HAMANN'S LONDON WRITINGS

The Hermeneutics of Trinitarian Condescension

John R. Betz

> What a twofold drama of majesty and abasement, of divinity and the profoundest level of human misery — what a drama for the Creator and all the heavenly hosts...; the world, angels, and men all take part in this mystery, as observers, as actors, as sponsors. — Hamann[1]

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It is one of the ironies of intellectual history that Johann Georg Hamann — one of the most revered personalities of his age — stands today in need of an introduction. He was an inspiration to Goethe and Jean Paul, a mentor to Herder and Jacobi, an enigma to Hegel, and a model of Christian authorship to Kierkegaard; and to make matters more interesting, he was a friend, neighbor, and intellectual adversary of Kant. Indeed, the *Magus im Norden* and his writings were once so "alluring and terrifying" (in Kierkegaard's phrase) that some of Germany's leading poets and philosophers made pilgrimages to see him, and certainly no German intellectual of the day failed to have something to say about him. For next to his humble occupation as a Prussian customs official — *in telonio sedens,* as he refers to himself, waiting for the arrival of the Lord (Mt. 9:9)—he was arguably the most brilliant critic of the Enlightenment, the Socrates of Königsberg, the German translator of Hume, the first to read and "metacritically" deconstruct Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason,* in short, probably the most interesting and radical thinker the ranks of Lutheran ortho-

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1. *Londoner Schriften, Historisch-kritische Neuedition,* ed. Oswald Bayer and Bernd Weissenborn (München: C. H. Beck, 1993), p. 373 (N I, p. 270). Although references to the London writings are based on this new edition, I include throughout parenthetical references to the standard edition of Josef Nadler, *Sämtliche Werke* (Wien: Herder Verlag, 1949-57), abbreviated as "N" by volume. All translations are my own.

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doxy ever produced. Today, however, he is a figure at the margins of academic discourse — to the point that his name is as often misspelled in the English-speaking world. This is due in part, certainly, to the distance of time, which has made any relevance he had to his age (the Enlightenment), and *a fortiori* any relevance he may have to our own, increasingly obscure. It is also due to Hamann's defiance of any simple classification, so that it is difficult to say whether he is a prophet, a humorist, a literary critic, a man of letters, a philosopher, a theologian, or perhaps all of these at once. More than anything, however, it is due to the occasional and exceedingly time-bound nature of his writings, which even in his own day were considered the epitome of "dark and puzzling" (as Mendelssohn put it), and today are all the more difficult — if not impossible — to understand.

More than anything, however, it is due to the occasional and exceedingly time-bound nature of his writings, which even in his own day were considered the epitome of "dark and puzzling."

Yet he has not been entirely forgotten, for (to borrow another phrase from Kierkegaard, one of his greatest admirers) "the system is hospitable."[2] Thus, literary critics may know him as the father of the *Sturm und Drang*, the movement that gave rise to German Romanticism;[3] scholars like Isaiah Berlin may know him as an "irrationalist" and "implacable enemy" of the Enlightenment;[4] philosophers like Dilthey may know him as a forerunner of Herder and (for different reasons) Schleiermacher;[5] and theologians like Barth may know him as an "irregular dogmatician" and forerunner of dialectical theology.[6] Nevertheless, Hamann's relevance to the history of ideas, and to contemporary theology in particular, continues to be obscure—even among Lutherans. And so it is virtually unknown that he inspired such diverse movements as German Idealism, the so-called *Erweckungsbewegung* (a late 19th century revival movement), and 20th century Expressionism[7] — not to mention that he is the only figure in Hegel's

2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 224.

3. See Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

4. See Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: J. G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York, 1994). Of course, it should be noted at the outset that Berlin's conclusion flatly contradicts the majority (one might even say all) of Hamann scholarship. See, in particular, O'Flaherty's debate with Berlin in the *New York Review of Books*, 18 Nov. 1993.

5. Wilhelm Dilthey, "Vom Aufgang des geschichtlichen Bewusstseins. Jugendaufsätze und Erinnerungen," in: *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leipzig und Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1936), vol. 11, pp. 1-39. While it is true that Hamann, well before Schleiermacher, stressed the interiority of religious feeling over against the abstractions of metaphysics and the jejune morality of the Enlightenment, this is arguably the only notable similarity between them — for reasons we shall see. Indeed, it is not without reason that Hamann could inspire such a dialectical thinker as Kierkegaard.

6. See Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1986), I/1, p. 294.

7. See James C. O'Flaherty, *Hamann's Socratic Memorabilia: A Translation and Commentary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 18.

corpus to receive the attention of an 80-page monograph;[8] that he is one of the first thinkers to consider the intimate connection between thought and language (well in anticipation of the late Wittgenstein); or that he is the only Protestant to whom Hans Urs von Balthasar has dedicated an entire chapter in his multi-volume theological aesthetics, *The Glory of the Lord.*[9] Indeed, it is scarcely realized that Hamann provided at once, in a remarkable irony, both the model for Kierkegaard's pseudonymous Christian authorship *and* the epistemological key to Hegel's system (though the system itself he would have abhorred); or that he exerted an equally profound influence upon Schelling, which contributed to Schelling's recurring existential concerns as well as to his late philosophies of mythology and revelation.

