, “*Christianisme, ou culte allégorique du soleil, sous se noms cabalistiques de Christ, et d’Yésus ou Jésus*,” pgs. 212-222.

²³⁴Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 146; see also the entire chapter, II: Silvestre de Sacy and Ernest Renan: *Rational Anthropology and Philological Laboratory*, 123-148.

Christianity that was in fact fictitious. As Said states, “. . .we must realize that the *Vie* was. . .a construction enabled by the historian’s capacity for skillfully crafting a dead. . .Oriental biography. . .*as if it were* the truthful narrative of a natural life.”²³⁵ This was the same conclusion Schweitzer had come to in his appraisal of the *Vie* in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*: “It is ‘Christian’ art in the worst sense of the term—the art of the wax image.”²³⁶ “There is a kind of insincerity in the book from beginning to end;” “[Renan’s] intention was to say not what really happened, but what *might* have happened.”²³⁷ Perhaps here lies the essence of the iconoclasm of both Strauss’ and Renan’s lives of Jesus. They destroyed not so much by stripping away old accretions of myth to reveal the naked truth, but rather by positing new images—*new* myths—based on the supposed superiority of rational non-love. To conclude this chapter I shall now examine Renan’s methodology for the *Vie* as expressed in his Introduction. As Phaedrus to Lysias, it will be seen that Renan had been enchanted by Strauss’ mythological hermeneutic, and like Phaedrus, Renan wished to make such sophistry popular.

In order not to burden his audience with a mass of footnotes and technical discussions—(the first edition of the *Vie* was originally intended for the *cultured* public)—Renan recommended a number of recent scholarly works that had been translated into French six pages into his introduction. The majority of the works were produced by German scholars, and Émile Maximilien Paul Littré’s translation of the second edition of Strauss’ life of Jesus was chief among them. “The criticism of the detail of the Gospel texts in particular has been made by Mr. Strauss in a manner which leaves little to desire,” Renan averred.²³⁸ Renan did find the work too devoted to theological discussion rather than history, but it remained “indispensable” for understanding *Renan’s motives* in his own interpretation of the Gospels and the technical problems they presented for the

²³⁵Said, *Orientalism*, 146, with emphasis in the original.

²³⁶Schweitzer, *Quest*, 159.

²³⁷Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 86, with my emphasis.

²³⁸Renan, *Vie*, viii.

historian.²³⁹ It is a telling remark, a brief moment of perhaps un-guarded honesty for Renan, for, as seen above, Strauss' avowed purpose in his life of Jesus was to *create a new theological foundation for Christianity in the Modern age*. Though never explicitly stated in Renan's *Vie*, this is in fact also his underlying motive.²⁴⁰ It would simply take France's defeat at the hands of the Prussians in 1871 and a rather lengthy burst of honesty by Renan in *La réforme intellectuelle et morale* to see this, as I shall discuss in Chapter Two.

Like Schleiermacher and Strauss before him, Renan felt it necessary to address the issue of the "miraculous" in attempting to write a scientific history of Jesus. Schleiermacher had pointed out that the limits of human understanding of *nature* left room for speculation concerning the "supernatural";²⁴¹ Strauss simply cast biblical stories of miracles as mythic fictions, but Renan rather wished to idealize them. He also wished to *conceal* his own skepticism and disbelief.²⁴² On the one hand, supernatural accounts [*réécits surnaturels*] had to be approached with the upmost care. It was necessary for the historian to interpret these accounts—or even to "reduce them to legends" in order to get to the facts which they concealed. This was not to mutilate the facts of such supernatural accounts in the name of an *a priori* theory, but rather to begin the very observation of the facts themselves.²⁴³ All of this was a recognition that ancient texts were filled with miraculous accounts because they were written before people were scientifically conscious enough to distinguish between the characteristics of miracles and of a fact. But Renan also pointed out that this was true even in modern times: "In our days, have we not seen almost all peoples of the world

²³⁹Renan, *Vie*, viii.

²⁴⁰Here I disagree with Schweitzer's assertion that Renan *differed* from Strauss in wishing "to set up a new system of dogma on the basis of history." (See Schweitzer, *Quest*, 158).

²⁴¹See Schleiermacher, *Life*, Lectures 4 and 5, pgs. 28-30.

²⁴²Cf. Schweitzer, *Quest*: "Renan professes to depict the Christ of the Fourth Gospel, though he does not believe in the authenticity or the miracles of that Gospel" (167).

²⁴³Renan, *Vie*, 1.

duped from vulgar influences or from childish illusions?”²⁴⁴ Renan cited the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, 10 Sept. and 11 Nov. 1851, and 28 May 1857, for contemporary accounts of miracles which through research were shown to be false; so too, critical examination of ancient accounts of miracles would *probably* also reveal their own illusionary character. It was not therefore an *a priori* philosophical decision against miracles, but rather “a constant experience” which was the cause for banishing miracles from history. Thus Renan’s famous, and given his own personal beliefs, *sophistic* statement: “We do not say: ‘The miracle is impossible;’ we say: ‘There has not been so far a verified miracle.’”²⁴⁵ He wished to appear to leave room for the possibility of miracles—and specifically resurrection—but only under the imperium of science:

That tomorrow a miracle worker presents himself with guarantees serious enough to be discussed; that he announces himself able, I conjecture, to resurrect a dead person; would that make him one? A commission composed of physiologists, of doctors, of chemists, of experts in critical/scientific history [*la critique historique*] would be named. This commission would choose the cadaver, ascertain that it is actually dead, designate the hall where it ought to be examined, regulate all the necessary precautions in order not to leave no room for doubt. If, within such conditions, the resurrection would work, a probability almost equal to certainty would be given.²⁴⁶

But Renan qualifies this: to meet the requirements of the scientific method, the miracle worker would have to verifiably repeat the resurrection of multiple corpses, under other conditions, and in different settings. Only then could it be historically/scientifically accepted that the miracle worker possessed supernatural powers.²⁴⁷

On the other hand, Renan wished not to be bound by a minimalist historical hermeneutic which would only allow the modern historian to repeat the

²⁴⁴Renan, *Vie*, 1-li.

²⁴⁵Renan, *Vie*, li.

²⁴⁶Renan, *Vie*, li-lii.

²⁴⁷Renan, *Vie*, li-lii.

stark consensus concerning Jesus' death voiced by Josephus and Tacitus, that Jesus had been “put to death by the order of Pilate at the instigation of the priests.”²⁴⁸ Renan freely admitted that the “admirable” account of the Passion found in the Gospels contained a mass of non-historical details; but it was precisely these “preachings” [*prédications*] which disclosed the “characteristic features [*physionomie*] of his discourses.” To omit such passages in the search for the truth would be “a kind of inexactitude worse than those to which one exposes himself in admitting the details which the text furnishes to us.”²⁴⁹

Rather, what Renan took as the poetic “inexactitude” of the Gospels pointed to a more profound truth: “These details are not true to the letter; but they are true to a superior truth; they are more true than the naked truth, in the sense that they are the truth rendered expressively and lifelike, *elevated to the height of an idea*.”²⁵⁰ This would almost pass for orthodoxy—(one is reminded of Origen’s view of contradictions in the Gospels as pointing to more profound spiritual truths)—but for two hindrances. The first is that Renan saw in the Gospels a pre-cursor to the *ideas* of the Enlightenment, and particularly its dreams of human intellectual autonomy, especially vis-à-vis the State, (as will be seen in the next chapter). Second, it was by such means that Renan *obscured* his intention “to say not what really happened, but what might have happened.”²⁵¹

“To say what *might have* happened;” to predict; to project through abstraction *alternative* realities—like the new maps of world of the 17th century—according to Foucault and Said, such was the power of the modern episteme of Representation. In essence, Representation enabled the *displacement* of the actual by the abstract. Renan’s *Vie* was a part of this project, and in his introduction Renan provided a glimpse into how the practical application of the displacement of the Gospels’ iconic portraits of Christ and the Church in favor of modern

²⁴⁸Renan, *Vie*, xlvi.

²⁴⁹Renan, *Vie*, xlvi.

²⁵⁰Renan, *Vie*, xlvi, with my emphasis.

²⁵¹Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 86.

conceptions of social and political order could be effected. This can be seen in the “fifth gospel” which displaced the Gospels of orthodoxy for Renan: the “Holy Land.”

One of the unique qualities of Renan’s life of Jesus was that he had actually seen for himself the places where the historical Jesus had lived and walked. This had been facilitated by his participation in the French “scientific mission” as a member of the *Académie des Inscriptions* in 1860 and 1861-62 to the “former Phoenicia”—(formerly *Ottoman* Phoenicia; the French had recently established their own hegemony there at the time of Renan’s writing).²⁵² While in Phoenicia Renan was able to frequent the “frontiers of Galilee” and to visit Jerusalem, Hebron, and Samaria. He claimed in fact that not one of the important places in the history of Jesus’ life had escaped him.²⁵³ Thus Renan was able to go beyond even Strauss in his critical history of Jesus: his life of Jesus was a literal archeology, a joining of textual analysis with the “enlightenment” of seeing the physical environment of the Nazarene. The results were intoxicating for Renan:

All this history which, at a distance seemed to float in the mists of a world without reality, took thus *a body* [*un corps*], a solidity which astonished me. The striking accord of the *texts* and *the places*, the marvelous harmony of the evangelical *ideal* with the *landscape* which served to frame it were to me like a revelation.²⁵⁴

Here *history* (as practiced by Renan) *embodied* in the *land* and now verified *topologically* replaced the Body of Christ in all three of its pre-Modern orthodox understandings—“*corpus verum*,” “*corpus mysticum*,” and “*corpus ecclesiasticum*”; (cf. above, pgs. 29-30). However, just like the extant Gospel manuscripts, this gospel of the land had been “torn” [*lacéré*] by the ravages of

²⁵²See Schweitzer, *Quest*, 158, and Renan, *Vie*, liii.

²⁵³Renan, *Vie*, liii.

²⁵⁴Renan, *Vie*, liii, with my emphasis.

Semitic culture—particularly through the decadence of both Islam and Judaism.²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it was here that Renan claimed to have found the “historical Jesus”:

I had before my eyes a fifth gospel, torn, but still readable, and henceforth, through the accounts of Matthew and Mark, in place of an abstract being that one could say has never existed, I saw an admirable human figure, living and moving.²⁵⁶

But one wonders: if Said’s analysis of “Orientalism” in general and Renan in particular is true, then could this be another displacement of Jesus by (and perhaps in) Renan? Instead of an affirmation of a “historical Jesus,” might it rather be a subtle and sophistic expression of another kind of historical-topographical taxonomy in which Renan could construct *his* Jesus?²⁵⁷ Might it be the iconographer showing his viewers the new wood on which he would paint the new image? It is hard to tell with Renan, for his relationship to the land of the Gospels was *sophisticated*. And perhaps here Schweitzer provides good insight: to the end, the New Testament was “something foreign” for Renan.²⁵⁸ The implications of this insight concerning the Modern icon of Jesus posited in the *Vie* will be considered in the next chapter.

²⁵⁵Renan, *Vie*, liii, and passim throughout the *Vie*.

²⁵⁶Renan, *Vie*, liii.

²⁵⁷On this point, see Halvor Moxnes, “Renan’s *Vie de Jésus* as Representation of the Orient,” in *Jews, Antiquity, and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, eds. Hayim Lapin and Dale B. Martin (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2003), 85-108.

²⁵⁸Schweitzer, *Quest*, 167.

Chapter 2: Origins of the Modern Jesus, Origins of the Fascist Jesus

Renan's negative critiques of orthodox Judeo-Christian theology and history have been correctly recognized as contributing to the culture of late 19th century ethnic nationalism and anti-Semitism in the West.²⁵⁹ That his *positive* assessments of Judaism and Christianity as the origins of Western modernity *also* played a part in the rise of fascist ideology, however, has not often been recognized.²⁶⁰ In this chapter I shall try to demonstrate that it was Renan's presentation of Jesus as a Enlightenment *idealist* with a heroic will that made Jesus attractive (to the extent that he could be) to Fascists such as Mussolini. For Renan's Jesus proclaimed a "kingdom of God" that simultaneously emphasized the individual's *internal* freedom *and* necessity to follow the *Führer*—whether Caesar, or a great idealist like Jesus—providentially provided within the secular State. In other words, Renan's *modern* and *positive* conception of Jesus' "kingdom of God" anticipated the later Fascist political theology of the autonomous Great Leader working his will within the autonomous State. Thus in tracing the origins of Renan's Modern Jesus, I shall also trace the origins of the Fascist Jesus.

2.1. The Modern Jesus: Renan's *Vie*

The 19th century was an age obsessed with origins. In particular, it was obsessed with the wondrous origins of the "modernity"²⁶¹ so powerfully manifested in its

²⁵⁹See for instance, See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) and Halvor Moxnes in *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth-Century Historical Jesus* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

²⁶⁰I think this is especially true of Susannah Heschel's critique of Renan's work in her *Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), as I will discuss in my Conclusion.

²⁶¹The term "modernity" was itself a creation of the 19th century; the French art critic and writer Charles Baudelaire coined the term in his 1859 essay "The Painter of Modern Life" on Constantine Guys. Baudelaire defined "modernity" as the *flux* or ever vanishing "nowness" of the present—"This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid. . ." See Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 12, 41.

own age and image.²⁶² And yet among some intellectuals there was a disturbing sense of the *fragility* of this Modernity, especially when viewed in the light of its ancient roots. After seeing the ruins of Paestum in Italy in 1860, Renan wrote to his friend Marcelin Berthelot, the famous chemist and author, that

I trembled for civilization on seeing it so circumscribed, resting on so fragile a foundation and on *so few individuals* even in the country where it is in the ascendant. *For how many men are there in Europe who really are of the nineteenth century? And what are we, leaders of the avant-garde, in the face of this inertia, this herd of brutes which follows us? Ah! Supposing one day they threw themselves on us and refused to follow us!*²⁶³

Ancient *ruins* pointed to nagging questions about the origins of modern Western civilization: could Modernity be traced back to the venerable and solid foundations of Antiquity, or was it the result of a definite break with the past, and as such, rootless and ultimately *ephemeral*—subject at any moment to a reversion to barbarism by the brutish masses? In other words, if, with such pillars as Socrates, Aristotle, and Jesus, ancient Western culture had crumbled before a tidal wave of ignorance, how long could Modern Enlightened Man hope to survive? The *avant-garde* was few; the *vulgar* were legion; indeed the propagation of the latter was seen by Renan and others (like Nietzsche) as perhaps the most significant achievement of modern bourgeoisie culture.

For Renan this was a particularly daunting problem. On the one hand, he was convinced that Jesus could be considered a man belonging to the 19th century. On the other hand, his faith in science had convinced him of the deficiency of the foundational stories of origins found in ancient texts such as the Bible. The

²⁶²A point made by Moxnes in *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 121-122. Moxnes notes that the search for new understandings of the origins of the modern world actually began in the 18th century with such works as J. G. Herder's 1772 *Origin of Language*, which was also one of the first "genealogies" of the modern quest of ethnic nationalism (121.) Renan's *Histoire générale des langues sémitiques* of 1856 was one of his main contributions to the 19th century generation of "occidental" ethnic nationalism. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), chapter II; Silvestre de Sacy and Ernest Renan: *Rational Anthropology and Philological Laboratory*, 123-148.

²⁶³Quoted in H. W. Wardman, *Ernest Renan: A Critical Biography* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1964), 56, with my emphasis.

Hebrew account(s) of the creation of the universe, of humankind, of the development of society and civilization (Genesis 1-11) were no longer considered a suitably rational and *moral* basis for modern life.²⁶⁴ The same deficiency applied to the New Testament's proclamation of a *new humanity* centered around Jesus of Nazareth, and which was lived out in a new community—the Church. And so the 19th century's quest of origins was at the same time a quest to posit new foundations for explaining, understanding, and re-structuring the world.²⁶⁵ In the natural sciences Darwin's *Origins of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871) exposed the masses to the most recent scientific research on the genesis of animal and human life, and, whether intentionally or not, also exposed them to the most powerful deconstruction of the biblical narrative of the creation and ordering of the world. In the same way, Renan's *Vie de Jésus*—the opening volume of his *Histoire des origines du christianisme*—exposed Europe's reading masses to *avant-garde* German criticism of the New Testament and to the historical Jesus.²⁶⁶ And Renan was quite intentional: the *Vie* was to be the beginning of the scientific liberation of Jesus, the church, and *modern humanity* from the historical bondage of 1800 years of ecclesiastical orthodoxy, which was itself an expression of the perpetual credulity of the masses that was being amplified in the 19th century by mass, materialistic culture.²⁶⁷ Renan was convinced that the historical Jesus discovered by German scientific research (*a la* Strauss) was the basis for the

²⁶⁴ Again going back to the 18th century, one may regard Rousseau's 1755 "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" as an example of the modern rejection and reconstruction of the ancient Jewish explanation of the cause of inequality and injustice as found in Genesis 3. Sin and the Serpent were no longer sufficient explanations. In the 19th century Friedrich Engels' *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884) continued Rousseau's work. At the dawn of the 20th century Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *Foundations of the 19th Century* (1911) argued for a racialized understanding of origins that totally rejected the notion of Adam and Eve and humanity as an icon of God.

²⁶⁵ Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 121.

²⁶⁶ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, First Complete Edition, ed. John Bowden; trans. W. Montgomery, J. R. Coates, Susan Cupitt, and John Bowden (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 159.

²⁶⁷ See Ernest Renan, *La Réform intellectuelle et morale* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1871), Part I, "Le Mal," pgs. 1-57.

Enlightenment.²⁶⁸ Thus through his own research Renan could show the link between Modernity and Jesus, and in so doing, demonstrate the *timeless* foundations of Modernity itself.

This Modern re-construction of Jesus, I argue, marks the beginning of the construction of the Fascist Jesus. Specifically I shall attempt to demonstrate that all of the elements of Renan's thought that attracted Mussolini to his writings in his formation of Fascist ideology can be found in the *Vie de Jésus*. For beyond Renan's gilded sentimental framing, the portrait he paints of Jesus is actually one of an idealistic, *heroic* futurist—a man of direct action, who, by the *force* of his personality and *will* established a solely interiorized and individual Kingdom of God that simultaneously laid the foundations for the autonomous Liberal State. That is, a State free from the mystical influence of the Body of Christ, but which through the *pouvoir-savior* of science institutionalized in State academies could work its will on the church—(an exact inversion of Schleiermacher's scientific and orthodox Christo-Ecclesiology).²⁶⁹

2.2. “Behold the *Man*”: Constructing the Liberal Modern Jesus

On 21 February 1862 Renan initiated his professorship at the *Collège de France* with a lecture on “The Role of the Semitic Peoples in the History of Civilization.” Opening the lecture he famously remarked that Jesus was ““an incomparable man”” and despite the fact that Renan as a scientist could only treat him as a historical figure, he nevertheless could not find fault with those who called this remarkable Jew “God.”²⁷⁰ (For this remark Napoleon III suspended Renan from lecturing at the *Collège* from 1862 until 1871).²⁷¹ Standing firm in his conviction, the following year Renan was more explicit with the publication of the *Vie*:

²⁶⁸Cf. Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism*, 122.

²⁶⁹Renan makes this vision of the autonomous Liberal State explicit in the *Réform*. I will treat this below.

²⁷⁰Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 77.

²⁷¹Schweitzer, *Quest*, 158.

“Jesus did not for a moment announce the sacrilegious idea that he was God.”²⁷² This was a sophistic statement—Renan certainly knew the several *egō eimi*—“I AM” statements by Jesus in the Gospels, whereby Jesus explicitly equated himself with YHWH by use of the Name of the God of the Jews (e.g. Exodus 3:14-15; John 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58). At the same time it was born out of the conviction that Jesus’ New Testament biographers had not embellished his character, but rather had diminished it by attributing their own mistaken ideas of divinity to him—and this due to the “*mediocrity*” of their understanding.²⁷³ Thus one of the first steps in liberating Jesus *for* the Modern age had to be his de-divinization. If, as Renan believed, Jesus was in fact one of the primary founders of the Modernity of the West, he must be made comprehensible to the modern sensibilities of the 19th century. This meant that Jesus had to be free from the Gospels’ mystical theology of a participatory God, a God so desirous of participating in his creation that he would become a *part* of it, even to the point of being *consumable* (“Take, eat, this is my body. . .” Matt. 26:26)—but *not* commodified or manipulated: “I am the food of the mature; grow then and you will eat me. *You will not change me into yourself like bodily food: you will be changed into me*” (St. Augustine, *Confessions* VII.10.16).²⁷⁴ For rational non-lovers of Jesus like Renan, such theology was madness and un-befitting the extraordinary *man* who had so nobly planted the seeds of human freedom—human morality—in the world.

Thus the Gospels’ assertions of Jesus’ divinity and entanglement with the miraculous was not just rationally embarrassing, but also *morally* problematic. For Renan, to violate one’s reason by believing in the supernatural was immoral (as he had explained to the Abbé Cognat in August 1845); it was a refusal to deal with the world as elucidated by Modern science. *This* was the central problem

²⁷²Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jésus*, neuvième édition, *Histoire des origines du christianisme, livre premier* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1863), 75.

²⁷³Renan, *Vie*, 450-451.

²⁷⁴Augustine, *The Confessions*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 1997), with my emphasis.

that Jesus uniquely posed to the Modern age, particularly to those like Renan who, through “. . . absolute sincerity and . . . *disinterested love* of the pure idea”, had dedicated their life to science in order to found “. . . *a new ideal of morality*.”²⁷⁵ In the conclusion to the *Vie* Renan contrasted Jesus with two of his other moral heroes: Marcus Aurelius and Baruch Spinoza. He noted that, of the three, the ancient Roman and the modern Jew were much more accessible to modern moral sensibilities than Jesus:

I know that our modern ideas are bruised more than once by this legend [i.e. the legend of Jesus], conceived by another race, under another sky, in the midst of other social needs. There are virtues which, in some regards, are more conformed to our taste. The honest and *suave* Marcus-Aurelius, the humble and gentle Spinoza, not having believed in miracles, have been exempted from *some errors that Jesus participated in*. The second, in his profound obscurity, had an advantage that Jesus did not seek.²⁷⁶

Renan continued by stating that, in spite of the issue of Jesus’ questionable “personal merit” of believing in and perpetuating the masses’ belief in miracles, he had still bequeathed to the world—even to Modernity—an “inexhaustible principle of moral renaissances” for which he had been rightly sanctified from the likes of Marcus Aurelius, Socrates, and Spinoza.²⁷⁷

Here Renan’s noted “lack of conscience” betrays itself in a powerful way.²⁷⁸ Throughout the *Vie* Renan argues that Jesus, like all of his fellow Jews in Palestine, was ignorant of Greek anticipations of post-Newtonian science which excluded divine intervention in “the government of the universe.”²⁷⁹ Therefore Jesus could be pardoned for his belief and performance of “miracles”, which were often simply the power of Jesus’ persuasion and force of personality on people with weaker bodies and minds (—i.e. the healing miracles of the sick); he and

²⁷⁵Renan, *Vie*, 451, with my emphasis.

²⁷⁶Renan, *Vie*, 451.

²⁷⁷Renan, *Vie*, 451-452.

²⁷⁸Schweitzer, *Quest*, 167.

²⁷⁹Renan, *Vie*, 40; 257, 260.

“especially” his disciples acted with a “perfect good faith.”²⁸⁰ At the same time, Renan pointed out that many of the miracle stories of the Gospels suggested that Jesus only *became* a miracle worker later in his ministry and this against his will (“*contre-coeur*”).²⁸¹ Why? “Philosophy is not sufficient for the masses. Sanctity is necessary for them.”²⁸² In order for Jesus to establish his vision of the Kingdom of God on earth, he had to play to the sentiments of the masses. Subtly, and perhaps unconsciously, Renan suggested that Jesus *manipulated* (howbeit with the best of intentions) the crowds around him to achieve his ends. In Renan’s estimation, Jesus’ moral vision justified his “miracles” and those of the Gospel writers who recorded them:

We admit therefore without hesitation that some acts which would be immediately considered as *acts of illusion or of folly* have held a great place in the life of Jesus. Is it necessary to ungratefully sacrifice to this side of his life the more sublime portion? May we guard ourselves from it!²⁸³

This passage strikingly anticipated Mussolini’s later sophistic perversion of Mark 11:23 in his critique and appreciation of the political utility of the “miraculous” and faith. Speaking early in his political career as a Socialist, Mussolini asked,

. . .is socialism perhaps reducible to a theorem? We want to believe in it, we must believe in it, mankind has need of a creed. It is faith that moves mountains, because it gives the *illusion* that mountains move. *Illusion* is perhaps the sole reality of life.²⁸⁴

On the other hand, Renan suggested that Jesus had been manipulated by the spirit of the times in which he lived. “The miracles of Jesus were a violence done to him by his age, a concession extracted from him by passing necessity. Thus the

²⁸⁰Renan, *Vie*, 255, 260-261.

²⁸¹Renan, *Vie*, 264.

²⁸²Renan, *Vie*, 451-452.

²⁸³Renan, *Vie*, 266-67, with my emphasis. Cf. also 162.

²⁸⁴Quoted in Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 161, with my emphasis.

exorcist and the miracle worker have died; but the religious reformer will live eternally.”²⁸⁵ Later in the *Vie*, while discussing Jesus’ overcoming of his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane to face the cross, Renan posited that Jesus totally rejected his former *roles* as a *sophist* debater, healer, and exorcist:

Henceforth, in effect, Jesus found himself again completely and unclouded. The *subtleties of the polemist*, the *credulity* of the miracle worker and the exorcist are forgotten. There only remains the incomparable hero of the Passion, the founder of the rights of the free conscience. . . .²⁸⁶

It is not clear from the text whether it was *Jesus* who forgot his former activity as a polemical magician at the prospect of becoming an “incomparable hero,” or if it was Renan who charitably forgot this after considering Jesus’ liberation of the Modern conscience.

Remarkably, Renan seems to have viewed Jesus as almost Machiavellian. He is the miracle worker who, forced by the necessity of the times, *appears* to have used miracles to form, in *actuality*, a new religious consciousness that finds miracles rationally and morally repugnant. One is here reminded of Machiavelli’s famous advice to Lorenzo de Medici on the advantages of the prince who can play the role of appearing virtuous:

I will even venture to say that [the virtues] damage a prince who possesses them and always observes them, but *if he seems to have them* they are useful. I mean that he should *seem* compassionate, trustworthy, humane, honest, and religious, and actually be so; but yet he should have his mind so trained that, when it is necessary not to practice these virtues, he can change to the opposite and do it skillfully.²⁸⁷

Had Mussolini wished to do so, he *could* have found in Renan’s portrayal of Jesus a model for manipulating a highly religious population which still believed in the miraculous—a population, for instance, like that of Catholic Italy in the early 20th

²⁸⁵Renan, *Vie*, 268.

²⁸⁶Renan, *Vie*, 379, my emphasis.

²⁸⁷Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Norton Critical ed., 2nd ed., trans. and ed. Robert M. Adams (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1992), Chapter XVIII, pg. 175.

century.²⁸⁸ And, quite apart from his own intentions, in de-divinizing and demystifying Jesus and his miracles, Renan confirmed the orthodox formula, “*aut Deus aut malus homo.*”

2.3. Jesus and the “Führer Principle”

The *Vie* offered other potential lessons as well, because Renan saw Jesus’ age and that of his own as similar in their revolutionary aspects. The first century C.E., just like Europe in the post-Enlightenment age, was ripe for the rise of dynamic leaders, an idea which some German thinkers would develop in the later 19th and early 20th centuries as the “*Führer principle.*”²⁸⁹ In Renan’s reconstruction, Jesus lived during a heroic age where all great leaders and movements led to *death*; a time of “*hidden forces*” which “humanity keeps in reserve” for epochal change. Only the French Revolution and the social and political changes it brought compared to the fevered and perilous days of Jesus’ life.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸The Lateran Pacts of 1929 by which Mussolini reconciled the Catholic Church to his rule by making Vatican City sovereign and exempt from Fascist law, restoring Ecclesial authority over marriage, and re-instituting compulsory Catholic education, has been judged as essentially Machiavellian on the *Duce*’s part. Like Hitler, Mussolini saw religion as an important and necessary *tool* in forming a society, for, as he stated above, “mankind has need of a creed.” Mussolini remained throughout his life an atheist who was tinged “with a certain superstition, typical of many of his countrymen, which urged that, despite the irrationality of His being, God might yet exist.” (R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London: Arnold, 2002), 237-239. Cf. also Benito Mussolini, “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,” in *My Autobiography with “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,”* former trans. Richard Washburn Child; latter trans. Jane Soames; (former New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928; latter London, W.C.: Leonard and Virginia Woolf, Hogarth Press, 1933; reprint, New York: Dover, 2006), 239; and Laura Fermi, *Mussolini* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 259. However, *unlike* Renan’s near Machiavellian Jesus, Mussolini made no real effort to appear as a devout Catholic. He never attended Mass nor observed the holy days of the liturgical calendar. As one Italian Catholic writer noted in the post war years concerning Mussolini’s use of religion, “The image of the devout son, of the penitent, of the son in prayer, was not an image of himself that he could accept: his intuition told him also that it was not an image of himself that he could show his faithful: the most sincere and trustworthy [were] barbarian warriors.” (Quoted in Fermi, 261).

²⁸⁹One good example of this development in Germany is Ernst Kantorowicz’ 1928 biography of Frederick II as the mysterious “wonder of the world” of Medieval Germany, who pointed to the modern *Führer* needed to save Weimar Germany. See Norman F. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), chapter 3, “The Nazi Twins: Percy Ernst Schramm and Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz,” pgs. 79-117. I wish to thank my colleague Dr. Scott Jesse for alerting me to this source.

²⁹⁰Renan, *Vie*, 44-45.

According to Renan, government was not a matter of speculative philosophy, metaphysics, or systematic theology, and neither was religion. Here the Semitic religions excelled all others, for they were “as little philosophical as possible.”²⁹¹ Moses and Muhammad, Renan pointed out, were “*hommes d’action*” who had “*dominé l’humanité*” by proposing action to their followers.²⁹² Jesus was also a man of action who did not engage in systematic theology or philosophy, but rather required of his disciple only one action: “to attach himself to him, to love him.”²⁹³ Renan emphasized that what made Jesus such a powerful leader was his *will*: “Jesus had neither dogmas nor system, but rather a fixed personal resolution, which, having surpassed in intensity every other *created will*, still directs to this hour the destinies of humanity.”²⁹⁴ Jesus was also in essence an idealist who provided the perfect moral exemplar for Modern humanity: “His perfect idealism is the highest rule of the free (*détachée*) and virtuous life.”²⁹⁵

Voluntarism and Idealism—the former declared heretical by the Church, and the latter non-existent in the canonical New Testament—were the two foundations upon which Jesus established his Kingdom of God on earth according to Renan. Understood in a post-Revolution, post-Romantic framework, Jesus became “the transcendent revolutionary” who tried to transform the world from its core and “found on earth the *ideal* which he had conceived.”²⁹⁶ Essentially, Jesus’ ideal of the Kingdom of God was a kind of Jewish utopia. Renan noted in particular the apocalyptic and eschatological antecedents of Jesus’ thought in the Book of Daniel, but Jesus was unique in adding to the old Jewish dreams “a moral

²⁹¹Renan, *Vie*, 45.

²⁹²Renan, *Vie*, 45-46.

²⁹³Renan, *Vie*, 46.

²⁹⁴Renan, *Vie*, 46.

²⁹⁵Renan, *Vie*, 445.

²⁹⁶Renan, *Vie*, 116, with my emphasis.

sense” and “social inclination” that the author of Daniel “had scarcely dared to imagine.”²⁹⁷ Jesus, as the “intimate” “son of God” and “executioner of his will,” believed himself to be the instigator of this universal revolution in which God’s “saints” would finally be revealed as the true rulers of the world and the wicked judged.²⁹⁸ Specifically, Renan emphasized that this eschatological transformation of heaven and earth would be accomplished through Jesus’ “*heroic will*” in which he believed himself to be “*all powerful*.”²⁹⁹ Or again, summing up the “essential character of Jesus’ work,” Renan wrote, “Devoted without reserve to his *idea*, he subordinated everything to such a degree that, towards the end of his life, *the universe no longer existed for him. It is by this access to a heroic will that he has conquered heaven*.”³⁰⁰ It could be argued that Renan wrote of Jesus’ establishment of the Kingdom of God in the same way that Mussolini would write of the Fascist State: “The Fascist State is an embodied *will to power and government*: the Roman tradition is here *an ideal of force in action*. According to Fascism, government is not so much a thing to be expressed in territorial or military terms as in terms of *morality and the spirit*.”³⁰¹ The Jesus of the *Vie* was non-doctrinaire in his doctrine of action, just as Mussolini described himself and the origins of Fascist doctrine:

Fascism was not the nursling of a doctrine worked out beforehand with detailed elaboration; *it was born of the need for action* and it was itself from the beginning *practical rather than theoretical*; it was not merely another political party but, even in the first two years, in opposition to all political parties as such, and *itself a living movement*.³⁰²

²⁹⁷Renan, *Vie*, 116

²⁹⁸Renan, *Vie*, 116-118.

²⁹⁹Renan, *Vie*, 118-119, emphasis mine.

³⁰⁰Renan, *Vie*, 458, with my emphasis.

³⁰¹Mussolini, “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,” 239, with my emphasis.

³⁰²Mussolini, “Political and Social Doctrine,” 228, emphasis mine.

In sum, Renan managed to construct perhaps the supreme oxymoron: a *Nietzschean Jesus*.³⁰³ That is, in Renan's portrayal, Jesus through the force of his own personality and will *made himself* into a god—just as Mussolini and Hitler would try to do in the 20th century.

The Kingdom would also come through Jesus' intimate connection with the people. Read in the light (or rather the darkness) of the future development of the fascist regimes of the 20th century, Renan's judgment of Jesus' relationship to "the people" is striking, especially when compared to Hitler's view of his relationship to the German "Volk." Speaking of Jesus' love for those rejected by orthodox Judaism, Renan writes:

The love of the people, pity for their impotence (*impuissance*), the feeling of the *democratic chief who feels the spirit of the masses living in him*, and who recognize him as their natural interpreter, burst forth at every instant of his actions and teachings.³⁰⁴

³⁰³Wardman argues that Renan *himself* was quite Nietzschean in his quest for academic and social power and so identified himself with the "historical Jesus" that he could not help projecting his own "will to power" onto the Nazarene. (See Wardman, *Ernest Renan*, 2, 26, 48, 56, 73, 76, 80, 86, 88).

To be fair, Nietzsche would disagree with my assessment. In his 1888 *Twilight of the Idols* he castigated Renan and his theology:
Renan. — Theology: or the corruption of reason by 'original sin' (Christianity). Witness Renan, who misses the mark with embarrassing regularity whenever he risks generalizing his yeses and nos. For instance, he would like to unite *la science* with *la noblesse*: but *la science* belongs with democracy, this is completely obvious. His desire to present an aristocratism of the spirit is no minor ambition: but at the same time, when faced with its counter-principle, the *évangile des humbles*, he falls down on his knees and does not stop there. . . What good is all this free-thinking, modernity, cynicism, and turncoat flexibility if at some gut level you are still a Christian, a Catholic and even a priest! Renan's inventiveness lies in seduction, just like a Jesuit and father confessor; his spirituality beams with a big, fat clerical smile,— like all priests, he only gets dangerous when he loves. Nobody can equal his life-threatening type of adoration. . . This spirit of Renan's, a spirit that *enervates*, is one more disaster for poor, sick, sick-willed France.—
(Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), from *Twilight of the Idols*, "Skirmishes of an Untimely Man," Aphorism 2, pg. 192; I wish to thank Dr. Michael Behrent for pointing out this passage to me).

Along with Wardman, however, I argue that Nietzsche *misread* Renan. What is more remarkable is that Susannah Heschel apparently shares Nietzsche's mistaken notion that Renan was actually a Christian Catholic. I shall address Heschel's misreading below.

³⁰⁴Renan, *Vie*, 185, with my emphasis.

Speaking in 1941, Hitler proclaimed his faith in the justice of Providence and his devotion to the German Volk thus:

Here I believe in a higher and eternal justice. It is imparted to him who proves himself worthy of it. And it was in this belief that I stood up before you for the first time twenty years ago. Back then I believed: it simply cannot be that my Volk is forsaken. It will be forsaken only if there are no men to be found to rescue this Volk. *If, however, someone pledges himself with a trusting heart to this Volk and works for it, who places himself wholly at the disposal of this Volk*, then it cannot be that Providence will allow this Volk to perish. Providence has wrought *more than miracles* for us in the time since.³⁰⁵

Here Hitler proclaimed himself worthy of the Volk—(and one can note, as with Renan’s portrayal of Jesus, a denial of miracles); earlier in his career in 1923 he challenged the German people as to whether or not they were worthy of a *Führer*:

What can save Germany is the dictatorship of the national will and of the national resolution. And if it be asked, ‘Is there a fitting personality to act as a leader?’—it is not our task to look for such a person. He is either given by Heaven or he is not given. Our task is to fashion the sword for his use when he appears. Our task is to give to the dictator when he comes a people *that is ripe for him*. German people, awake! It draws near to day!³⁰⁶

For a time in National Socialist Germany, both parties found each other worthy. Remarkably, a similar dialectical relationship between Jesus and his followers can be seen in Renan’s treatment of Jesus’ death. In the following passage significant elements of fascist political theology can be seen: heroic death and struggle, “ardent battle,” and a popular, *conferred* divinity. Contra orthodoxy, the main sign of Jesus’ divinity was not his resurrection (Renan flatly dismissed this³⁰⁷), but rather his *death*. After recounting Jesus’ last words, Renan writes:

Rest now in your glory, noble initiator. Your work is completed; your divinity is founded. No longer fear to see crumble by a *failure* (*faute*; i.e.