At the threshold of modernity stands a uniquely tragic figure ... because in this figure all lines seem to converge — the concerns of strict Lutheranism, of classical education and culture, and of a theological aesthetics that would embrace them both in a genuine encounter—and yet, he remained a figure out of joint with his times and his thought never came to fruition.

But as von Balthasar points out, none of these figures reflects the fullness of his thought, particularly with regard to the development of a theological aesthetics; for "Hamann ... was alone in seeing that the real problem was how to construct a theory of beauty in such a way that in it the total aspiration of worldly and pagan beauty is fulfilled while all glory is at the same time given to God in Jesus Christ."[10] Nor was Hamann's vision faithfully transmitted to a later generation (either by Herder or Jacobi, Schelling or Kierkegaard), and for this reason von Balthasar observes: "At the threshold of modernity stands a uniquely tragic figure ... because in this figure all lines seem to converge — the concerns of strict Lutheranism, of classical education and culture, and of a theological aesthetics that would embrace them both in a genuine encounter—and yet, he remained a figure out of joint with his times and his thought never came to fruition."[11] This is not to say that Hamann's ideas were without effect, as John Milbank has rightly insisted; for Kant's critical philosophy would never have collapsed as quickly as it did were it not for Hamann's obscure, but highly effective "philological crusade."[12] But if, through Herder, the history of philosophy eventually assimilated Hamann's historical-linguistic critique of reason, it never assimilated the theological aesthetic upon which it was

8. G. W. F. Hegel, "Hamanns Schriften," *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik,* No. 77-80 and 107-114 (1828), cols. 620-640 and 859-864; rpt. in *Berliner Schriften, 1818-1831,* vol. XI of *Werke,* ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), pp. 275-352.

9. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics,* vol. 3, "Lay Styles" (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985), pp. 239-278. Other figures in the Protestant tradition, like Kant, Schelling, and Hegel, are summarily treated in vol. 5, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

10. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics,* vol. 1, "Seeing the Form" (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), p. 81.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 80 (revised translation).

12. See "The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology,* ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 23.

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founded. And given the rich implications of this vision for a *theological* understanding of reason, history, language — given also the subsequent polarization of theology into the extremes of Hegel and Kierkegaard, Schleiermacher and Barth — it is understandable that von Balthasar should lament: "How little was needed and he [Hamann] could have become the theological mentor and 'familiar spirit' of German Idealism (instead of Schleiermacher), exceeding his actual historical influence, and so determined the theological climate for more than a century."[13]

Following von Balthasar, my intention is thus to reintroduce Hamann's theological aesthetics, which consists chiefly in his understanding of beauty in terms of *kenosis,* i.e., as the radiance of divine condescension (and which, needless to say, makes him a major source of von Balthasar's own theological project). While it would be typical to treat Hamann's aesthetics in light of his most well-known work, his *Aesthetica in nuce* (1762), in the following I will be concerned almost entirely with Hamann's early, so-called "London writings." For it is in these writings, which were composed at a furious pace following his conversion in London in 1758, that Hamann first articulates what one might call a "hermeneutics of condescension," which begins with meditations on Scripture and leads to a mystical vision of all reality as the kenotic presence of transcendence. (In this respect, for all its importance and epigrammatic power, the *Aesthetica in nuce* is simply a condensed manifesto, written for a rationalist audience, of ideas first penned in London.) Furthermore, Hamann's radical intuition of divine condescension, as expressed in these writings, is not only the source of his profoundly *anti-Gnostic* sensibility, but informs everything from his aesthetics (including his view of creation and language) to his late "metacritique of pure reason." And for this reason, in addition to the wide range of theological topics they comprise, including the Trinity, creation, and redemption, the London writings provide the best introduction to Hamann's thought, indeed, to Hamann himself: to a figure who is arguably one of the greatest, most prophetic, and, ironically, most forgotten Christian authors of modernity — the Irenaeus of his time, who defended Christianity against every Gnostic attempt to go behind (and thus to dismiss as unnecessary) the sensible form of revelation that God has *chosen* (whether in Christ or the Scriptures), the dire consequences of which he saw as nothing other than the nihilism that Nietzsche belatedly proclaimed.

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Beyond their relevance to Hamann's theological aesthetics, the London writings are of interest for a number of other reasons. Firstly, as a series of meditations on Scripture, they testify page after page to Hamann's practice of allegorical interpretation, which singles him out not only *vis-à-vis* the rationalism of the Enlightenment, but even with regard to the exegetical norms of his own Lutheran tradition. (This,

13. *The Glory of the Lord,* vol. 3, p. 277.