³⁰⁵Quoted in Rainer Bucher, *Hitler’s Theology: A Study in Political Religion*, trans. Rebecca Pohl, ed. Michael Hoelzl (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 62, emphasis mine.

³⁰⁶Bucher, *Hitler’s Theology*, 65 n. 2, with my emphasis.

³⁰⁷Renan, *Vie*, 433.

the crucifixion [?]) the edifice of your efforts. . . At the price of some hours of suffering, which have not even struck your great soul, *you have purchased* the most complete immortality. For some thousands of years, the world will be dependent on you! *Flag of our contradictions, you will be the sign around which it will give itself over to the most ardent battle. A thousand times more living, a thousand times more loved since your death than during the days of your passage here below, you will become so much the corner-stone of humanity that to root out your name from this world would be to shake it to its very foundations. Between you and God, one will no longer distinguish. Complete conqueror of death, take the royal highway that you have traced, by centuries of adorers.*³⁰⁸

Here Renan's denial of Jesus' resurrection proves problematic both historiographically and in its implications for 19th and 20th century political theology. As N. T. Wright has convincingly argued in *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, no first-century Jew would have had such faith in a *dead* messiah, as attested by Simon bar Cochba's failed messianic revolt against Hadrian of 132-135 C.E. Rabbi Akiba had proclaimed Simon "bar Cochba"—"son of a star"—a messianic allusion to Numbers 24:17; after the revolt was brutally crushed by the Romans, later rabbis referred to Simon as "bar Koziba"—"son of a lie."³⁰⁹ Renan's assertion, then, that Jesus' Jewish followers worshiped him after and *because of* his heroic death simply has no historical basis. Theologically, Renan's notion that Jesus' followers *made* him divine is analogous to the modern heterodoxy identified by Henri de Lubac wherein the "Church makes the Eucharist," rather than *vice-versa*.³¹⁰ And it is this combination of bad history and heterodoxy that makes Renan's Jesus so susceptible to being read as a *Führer*. Renan asserts that the Church made the Christ; but the relationship is dialectical—the *force* of Jesus' *personality* is what drew the Church to him, and

³⁰⁸Renan, *Vie*, 426, emphasis mine. I wish to thank my colleague Dr. Michael Behrent for aid in translating the beguiling "*va relever de toi*" intransitively. All imperfections are mine.

³⁰⁹N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 3, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 138; 205; 233; 244-45; 273; 582-83; 727; see also Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21.

³¹⁰See Henri Cardinal de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 88 and passim.

what compelled the Church, in the wake of his death, to *make* him the Christ. The same may be said of National Socialism and Hitler; a social body made Hitler *Führer*, but it was the force of Hitler's personality which drew this social body to him. Here the thread common to both Renan's "Liberal Christ" and the later fascist "*Führer* principle" can be seen in both Jesus' and Hitler's election *by their respective followers*. Hitler, after all, could at times be quite liberal. "Dictatorship," he once said, was "the highest form of democracy."³¹¹

In Hitler's case this is consistent with the inner-logic of liberalism—at least until the people lose their agency—i.e., up to the point that the democratically elected *Führer* who embodies the will of the people becomes the un-removable dictator.³¹² With Jesus, such a liberal conception is utterly incompatible with orthodoxy: "*You did not choose me, but I chose you,*" says Jesus to his disciples in John 15:16 (NET); and as YHWH again and again says to Abraham and Israel (see Gen. 12:1; Deut. 7:7; Is. 65:12; 66:4; Psalm 78:67; 118:22; I Sam. 8:7). And un-like Hitler's relationship to his social body, Christ's lordship is no post-Enlightenment dictatorship—"My commandment is this—to love one another just as I have loved you" (John 15:12 NET; cf. also Mark 10:41-45). Under Christ's dominion there is freedom (Gal. 5:1) within a real social body that does not work by coercive (if often latent) force, but rather by self-giving love. Unlike in fascism, the individual does not die to the group, but rather only to a narcissistic selfishness; there is unity with diversity—there is one Spirit, but many gifts, one Body but many different members (I Cor. 12), and election without warfare (cf. Acts 1:12-26 and the disciples' replacement of Judas). In the *Vie Renan* appears to love the new social body and praxis proclaimed by Jesus and the Church. Yet in reality he simultaneously rejects them as being irrational; his Lysian "rational non-love" continually trumps his admiration for the kingdom of God as found in the New Testament. Ultimately Renan's representation of the Church founded by Jesus is Liberal: Jesus' movement was a "delicate

³¹¹Quoted in Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*, 88.

³¹²Cf. Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*, 85-88.

communism,” but like the ill-fated revolutions of 1848, was doomed to fail: “. . .it is clear that they could not rally the whole of society. Jesus soon understood that in effect, the official world of his time would accept nothing of his kingdom.”³¹³ Jesus’ project was beautiful, but not rational.³¹⁴ Therefore one could not *really* participate in it. Thus Renan counselled his readers:

Happy is he who has been able to see with his eyes this divine blossoming, and to participate, *if only for one day, this illusion without parallel!* But more happy still, Jesus would say *to us, those who, free from all illusion, reproduce in themselves the celestial apparition, and, without millennial dreams, without a chimerical paradise, without signs in the heavens, by the righteousness of his will (par la droiture de sa volonté), and the poetry of his soul, will newly create in his heart the true kingdom of God!*³¹⁵

In other words, the modern rational (non-) lover of Jesus must scour away all the mystical signs and practices of orthodoxy to create *within and by themselves*—in imitation of Jesus’ own *voluntarism*—an internalized and, subjective “kingdom of God.”

2.4. Jesus and the Autonomous Liberal State

Perhaps what made Jesus an enduring *Führer* for Modern Man was the fact that, according to Renan, Jesus’ ideas of “radical revolution”—of the *apokatastasis pantōn* (“the restoration of all things”) of Acts 3:21 (cited by Renan in the Greek)—extended to everything *except* the political realm. Speaking of Jesus’ early ministry and the development of his ideas of the kingdom of God, Renan wrote:

From that time on, without doubt, he had renounced politics; the example of Judas the Galilean had revealed to him the futility of popular sedition. He never thought of revolting against the Romans and the tetrarchs. The unbridled and anarchical principle of Judas was not his. Jesus’ submission to the established powers, *which was at heart derisive*, was complete in *outward expression*. He paid the tax to Caesar in order not to scandalize.

³¹³Renan, *Vie*, 178.

³¹⁴Renan, *Vie*, 193.

³¹⁵Renan, *Vie*, 194, with my emphasis.

*Liberty and right are not of this world; why trouble his life through some vain susceptibilities?*³¹⁶

In this portrayal, Jesus' political theology is subversive to the Romans only in his cynicism, not in his actions. Yet Jesus' action of paying the hated tax to Caesar *was* a direct challenge to some strands of Jewish political theology of the Second Temple period—for example Judas the Galilean's disastrous revolt against the Roman census/taxation of 6 C.E.). According to Renan, Jesus' political theology was a stumbling block to Jewish revolutionary hopes, but Pagan Empire had nothing to fear from the young and beautiful Galilean teacher.³¹⁷ Renan's Jesus made space for the world's—particularly the *pagan* world's—*Führer* by laying the foundations of an *apolitical*, “religion-less” universal religion. In doing so, Renan's Jesus laid the foundations for the Autonomous Liberal State.

Indeed, Renan believed that primitive Christianity distinguished itself from both Jewish and Pagan thought in its world-denying political theology. The unique kingdom of God which Jesus founded, Renan stressed, was “the kingdom of the spirit,” the “doctrine of the liberty of souls” *abstracted* (“*abstraction faite*”) from the “imperfections which mix themselves in all things realized by humanity.”³¹⁸ Certainly pagan philosophers had produced such thoughts before Jesus; Renan notes the “beautiful” ideas of the Stoics who had also found means of being free under tyrants. Yet, like the Jews, the ancient pagan world tended to attach freedom to specific political systems, and thus if the Jews had their “Theudas” and “Barkokeba,” the pagans had their “Harmodius and Aristogiton,” their “Brutus and Cassius.”³¹⁹

³¹⁶Renan, *Vie*, 119, emphasis mine.

³¹⁷On Jesus as beautiful, see pg. 80 of the *Vie* where Renan asserts that Jesus “without doubt” had a “ravishing” face.

³¹⁸Renan, *Vie*, 121.

³¹⁹Renan, *Vie*, 121.

Still, in the *Vie* Renan affirmed that the genius of Christianity’s political theology stemmed from its Jewish roots.³²⁰ The Law of the Jews was “social and moral” in character, and if well observed was a path towards “perfect happiness.”³²¹ By contrast, the “Laws” of the Greeks and the Romans were rarely concerned with questions of “abstract right” and “happiness and private morality.” The pagans had provided the West with the foundations for national (i.e. specific) laws and civil republics; the Jews, however, established the foundations for *transcendence*: “. . .the *oeuvre* to which this people works is a kingdom of God, not a civil republic; a universal institution, not a nationality or a country.”³²² And in contrast to the ancient Indo-European peoples who looked to an ever vanishing original paradise in the past, the Jewish people were thoroughly eschatological—always placing their hope in the age to come. “Israel placed the Golden Age in the *future*.”³²³ The Jews’ *avant-garde* penchant for transcendence and progress (i.e. their forward looking worldview), made them a living protest against the “superstition and religious materialism” of the surrounding pagan cultures of the Mediterranean world.³²⁴ At the same time, Renan also stressed that this kernel of enlightenment had itself often been overcome within Judaism by its own proclivity to “severity, egoism, mockery, cruelty, narrow-mindedness, subtlety, sophistry,” and a fanatical obsession with ritual sacrifice and obedience to the *national* “cult of Jehovah” as evidenced in the Torah.³²⁵

³²⁰By 1887 and the publication of the first volume of *l’Histoire du peuple d’Israël*, Renan had come to the conclusion that in fact it was the “Aryan” races which had *perfected* Christianity socially and politically; I shall examine this in the next chapter. See Laudyce Rétat’s excellent introduction to Ernest Renan: *Histoire des origines du christianisme: Vie de Jésus, Les Apôtres, Saint Paul*, intro. Laudyce Rétat (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), xiii-xvii.

³²¹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 10-11.

³²²Renan, *Vie* (1863), 11.

³²³Renan, *Vie* (1863), with my emphasis.

³²⁴Renan, *Vie* (1863), 11-12.

³²⁵Renan, *Vie* (1863), 49, and 9, respectively.

Jesus, on the other hand, had introduced an “*idea (l’idée)*” into the world—*not a religion* based on culturally specific rituals (e.g., kosher laws, sacrifices, and so forth). His “perfect idealism” distinguished him from all ancient and modern “agitators.”³²⁶ Renan’s Jesus was in some regards an anarchist, “for he had no idea of civil government” that was not abusive and “the natural enemy of the men of God.” Yet he never advocated armed revolution against the established powers, but rather taught by example that force was to be overcome by purity of heart.³²⁷ Thus, as opposed to Judaism, Jesus had democratized “the kingdom of God”—*all* people now had the *right* (“*le droit de tous les hommes*”) to participate in the universal spiritual polity opened up by Jesus.³²⁸ Some 1700 years before the Enlightenment, Renan’s Jesus had finally wrought the separation of religion from the State (“*l’État*”): “The rights of conscience, removed from political law, arrived to constitute a new *power*—the ‘spiritual power.’”³²⁹ It is significant to note that Jesus’ revolution of “spiritual power” is, in Renan’s account, actually *intellectual*—not the biblical *pneuma/pneumatikos*—“spirit/spiritual”—the *communal experience of God’s Spirit* given by Jesus and experienced through *participation* in his life, death, and resurrection (cf. John 15:26; Phil. 3:10).³³⁰ Renan’s intellectualizing of Jesus and his ministry was a part of liberating Jesus from the Church and Modern Man from the praxis of orthodox Christianity while still enabling friendly relations with the Nazarene.

However, Renan was careful to note that the intervening centuries between Jesus and the birth of the Church had seen the rise of “horrible tyranny”

³²⁶Renan, *Vie* (1863), 127 and 439.

³²⁷Renan, *Vie* (1863), 127-128.

³²⁸Renan, *Vie* (1863), 439.

³²⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), with my emphasis.

³³⁰See also the article on πνεῦμα by Schweizer in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. VI, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1968; reprint 1995), 396-397.

at the hands of bishops who were actually princes, and popes who were in reality kings. This duplicitous “empire of souls” had in the past used “torture and the stake” to maintain its power.³³¹ Hence while Renan’s Jesus had laid the foundations for the separation of Church and State, for human intellectual autonomy vis-à-vis the State *and* the Church, for the creation of Modern *private, subjective* spirituality, the *fruition* of his work had only come in the post-Enlightenment, Post-Revolution age. “But the day will come when the separation will bring its fruits, when the domain of the things of the spirit will cease to be called a ‘power’ in order to be called a ‘liberty.’”³³² Contrary to the Gospels’ portrayal of a surprising *Divine* participation in the world, Renan asserted that originally Christianity had been a *people’s movement*—apparently not unlike the French Revolution itself. It had arisen from the “conscience of a man of the people” and had been “loved and admired” from the beginning “by the people.”³³³ In fact Christianity was “. . .the first triumph of the revolution, the victory of the popular feeling (*du sentiment populaire*).”³³⁴

On the surface, Renan’s representation of Jesus and early Christianity seems benevolent enough, for certainly orthodoxy does indeed call for the dignity and freedom of every human individual based on their intrinsic *being as a (mystical)*³³⁵ *image of God* (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). The problem is that Renan, along with the majority of the intellectuals of his generation, had rejected the orthodox mystical ontology which had for nearly two millennia been the basis for Western liberties in exchange for the Modern fiction of autonomous, individual “human

³³¹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 439.

³³²Renan, *Vie* (1863), 439-440.

³³³Renan, *Vie* (1863), 440.

³³⁴Renan, *Vie* (1863), 440.

³³⁵It is the *mystical*, hidden/un-seen nature of humanity’s divine “image-ship,” or perhaps rather the rejection of this pre-Modern orthodox belief that has caused so much controversy among Christians regarding Darwinian Evolutionary theory. Moreover, this loss also helped to give rise to the autonomous, contractual, “rights” based State. . .this bears much more research in the future.

rights.”³³⁶ In reality his genealogy of Modern “liberty” and “rights” from Jesus to the French Revolution is like the speeches of the Sophists Gorgias and Tisias, whom Socrates mocked for their ability to persuade those ignorant of the truth by making “new things old and old things the reverse.”³³⁷ For neither the Old nor New Testaments know anything of *autonomous* human rights. The concept of “right” always implies that one is *owed* something. In this sense the Modern, 17th and 18th century conceptions of “right” were similar to the antique idea of justice (to render to each person what they are due). But the Modern conception went further in believing that humans are somehow first owed *existence* itself—as John Locke stated in the first of his triad of “Natural Rights”—“Life, Liberty, and Property.”³³⁸ From the view of pre-Modern orthodoxy, the Modern development of the concept of autonomous human rights was another expression of the sinful and delusional “*esse in semet ipso*.” “Shall the clay say to the potter, “What are you doing?” (Is. 45:9, JPS); “What advance claim did heaven and earth have upon You, when you made them in the Beginning? Let Your spiritual and corporeal creation speak up and tell us what rights they had” (St. Augustine, *Confessions* XIII.2.2)³³⁹—biblical, pre-Modern orthodoxy radically rejected any type of creaturely autonomy. Therefore it rejected the *right* to life; yet it also *universally* prohibited murder based not on the fragile, contingent existence of other

³³⁶On the genealogy of the rejection of the orthodox, mystical basis of human liberties and the rise of the early Modern legal fiction of autonomous, individual human rights, see John Milbank, “Against Human Rights: Liberty in the Western Tradition,” *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* (2012), pp. 1-32. On the fictitious nature of Modern human rights, see Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*, 3rd ed., (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 66-69.

³³⁷Plato, *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 539.

³³⁸See John Milbank in *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2006), 13-18. The Deistic foundation of modern human rights as found in the U. S. Declaration of Independence—“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—” is not supported by biblical Judeo-Christian theology. See for instance Deuteronomy’s absolute proclamation of the “rights” of the Creator: “See, then, that I, I am He; there is no god beside Me. *I deal death and give life*; I wounded and I will heal; None can deliver from My hand” (32:39, JPS, with my emphasis).

³³⁹St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. and intro. Maria Boulding (New York: New City Press, 1997), 343.

creatures—(e.g. kings, princes, *die Führer*, “the people” or their contracts)—but on the ontological reality of God and his Goodness:

I the LORD am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage. . . You shall not murder. (Ex. 20:2, 13, JPS)

Murder of God’s image-bearers (cf. Gen. 1:26-27) was the ultimate form of iconoclasm and was seen first and foremost as a sin against *God*; thus even kings were not above or beyond the sixth commandment (cf. Psalm 51). Positively, such theology produced a radically new form of “government” for the *societas perfecta* of the Church that might best be described as “*agape*-ocracy”:

Jesus said to him, ‘*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*’ . . . ‘*Love your neighbor as yourself.*’ (Matt. 22:37; 39; Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18, NET).

But I say to you, *love your enemy.* . . (Matt. 5:44, NET).

Thus in its original political theology (cf. Paul’s use of *politeuesthe* and *politeuma en ouranois* in Phil. 1:27 and 3:20-21), the Church posed a threat to every political theology based on *autonomy*—whether the (tragic) autonomy of force of Greco-Roman *heroic politics*, or the secular and collectivist autonomy of 18th century Liberal *contractual* politics. The biblical notion that ontologically humans have no right to existence, and thus by extension no other *self-generated* “rights,” but rather simply exist because of *God’s Grace and Love*, could be very frightening—witness the Gospels’ accounts of *Pilate’s* trial before Jesus; (cf. Mt. 27:11-14; Mk. 15:1-5; Jn. 18:33-38; 19:8-11). It apparently was too frightening for the Enlightenment, and was universally rejected within Protestant political theology from at least the 18th century onwards. The rejection proved momentous—particularly in 20th century Germany. As Germans were to find out under the National Socialist regime, rights based on the contingencies of autonomously conceived contracts (for example, the Weimar constitution) and the *secular* “will to power” of Modern democracy proved fragile indeed, particularly

with regard to the State's right to *murder*.³⁴⁰ The Jesus of orthodoxy, of biblical history, cannot be made to support such political theology. Renan's Jesus could and did.

That the *Vie* was one of Renan's contributions to the on-going perfection of the French autonomous state can be seen by briefly examining his *La réforme intellectuelle et morale*, his bitter response to the German defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. Here, Renan openly expressed his Liberal, *anti-democratic* philosophies. France's defeat in the war had revealed the decadence of its bourgeoisie materialism and the impotence of its vulgar democracy.³⁴¹ Renan's remedy was a call for a secularized monarchy and Christianity—a Modern Autonomous State—wherein an *avant-garde* of intellectuals would be free to construct a new Empire based on Science.³⁴² There were no contradictions here for Renan: “One can be royalist without admitting divine right, just as one can be Catholic without believing in the infallibility of the pope, Christian without believing in the supernatural and the divinity of Jesus Christ. . .”³⁴³ What the war highlighted was the problem of Catholic Christianity in the Modern era, and particularly France's anachronistic adherence to Catholicism's “transcendent mysticism” and poisonous supernatural beliefs.³⁴⁴ Protestant nations such as England and Germany had managed to adjust to Modernity through the

³⁴⁰Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*, 74, calls attention to genocide researcher Gunnar Heinsohn's thesis that Hitler's primary goal in the Holocaust was to eliminate the people and religion which made a universal prohibition against murder (Ex. 20:13), and thereby remove “all future conquests of a bad ‘conscience’ in the course of exterminations.”

³⁴¹Ernest Renan, *La réforme intellectuelle et morale* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1871), 25, 37, 39, 64, 82, 94, 107, and *passim*.

³⁴²Renan, *La réforme*; see for instance 42 on Renan's hope for a French, English and German “political and intellectual union” which would direct “humanity and civilization.”

³⁴³Renan, *La réforme*, 76.

³⁴⁴Renan, *La réforme*, 97.

acceptance of science and modern rationality; France's defeat came precisely from its "lack of faith in science" (*Le manque de foi à la science*).³⁴⁵

Thus Renan called for a radical reform of France's entire educational system. His model was that of Germany's *Protestant* system of public instruction, which from Luther onwards had emphasized rationality in all things:

Lutheranism having made religion *to consist of reading a book*, and later having reduced Christian dogmatics to an impalpable quintessence, has given an importance to education outside of the schoolhouse; *the illiterate has almost been chased from Christianity; sometimes Communion is refused him.*³⁴⁶

In Renan's estimation the genius and *power* of German Protestantism was that it had transformed traditional Christianity from a mystical, liturgical faith into a *rational exercise*—into "reading a book." Such was not the case in Catholic France:

Catholicism, on the contrary, *having made salvation to consist of sacraments and belief in the supernatural, considers education a secondary thing. Excommunicating those who neither know how to read nor write would appear impious to us.* The school not being the annex of the church is the rival of the church.³⁴⁷

Renan hoped for a day when the Catholic church would purge itself of its obsolete rules; when village curés might teach students from the latest scientific textbooks rather than from breviaries.³⁴⁸ In this context his *Vie de Jésus* could be taught in Catholic schools, for it would teach students the scientific, historical Jesus—the founder of strong, autonomous states. It would teach students how to be *Modern* Christians, Christians who did not believe in the supernatural nor in the divinity of Christ; Christians who did not waste their time in "outdated" (*surannées*), ritualistic worship; Christians who would be of great service to their nation in

³⁴⁵Renan, *La réforme*, 95.

³⁴⁶Renan, *La réforme*, 95, my emphasis.

³⁴⁷Renan, *La réforme*, 95, emphasis mine.

³⁴⁸Renan, *La réforme*, 96.

conquering inferior races, in executing revenge on Germany; in regaining French glory in the modern age.³⁴⁹

While Renan hoped for such church reform, he was doubtful it would ever come. Ultimately, he argued that if there ever was to be true intellectual and moral progress in France, its universities would have to be free from ecclesiastical influence and oversight. In other words, in calling for secular universities he was calling for the inculcation of a rationality without worship, of reason separated from divine love that was not only anti-orthodox, but also anti-Socratic (as demonstrated in *The Phaedrus*). This was the way forward for Renan. For these new universities would help produce a Modern philosopher-king:

Formed by the universities, a head of a rational society ruling by science, proud of this science and little disposed to let its privilege perish to the profit of an ignorant mass. . .giving more to specialty, to science, to those things which the Germans call the '*Fach*,'³⁵⁰ less to literature, to the talents of writing and speaking; completing these solid deeds of the social edifice by a brilliant court and capital, from which the cry of an aristocratic spirit does not exclude the solidity and strong culture of reason; which at the same time elevates the people, reviving its weakened faculties, inspiring it with the aid of a *good clergy devoted to the country*; the regard of a superior society, the respect of science and virtue, the spirit of sacrifice and devotion; this is what would be ideal. It would at least be beautiful to seek to approach it.³⁵¹

Notably, these new universities would also produce a secularized clergy devoted to the State, rather than to the trans-national, trans-historical, Mystical Body of Christ. However, this too, according to Renan, would be consistent with the historical Jesus, or at least with *his* anti-theological, anti-liturgical Jesus of the *Vie*.

³⁴⁹Renan, *La réforme*, 96; on Renan's hope for future French conquest of "races inférieures" as France returned to its natural European role as "*une race de maîtres et de soldats*," see 93-94; on his scientific racism, see 99; 111; for France's *revanche* on Germany, see 120.

³⁵⁰*Fach* in German refers to a field of specialized knowledge, cf. *fach gebiet*, *fach kenntnisse*.

³⁵¹Renan, *La réforme*, 106-107, with my emphasis.

2.5. The Anti-Theological, Anti-Liturgical Jesus

Both Mussolini and Hitler from very early on in their political careers recognized the *utility* of public ceremonies, of symbols, of beguilingly beautiful masses, of *secular liturgies* in uniting people around their causes.³⁵² The Jesus of the *Vie* was thoroughly against all of these things. And yet, Renan's anti-liturgical Jesus was capable of contributing to the darkest element of fascism: its anti-Judaic, anti-Semitic pathology. To see this it is necessary to examine Renan and Jesus' ecclesiology in the *Vie*, for here the connection between the Liberal Modern and Fascist Jesus is clearest.

Renan's ecclesiology at first seems Catholic; Jesus' essential work was the calling of the disciples and the depositing of his remarkable doctrine of love in their hearts.³⁵³ Reading further one finds that it was actually "Protestant" (to the degree it may be considered in any way Christian), Modern, and anti-Mystical:

Jesus is not a founder of dogmas, *a maker of symbols*; he is the initiator of the world to a new spirit. *The least Christian of men were, on the one hand, the doctors of the Greek Church, who, at the beginning of the fourth century, entangled Christianity in puerile metaphysical discussions, and, on the other hand, the scholastics of the Latin Middle Ages, who wished to draw from the Gospel thousands of articles of a colossal 'Summa.'* Clinging to Jesus in view of the kingdom of God—*this is what it meant in the beginning to be Christian. . . .*In order to renew itself, [Christianity] has only to return to the Gospel. The kingdom of God, *such as we conceive it, differs notably from the supernatural apparition that the first Christians hoped to see bursting in the clouds.* But the feeling that Jesus has introduced in the world is *rightly ours (bien le nôtre)*. His perfect idealism is the highest rule of the free (*détachée*) and virtuous life.³⁵⁴

Rather than theology and a real social body, Renan's Jesus brought ". . . *liberty*, that society actually excludes as an impossibility, and which only has all its amplitude in the domain of *thought*;" he was the first to proclaim *and live* out

³⁵²See Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*, 8-9.

³⁵³Renan, *Vie* (1863), 443-44.

³⁵⁴Renan, *Vie* (1863), 444 and 445 with my emphasis.

“. . .the royalty of spirit.”³⁵⁵ (It is necessary to note the triple *entendre* of *l'esprit* in French: “spirit, mind, understanding,” and its difference from the biblical *pneuma*—divine spirit. The anonymous English translation of the *Vie* from 1863 renders *l'esprit* as “mind,” reflecting Renan’s portrayal of Jesus as an Enlightenment *philosophe*).³⁵⁶ In this sense, Christianity was “almost synonymous with ‘religion’” itself, and it was also in this sense that Renan could state that “. . .we are Christians, even when we differ on almost all the points of Christian tradition which has preceded us.”³⁵⁷

This new religion which Renan’s Jesus had founded was completely different from other ancient religions. On the one hand, Jesus, in a revolutionary break from Judaism, taught an un-mediated relationship between Man and his heavenly Father, anticipating the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment’s dream of a “pure cult” without priests or “exterior practices” by nearly 1800 years.³⁵⁸ On the other hand, Jesus’ priest-less religion was a break from Greco-Roman practice as well, and Renan acknowledged that the prophets of Judaism (especially Isaiah) were unique in antiquity for their antipathy towards ritualistic worship.³⁵⁹ Christianity had thus “seduced the noblest souls (*âmes élevées*)”³⁶⁰ through “the attraction of a religion free from all exterior ritual (*forme extérieure*).”³⁶¹

However, the centrality of Eucharistic liturgical practice in eighteen centuries of Christian history posed a special problem for Renan’s historical

³⁵⁵Renan, *Vie* (1863), 446, my emphasis.

³⁵⁶See Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, anon. trans. (Albert & Charles Boni, Inc., 1936), 292.

³⁵⁷Renan, *Vie* (1863), 445, 447.

³⁵⁸Renan, *Vie* (1863), 85.

³⁵⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 88.

³⁶⁰“*âmes élevées*” could also be translated as “the most educated minds; (see Renan, *Life*, (1936), 112 and its rendering: “elevated minds.”

³⁶¹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 112.

representation of Jesus’ “religion-less religion.” In his treatment of the Last Supper Renan acknowledged that the *remembrance* of the meal became the height of Christian piety and the foundation of the most fruitful Christian institutions.³⁶² After Jesus’ death, the disciples came to imagine and invest the meal with a “sweet mysticism” (*suave mysticité*).³⁶³ From here, Renan began to de-construct the orthodox significance of the meal as the institution of the Eucharist. Renan asserted that, in reality, Jesus did nothing extraordinary at *this* meal; Jesus’ breaking of the bread was one of his regular “mysterious rite[s]” (Renan must have in mind Jesus’ breaking of bread to feed the crowds). The Church’s belief that this meal was the institution of the Eucharist was based on the Gospels’ confusion of the last supper with the Passover *seder* and the early Christian belief that Jesus’ death was the supreme sacrifice which superseded the sacrificial system of the Law. This combination of erroneous beliefs was what had transformed Jesus’ last meal with his disciples into the mystical sacrament practiced by the Church in the mass.³⁶⁴

Prejudicing the value of John’s eyewitness testimony of the meal over the Synoptic accounts, Renan pointed out that the Fourth Gospel makes no mention of Jesus’ sacramental words over the bread and wine: “. . .Take, eat, this is my body . . .All of you drink from the cup, for this is my blood of the covenant which is being poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:26-28; cf. Mk. 14:22-24; Lk. 22:19-21).³⁶⁵ This was proof to Renan that John did not view the Eucharist as having been instituted by Jesus. Rather, for John, Jesus’ central action that night was the washing of the disciples’ feet.³⁶⁶ Renan mused that the “sacrament” of foot-washing probably obtained an importance in “certain

³⁶²Renan, *Vie* (1863), 384.

³⁶³Renan, *Vie* (1863), 385.

³⁶⁴Renan, *Vie* (1863), 386.

³⁶⁵My translation.

³⁶⁶Renan, *Vie* (1863), 387.

primitive Christian families” that it had since lost.³⁶⁷ Then again, even this was suspect. John’s report of Jesus’ act of humility vis-à-vis his disciples on the night of the Last Supper reflected the tendency in all of the canonical Gospels to associate all of Jesus’ “great moral and ritual recommendations” with the rich drama of the Teacher’s last night with his disciples.³⁶⁸ As with the breaking of bread, Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet must have been a regular practice. John simply could not resist the opportunity to add this to such a ready-made scene of “high feeling.”³⁶⁹

What *was* significant about the Last Supper for Renan was the Johannine Jesus’ last command to his disciples for them to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:33-35; 14:12-17). *This a-religious command—and not a dominical mystical sacrament—was the true foundation of the unity of the Church: “It is always the unity of his Church, constituted by him or by his spirit, which is the soul of the symbols and of the discourses that the Christian tradition made go back to this sacred moment.”*³⁷⁰ In his simultaneous de-construction and re-presentation of the Last Supper, Renan’s Jesus anticipated the optimistic sociology of the French Revolution by teaching “*avec un sentiment exquis,*” of a “brotherhood of man” as “sons of God.”³⁷¹ More radically, in denying Jesus’ institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist, Renan’s historical approach denied the radical essence of the Gospel: *God’s gracious and mystical forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.*

At the level of political theology, this is the same implicit denial of the *deistic* ontology of the Autonomous Liberal State as conceived in the 18th century.

³⁶⁷Renan, *Vie* (1863), 387.

³⁶⁸Renan, *Vie* (1863), 387-388; cf. also f.n. 1, where Renan dismisses John’s record of Jesus’ farewell discourse as un-historical.

³⁶⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 388.

³⁷⁰Renan, *Vie* (1863), 388.

³⁷¹Cf. Renan, *Vie* (1863), 81.

“Nature’s God” (U. S. Declaration of Independence) and the “Supreme Being” (French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen) did not participate in this world because it was not necessary; humanity did not need salvation because there was no such thing as sin. There was also no Grace in this world. However when, after the disaster of the First World War, European nations re-discovered the need for salvation, Mussolini and Hitler filled the grace-less void created by Enlightenment political theology with their own offers of deliverance and the purging of sins—*other peoples’ sins* (e.g. those of Communists, Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals)—through a hideous *theology of elimination and self-generated force*.³⁷² Renan could not foresee the potential implications of the political theology of his historical Jesus. Nor was he alone in the *avant-garde* demystification and rationalization of Christianity that would create the conditions for the possibility of the advent of the “fascist Jesus” of early 20th century German academia. But he does seem to be one of the early pioneers in the rise of academic anti-Judaism within the study of the origins of Christianity. This can be seen again in his treatment of the institution of the Eucharist.

As discussed above, Renan’s Jesus was unique in the history of religions precisely by creating a “religion-less religion.” However, Christianity had been, and still was in Renan’s day, characterized by religious rituals, particularly the Eucharist within Catholic Christianity. The *Church’s* early reversion to a *Jewish-like* priesthood and “*exterior practices*”—(e.g. the Eucharist—the Church’s new Passover ritual)—had subverted Jesus’ own vision:

An absolutely new idea, the idea of a religion founded on the purity of the heart and on human brotherhood, entered the world through him. It was an idea so elevated that the *Christian church became in this regard completely false to his intentions and, even in our day, only a few souls are capable of accepting it*.³⁷³

³⁷²Bucher, *Hitler’s Theology*, 112-118.

³⁷³Renan, *Vie* (1863), 90, with my emphasis.

In other words, the Church's liturgical practices *are too Jewish*—"too exterior." Renan's criticism of the Church is thus latently anti-Judaic, and, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, also racially based and therefore anti-Semitic.

I have attempted in this chapter to show how Renan's historical Jesus and ecclesiology could serve as a basis for Fascist political theology through his adherence to Modern conceptions of autonomous reason and the autonomous liberal State. Renan's de-mystified Jesus *was not Lord* (cf. Philip. 2:9-11) but was simply one *Führer* among many others living in a self-governing world. In the next chapter, I shall try to demonstrate how Renan's historical Jesus managed to contribute to the distinguishing feature of Fascist ideology in German National Socialism: its anti-Semitism.³⁷⁴ For not only was Renan's Jesus Liberal, he was also a Marcionite.

³⁷⁴Both Ernst Nolte and Zeev Sternhell make the point that Fascism was not a monolithic political ideology. Nolte casts French Fascism, Italian Fascism, and German National Socialism in a Hegelian dialectical relationship of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. See Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), chapters 1-2, and part 5, "Fascism as a Metapolitical Phenomenon." Sternhell is adamant in distinguishing Fascism from Nazism, the latter being at its core driven by "biological determinism." See Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder, and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4-5. It is my argument that Renan's *Vie* has the dubious honor of having contributed to both Fascist and National Socialist thought.

Chapter 3: A Genealogy of the Fascist Jesus: From Renan to Jakob Wilhelm Hauer and Walter Grundmann

This chapter traces the origins of the “Academic-Fascist Jesus” which emerged in German academic theology between the two World Wars and its connection to Renan’s historical Jesus of the *Vie*. Here the darkest legacies of Renan’s revival of the ancient Marcionite heresy can be seen in the “German Faith Movement” of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, the academic anti-Semitic Institute of Walter Grundmann, and the murderous rhetoric of Hitler himself. The genealogy of the Academic-Fascist Jesus is a chilling reminder of Rainer Bucher’s insight from his study, *Hitler’s Theology*: “. . .the ground of civilization is thin beneath our feet and. . .it is not threatened from the margins of society but first and foremost from society’s centre. . .”.³⁷⁵ By the early 20th century, Western civilization was being threatened from the heart of some of its most venerable theological faculties through cutting-edge research into the life of Jesus. And if Susannah Heschel’s thesis in *The Aryan Jesus* is correct, scholars such as Grundmann and Hauer were not only producing scholarly literature, but also academic “desk-murderers” as well.³⁷⁶

3.1. The Return of the Marcionite Heresy and the Rise of the Fascist Jesus

Speaking before a Nazi assembly in Munich in April 1922, Adolf Hitler expressed *his* understanding of Christian theology and Christian duty thus:

. . .my feeling as a Christian points me to my Lord and Savior as fighter. It points me to the man who once in loneliness, surrounded only by a few followers, recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to the fight against them and who, God’s truth! was greatest not as *sufferer* but as *fighter*. In boundless love as a Christian and as a man I read through the passage which tells us how the Lord at last rose in His might

³⁷⁵Rainer Bucher, *Hitler’s Theology: A Study in Political Religion*, trans. Rebecca Pohl, ed. Michael Hoelzl (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 122.

³⁷⁶Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 16-17.

and seized the scourge to drive out of the Temple the brood of vipers and adders. How terrific was His fight for the world against the Jewish poison [and] today, after two thousand years, with deepest emotion I recognize more profoundly than ever before in the fact that it was for this that He had to shed His blood upon the Cross. As a Christian I have no duty to allow myself to be cheated, but I have the duty to be a fighter for truth and justice.³⁷⁷ And as a man I have the duty to see to it that human society does not suffer the same catastrophic collapse as did the civilization of the ancient world some two thousand years ago—a civilization which was driven to its ruin through this same Jewish people.³⁷⁸

Here Hitler expressed in a new and powerful way the old heresy of Marcion, whose theology was condemned by the Church in the second century for positing that the God of the Old and New Testaments were not the same, and for denying the *mystical being* of Jesus as recorded in the birth narratives of the Synoptics and the prologue of John's Gospel. Like Marcion, Hitler argued that the God of the Old Testament and his followers were in actuality *satanic*. Christianity therefore was a radical break with Judaism; Jesus did not, could not, worship YHWH, let alone be His Incarnation.