incidentally, in addition to his extensive knowledge of the church fathers, makes him far more continuous with the Catholic tradition than is generally realized). Secondly, they challenge modern notions of subjectivity inasmuch as, for Hamann, the self is not a pre-given identity, but is constituted through language, specifically, through the allegorical meaning of the biblical texts. Indeed, for him, one's very self, and not simply faith, is constituted *ex auditu* by the Word of God. Thirdly, they are the first writings to distinguish Hamann, the former advocate and failed entrepreneur of the Enlightenment, from Hamann, the *Magus im Norden,* and thus constitute a rich document in the history of conversions. To be sure, as Bayer and Weissenborn have noted in their new historical-critical edition, they represent a cultural and literary deposit of the first rank — one comparable in spirit and scope to Augustine's *Confessions.* In fact, even their biographies are similar: after much searching in the books of classical and modern wisdom and finding them ultimately "comfortless," Hamann turns to the books of Scripture, is seized by their hidden depth, and encounters therein, particularly in the history of Israel, the spiritual allegory of his life.[14] And here too, like Augustine in book VII, what Hamann found so astonishing, so life-changing — whether *vis-à-vis* Platonism or Enlightenment deism — was the radical *humility* of the God that Christianity proclaims. There is, finally, an undeniable advantage in treating these writings. For unlike Hamann's later authorship, which earned him the reputation of being dark, obscure, and even unintelligible, the London writings — by far the lengthiest in his corpus — are direct and personal, written in clear, accessible prose. And, last but not least, there is currently no major treatment or translation of these writings in English — a circumstance that the present essay in some small measure seeks to redress.[15]

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Since Hamann never intended the London writings for publication, however, it was not until his death in 1788 that they came to the attention of a wider audience, leaving his contemporaries to ponder, and mostly to puzzle over, his subsequent, oracular dispatches from Königsberg. Fortunately, upon discovering them during an inventory of his father's writings, Hamann's son sent them to Jacobi, who quickly assessed their importance, calling them a "veritable treasure."[16] But it

14. Cf. Augustine, *Contra Academicos* II, ii, 5 (CCL 29, p. 20f.): *"Titubans properans haesitans arripui apostolum Paulum."* ("Staggering, hastening, hesitating, I grasped the apostle Paul").

15. See, however, Ronald Gregor Smith's, *J. G. Hamann (1730-88): A Study in Christian Existence, With Selections from his Writings* (London: Collins, 1960), which includes modest selections from Hamann's early writings. For the best general introduction to Hamann in English, see James C. O'Flaherty, *Johann Georg Hamann* (Boston: Twayne, 1979). For an introduction to the central works of Hamann's later "authorship," see Gwen Griffith Dickson's excellent translation-commentary, *Hamann's Relational Metacriticism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995).

16. Not long thereafter Jacobi wrote to his friend, the theologian in Kiel, Johann Friedrich Kleuker, to relay the news: "...I have just received a complete work [of Hamann] on the

was not until 1813 that any of the writings was published, when Jacobi sent Friedrich Schlegel (another Hamann enthusiast) a small, but rich selection for publication in the third volume of his journal, *Deutsches Museum.* And while Friedrich Roth's edition of Hamann's writings appeared between 1821 and 1825 (the long-awaited edition that Hegel reviewed), it was not until Nadler's critical edition (1949-57) that the London writings were published in their entirety. And yet, as the past century of Hamann scholarship has shown (and Jacobi well realized), these writings are indispensable to an understanding of all Hamann's later publications.

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The London writings were composed in only a few months, between March and July, 1758, at which point Hamann returned first to Riga and eventually to Königsberg. They include a small piece titled, *Ueber die Auslegung der heil. Schrift* (*On the Interpretation of Holy Scripture*); an extensive lyrical commentary on Scripture titled, *Biblische Betrachtungen eines Christen* (*Biblical Meditations of a Christian*); an autobiographical account of Hamann's conversion, *Gedanken über meinen Lebenslauf* (*Reflections on the Course of my Life*); *Gedanken über Kirchenlieder* (*Reflections on Church Hymns*); a small collection titled, *Brocken* (*Fragments*); *Betrachtungen über* Newtons *Abhandlung über die Weissagungen* (*Observations about Newton's Treatise on Prophecies*);[17] and a lengthy concluding prayer. With the exception of *On the Interpretation of Holy Scripture* and *Observations about Newton's Treatise,* both of which are undated, all of the writings were composed in this order. I begin, however, with Hamann's autobiography, which he began midstream on 21 April, the same day he concluded his *Biblical Meditations.* I then treat Hamann's *On the Interpretation of Holy Scripture,* the *Biblical Meditations* with *Reflections on Church Hymns,* and the *Fragments* with *Observations about Newton's Treatise.*

CONVERSION

From Hamann's own account, we know that he went to London in 1757 on behalf of his friend's, Christoph Berens', trading firm in Riga. We also know that he soon thereafter, having failed in the venture for reasons

Bible, which he composed in 5 weeks in London in 1758. During these 5 weeks he read through the whole Bible and wrote this thick book of meditations on it. Afterwards he directly appended an account of his life up to this complete conversion [*Sinnesänderung*]. I cannot tell you with what interest I have read the latter.... The Meditations and some small pieces he composed soon after them are a veritable treasure, at least for me. Everywhere I find the same spirit, the same manner of thought, the same convictions. The Spirit of God, whom man must receive, is the key to all; with him one finds the most convincing proofs precisely where, without him, one would [have] the most irresolvable doubts." Quoted in editorial introduction to *Londoner Schriften,* p. 16.

17. Thomas Newton (1704-1782), the bishop of Bristol. The full title of Newton's treatise is *Dissertations on the Prophecies, Which have remarkably been fulfilled, and at this time are fulfilling in the world* (London, 1754-58).

unknown, fell into desperate poverty and wantonness, moving restlessly from one place to another for nearly a year. It was then, amid such circumstances, that he began reading Scripture and "descended," as he would later describe it, "into the hell of self-knowledge":[18]

> My loneliness, the prospect of absolute deprivation and of being a beggar..., in short, the barrenness of my circumstances and the magnitude of my worries took away my taste for my books. They were poor consolation, these friends, which I deemed necessary for my existence and by whose company I was so taken that I viewed them as the only support and ornament of human destiny. Under the tumult of all my passions, which overwhelmed me..., I unceasingly asked God for a friend, for a wise, sincere friend, whose image I no longer recognized..., a friend who could give me a key to my heart, the thread that would lead me out of my labyrinth. Praise God! I found this friend in my heart, who crept into it right when I most felt its emptiness, darkness, and desertedness. By this time I had read through the Old Testament once in its entirety and the New [Testament] twice.... Wishing to start anew I began to perceive a cover over my reason and my heart, which had kept the book closed to me the first time. I thus set out to read it with more attention, in a more orderly fashion, and with more hunger; and to write down my thoughts as they would occur.[19]

He began reading the Scriptures on the 13th of March, but to no great effect, given the preconceptions he brought with him. Six days later, however, on Palm Sunday, he began his reading anew, at which point he began to perceive their divine, allegorical content; and thus began the Biblical Meditations.

Hamann goes on to say that he began reading the Scriptures on the 13th of March, but to no great effect, given the preconceptions he brought with him. Six days later, however, on Palm Sunday, he began his reading anew, at which point he began to perceive their divine, allegorical content; and thus began the *Biblical Meditations,* the scriptural commentary, comprising several hundred pages, that would occupy him for the next month:

> I forgot all my books about [the Scriptures], I was even ashamed ever to have compared them to the book of *God,* ever to have placed them side by side, and ever to have preferred another. I found the unity of the divine will in the redemption of Jesus Christ; that all history, all miracles, all the commandments and works of God lead to this central point, to lead the human soul out of slavery, servitude, blindness, folly and death to the greatest happiness, to the highest blessedness and to an accepting of such goods, whose greatness, when they are revealed, must shock us more than our own unworthiness or the possibility of making ourselves worthy of them. I recognized my own crimes in the history of the Jewish people, I read my own life's story, and thanked God for his long-suffering with this his people, because nothing but such an example could justify a similar hope.[20]

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Discovering the allegorical depths of the Old Testament, Hamann straightaway identifies himself with the people of Israel: "Whoever would compare my life with the travel log of Israel would find that

18. N II, p. 164.

19. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 342 (N II, p. 39f.).

20. *Ibid.*, p. 343 (N II, p. 40).

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they exactly correspond."[21] The central account of his conversion experience, however, concerns one story in particular, namely, that of Cain and Abel. For just as David recognized his own crime in Nathan's parable (2 Sam. 12:7), Hamann recognized in the murder of Abel his own participation in the spilling of Christ's blood:

> I read the fifth chapter of the fifth book of Moses on the evening of the 31. of March, fell into deep reflection, thought about Abel, of whom God said: the earth **opened its mouth** to receive the **blood** of your **brother** – – I felt my heart beat, I heard a voice sighing and wailing in its depths as the voice of blood, as the voice of a murdered brother, who wanted to avenge his blood if I did not at times hear it and continue to stop up my ears to its voice — that precisely this made Cain a restless fugitive. I felt at once my heart swelling, it poured itself out in tears, and I could no longer — I could no longer hide from God that I was the murderer of my brother, that I was the murderer of his only begotten Son.[22]

Yet precisely at the point of conviction, "when we hear the blood of the redeemer crying out in our heart, we feel that its ground has already been sprinkled..., that the same avenging blood cries grace to us."[23] And with this sense of forgiveness, he goes on to say, "The Spirit of God continued, in spite of my great weakness, in spite of the long resistance that I previously mounted against his witness and his stirrings, to reveal more and more to me the mystery of divine love and the benefit of faith in our merciful and only savior."[24] Such was the spirit in which he continued his *Biblical Meditations*: "I continued ... in the reading of the Word of God and enjoyed the same assistance by which it was written as the only way to understand it, and on the 21st of April, with God's help, with extraordinary comfort and refreshment, brought my work, without interruption, to a conclusion."[25]

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Through a sudden, uncanny transposition accomplished by Scripture itself—and for which he would later employ the term "meta-schematism" — Hamann thus discovered that Scripture was "living and active" (Heb. 4:12), that in some strange way it was also addressed to him; and in this respect he was fond of citing the line from Horace, *mutato nomine de te fabula narratur.* "Change but the name and the story speaks of you."[26] In other words, as Hamann came to experience, the

21. *Ibid.*, p. 345 (N II, p. 42).

22. *Ibid.*, p. 343 (N II, p. 40f.).

23. *Londoner Schriften*, p. 138f. (N I, p. 78).

24. *Ibid.*, p. 343f. (N II, p. 41).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 344 (N II, p. 41).