Hitler's rhetoric was also pure sophistry. He was no Christian, but rather a deist whose god was the product of his own mystical beliefs in Providence, Social Darwinism, and *völkisch* (racist) ideology.³⁷⁹ In numerous private "table talks" with his staff, Hitler repeatedly and consistently stated his dis-belief in all things Christian; Christianity was "the maddest thing any delusional human mind has ever produced;" "He who lives naturally [. . .] will inadvertently come into opposition to the Church. This will cause the Church to collapse. *Science will reign victorious.*"³⁸⁰ "[The Protestant churches] have no future. At least not for

³⁷⁷Hitler's statement here is illustrative of the danger of the concept of *autonomous* human rights: he contradicts Jesus' ethics of graced "right-less-ness" (to coin a very awkward new word) from the Sermon on the Mount—" . . .if someone wants to sue you and to take your tunic, give him your coat also" (Matt. 5:40, NET), and Paul's admonition, based on Jesus' ethics, to those Corinthians given to lawsuits—"Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" (I Cor. 6:7, NET).

³⁷⁸Quoted in Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*, 77, with Bucher's emphasis.

³⁷⁹This is the heart of Bucher's thesis concerning Hitler's god; see 10 and *passim*.

³⁸⁰Bucher, *Hitler's Theology*, 26, 27, from "table talks" of 14 October 1941 and 13 December 1941 respectively; my emphasis added.

Germans. . . . Nothing will prevent me from eradicating totally, root and branch, all Christianity in Germany. . . . A German Church, a German Christianity, it is all rubbish. . . One is either Christian or German.”³⁸¹ His *talk* of “boundless love as a Christian” was in reality negated by the *non-participatory rationality* of his deistic belief in a creator god who stands aloof from the world and by his fundamental hatred. He perversely spoke of ancient Western pagan civilization’s collapse at the hands of “Jewish people,” meaning in actuality the rise of *Christianity*—subtly obscuring the fact that his anti-Semitism extended quite logically to Christianity,³⁸² and belying the falsity of his latent assertion that Jesus was not himself Jewish. In sum, Hitler’s sophistry was itself satanic:

Every word that issues from Hitler’s mouth is a lie. When he says peace he means war and when he most sinfully names the name of the Almighty, he means the force of evil, the fallen angel, Satan. His mouth is the stinking throat of hell and his power is fundamentally depraved.³⁸³

By 1945 it would become apparent just how lethal was the combination of Hitler’s sophistry, heresy, and deistic science based on a non-loving, non-participatory rationality.

Yet Hitler’s espousal of Marcion’s heretical theology was in fact not exactly something altogether new. Renan had already posited the same ideas about Jesus and his relation to Judaism (though not with the same force or purposes) in the *Vie*. For instance, speaking of Jesus’ first journeys to Jerusalem, Renan wrote:

These journeys, moreover, were essential to his design; for he knew already that in order to play a role of the first order, it would be necessary to go out from Galilee *and attack Judaism within its strong hold, which was Jerusalem.*

³⁸¹Quoted in Karla Poewe’s *New Religions and the Nazis* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 112, from Hitler’s “table talk” of 7 April 1933.

³⁸²This point is made forcefully in Poewe’s study of the work of the German academic Jakob Wilhelm Hauer and his “German Faith Movement” during the Third Reich. See *Ibid.*, pgs. 7,8, 9-10, 14, 55, 63, 109, 137, 142-143, 156.

³⁸³Quoted in Bucher, *Hitler’s Theology*, 82.

The little Galilean community was [in Jerusalem] very far from home. Jerusalem was then almost that which it is today—a city of pedantry, of acrimony, of disputes, of hatreds, of the *petitesse d'esprit*. Fanaticism there was extreme and its religious seditions very frequent. . . ³⁸⁴

Commenting on Jesus' frequent pilgrimages to Jerusalem and to the Judean desert, Renan *mused*:

These trips, where the nation re-united to communicate its ideas, and which were almost always the crucibles of great agitation, put Jesus in contact with the soul of his people, *and without doubt inspired in him already a lively antipathy for the faults of the official representatives of Judaism*. One supposes that early in his life the Judean desert had been for him another school and that he had made long stays there. *But the God which he found there was not his. It was rather the God of Job, severe and terrible, who answers to no one. Sometimes it was Satan which came to tempt him*. He returned then to his dear Galilee, and met again his heavenly Father, in the midst of its verdant hills and clear streams. . . ³⁸⁵

It is notable that Satan is here paralleled with the inscrutable God of Judaism. Elsewhere Renan contrasted Judaism's "partial despot", which set Israel as a chosen people against the world, to Jesus' God who ". . .[was] the God of humanity."³⁸⁶ And in a similar fashion, Renan emphasized that Jesus himself represented the antithesis to Judaism: "Far from Jesus being the continuator of Judaism, he represents the rupture with the Jewish spirit."³⁸⁷

This radical abstraction and re-presentation of the historical Jesus from his Jewish context has been recognized as Renan's attempt to, on the one hand, place Jesus beyond the bounds of race and ethnicity altogether; to make him "neither Jewish nor Greek" and thus the ideal carrier of a universal modern religious

³⁸⁴Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jésus*, neuvième édition, *Histoire des origines du christianisme, livre premier* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1863), 206, emphasis mine.

³⁸⁵Renan, *Vie*, 69-70, with my emphasis.

³⁸⁶Renan, *Vie*, 78.

³⁸⁷Renan, *Vie*, 455.

ethic.³⁸⁸ Contra Matthew and Luke’s nativity accounts of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem of *Judea*, Renan placed Jesus’ birth in Nazareth of Galilee. Noting that *Gelil haggoyim* (Galilee) in Hebrew means “circle of the Gentiles,” and pointing out the great number of *non-Juifs* resident there in Jesus’ time, Renan wrote that it was “therefore impossible to raise here any question of race and to seek which blood flowed within the veins of the one who has contributed the most to erasing within humanity the distinctions of blood.”³⁸⁹ However, Jesus’ race was in fact tied to his conception of religion in Renan’s estimation. In his conception of God as a universal Father of all, Jesus “was nothing like his race (*en cela il n’est nullement de sa race*). *Neither the Jew nor the Mohammedan has understood this delightful theology of love.*”³⁹⁰ If Jesus’ race could not exactly be ascertained, Renan seemed certain (at least in the *Vie*) that in many ways Jesus was *not Jewish*. This points to the other often recognized tendency in Renan’s scholarly work on Jesus and the history of Christianity: his penchant to “occidentalize.”³⁹¹ By the time the first volume of his *Histoire des origines du peuple d’Israël* appeared in 1887, the remarkable dialectic of Renan’s thought had led him to the conclusion that while Jesus and Christianity were in their origins *tout juif*, Christianity had only reached its perfection among *the Aryan races*.³⁹² He had already intimated this in the final volume of his history of the origins of Christianity, *Marc-Aurèle* (1882), when he wrote that Judaism was “the wild-stock upon which the Aryan race has produced its flower.”³⁹³

³⁸⁸See Laudyce Rétat’s introduction to Ernest Renan, *Histoire des origines du christianisme: Vie de Jésus, Les Apôtres, Saint Paul*, intro. Laudyce Rétat (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), viii.

³⁸⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 22 and f.n. 1.

³⁹⁰Renan, *Vie* (1863), 77, with my emphasis.

³⁹¹Renan, *Histoire des origines du christianisme*, xii, and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), chapter, II: Silvestre de Sacy and Ernest Renan: *Rational Anthropology and Philological Laboratory*, 123-148.

³⁹²Renan, *Histoire des origines du christianisme*, xii-xiii.

³⁹³Quoted in Renan, *Histoire des origines du christianisme*, xiii.

In this way Renan's *Vie* heightened the dialectical tensions between Judaism and Christianity, and a generation later would provide "scientific" support for anti-Semitic polemics among fascist academics in Germany between the two World Wars. Karla Poewe's *New Religions and the Nazis* (2006) chronicles the (de)evolution of Renan's type of scholarly Marcionitism in the early 20th century through an examination of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, founder of the German Faith Movement of the Nazi regime. Poewe argues that Hauer's path to the neo-Pagan and Hindu hybridization that characterized his new religion began with *liberal* Christian theology—the very same kind of theology so powerfully exemplified by Renan and his work on Jesus.³⁹⁴ Similarly, Susannah Heschel's 2008 *Aryan Jesus* has demonstrated a genealogy of "racializations" of the "historical Jesus," beginning with Renan and continuing through the work of Professor Dr. Walter Grundmann and his "Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life".³⁹⁵ Through an examination of Renan's treatment of Jesus' supposed Galilean roots contrasted with his equally supposed antagonism towards Judea and Jerusalem, and Renan's portrayal of Jesus' arrest and trial, I hope in this chapter to demonstrate the genealogical links between Renan and Hauer and Grundmann's Aryan Jesus. In doing so I shall also try to demonstrate that, tragically, the Fascist-Aryan Jesus was the *Academic* Jesus.

3.2. Renan's Dialectic: Indo-European versus Semitic

Renan situated Jesus in a dialectical world of two contrasting races. In the first chapter of the *Vie*—"The Place of Jesus in the History of the World"—Renan stated that only two races had really made humanity: the Indo-European and the Semitic.³⁹⁶ The former gave the world moral and natural religion, or rather the poetic basis which was the foundation of morality and religion. But due to their

³⁹⁴See Poewe, *New Religions and the Nazis*.

³⁹⁵See Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus*.

³⁹⁶Renan, *Vie* (1863), 4.

inability to overcome the intellectual deficiencies of polytheism, mysticism, and localism, the Indo-European races had failed to deliver to humanity a universal, rational religion.³⁹⁷ Rather, this glory fell to the Semitic race, which had been isolated from the irrationalities and absurdities of Indo-European polytheism and fetishism.³⁹⁸ Jewish monotheism's superiority stemmed from its "Law," which, compared to the institutions of the Egyptians and the ancient Babylonians, contained "powerful seeds of social equality and morality."³⁹⁹ *Liturgically*, the praxis of Israelite priests differed very little from that of other ancient priesthoods—and this was one of ancient Judaism's deficiencies—its adherence to the Ark of the Covenant and the "relics," "souvenirs," and "book" it contained. "Not from *this*," Renan wrote, "would come the institution which would determine the future. . ."⁴⁰⁰ Yet what did distinguish the Israelites from other "theocratic" peoples was their subordination of sacerdotal praxis to the inspiration of the individual, that is, the inspired visions and oracles of their prophets. In a remarkably modern and liberal way, Renan saw Israel's prophets as "defenders of the *ancient democratic spirit*, enemies of the rich, *opposed to every political organization* and to those who had led Israel in the ways of the other nations"; *they* were the "true instruments of the religious primacy of the Jewish people."⁴⁰¹

At the same time, it was these very prophets which had inculcated in the Jewish race a fanatical, nihilistic faith. Their oracles were often instrumental in provoking the wrath of Gentile empires (e.g., the Assyrians), and in fostering dangerous dreams of *Jewish* empire by way of eschatology:

From very early on [the prophets] announced unlimited hopes, and when the people, in part victim of their impolitic councils, had been crushed by Assyrian power, they proclaimed that a reign without bounds was reserved

³⁹⁷Renan, *Vie* (1863), 4-5.

³⁹⁸Renan, *Vie* (1863), 5-6.

³⁹⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 6.

⁴⁰⁰Renan, *Vie* (1863), 7, with my emphasis.

⁴⁰¹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 7, emphasis mine.

to them, that one day Jerusalem would be the capital of the entire world and that the human race would make itself Jewish (*le genre humain se ferait juif*). Jerusalem and its temple appeared to them as a city placed on the summit of a mountain to which all the peoples of the world ought to flock, as an oracle from where the universal Law must go out, as the center of an ideal reign, where the human race, pacified by Israel, would rediscover the joys of Eden.⁴⁰²

Renan thus saw a connection between the Jews' resistance to imperial oppression and their proclivity to fanaticism and irrational eschatological *rêves* ("dreams") but also "day dream," "illusion." The Maccabean revolt (ca. 167-163 B.C.E.) was a prime example—and analogous to the same tendencies that Christians would indulge in and express during the persecutions of Nero some two centuries later; the former producing the first apocalyptic book, Daniel, and the latter the Apocalypse of John.⁴⁰³ Renan saw the Book of Daniel as the ultimate expression of the messianic hopes of the Jews, and suggested that its author expressed the ultimate transformation of Jewish conceptions of the messiah caused by the Maccabean revolt. Prior to the Maccabean revolt, the messiah was seen as a *human* king after the fashion of David, Solomon, or even Cyrus the Great. But during the conflict and after the Jewish *victory* over the pagan regime of Antiochus IV, the messiah was transformed into "a son of Man' appearing in the sky, a supernatural being, clothed with human appearance, commissioned to judge the world and to preside over the coming golden age."⁴⁰⁴ In Renan's estimation, the unknown author of the Book of Daniel marked the transition from the old prophets of Judaism to the "kingdom of God"—from religious *sentiment* to religious *empire*.⁴⁰⁵

It was a dangerous shift which Jesus *partly* inherited. Renan's Jesus—(and also that of orthodoxy)—fully adopted the "new" messianic conception of

⁴⁰²Renan, *Vie* (1863), 7-8, with my emphasis.

⁴⁰³Renan, *Vie* (1863), 14.

⁴⁰⁴Renan, *Vie* (1863), 15.

⁴⁰⁵Cf. Renan, *Vie* (1863), 15.

the mysterious “son of Man” of Daniel 7 who, along with the “Ancient of Days,” would in the “last days” replace the destructive and beastly reign of pagan empire with his own.⁴⁰⁶ And, consonant with orthodoxy, Renan’s Jesus also eschewed violence against the pagans as a means of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. (Significantly, however, *unlike* the New Testament accounts, Renan’s Jesus, as will be seen below, was totally *apolitical*; his Jesus *did not* “have *all* authority in heaven *and on earth*” [Matt. 28:18, NET, with my emphasis]).⁴⁰⁷ However many of Jesus’ fellow-Jews were beguiled by the political messianism expressed in the Book of Daniel, and by the time of the Roman dominance of Judea, this had produced in the *zélateurs du mosaïsme*⁴⁰⁸ an “extraordinary contempt for life, or to say it better, a kind of appetite for death.”⁴⁰⁹ This was one of Renan’s major points in chapter IV of the *Vie*—“The Order of Ideas Which Surrounded the Development of Jesus.” Here Renan posited a dialectic/dichotomy between the nihilism of irrational Jewish political messianism and the benign, rational (and perhaps at times tyrannical) empire of the Romans. And after recounting numerous failed Jewish revolts against the Romans, Renan made a connection with the contemporary heirs of the Semites and Indo-Europeans in North Africa—that is, the Muslims of Algeria vis-à-vis the French Empire. Writing of the similarities between the doomed fanaticisms of first-century Jewish rebels to that of Islamic resistance to French power in Algeria, Renan stated,

Experience counts for nothing within these great fanatical movements. Algeria, from the beginning of French occupation, witnessed each spring some prophets which declared themselves invulnerable and envoys of God

⁴⁰⁶Cf. Renan, *Vie* (1863), 38.

⁴⁰⁷For the New Testament’s portrayal of Jesus’ political relevance in his day and ours, see (among many others) Matt. 2:13-23; 22:15-22; Lk. 2:13-14; Jn. 18:4-6; 18:28-19:16; Phil. 2:10-11; the entire Book of Revelation). N. T. Wright also emphasizes this in his “historical Jesus”; see his *Jesus and the Victory of God* (1996) and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003), volumes 2 and 3 of his *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press).

⁴⁰⁸Renan, *Vie* (1863), 58.

⁴⁰⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 62.

for the chastisement of the infidels; the following year, their death was forgotten and their successor found no less faith.⁴¹⁰

The historical lesson that Renan taught here was that Semitic irrationalism had survived into the Modern world, and, just as in the first century C.E., was *still* being crushed through the power of Indo-European rational States. Unlike his *race*, Renan pointed out that Jesus had presented no such problem for Pagan Empire: “Within his itinerant career, one does not see a single time Jesus having been troubled by the police.”⁴¹¹ Yet this was in part due to the internal dialectic Renan saw within Jewish culture between Galilee in the north, and Jerusalem and Judea in the south.

3.3. Renan’s Dialectic: Galilee versus Jerusalem

Renan found Jesus encircled geographically, politically, and theologically: to the North of Nazareth lay Hermon and Caesarea Philipi, centers of pagan empire; to the South beyond the mountains of Samaria lay “sorrowful Judea, dried up as by a scorching wind of abstraction and death.”⁴¹² Jesus, Renan pointed out, spent the majority of his life within the “enchanted circle” of Nazareth/Galilee, the “cradle of the Kingdom of God,” shielded from pagan empire on the one hand and the theological abstraction and nihilism of his fellow Jews on the other.⁴¹³

Renan made much of what he saw as the dialectical tension between the Galilean *liberté* of the north versus the Judean *messianisme* of the south. It had produced in the “Hebraic nation” a fecundity of moral thought characteristic of “every people called to a high destiny.”⁴¹⁴ In this the Jews mirrored the creative tension in Greece between Sparta and Athens, which were “rival sisters necessary

⁴¹⁰Renan, *Vie* (1863), 62.

⁴¹¹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 62.

⁴¹²Renan, *Vie* (1863), 28.

⁴¹³Renan, *Vie* (1863), 28.

⁴¹⁴Renan, *Vie* (1863), 62, 63.

to one another.”⁴¹⁵ Renan latently related Athens to Galilee, and Sparta to Jerusalem. It was not Jerusalem which had “conquered humanity”—just as Sparta had not through its martial philosophy been able to mould the Western mind.⁴¹⁶ Rather it was Galilee—“the north”—(as Athens in relation to the Peloponnesus)—which *alone* had “created Christianity” (“*Le nord seul a fait le christianisme*”) and thus had left an indelible mark on the world.⁴¹⁷ Renan (perhaps unconsciously) portrayed Jesus as the product of a bucolic Jewish version of Athens situated in the hills of Galilee. Renan’s historical Jesus, the product of a *re-presented* Galilean Athens, became the Jewish Socrates. And here Renan also revealed his antipathy for Judaism in intensifying the historical dialectical conflict between Judaism and Christianity through his anthropological geography: “Jerusalem, to the contrary, is the true country of the obstinate Judaism (*judaisme obstiné*) which, founded by the Pharisees, codified by the Talmud, has traversed the Middle Ages and has come down even to us.”⁴¹⁸

At the same time, Renan concluded that Jesus, like Buddha, Zoroaster, and Plato, conformed his teachings to the “instincts and needs of the heart” of *his* people and *their* specific historical context.⁴¹⁹ However, the religion (or philosophy?⁴²⁰) Jesus produced was clearly *distinct from Judaism*. In contemplating how Jesus as a Jew could produce a religion that was at once universal and like every other product of human culture *except* that of his own race, Renan asked,

Is it more just to say that Jesus owes all to Judaism and that his greatness is nothing other than that of the Jewish people? No one is more disposed

⁴¹⁵Renan, *Vie* (1863), 63.

⁴¹⁶Cf. Renan, *Vie* (1863), 63-64.