26. Horace, *Satires* I/1, 69f.: *"Quid rides? Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur."* See Hamann's letter to Lindner in *Briefwechsel*, 7 vols, ed. W. Ziesemer and A. Henkel (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1955-1979), I, p. 396 (Hereafter cited as "ZH" by volume): "Why are you laughing? You yourself are the man of the fable"; see also his letter to Jacobi (ZH VI, p. 272): *"Quid rides? de TE fabula narratur."* For further discussion, see Bayer, *Zeitgenoße im Widerspruch* (München: Piper, 1988), p. 77.

same biblical text that spoke of his life in allegories also showed a remarkable power to lay it bare through them, "penetrating even to the division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow," so as to judge "the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12); and in this respect, through the surgical operation it accomplished and the subsequent conversion it effected, the Bible validated its authority as the sublime, effective Word (*verbum efficax*) of the Creator.

As Oswald Bayer has suggested, whose own hermeneutics is influenced by Paul Ricoeur, Hamann's London writings thus present a hermeneutics that is squarely opposed to the interpretive practices of the modern subject (not to mention the Jesus Seminar), indeed, a hermeneutics that overturns modern notions of subjectivity altogether. For it is no longer a question of how can "I" (understood as an immediately self-present *cogito,* a pre-textual identity) understand the text, but rather a question of how the text understands and constitutes me.[27] In other words, the priority shifts from the modern subject, which constitutes itself — say, through Descartes' radical doubt — to the object, the text, *before* which, and in engagement with which, the subject first recognizes himself or herself as a person *within* the story that is told. Thus, Hamann not only challenges Romantic (Novalis) and transcendental (Kant) accounts of subjectivity, but anticipates postmodern attention to narrative and its role in the constitution of the self. Accordingly, Hamann takes the motto from Bengel, which Eberhard Nestle later placed at the beginning of his edition of the Greek New Testament, and inverts it: "*Te totum applica ad textum: rem totam applica ad te.* There is a ὕστερον πρότερον in this sentence. The first must be the last. The more the Christian recognizes that in this book *his own* story is told, the more the zeal grows for the letter of the Word."[28] One's zeal grows because, as Hamann came to realize, it was the Word of God that created unity out of the diffusion, the nothingness, of his life; and in this respect he found the work of the Holy Spirit — in the writing of Scripture and its effect upon readers — to be a similar *creatio ex nihilo,* which parallels the work of the Father in creation and the work of the Son in redemption (cf. 1 Cor. 4:6).[29]

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It is no wonder, therefore, that Hamann should speak of his conversion in dramatic terms, as when he says, "God poured me from one vessel

27. See Oswald Bayer, *Autorität und Kritik: Zur Hermeneutik und Wissenschaftstheorie* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1991), p. 19ff.

28. ZH II, p. 9. As Bayer explains: "The 'self-critical subjectivity' of the Christian is received in the knowledge that 'this book' speaks of him, that he is interpreted by the text of this book, and through it, by the author of the book itself" (*Autorität und Kritik,* p. 22).

29. Cf. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 251 (N I, p. 190): "Next to the wealth of God in nature, which arose out of nothing, there is no greater creation than the transformation [by the Holy Spirit] of human concepts and impressions into heavenly and divine mysteries; this omnipotence [which transforms] human language into the thoughts of the Cherubim and Seraphim."

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into another"; and, similarly, in the language of Paul (cf. Gal. 2:20) and Luther, when he speaks of it in terms of an exchange:

> My son! Give me your heart! — Here it is, my God! You demanded it, as blind, hard, rocky, misguided, and stubborn as it was. Purify it, create it anew, and let it become the workshop of your good Spirit. It deceived me so many times when it was in my own hands that I no longer wish to recognize it as my own. It is a leviathan that you alone can tame — by your indwelling it will enjoy peace, comfort, and blessedness."[30]

In sum, Christ is now the principle of his life, for "It would be more possible to live without one's heart and head than without him. He is the head of our nature and of all our powers, and the source of movement, which can no more stand still in a Christian than the pulse can stand still in a living man. Yet the Christian alone is a living human being, moreover, an eternally immortal living being, because he lives and moves and has his being in God...."[31] By the same token, Christ is the center: "Once our soul first finds its center in him, it no longer leaves him in its movements; as the earth is true to the sun, so it remains true to him...."[32] Thus one will find throughout the London writings ample praise of Christ, the Word made flesh. But since his conversion occurred precisely by way of reading, Hamann's immediate thanks is for the analogous treasure hidden beneath the "flesh" of the letter of Scripture:

This Word of God accomplishes in the soul of a devout Christian, whether he be simple or learned, wonders just as great as those described in it.

> I conclude with a proof [based on] my own experience, with heartfelt and sincere thanks to God for his saving Word, which has proven itself as the sole light whereby we not only come to God, but know ourselves[;] as the most valuable gift of divine grace, which surpasses nature and all its treasures as far as our immortal spirit surpasses the lime of flesh and blood; as the most astonishing and most venerable revelation of the most profound, most sublime, most marvelous mysteries of God's nature, attributes, [and] exceedingly will chiefly toward us pitiful human beings...; as the only bread and manna of our souls, which a Christian can no more dispense with than the earthly man can dispense with his daily necessities and sustenance — indeed, I confess that this Word of God accomplishes in the soul of a devout Christian, whether he be simple or learned, wonders just as great as those described in it; that the understanding of this book and faith in its contents can be attained by no other means than through the same Spirit who inspired its authors; that his inexpressible sighs, which he creates in our hearts, are of the same nature as the inexpressible images, that are scattered throughout the Holy Scriptures with a greater prodigality than all the seeds of nature and its kingdoms.[33]

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30. *Londoner Schriften*, p. 345 (N II, p. 42f.).