⁴¹⁷Renan, *Vie* (1863), 64.

⁴¹⁸Renan, *Vie* (1863), 64.

⁴¹⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 454-455.

⁴²⁰Renan after all places Jesus, with the exception of Zoroaster, in the company of philosophers here.

to place high this unique people, whose particular gift seems to have been in containing in its bosom the extremes of good and evil.⁴²¹

It was in actuality a rhetorical question; again, Renan placed Jesus in the context of other historical figures to illustrate his point that Jesus *did not* owe the genius of his religion to his own people. Jesus had indeed come out of Judaism, but only as a *reactionary* in the same way that Socrates had come out of Greek Sophism, as Luther from late medieval scholasticism, or Rousseau from 18th century Enlightenment thought.⁴²² On the one hand, nobody could escape their age and race—“One is from his age and his race, even when one reacts against his age and his race.”⁴²³ Yet Renan emphasized that Jesus represented the antithesis to Judaism; it was in this context that he stated that Jesus was “far from. . .being the continuator of Judaism” and that he represented “the rupture with the Jewish spirit.”⁴²⁴ Moreover, following *Jesus’* lead, the historical development of Christianity had increasingly been away from its Jewish roots. Indeed, Christianity’s “perfection” (apparently in the Modern Reformation age) consisted not in returning to Judaism, but “to Jesus.”⁴²⁵ Renan’s historical Jesus was thus *himself* anti-Jewish. And in his treatment of Jesus’ arrest and trial, Renan revealed *his* anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic tendencies.

3.4. “Let His Blood Be On Us”: Renan and the “Enemies of Jesus”

Renan’s view of an original dialectical and violent conflict between Judaism and Christianity was most explicitly revealed in his reading of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Read in the light of Schleiermacher and Strauss’ accounts (see Chapter 1, pgs. 41-62), Renan’s is remarkably *passionate*, belying a critical blind-spot in Enlightenment notions of objectivity: while *love*

⁴²¹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 455.

⁴²²Renan, *Vie* (1863), 455.

⁴²³Renan, *Vie* (1863), 455.

⁴²⁴Renan, *Vie* (1863), 455.

⁴²⁵Renan, *Vie* (1863), 455.

for one's subject matter was always to be guarded against, *antipathy* was often not, and particularly antipathy against those perceived as embodying threats to the Enlightenment itself. This may be seen as the great flaw of Renan's interpretation of Jesus' conflict with Jewish and Roman authorities. He projected the Enlightenment's political theology onto Roman Judea: Rome became the tolerant, *secular*, civil power; Annas, Caiphas, and the Jewish priesthood became the seditious fanatics dedicated to the overthrow of secular reason, order, and civilization. Jesus became the victim of the latter's refusal to follow *either* Rome or Jesus' enlightened paths. And of the two groups, Renan emphasized that the most implacable "*enemies* of Jesus" (see the title of Chapter XXVII) were the Jews.

The Romans were, in Renan's estimation, essentially secular—largely aloof from religious matters—and yet, being a "political people," they lent semi-official support for the "confounded" religious and civil laws of the Jews; this was how the Romans found themselves involved in the arrest and trial of Jesus.⁴²⁶ Renan found this similar to Europe's post-Enlightenment imperial regimes' experiences in the Orient:

Although neutral in religion, the Romans sanctioned thus very often some penalties against religious offenses. The situation was somewhat similar to the holy cities of India under English domination, or better yet of that state which Damascus would be the following day if Syria were to be conquered by a European nation.⁴²⁷

The latter statement came from Renan's personal experiences as a part of the French intervention in Syria during the eruption of ethnic violence between Christians and Muslims in Ottoman "Phoenicia". (This was the context of Renan's "scientific mission" there as a member of the *Académie des Inscriptions* in 1860 and 1861-62; Renan was protected in his work by Napoleon III's army

⁴²⁶Renan, *Vie* (1863), 398.

⁴²⁷Renan, *Vie* (1863), 398-399.

and navy.)⁴²⁸ Renan's implicit argument was that Western Enlightenment rule (whether Ancient or Modern) was more just than Eastern Theocratic rule, whether under the Jews or the ". . .Arabs of Algeria . . . ruled by the code of Islam."⁴²⁹ Pilate, Renan speculated, probably viewed the Jews in the way "liberal prefect[s]" in France used to view the *Bas-Bretons*, who would revolt against the building of a new road or a new school; it was the Jews' own Law that was the main obstacle to Pilate/Rome's attempts to improve the infrastructure of the country—just as Islamic *Shari 'a* impeded French improvements in Algeria in Renan's day (cf. above, pgs. 110-111).⁴³⁰

Contrary to Schleiermacher's assessment of Pilate's culpability in Jesus' death, Renan took pains to exonerate the representative of Roman justice. It was certainly true that Pilate did not love the Jews; but the Jews' hatred (*détestaient*) for Rome and its rule was greater.⁴³¹ In Renan's interpretation, the Jews were convinced that Pilate was determined to abolish the Jewish Law. "Their narrow fanaticism, their religious hatreds shocked [the] broad feeling of justice and civil government that the most mediocre Roman carried with him everywhere."⁴³² Pilate had no wish to play a part in the Jewish leaders' plot to kill Jesus; he hated their Law and actually wished to save Jesus.⁴³³ In perhaps what was a self-

⁴²⁸See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, First Complete Edition, ed. John Bowden; trans. W. Montgomery, J. R. Coates, Susan Cupitt, and John Bowden (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 158; Renan, *Vie*, (1863), liii; and for context of the French intervention in Syria, Arthur Goldschmidt, Jr. *A Concise History of the Middle East*, 6th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 140-41; 257. In November 1860 Renan wrote of the helpfulness of the French Army and Navy in aiding him in his work: "My mission is getting on perfectly; we are going to make excavations on a large scale, in company with the army. The naval authorities are also very obliging, and have, with great kindness, placed a steamer at my disposal." (Renan to M. Berthelot, 9 November 1860, in Ernest Renan, *Letters From the Holy Land*, trans. Lorenzo O'Rourke (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1904, 148).

⁴²⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 398.

⁴³⁰Renan, *Vie* (1863), 401, 402.

⁴³¹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 400.

⁴³²Renan, *Vie* (1863), 401.

⁴³³Renan, *Vie* (1863), 402, 403.

projection, Renan speculated that Pilate must have found Jesus “an inoffensive dreamer” and as such no threat to secular order.⁴³⁴ Rather, according to Renan, Pilate knew that when “religious fanaticism” was able to “obtain the violence of civil governments”, it was then the first to blame the State for its use of force.⁴³⁵ Renan then offered his own judgment: “Supreme injustice; for the true culprit, in such cases, is the instigator!”⁴³⁶

Yet, fearing for his position, and the Jews’ accusation that Jesus was an insurgent “King of the Jews” opposed to Roman rule, Pilate gave into the Jews’ demands for the life of Jesus, and cast upon them all the responsibility for the future consequences of *their* complicity in the death of Jesus. Here Renan brought up the notorious “blood guilt” verse of Matthew 27:25. “[These consequences], according to the report of the Christians, [the Jews] would have fully accepted, in crying out themselves: ‘Let his blood fall on us and on our children!’”⁴³⁷ Like Strauss (see above, Chapter 1, pgs. 56-57), Renan did not find Matt. 27:25 historical; yet, un-like both Schleiermacher and Strauss, Renan believed it *did* express “a profound historical truth.”⁴³⁸ And this was the truth: *the Jews’* “religious intolerance” had “forced the hand of the civil power!”⁴³⁹ Renan was quite emphatic on this point. “The ‘secular arm,’ behind which the clerical cruelty hides, is not culpable. No one may say that he has horror of blood, when he pours it out for his servants.”⁴⁴⁰ In Renan’s court of Enlightenment historical judgment, Pilate and Roman Imperium should be exonerated for the death of Jesus; the same did not apply to Judaism and its

⁴³⁴Renan, *Vie* (1863), 404.

⁴³⁵Renan, *Vie* (1863), 402.

⁴³⁶Renan, *Vie* (1863), 402.

⁴³⁷Renan, *Vie* (1863), 410.

⁴³⁸Renan, *Vie* (1863), 410.

⁴³⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 410.

⁴⁴⁰Renan, *Vie* (1863), 410-411.

leaders: “It was, then, neither Tiberius nor Pilate which condemned Jesus. It was the old Jewish party; it was the Mosaic law.”⁴⁴¹

Thus the bulk of Renan’s energy was spent in condemning Annas, a part of the “old Jewish party,” and the father-in-law of the Jewish High Priest Caiaphas, under whom Jesus’ trial in the Sanhedrin took place. This is rather curious considering that Annas is only mentioned four times in the New Testament, with only two of these references (John 18:13, 24) directly relating to Jesus’ trial.⁴⁴² However according to Renan, Annas had complete religious authority, and speculated that the order for Jesus’ arrest probably came from him.⁴⁴³ Notably, again in contrast to Schleiermacher and Strauss, Renan used the term “murder” in referring to Annas’ role in Jesus’ death: he was the “true author of the juridical murder (*meurtre juridique*)” of Jesus, yet lacked the actual power to have him put to death (hence his turning of Jesus over to the High Priest Caiaphas).⁴⁴⁴ Concerning Caiaphas himself, Renan judged that he was merely the “blind tool” of Annas.⁴⁴⁵ In sum, Renan concluded that the Sanhedrin’s death sentence against Jesus was pronounced with a careless disdain; he mused that the members of the court could never have imagined that their sons would have to give an account to an “angry posterity” for the results of their fathers’ laxity.⁴⁴⁶

In the *Vie* Renan wrestled with the historical consequences of Jesus’ crucifixion for both Judaism and the Modern State. On the one hand he noted that modern thought no longer imputed “moral demerit” for the crimes of the father against the son; each must now answer to human and divine justice for their

⁴⁴¹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 411.

⁴⁴²The other two mentions of Annas occur in Luke 3:2 and Acts 4:6.

⁴⁴³Renan, *Vie* (1863), 394.

⁴⁴⁴Renan, *Vie* (1863), 396.

⁴⁴⁵Renan, *Vie* (1863), 396.

⁴⁴⁶Renan, *Vie* (1863), 397.

individual acts.⁴⁴⁷ Hence contemporary Jews could rightly protest against the blame for Jesus’ “murder” (*meurtre*), for perhaps they were descended from Simon of Cyrene, or “perhaps at least they were *not* among the crowd crying ““Crucify him!””⁴⁴⁸ And yet, “. . .[N]ations have their responsibilities as do individuals. *And if ever crime was the crime of a nation, it was the death of Jesus.*”⁴⁴⁹ Jesus had been tried and condemned by *his* nation for blasphemy—for claiming to be the *Jewish* messiah. In this regard Renan conceded that Jesus’ death *was* legal. The Mosaic prescription against blasphemy, with which the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus before Pilate, was, in his words, “. . .the very soul of the nation.”⁴⁵⁰ From this perspective the Jews’ actions against Jesus made perfect sense, for Jesus had

. . .without doubt attacked the [Mosaic] cult and aspired to destroy it. The Jews said to Pilate with a frankness simple and true: ‘We have a Law, and according to this Law he ought to die; for he makes himself the Son of God’ [Jn. 19:7]. *The law was detestable; but this was the law of ancient ferocity*, and the hero who offered himself up to abrogate it must first submit everything to it.⁴⁵¹

Once again, Renan’s poor historical analysis (exemplified here by his modern projection of post-Reformation Protestant antipathies towards “external” religious rites of Judaism (and Catholicism) onto a first-century milieu in which the distinctions between “Judaism” and “Christianity” were not so clear⁴⁵²), combined with heretical theology, produced a dangerous sophism. The sophism can be seen when comparing Renan’s analysis to the primary text(s) of the New Testament. According to Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus made a rather programmatic statement early in his ministry concerning his position towards the Mosaic Law:

⁴⁴⁷Renan, *Vie* (1863), 411.

⁴⁴⁸Renan, *Vie* (1863), 411, with my emphasis.

⁴⁴⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 411, my emphasis.

⁴⁵⁰Renan, *Vie* (1863), 411.

⁴⁵¹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 411-412, with my emphasis.

⁴⁵²See for example, Galatians, Romans 9-11, Hebrews, James 2:14-26, and the Didache.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish these things but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth pass away not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter will pass from the law until everything takes place” (Matt. 5:17-18, NET).⁴⁵³ The danger can be seen in Hitler’s theology as expressed in his speech in Munich in 1922:

*. . . my feeling as a Christian points me to my Lord and Savior as fighter. It points me to the man who once in loneliness, surrounded only by a few followers, recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to the fight against them and who, God’s truth! was greatest not as sufferer but as fighter. . .*⁴⁵⁴

Yet unlike Hitler, Renan *seemed* to advocate tolerance for those with differing religious views than his. In fact he concluded his chapter on Jesus’ arrest and trial by lamenting that it had taken eighteen centuries for Jesus’ blood sacrifice to bear its fruit of enlightenment and tolerance. He was disgusted that the intervening eighteen centuries had witnessed the torture and death of thinkers as noble as Jesus in the name of the great teacher from Nazareth.⁴⁵⁵ Still, there was for Renan an important distinction to be made between Christianity and Judaism in this regard: “Christianity has been intolerant; but intolerance is not essentially a Christian fact. *It is essentially a Jewish fact. . .*”⁴⁵⁶ Judaism was the first faith to posit the Absolute in religion. It was also the first to condemn absolutely—to the point of death—any innovator which deviated from the already received divine law (citing Deut. 13:1 ff.).⁴⁵⁷ To be sure, the pagan world had also had its share of religious violence, but then, in a strange question, Renan asked, “But if it had had this law [the Mosaic law], how would it become Christian?”⁴⁵⁸ No, “The Pentateuch has thus been in the world the first code of

⁴⁵³Cf. Luke 16:16-17; 24:44-47.

⁴⁵⁴Quoted in Bucher, *Hitler’s Theology*, 77, with Bucher’s emphasis.

⁴⁵⁵Renan, *Vie* (1863), 412.

⁴⁵⁶Renan, *Vie* (1863), 412, with my emphasis.

⁴⁵⁷Renan, *Vie* (1863), 412.

⁴⁵⁸Renan, *Vie* (1863), 412.

religious terror. Judaism has given the example of an immutable dogma, armed with the sword.”⁴⁵⁹ For Renan, Judaism was *the* counter-revolutionary movement to Enlightenment Modernity that had displayed its own code of political terror, with the most conspicuous example being its murder of Jesus. The chapter then ended with another dangerous sophism:

If, instead of pursuing the Jews from a blind hatred, *Christianity had abolished the regime which had killed its founder*, how much more of consequence, how much better it had deserved of the human race!⁴⁶⁰

The first clause appears to condemn the Christian history of violence against “the Jews”—against the race. Yet throughout the entire chapter Renan argued that “the regime” which killed Jesus *was Jewish*—made up of Jewish leaders (e.g., Annas, Caiaphas), enforcing the “soul of the nation” which was the Mosaic Law. Thus by the end of the sentence Renan wished for the complete abolition of *Judaism*. Renan *does not* here call for genocide of the Jewish race. However, given the connections Renan made between geography, culture, and race elsewhere in his writings—e.g. “[T]he desert is monotheistic; sublime in its immense uniformity, it revealed at first sight to Man the idea of the infinite, but not the feeling of this incessantly creative life which a nature more fecund has inspired in other races” (from *Histoire générale des langues sémitiques*, 1855)⁴⁶¹—his statement is indicative of the perilous “slippages” in anti-Judaic/anti-Jewish/anti-Semitic language and thought that Susannah Heschel rightly identifies as contributing to the Nazi ideology that made the Holocaust possible.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹Renan, *Vie* (1863), 412-413.

⁴⁶⁰Renan, *Vie* (1863), 413, with my emphasis.

⁴⁶¹Quoted in Renan, *Histoire des origines du christianisme*, xix.

⁴⁶²See Susannah Heschel, “Historiography of Anti-Semitism versus Anti-Judaism: A Response to Robert Morgan,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 3 (2011), 258. Questioning Morgan’s call for a distinction between “anti-Judaism” and “anti-Semitism,” Heschel writes: “How, for example, ought we to understand the mixture of Scripture and murder in this 1936 statement of Siegfried Leffler, one of the leaders of the German Christian Movement: ‘Even if I know ‘thou shalt not kill’ is a commandment of God or ‘thou shalt love the Jew’ because he too is

As alluded to above, in addition to the consequences of Jesus' crucifixion for Jews and Judaism, Renan also pondered the results that Jesus' execution had wrought in the development of the Modern State. A key theme in Renan's thought concerning both of these topics—that of Judaism and the State—was the notion of “the times of the great Christian revenges” (*le temps des grandes vengeances chrétiennes*).⁴⁶³ Renan's interpretation here is highly questionable; revenge/vengeance has never been a *Christian* virtue (cf. Deut. 32:35 and Romans 12:19), and when “Christian” kings, armies, or individuals have exercised revenge, they have done so in contradiction to their own scriptures. Nevertheless, to Renan, Christianity's greatest revenge came against the State itself. Even though the Roman “civil power” was “innocent in the death of Jesus” (Pilate having signed his death warrant against his will), the official Roman sanction and execution of Jesus' death sentence merited blame for the greatest miscarriage of justice in world history. In presiding over Calvary, “the State had given itself the gravest wound.”⁴⁶⁴ This facilitated the spread of a legend “full of all kinds of irreverence” where Roman judges and police had united “against the truth” to effect a most odious offence.⁴⁶⁵ In Renan's estimation this was a most dangerous legend:

Seditious to the highest degree, the history of the Passion, propagated by thousands of popular images, showed the Roman eagles sanctioning the most iniquitous of executions, the soldiers carrying it out, a prefect ordering it. *What a blow to all established powers!* They have never

a child of the eternal Father, I am able to know as well that I have to kill him, I have to shoot him, and I can only do that if I am permitted to say: Christ.' In Morgan's terms, is Leffler's statement an example of Christian theological anti-Judaism? Cultural antisemitism? Theological antisemitism? How is this taxonomy useful to historians?" (258-259). Heschel's question is prescient, but I would dare offer other terms for characterizing Leffler's statement: heretical and satanic. I am well aware that these too “[run] counter to current academic approaches” (258), but if my thesis that the loss and rejection in Modern (post Enlightenment) Academia of an epistemology and ontology based on the mystical Christo-Ecclesiology of orthodoxy helped produce the “slippages” that Heschel identifies, I do not think my terms unwarranted. This will be a central focus in the conclusion to the dissertation.

⁴⁶³Renan, *Vie* (1863), 439.

⁴⁶⁴Renan, *Vie* (1863), 440.

⁴⁶⁵Renan, *Vie* (1863), 440.

recovered well. How can they receive from the regard of poor people an air of infallibility when they have on their conscience the great mistake of Gethsemane?⁴⁶⁶

Renan noted that this “popular attitude” persisted even to the days of his youth in Brittany: the *gendarme*, “as the Jew elsewhere,” was viewed with “a kind of pious repulsion; for it was he who arrested Jesus!”⁴⁶⁷ Thus in the *Vie* Renan expressed latently what is explicit in *La réforme intellectuelle et morale*: the Church (and *its* Gospels) were the great enemy to the State and social stability. One can also detect here a Gnostic disdain for the vulgar masses, for those un-enlightened (and perhaps un-enlightenable) to the true nature of the historical Jesus and historical church which fostered such pernicious legends. Notably, Renan’s disdain was only for the popular acceptance of Church dogma regarding the former’s superiority to the State. He had *nothing* to say against the popular anti-Judaism/Semitism expressed in the Brittany of his youth.

In sum, Renan not only saw Judaism but orthodox Christianity as the great counter-revolutionary antagonists to his Enlightenment Jesus and the Liberal “religion-less” political theology which Renan attributed to him. But as was seen in the previous chapter, Renan was a “critical liberal”⁴⁶⁸ (37; 42-44)—especially after France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War—who wished to see the restoration in France of a strong, centralized State which would encourage and also be sustained by the imperium of Modern Science. Renan and his *Vie de Jésus* would, he hoped, play an important role in the formation of this new *avant-garde* Modernity. This is why Ernst Nolte in his *Three Faces of Fascism* included Renan in his genealogy of the Modern thinkers who wished to establish

⁴⁶⁶Renan, *Vie* (1863), 440-441, with my emphasis.

⁴⁶⁷Renan, *Vie* (1863), 441.

⁴⁶⁸This is Ernst Nolte’s characterization of Renan (and August Comte, Frédéric Le Play, Hippolyte Taine, and Fustel de Coulanges)—all intellectual forerunners and “teachers” of Charles Maurras, the founder of the first Fascist political party, *La Action Française*. See Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 37; 42-44. In Nolte’s reading, all these men wished to posit a counter Modernity to the one ushered in by the French Revolution.

through revolutionary means (in Renan's case through revolutionary historical-theological research) a *counter Modernity*, or perhaps better, a kind of *hyper Modernity* that would supersede liberalism, socialism, and most especially orthodox Judaism and Christianity.⁴⁶⁹ Furthermore, Renan's critical life of Jesus opened the path way for other "critical liberals" of the early 20th century, such as Germany's Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, Professor of Religious Studies and Indology at the universities of Tübingen and Marburg, and "'prophet and leader'" under the Nazis of the German Faith Movement.⁴⁷⁰

3.5. Critical Liberal Theology and the Nazis: Jacob Wilhelm Hauer's German Faith Movement

One of the more powerful (and controversial) theses of Karla Poewe's *New Religions and the Nazis* is that the anti-Semitism of German National Socialism *did not* originate from Christianity.⁴⁷¹ She demonstrates this through her examination of the life and work of Jakob Wilhelm Hauer, whose synthesis of neo-Pagan and Hindu philosophy and theology became the basis of the German Faith Movement he founded in 1933. Poewe also demonstrates that Hauer's path to the German Faith Movement began with his *liberal* academic theology—that is, the scientific study of Christianity and Judaism *free* from faith and *love*—the same path taken by Renan a generation earlier. While Poewe did not find any instances where Hauer directly referenced Renan or his work, she does note that Renan "fit into the *völkish* phenomenon, which however soon moved beyond him in the more radical direction as seen in the constructions used by 'German-Christians' (*Deutsche Christen*) and beyond that into the worldview paradigm of for example the SS."⁴⁷² Politically there were parallels between Renan's life and

⁴⁶⁹This is the core of Nolte's thesis concerning the rise of Fascism: it was a revolutionary movement *against* revolution; specifically the revolutionary Liberal and Marxist "modernities" which Fascists believed were the fruition of the French Revolution. See *ibid.*, 6, 20-21, 37-53. In the Fascist movements' wish to create a new Modernity, I see them as "hyper."

⁴⁷⁰Poewe, *New Religions*, 18.

⁴⁷¹Poewe, *New Religions*, 8, 14, 63, 142-143, 170-171.

⁴⁷²Karla Poewe, e-mail message to author, 6 January 2014.

Hauer's as well. In his day Renan attached his hopes for a new enlightened world to a revived scientific monarch in France; Hauer saw in Hitler and National Socialism the political form which would complete *his* German Faith Movement and the eradication of what Hauer would have called "the Church and Jewish Problem."⁴⁷³ He was drawn to Hitler precisely because he correctly perceived that the *Führer* was not Christian.⁴⁷⁴ And like Renan, Hauer's intellectual work began with a loss of faith and inability to participate in the love of the Teacher from Nazareth.

From 1900 to 1911 Hauer was a missionary with the Basel Mission Society, and it was through this that he came to India and was exposed to Hindu theology from 1907 to 1911. It was during his time as a missionary that he also lost his faith through a combination of reading Nietzsche, the *Apologia of Socrates*, and most especially the *Bhagavad-Gita*.⁴⁷⁵ However, like Renan, Hauer never lost his admiration for Jesus as a *man*, although that admiration was always on *Hauer's* own terms. Thus after forming the German Faith Movement, he could write to a pastor that "Jesus is a brother and comrade in the fight for a free faith. . .but in the form of a German Faith. . .I am *a free man*. *I am also free to decide against* [Christ's] *word and commands when they do not mesh with my sense of inner necessity*."⁴⁷⁶ Writing publicly in 1935, however, Hauer was more blunt: "in reality I have never been a Christian."⁴⁷⁷ This became apparent in his German Faith.

In January 1934 Hauer described the "concrete content" of the German Faith in the inaugural issue of the movement's flagship journal, *Deutscher Glaube*. At the center of the German Faith was what Hauer called the "*Volk's*

⁴⁷³Poewe, *New Religions*, 102; 137-139.

⁴⁷⁴Poewe, *New Religions*, 97.

⁴⁷⁵Poewe, *New Religions*, 28, 32, 65.

⁴⁷⁶Quoted in Poewe, *New Religions*, 122, with my emphasis.

⁴⁷⁷Quoted in Poewe, *New Religions*, 122.

religious *Urwille*”—the primal will of the pre-Christian German *Volk* that revealed itself mysteriously through “inner prompting(s),” or through the thoughts of Germany’s great philosophers. The *Urwille* was the “only *Führer* who works within our own soul” and whom adherents to the German Faith were “unconditionally bound.”⁴⁷⁸ The faith in the *Urwille* was connected to a *völkisch*, neo-Pagan worship of German land and German people: “For us there is no higher revelation of the eternal reality than that found within German space and coming from the German soul.”⁴⁷⁹ In the same issue Hauer radically echoed Renan’s distinction between Semitic and Aryan races and religions:

. . .one can safely talk about an Indo-Germanic Faith and contrast it with the Israelite-Jewish-Christian one that was born and formed in the Near-Asian-Semitic space. . .[it is not saying too much] when we claim that the *battle between these two faith-worlds*, the Near-Asian-Semitic-Christian and the Indo-Germanic ones, is the real topic of religious world history.⁴⁸⁰

For those with ears to hear, these were prophetic words. Hauer himself was convinced that the German Faith Movement was “a phase of a several centuries-old battle between the Near-Eastern-Semitic and the Indo-Germanic world. Only in terms of this relationship can the historical meaning of the German Faith movement be clearly understood.”⁴⁸¹ He was also convinced that

German Faith of necessity demands the National Socialistic worldview, that therefore every German Faithler [sic] must be a National Socialist . . .Likewise, I am convinced that the National Socialistic worldview, when it is understood and lived in depth, leads to German Faith.⁴⁸²

Poewe emphasizes that Hauer was able to *construct* his new faith based on his practice of liberal theology, beginning with his clandestine reading while at the Basel Mission of Adolf Harnack’s *What is Christianity*—a book which the

⁴⁷⁸Poewe, *New Religions*, 75-76.

⁴⁷⁹Quoted in Poewe, *New Religions*, 76.

⁴⁸⁰Poewe, *New Religions*, 72, emphasis mine.

⁴⁸¹Quoted in Poewe, *New Religions*, 92.

⁴⁸²Quoted in Poewe, *New Religions*, 23.

Nazis praised as a “freer and livelier conception of theology,” but which the mission regarded as heretical for its denial of the Godhead of Christ and its hostility to theology itself.⁴⁸³ The attraction of liberal academic theology for Hauer was its ability to open up new horizons of thought, belief, and practice—and to free the world from the constraints of outworn Christian orthodoxy and *its* basis in Jewish orthodoxy.⁴⁸⁴ And like Renan before him, Hauer through his scientific study of religion came to reject Jesus’ Jewish origins. Describing the place of Jesus within his German Faith, Hauer wrote, “. . .we *can* affirm the *primal force* in Jesus. The religious culture within which Jesus is wrapped *and that especially weighs down the history of his church, we have to, or at least I have to, reject.*”⁴⁸⁵ Poewe helpfully clarifies what Hauer meant by Jesus’ and the church’s “religious culture”—the Jewish theological concepts of salvation and guilt. She also plainly states why Hauer rejected these: they went against the social Darwinism and anti-Semitism of the German Faith.⁴⁸⁶ Salvation and guilt also posed a fundamental challenge to Modern Liberalism’s faith in autonomy. Jesus as the Crucified, Resurrected, and Returning Messiah was a constant reminder of the radicality of Genesis 3, and the autonomy destroying implications of *ex nihilo* creation as alluded to in Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning, *God* created the heavens and the earth” (NET).

More so than Renan, Hauer merged his academic and political praxis. Hauer was an early member of the Nazi party, and around 1933 joined the SS for roughly three years.⁴⁸⁷ He noted to his immediate superior in the SS, Werner Best, that as early as 1929 he had tried to prevent a “baptized Christian” of Jewish descent from obtaining a post at Tübingen University. “Unfortunately,” he wrote,

⁴⁸³Poewe, *New Religions*, 29.

⁴⁸⁴Poewe, *New Religions*, 12, 21.

⁴⁸⁵Quoted in Poewe, *New Religions*, 69, with my emphasis.

⁴⁸⁶Poewe, *New Religions*, 69.

⁴⁸⁷Poewe notes that Hauer did not get along well with the SS leadership—particularly Himmler, Heydrich and Wüst. By 1936 they demanded his resignation. See *ibid.*, Chapter 9.

“I did not succeed then. The documentary evidence of my battle can be found in the files of the philosophical faculty.”⁴⁸⁸ Hauer did not go far as to support the murder of Jews, but he did believe that some radical solution was needed in order to rid Germany of all Jews. (This was the rationale behind his rather paradoxical/ironic support of Zionism).⁴⁸⁹ However, at least one of his students, Paul Zapp, did participate directly in Nazi atrocities. At his trial for the murder of 13,499 people in the Ukraine during the war, Zapp argued in his defense that he had committed the crimes as a result of carrying out what he had learned from Hauer.⁴⁹⁰ It is a sobering reminder of the real-world importance of “higher education” in the modern age.

3.6. *The Aryan Jesus Controversy: Ernest Renan, Walter Grundmann, and Christian Anti-Semitism*

In *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* Susannah Heschel notes that it was Renan’s philological and historical studies of Judaism and Christianity that provided the “indispensable” vocabulary necessary to subsequent racializations of Jesus.⁴⁹¹ Heschel points out that as early as 1855 Renan had written that he was the first to recognize “that the Semitic race compared to the Indo-European race represents in reality an inferior composition of human nature.”⁴⁹² More specifically, she argues that it was Renan’s *Vie* that “brought race to the heart of Christian theology and the figure of Jesus”⁴⁹³ and that Renan had constructed a Jesus which had *overcome* his Jewishness.⁴⁹⁴ Heschel here quotes Renan’s remarkable statement in the *Vie* that, after visiting

⁴⁸⁸Quoted in Poewe, *New Religions*, 137-138.

⁴⁸⁹Poewe, *New Religions*, 137-139.

⁴⁹⁰Poewe, *New Religions*, 33.

⁴⁹¹Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 33.

⁴⁹²Quoted in Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 35.

⁴⁹³Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 34.

⁴⁹⁴Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 35, 38.

Jerusalem, Jesus “‘appears no more as Jewish reformer, but as a destroyer of Judaism. . .Jesus was no longer a Jew.’”⁴⁹⁵

However, Heschel also notes that by the 1920s and 1930s, there were problems with Renan’s non-Jewish Jesus among German academics who were constructing an Aryan Jesus based on the foundations laid by Renan. Particularly, Renan’s use of the “language of German romanticism that allowed him to appropriate feminine images to signal Jesus’ masculinity”—(e.g., Jesus as *Le charmant docteur*, as having a “ravishing face” [*une de ces ravissantes figures qui apparaissent quelquefois dans la race juive*]⁴⁹⁶)—was no longer appropriate for post-World War I German culture. In the stinging shadows of the Versailles Treaty, of the perceived impotency of Weimar democracy, and in the emerging flame of German National Socialism, a new, “tough, hard-hearted Jesus” was needed.⁴⁹⁷ This was provided, Heschel contends, by Walter Grundmann, who was Professor of the New Testament at Jena University, and, from 1939 to 1945, was academic director of The Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life. At the opening ceremony for the Institute, Grundmann delivered the keynote lecture entitled, “The Dejudaization of the Religious Life as the Task of German Theology and Church.” In the lecture Grundmann noted that even as Luther had once overcome Catholicism, German Christians (a pro-Nazi faction within the Protestant church in Germany), must now overcome Judaism.⁴⁹⁸ In this battle the Institute would continue the *avant-garde* New Testament scholarship which “had made apparent the ‘deformation of New Testament ideas into Old Testament preconceptions’” and thus eliminate the Jewish obstruction(s) which denied German Christians access to the Bible.⁴⁹⁹ The

⁴⁹⁵Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 35.

⁴⁹⁶Renan, *Vie* (1863), 219 and 80, respectively.

⁴⁹⁷Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 52-53.

⁴⁹⁸Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 2.

⁴⁹⁹Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 2.

Bible would have to be cleansed in order to reveal the historical truth about Jesus and his wish to see the destruction of Judaism. Heschel notes that for Grundmann this task was dire: following Nazi propaganda, he believed that the Jews had destroyed Germans' *völkisch* thinking, and through Bolshevism, threatened world domination. Thus for Grundmann, the battle against the Jews was both military and spiritual: "Jewish influence on all areas of German life, including on religious-church life, must be exposed and broken."⁵⁰⁰

According to Heschel, during its six-year existence Grundmann's Institute was widely successful in achieving support "from a host of church officials and theology professors" for its radical attempt to de-Judaize Christianity and form a Germanic, Aryan Christianity.⁵⁰¹ She argues that one reason for the success of the Institute was that it tapped into an already established well-spring of *Christian and Nazi anti-Semitism*. Heschel writes:

. . .while seeking to undermine the political power and moral authority of the churches, Nazism simultaneously appropriated *key elements* of Christian theology into its own ideology both for winning adherents used to Christian arguments [of anti-Semitism] and also to give its own message a coherence and resonance *with the age-old Christian teachings* that had shaped European culture. Conversely, German Christians appropriated Nazi rhetoric and symbols into the church to give its Christianity a contemporary resonance.⁵⁰²

Both Heschel's claims of the widespread influence of the Institute and her assertion of the Christian origins of Nazi anti-Semitism have been debated, and there is no need here for a recapitulation of Peter Head and Robert Morgan's lengthy critiques and rebuttals to *The Aryan Jesus* in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*.⁵⁰³ However I would like to question what Heschel means by

⁵⁰⁰Quoted in Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 2.

⁵⁰¹Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 1.

⁵⁰²Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 8-9, with my emphasis.

⁵⁰³See Peter Head, "Susannah Heschel's *The Aryan Jesus*: A Response," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32, no. 4 (2010): 421-430, and Robert Morgan, "Susannah Heschel's Aryan Grundmann," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32, no. 4 (2010): 431-494.

her frequent use of “Christian theologian,” “Christian theology,” and the “key teachings” of Christianity in connection to anti-Semitism in general, and Nazism in particular.⁵⁰⁴ Very questionable also is her assertion that Renan was a “*Catholic scholar*.”⁵⁰⁵ In sum, I am not convinced that Heschel’s approach to the problem of the “Fascist-Aryan Jesus” has sufficiently gone beyond the same Enlightenment epistemological and ontological *mathēsis* that helped to produce scholars like Renan, Hauer, and Grundmann; for her the problem of Nazi theology still seems to be one of *only* a gross misapprehension of the *facts* about Jesus and his roots. Not once does she entertain the possibility that the cataclysmic *intellectual* failure of academic theology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was the result of a profound *spiritual deprivation*. Thus in the conclusion to this dissertation, I shall attempt to answer the questions I have raised with Heschel’s theses and Renan’s *Vie* as a means of calling for a radical return within academic theology to what I have termed mystical Christo-Ecclesiology. For it is in this return that the non-loving Sophistry of the Modern Academy and the danger of producing academic “desk murderers”⁵⁰⁶ may be overcome.

⁵⁰⁴See Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 63, 8, and 23, respectively, and *passim*.

⁵⁰⁵Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 30, and see 36.

⁵⁰⁶Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 16-17.

Conclusion:
Overcoming “Desk Murder”: Mystagogy and The Good Teacher

In this dissertation I have sought to demonstrate that the connection between Renan’s “historical Jesus” and the later “Fascist-Academic Jesus” of the early 20th century runs through three systematically linked problems associated with the rise of modern secular rationality: first, the rejection of pre-modern mystical ontology and epistemology (as represented in the *Phaedrus*) in general, and specifically the mystical Christo-Ecclesiology of orthodoxy; second, a radical abstraction of Jesus from his Jewish and ecclesiological contexts which further amplified the dialectical conflict between Judaism and Christianity; and third, (perhaps the essence of the first two instances), the attempt to *re-present* and supplant pre-Modern orthodoxy’s understanding of Jesus of Nazareth and the social body he founded, the Church, through the positing of a “secular” messiah and de-mystified *ekkllesia*. In sum I have argued, using Renan’s de-mystified portrayal of Jesus, that the more scientific and rational the approach to understanding Jesus’ historical life became, the more susceptible he became to being co-opted and manipulated by the emerging anti-Judaic and anti-Semitic political theologies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was precisely the mystical *imprecision* practiced in the Pre-Modern Church—(what Nicholas of Cusa called the “cloud of unknowing” in his “historical Jesus” writing, *On the Vision of God*)⁵⁰⁷—which connected Jesus to Abraham in the past, the Church in the present, and all who would come into the “Israel of God” in the future, whether “Jew or Greek” (cf. John 8:31-58; Matt. 22:31-32; Romans 4-11; Galatians 6:16, 3:28; Hebrews 11-12:2). By contrast, it was the supposed precision of the Modern scientific gaze, un-clouded by love, which objectified Jesus and set him in dialectical opposition to the Jews and Judaism.

⁵⁰⁷See Nicholas of Cusa, “On the Vision of God,” 6.21 in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality, trans. H. Lawrence Bond (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1997), 244-245.