31. *Ibid.*, p. 431 (N II, p. 48). Cf. ZH I, p. 341: "...the Christian does everything in God; eating and drinking, traveling from one city to another, residing there for a year ... are divine matters and works."

32. *Ibid.*, p. 349 (N II, p. 46).

33. *Ibid.*, p. 345-346 (N II, p. 43).

Clearly, if Hamann's hermeneutic of Scripture anticipates postmodern narrative theory (and is thus, in some sense, novel), it is no less traditional, inasmuch as it is based in the *claritas interna spiritus sancti.* One must be illumined by the Spirit of the one who inspired Scripture in order to understand it. In fact, properly speaking, there is no understanding outside of this circle that is anything but a confirmation of one's prejudices, a *Gaukelspiel* of reason with itself; and, as we shall see, Hamann has the same opinion with regard to the books of nature and history, both of which are closed, "sealed," to a purely rational understanding. Within the circle of understanding, however — i.e., once one has submitted oneself to its scrutiny — Scripture becomes "living and active," capable of accomplishing miracles in those who read it. At which point it reveals itself precisely as the Word of God, i.e., as the Word of the one who said, "'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen. 1:3), and thus as the sublime — because effective — speech of the Creator (*verbum efficax*).[34] And it is to this creative power of the Word, which frames all of human history as the Alpha and Omega, that all of Hamann's authorial reflections and mimetic practices ultimately refer. But, as the above quotation attests, Hamann leaves even the comparison to creation behind; for Scripture is as superior to nature as the spirit is superior to flesh and blood: "Nature is glorious. Who can overlook it? [Yet] who understands its language? For the natural man it is mute and lifeless. But Scripture, the Word of God, the Bible, is more glorious, is more perfect; [it is] the wet nurse that gives us our first food, the milk that makes us strong...."[35] Similarly, in reference to Revelation 22:2, it is "the tree of life, whose leaves heal the peoples and whose fruits are there to nourish our souls."[36] But once again, for Hamann, such an understanding of Scripture is sealed from rational exegesis, because it lacks the humility that is required to be fed, seeking to interpret rather than to be interpreted (*sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres,* as Luther puts it), if not simply to confirm, as in a mirror, what it already knows *a priori.*[37]

*But once again, for Hamann, such an understanding of Scripture is sealed from rational exegesis, because it lacks the humility that is required to be fed, seeking to interpret rather than to be interpreted (*sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres, *as Luther puts it), if not simply to confirm, as in a mirror, what it already knows* a priori.

Needless to say, such convictions regarding Scripture and the scriptural constitution of the self placed Hamann in direct opposition to his age — the age of "criticism" to which, in the words of his friend Kant,

34. In this respect, Hamann follows Longinus. See *Biblical Meditations,* p. 73 (N I, p. 15): "Longinus found it marvelous that Moses would have the highest God speak and that what he speaks happens."

35. *Ibid.,* p. 152 (N I, p. 91); cf. p. 109 (N I, p. 49): "Nature flees [*verschwind[e]t*] before your Word. Here is the holy of holies[;] the whole of creation is but a forecourt in comparison with what we see in your Word."

36. *Ibid.* p. 152 (N I, p. 92).

37. See Martin Luther, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, 1883–), vol. 7, p. 97. As Bayer explains, this means "that in providing for its own interpretation, Scripture interprets me and not I Scripture." See *Autorität und Kritik,* p. 22.

For Hamann, as for Pascal, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not *the God of the philosophers — just as there is no proper knowledge of the Scriptures or, for that matter of God, apart from Christ (and his Spirit), who is the center of all.*

"everything," including Scripture, "must submit."[38] And for this reason, among others, Hamann is well described as the Pascal of the 18th century, whose conversion experience *vis-à-vis* Kant and the Enlightenment repeats the conversion experience of Pascal *vis-à-vis* Descartes and the birth of modern philosophy (as Dilthey, for one, was right to point out). To be sure, for Hamann, as for Pascal, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is *not* the God of the philosophers—just as there is no proper knowledge of the Scriptures or, for that matter of God, apart from Christ (and his Spirit), who is the center of all.[39] Thus he confesses, in words directly reminiscent of Pascal, "that without faith in Jesus Christ it is impossible to know God [and] what a loving, inexpressibly good and beneficent being he is."[40] To which von Balthasar rightly adds, "...Hamann never deviated one iota from this consistent and unbroken Christocentrism."[41] But, for Hamann, what most distinguishes the God of Christianity from the God of metaphysics is the astonishing extent of God's love for human beings; and thus he says in the spirit of Luther's *pro me* that God's "wisdom, omnipotence, and all other attributes seem to be, as it were, but the instrument of his love for man."[42] Similarly, *vis-à-vis* the claims of natural theology, he pointedly says, "The pagan, the philosopher, recognizes the omnipotence, majesty, holiness, and goodness of God; but of the *humility* of his *love for man* he knows nothing."[43] And again, "this preference for human beings, the insects of creation, belongs to the most profound [truths] of divine revelation," which reason in no way can fathom — just as it *a fortiori* cannot fathom "that Jesus Christ would not simply be content to become a man, but to become a poor and most pitiable one."[44]

Nowhere else in the history of Christianity (not even in Irenaeus) does one find such an extraordinary emphasis on humility as an attribute of the divine nature, and nowhere else does one find this attribute extended with such impeccable logic to all *the persons of the Trinity.*

Of course, such views are hardly unique, especially in light of Paul's discourse on the Word of the Cross (1 Cor. 1:18f.) and the humility of the Son (Phil. 2:6f.). But nowhere else in the history of Christianity (not even in Irenaeus) does one find such an extraordinary emphasis on humility as an attribute of the divine nature, and nowhere else does one find this attribute extended with such impeccable logic to *all* the persons of the Trinity. Thus, Hamann speaks in striking terms, in addition to the humility of the Son, of the humility of the Holy Spirit, "who, in the face of our proud little mare of reason, produced a book as his

38. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 9.

39. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 303 (N I, p. 242): "The revelation in the flesh is the midpoint of everything. This is the content of the whole of the divine Word, indeed, the reason why it is given to us."

40. *Ibid.*, p. 346 (N II, p. 43).

41. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord,* vol. 3, p. 246 (modified translation).

42. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 346 (N II, p. 43).

43. ZH I, p. 394.

44. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 346 (N II, p. 43).

Word, in which, like a foolish and crazy [spirit], what is more, like an unholy and unclean spirit, he made small, contemptible events into the history of heaven and of God (1 Cor. 1.25)."[45] And on the following day he adds, "Indeed, the entire Bible seems to have been written for just this purpose, to teach us the kingdom [*Regierung*] of God through trivialities [*Kleinigkeiten*].... Everything that appears to earthly reason as improbable and absurd is, for the Christian, invariably and undeniably certain and comforting."[46]

For Hamann, the offensive form of Scripture goes mysteriously hand in hand with the offensive form of the Son (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18ff.), the mystery *of the one, which effectively keeps profane reason at a distance, pointing to the* mystery *of the other, and vice versa.*

One can readily see how such statements (reminiscent of Tertullian) would have affected Jacobi, Germany's most famous fideist, and later — it almost goes without saying — Kierkegaard. They also reveal the basis of Hamann's later polemic against the neologians, especially Johann David Michaelis, the professor of oriental languages in Göttingen, who, like Rudolf Bultmann two hundred years later, considered the vexatious "mythological" form of Scripture to be the dispensable husk of a purely rational (or existential) content. To be sure, for Hamann, the offensive form of Scripture goes mysteriously hand in hand with the offensive form of the Son (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18ff.), the *mystery* of the one, which effectively keeps profane reason at a distance, pointing to the *mystery* of the other, and vice versa. Hence Hamann's later "mystery writings" [*Mysterienschriften*] against the rationalist theologian Starck; hence the opening of his *Hierophantic Letters* with a quotation from Matthew 19:11, "*Non omnes capiunt verbum istud, sed quibus datum est*"; hence the opening of his mysterious ΚΟΓΞΟΜΠΑΞ [*Konxompax*]: *Fragments of an Apocryphal Sibyl on Apocalyptic Mysteries* with two dashes — with a solemn invocation of silence.[47]

What is unique about Hamann's experience, however, is that he does not begin with the humility of the Son, as one would expect, but with the humility of the Holy Spirit, who reveals the humility of all the persons of the Trinity.

HOW TO APPROACH SCRIPTURE

From Hamann's autobiography it is clear that his induction into the mysteries of Christianity occurred by way of Scripture; and that chief among these mysteries — because of a piece with the mystery of love — was the mystery of divine humility, which he found not only in the form of the Son, but also in the work of the Holy Spirit as the author of Scripture. What is unique about Hamann's experience, however, is that he does not begin with the humility of the Son, as one would ex-

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*, p. 349 (N II, p. 45f.).

47. See N III, p. 135f.; p. 217. Needless to say, the title, *Konxompax,* which parodies an obscure term from the freemasonry of the time, is already impenetrable. For a thorough discussion of this text and of Hamann's use of dashes, see Ingemarie Manegold's dissertation, *Johann Georg Hamanns Schrift "Konxompax"* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1961), p. 127. See also N III, p. 25 where Hamann refers to himself as the "hierophant's handyman" and N II, p. 197, where Hamann begins his *Aesthetica in nuce* with a quotation from Horace, calling the profane crowd to be silent.