In this way my research supports Karla Poewe's theses that liberal theology,⁵⁰⁸ and, in Renan's case, his liberal, Enlightenment Jesus, opened the path for the heretical, neo-pagan "Aryan Jesus" of the Nazis. Renan's liberal theology produced a remarkable *fiction*: a Jesus who supported an *autonomous state* whose guarantee of "human rights" is based on nothing more than contract, human will, and ultimately, force. From my reading of the *Phaedrus*, I have argued that this liberal conception of Jesus was also sophistic, that is, it was based on a philosophy which radically separated loving from knowing, and knowing from mystical participation in the Divine. For indeed, the master key to Renan's liberation of Jesus was his faith in science and his Lysian *amour désintéressé* for "the pure idea."⁵⁰⁹ I argue (controversially to be sure) that Renan's participation in the *fiction* of an objective, non-loving rationality led to his construction of *fictions* about Jesus, for instance that his god and the god of the Jews was different.⁵¹⁰ Hauer, Grundmann, Hitler—each, in their own fashion, men devoted to a non-loving, non-participatory rationality—at least in regards to the Jesus of orthodoxy—but not to the gods of Science, Force, and War—later participated in and magnified these fictions about Jesus, as Hitler sophistically propounded in his Munich speech in 1932:

. . .my feeling as a Christian points me to my Lord and Savior as fighter. It points me to the man who once in loneliness, surrounded only by a few followers, recognized these Jews for what they were and summoned men to the fight against them and who, God's truth! was greatest not as *sufferer* but as *fighter*.⁵¹¹

Long ago Socrates warned of the danger to the *polis* sophistic "disinterested love-as-knowledge" could take. Speaking of Lysias' type of non-loving "objective" speech, Socrates asks Phaedrus:

⁵⁰⁸See Karla Poewe, *New Religions and the Nazis* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁰⁹Ernest Renan, *Vie de Jésus*, neuvième édition, *Histoire des origines du christianisme, livre premier* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1863), 451.

⁵¹⁰See Renan, *Vie*, 69-70.

⁵¹¹Quoted in Rainer Bucher, *Hitler's Theology: A Study in Political Religion*, trans. Rebecca Pohl, ed. Michael Hoelzl (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 77, with Bucher's emphasis.

. . . when the orator who does not know what good and evil are undertakes to persuade a state which is equally ignorant, not by praising the ‘shadow of an ass’ under the name of a horse, but *by praising evil under the name of good*, and having studied the opinions of the multitude persuades them to do evil instead of good, what harvest do you suppose his oratory will reap thereafter from the seed he has sown?⁵¹²

Phaedrus correctly responds, “No very good harvest.”⁵¹³ How true this was of the seeds sown by Renan, Hauer, Grundmann and that generation of non-loving, rational academics from the death of Schleiermacher to the birth of Bonhoeffer.

Again in line with Poewe and Rainer Bucher’s works, but against Susannah Heschel,⁵¹⁴ I have argued that Renan’s (and consequently later Nazi historians and theologians such as Hauer and Grundmann) anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism in no way stems from *orthodox* Christianity, but rather from their resurrection of Pagan sophism combined with Marcionite *heterodoxy*. As noted in my conclusion to Chapter 3, I find Heschel’s frequent use of “*Christian* theologian” and “*Christian* theology” problematic when referring to the theology and history produced by Renan and Grundmann. For instance, she makes a point of referring to Renan as a “Catholic” and to “many members” of Grundmann’s Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life as being “Protestants,” and implies an ecumenical link between the two groups based on an “anti-Semitism [that] was able to function as the common ground for Christians of different varieties and cultural contexts.”⁵¹⁵ While she does mention that Renan was “repudiated by the Roman Catholic Church for his writings and in doubt over his own faith,”⁵¹⁶ she does not mention that Renan *first*

⁵¹²Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 260, C, English, 515, 517, in *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), with my emphasis.

⁵¹³Plato, *Phaedrus*, Greek, 260, D, English, 517.

⁵¹⁴Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).

⁵¹⁵Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 36.

⁵¹⁶Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 36.

rejected the Church and its sacraments.⁵¹⁷ Thus in her presentation, Renan's anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism *appear* to stem from his supposedly Christian roots as a scholar.

But Heschel is wrong in presenting Renan in this way. This can be seen in her problematic quoting and editing of one of Renan's more remarkable anti-Judaic statements from the *Vie*. She writes:

For Renan. . .the fact that Jesus was born into a Jewish milieu and practiced Judaism proved his greatness: his ability to overcome his Jewishness. After visiting Jerusalem, Jesus [now quoting an English translation of the *Vie*⁵¹⁸] 'appears no more as a Jewish reformer, but as a destroyer of Judaism. . .Jesus was no longer a Jew.'⁵¹⁹

Yet contrary to Heschel's presentation of Renan in general—that he was in some way a Christian and that that produced such anti-Judaic remarks in the *Vie*—the passage Heschel quotes actually points to Renan's worship of *Enlightenment* ideals as the basis of his anti-Judaism. The problem is with Heschel's quotation of Renan out of context when he states that "Jesus was no longer a Jew." After discussing Jesus' antipathy for the Jewish Temple system of worship, Renan states:

This narrow Law, hard, without charity, is only made for the children of Abraham. Jesus claimed that every man of good will, every man who received and loved him, is [a] son of Abraham. The pride of blood appeared to him the capital enemy which he must combat. Jesus, in other terms, is no longer Jewish [*Jésus, en d'autres termes, n'est plus juif*].⁵²⁰

As is so often the case with Renan, his heterodoxy (the Law is only made for Jews—a contradiction of orthodoxy—see Matt. 5:17-18; Lk. 16:16-17; 24:44-47;

⁵¹⁷See Ernest Renan, *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, 28e éd. (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1897), 312.

⁵¹⁸Heschel quotes here Charles E. Wilbour's 1864 translation of the *Vie*, citing pages 206-207; see her bibliography, pg. 317.

⁵¹⁹Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 35.

⁵²⁰Renan, *Vie*, 222-223.

Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14⁵²¹) is mixed with orthodoxy—“every man who received and loved [Jesus], is a son of Abraham” (Renan correctly cites Lk. 19:9 here). Renan’s assertion that Jesus denied the importance of “the pride of blood” is correct and affirms the pre-Modern, *pre-racist*⁵²² orthodox belief that there is only *one race*—the *human race* (cf. Acts 17:26—“From *one man he made every nation of the human race* to inhabit the earth. . .” [*epoiēsen te ex henos pan ethnos anthrōpōn*], NET, with my emphasis). Yet his denial of Jesus’ Jewishness—(against the orthodoxy of John 4:21-22, NET—“Jesus said to her. . .salvation is from the Jews”)—his wish to make Jesus “white”—“beyond race”⁵²³—is completely heterodox and stems from his attachment to a post-Enlightenment conception of race. It was quite revolutionary, and, indeed, Renan continues by asserting that Jesus himself was revolutionary:

. . . Jesus, in other terms, is no longer Jewish. *He is revolutionary to the highest degree; he calls all men to a religion founded on their single quality as children of God. He proclaims the rights of man, not the rights of the Jew [Il proclame les droits de l’homme, non les droits du juif]; the religion of man, not the religion of the Jew [la religion de l’homme, non la religion du juif]; the deliverance of man, not the deliverance of the Jew [la délivrance de l’homme, non la délivrance du juif]. Ah! We are far from a Judas the Galilean, from a Mathias Margaloth, preaching revolution in the name of the Law! The religion of humanity, established not on blood, but on the heart, is founded. Moses is surpassed; the temple has no more reason for being and is irrevocably condemned.*⁵²⁴

⁵²¹The relationship between Christian praxis and “the Law” is, I realize, complex theologically and historically. Part of the problem is what is meant by “Law”—does it refer to the 600 plus laws found in the Tanakh by the Pharisees? to the “10 Commandments”? or, as Paul indicates in Romans 13:8-10 and Galatians 5:13-14—*love*? (On the latter point, cf. Deut. 6:4-5; 10:12; 11:1; Matt. 22:34-40; Mk. 12:28-34; Lk. 10:25-28).

⁵²²The concept of “race” and “races” was not invented by Western natural philosophers until around the 17th century. See George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1978).

⁵²³See Halvor Moxnes in *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth-Century Historical Jesus* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 145-147.

⁵²⁴Renan, *Vie*, 223, with my emphasis.

Heschel's failure to consider and quote the entirety of this passage obscures the fact that the basis of Renan's anti-Judaism was his adherence to an Enlightenment and Romantic conception of religion and humanity.

In sum, Heschel's understanding of what it means to be "Christian" or practice "Christian theology"—(which St. Augustine famously defined as "faith seeking understanding")—is obscure. She never, in fact, defines what *she* means when she applies these terms to scholars like Renan or Grundmann. Certainly Augustine's definition of theology could not be applied to either Renan or Grundmann, for neither had, by their own admission, an orthodox Christian faith. Concerning the term "Christian," there is some hint that Heschel conceives of Christianity in an orthodox Enlightenment fashion as simply one other sociological phenomenon that can be rationally calculated and tabulated through tax records, census data, or other methods of State based *pouvoir-savoir*. She uses state records to point out the numbers of "German Christians"⁵²⁵—some 600,000 out of the nearly 40,000 million Protestant Christians in Germany.⁵²⁶ Poewe's analysis of the disputed figures of how many SS members were "Christian" or "*Gottgläubig*" ("God believers," i.e. believers in any of a number of "new religions" created during the Nazi regime) shows the problems with this. At least one study cited by Poewe claims that 76 percent of SS members were *Gottgläubig*; another study argues that 75 percent were Christian.⁵²⁷ Poewe argues that her archival research supports the findings that the majority of the SS were *Gottgläubig*. She also points out that part of the problem of relying on state records to determine how many SS members were "Christian" or not is that because the Christian churches in Germany received state funding, many SS members who expressed their hatred of Christianity in private letters publicly

⁵²⁵My friend and fellow researcher Naomi Thurston rightly points out that *Deutsche Christen* was a "hijacked term," another wicked sophism perpetrated by the Nazis. I am thankful for all of her many insights and help with the German terms in this dissertation. All infelicities are mine.

⁵²⁶Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 3.

⁵²⁷Poewe, *New Religions*, 22.

maintained their “Christian status” for the most cynical and base of reasons: to avoid higher taxes.⁵²⁸

This points to the fundamental inability of Enlightenment methods of rationality to rationally master orthodoxy’s understanding of the *mystical, hidden essence* of what it means *to be* “Christian”—*to participate in the mystery of Christ Himself*. According to Matt. 24, Jesus expressed this mystery to his disciples when discussing the coming eschatological age:

But as for that day and hour no one knows it—not even the angels in heaven—except the Father alone. For just like the days of Noah were, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. . . Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one left. There will be two women grinding grain with a mill; one will be taken and one left. (Matt. 24:36-41, NET)

Jesus’ point here is that to the eyes of “objective observers,” the *exterior signs* of who may rightly be called “Christian” will be a mystery that will ultimately only be revealed with Jesus’ return. Again, Matthew’s Gospel reports Jesus saying, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven—only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21, NET). Hence Augustine’s observation that

. . . while she is a pilgrim in this world, the City of God has with her, bound to her by the communion of the sacraments, some who will not be with her to share eternally in the bliss of the saints. Some of these are concealed. Some of them, however, join openly with our enemies, and do not hesitate to murmur against the God Whose sacrament they bear. (*City of God* I.35)⁵²⁹

But then again, *there are* external signs of who is a Christian, for “a tree is known by its fruit” (Matt. 12:33, NET):

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, depravity, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger,

⁵²⁸Poewe, *New Religions*, 23, 28.

⁵²⁹St. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48.

selfish rivalries, dissensions, factions, envying, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and similar things. I am warning you, as I had warned you before: Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. . . (Gal. 5:19-24, NET).

Surely *this* is not what Heschel means when she writes that Nazism incorporated the “*key teachings*” of Christianity into “its own, more elevated political ideology, exploiting its language and ideational framework rather than trying to destroy it”?⁵³⁰ Still, it is—or *would be*—a great and terrible mystery as to how “Christians” as understood by the New Testament, and orthodoxy could perpetrate the satanic works of the Holocaust and *in so doing remain Christian*. Even Adolf Eichmann intuited this. While in custody awaiting his trial in Israel for his role in sending millions of Jews to their deaths in Nazi concentration camps, Eichmann stated in his defense, “. . . I myself had no hatred for Jews, for my whole education through my mother and my father had been strictly *Christian*. . .”⁵³¹ This was a sophistry on Eichmann’s part; two hours before being hanged he told the Protestant minister who had offered to read the Bible with him that he had no “time to waste”—for he was a *Gottgläubiger*.⁵³² Thus Adolf Eichmann, an accountant “desk murderer,”⁵³³ received justice.

Hannah Arendt explained what might be termed the “Eichmann phenomenon” through “the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*.”⁵³⁴ Heschel’s explanation for why so many learned scholars in Germany contributed to the construction of what 70 plus years later looks so ridiculous—an

⁵³⁰Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 23, with my emphasis.

⁵³¹Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), 30.

⁵³²Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 27, 252.

⁵³³Cf. Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 16.

⁵³⁴Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 252, emphasis in the original.

“Aryan” Jesus—is on the one hand largely based on what Poewe calls “an article of faith, ferociously held against all evidence to the contrary, that anti-Semitism has its source in Christianity.”⁵³⁵ On the other hand, Heschel seems at a loss to explain why and how scientifically trained scholars could be so wrong in their judgments: “Regardless of their training and the high standards of historical scholarship for which German universities were so respected, a remarkable number of academics in a range of fields came to stand behind claims that Jesus was a Buddhist or that Galilee was Gentile.”⁵³⁶ Heschel’s study points out the problem of the impotency of modern scientific rationality in preventing the monstrosities of Nazi theology, but offers no answer as to its causation. Answering this question is critical; Heschel’s work shows that in the early 20th century, academics had life and death consequences. And they still do, as recent events involving Renan, the one-time Nazi philosopher Martin Heidegger, and the right-wing French historian and supposed “Catholic traditionalist”⁵³⁷ Dominique Venner demonstrate.

In May 2013 the French Republic legalized gay marriage. In his blog post of 21 May, Venner linked the issue of liberalized marriage laws to increased Muslim immigration to France. The latter was by far of much greater concern, and Venner quoted an Algerian blogger who predicted that in fifteen years there would be enough Islamists in France to suppress the law and institute Islamic *Shari’a* law in France.⁵³⁸ Alarmed, Venner invoked Renan in a call for radical cultural and political reform to stem the slide into decadence:

⁵³⁵Poewe, *New Religions*, 8.

⁵³⁶Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 64, and see also 282, 284.

⁵³⁷This according to *The Independent*; see <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/farright-french-historian-78yearold-dominique-venner-commits-suicide-in-notre-dame-in-protest-against-gay-marriage-8625877.html#> (accessed 26 June 2013). I wish to thank my friend and colleague Dr. Michael Behrent for calling this event to my attention, and to Venner’s last blog as cited below.

⁵³⁸See <http://www.dominiquevenner.fr/2013/05/la-manif-du-26-mai-et-heidegger/>

It will not suffice to organize some pretty protests in the street in order to stop them. What is needed first is, as Renan said, a true ‘intellectual and moral reform.’ They must allow for a re-conquest of the memory of French and European identity, the need of which is still not clearly perceived.⁵³⁹

But this was not all. New and “spectacular” gestures, symbols, and words would need to be accompanied by *authentic acts*. In other words, Venner called for a *new liturgy* to save Modern Europe. Here Venner turned to *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s magnum-opus:

It will be necessary for us to remember, as Heidegger has genially put it, that the essence of man is his existence [now] and not in ‘another world.’ It is here and now that our destiny plays itself out until the last second. And this final second has as much importance as the rest of one’s life. This is why it is necessary to be oneself until the last instant. It is in deciding oneself, in truly willing one’s destiny that one is the conqueror of nothingness. And there is no escaping this exigency because we have nothing but this life in which we decide to be entirely ourselves or nothing.⁵⁴⁰

It was Venner’s last blog. That same day, he went to Notre Dame Cathedral, and beside the altar where the Eucharist is celebrated, offered up his own sacrifice by shooting himself in the head. This time “desk murder” became self-murder. Here de Lubac’s words of *Corpus Mysticum* written in 1944 seem especially appropriate:

It seems that it would. . . be of great interest, we might even say of pressing urgency, given the present state of what remains of ‘Christendom’, to return to the sacramental origins of the ‘mystical body’ in order to steep ourselves in it.⁵⁴¹

Would that Venner could have embraced this *invisible and real body* as a means of *hopeful living in the world*. Would too that he had been able to experience at

⁵³⁹See <http://www.dominiquevenner.fr/2013/05/la-manif-du-26-mai-et-heidegger/>

⁵⁴⁰See <http://www.dominiquevenner.fr/2013/05/la-manif-du-26-mai-et-heidegger/>

⁵⁴¹Henri Cardinal de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 260.

the altar of Notre Dame the words of the Psalmist: “Taste and see how good the LORD is; happy the man who takes refuge in Him!” (Psalm 34:9, JPS).

It has been the purpose of my dissertation to argue “beyond the secular reason”⁵⁴² of the Academy that in regards to “the historical Jesus,” the only path to gaining an accurate and true vision of his life is through a *participation in his life*. This is the mystery which Renan, Hauer, Grundmann, Heschel, and the majority of the Modern Academy have missed. In sum, I have been arguing for a return to a broader conception of what Reason is, and how it is practiced.⁵⁴³ With Socrates, Plato, and the Jesus of the Gospels I have argued that there is no knowing without loving, no loving without participation. Of course, this path of knowledge to the “historical Jesus” is mysterious; but long ago Plato in the *Meno* and St. Augustine in *The Teacher* demonstrated that the path to *all knowledge* is mysterious.⁵⁴⁴ And each in their own way—according to the light given to them, showed that the path of mystagogy is the path to The Good Teacher (cf. Luke 18:18)—“Christ—that is, *the unchangeable power and everlasting wisdom of God*”—who gives true knowledge and the path to “the happy life which all proclaim they seek.”⁵⁴⁵ To the consternation of the post-Enlightenment Academy, this is not something that can be necessarily “proven.” However, to be objective, because “wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (Matt. 11:19, NET), it

⁵⁴²See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2006).

⁵⁴³I am making the same argument as Pope Benedict XVI in his controversial Regensburg lecture on “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections” in 2006. See http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html (accessed 6 Jan 2014).

⁵⁴⁴See Peter King’s introduction to St. Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1995), vi-xx.

⁵⁴⁵St. Augustine, *The Teacher*, 11.38.45, with emphasis in the original; 13.46.20-25.

might be asked: which Nazarene still lives *and* brings *life*—Renan’s, or the Gospels’?⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁶Cf. Étienne Nodet, —“...the Gospels valiantly bury their commentators.” See his *The Historical Jesus? Necessity and Limits of an Inquiry* trans. J. Edward Crowley (New York: T & T Clark International, 2008), 20.

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