Hamann intends to "fend off" Christianity's "cultured despisers," in this case the critics of the Enlightenment, who presume to criticize Scripture on the basis of "reason alone."

pect, but with the humility of the Holy Spirit, who reveals the humility of all the persons of the Trinity. And it is with this essentially triune mystery that he opens his hermeneutical preface, *On the Interpretation of Scripture*: "God an author! — The Creator of the world and Father of human beings is denied and reproved, the God-man was crucified, and the inspirer of God's Word is ridiculed and blasphemed. The inspiration of this book is just as great an act of abasement and condescension as the creation of the Father and the incarnation of the Son."[48]

Once again, Hamann employs dashes in order to alert the reader to a mystery, in this case, the mystery of divine condescension. And, once again, the suggestion is that Christianity is a kind of mystery religion: that it is literally "closed off" (μύω) to the uninitiated, the "merely rational," who stand "before the temple" (*pro-fanum*). At the same time, by his dashes (and by the outward form of his later authorship), Hamann intends to "fend off" Christianity's "cultured despisers," in this case the critics of the Enlightenment, who presume to criticize Scripture on the basis of "reason alone." And so he goes on to say, in a mixture of humor and seriousness that prefigures his later writings: "As little as an animal is capable of reading the fables of Aesop, Phaedrus, and *la Fontaine* — or, even if it were able to read them — it would not be able to make such bestial judgments regarding the sense of the stories and their justification as human beings have made in criticizing and philosophizing about the book of God."[49] Indeed, for Hamann, far from being immediately accessible to reason, there is no understanding of Scripture (or of any of the Christian mysteries) apart from the Spirit of humility in which it was written: "Humility of heart is the one required disposition and most indispensable preparation for the reading of the Bible." Moreover, it is humility that first enables one to see the "old rags" of Scripture as a means of salvation: "We all find ourselves in such a swampy prison as the one in which Jeremiah found himself. Old rags served as ropes to pull him out; to them he owed his gratitude for saving him. Not their appearance, but the services they provided him and the use he made of them, redeemed his life from danger (Jer. 38:11-13)."[50]

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After reflecting on the equally humble materials Christ used to heal the blind man (Jn 9:6), Hamann then considers the description of David's behavior before the court of Gath: "So he changed his behavior before them; he pretended to be mad when in their presence. He scratched

48. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 59 (N I, p. 4). And similarly, he says: "The Word of this Spirit is just as great a work as creation, and just as great a mystery as the redemption of human beings[;] indeed, this Word is the key to the works of the former and the mysteries of the latter" (*ibid.*).

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.* Cf. ZH I, p. 341, where Hamann says to Lindner: "Allow me my pride in these old rags. These old rags have saved me from the pit, and I pride myself in them like Joseph in his colored coat."

marks on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle run down his beard" (1 Sam. 21:13-14). And of particular interest to Hamann is the response that this behavior elicits from Achish (vv. 14-15): "Achish said to his servants, 'Look, you see the man is mad; why then have you brought him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?'" Hamann then observes, "Who can read the story of David without a trembling of reverent fear [*Zittern der Ehrfurcht*], [...the story of one] who distorted his gestures, played like a fool, painted the doors of the gate, [and] slobbered on his beard, without hearing in the judgment of Achish an echo of the thinking of an unbelieving joker and sophist of our time."[51] At face value, what is striking here is the language of fear and trembling that Hamann adopts in view of this passage; for in the story of David before Achish, which is presented *as the Word of God*, one is presented with a story that defies rational comprehension, indeed, a story that flatly contradicts rational notions of what should pass as divinely inspired. And here already one can see a few of the reasons why Kierkegaard begins his study of Abraham, *Fear and Trembling*, with a quotation from Hamann. What Hamann finds most interesting in this story, however, is how Achish's judgment is mirrored in the judgment of the critics of God of every age, and particularly in the judgment of the critics of the Enlightenment, who dismiss Scripture in the same way that Achish dismisses David. And, for Hamann, the passage is doubly fearful given that this gesture amounts to blasphemy (cf. Mt. 12:24-31). Yet it is precisely such an improbable story and, more generally, such an improbable *style* that God has *chosen*, and so he concludes his reflections, fittingly, with a quotation from Paul on the irony of divine election (1 Cor. 1:18:26-28).

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MEDITATIONS AND HYMNS

If *On the Interpretation of Holy Scripture* offers a brief statement of method, the *Biblical Meditations* is its application in the form of a lengthy and inspired biblical commentary. But here too Hamann prefaces his meditations with hermeneutical reflections on the proper way to understand the Bible, as when he says: "The necessity of putting ourselves as readers into the disposition of the author we have before us ... is a rule that is as necessary here as in the case of other books."[52] As difficult or impossible as this may be in the case of a human author, for Hamann it is not impossible in the case of God, "because the Holy Spirit is promised to all who petition the heavenly Father."[53] And it is in this way, as

51. *Ibid.*, p. 61 (N I, p. 5).

52. *Ibid.*, p. 66 (N I, p. 8).

53. *Ibid.*

For Hamann, the Bible is the key to understanding the broader context of nature and history. As he puts it in the Fragments, *"Nature and history are ... the two great* commentarii *on the divine Word; and the latter, on the other hand, the only key that unlocks our knowledge of both."*

we have seen, that one enters the circle of understanding. For Hamann, however, the circle is not limiting, as a kind of pietistic reading might suggest, but opens everything. Indeed, for Hamann, the Bible is the key to understanding the broader context of nature and history. As he puts it in the *Fragments*, "Nature and history are ... the two great *commentarii* on the divine Word; and the latter, on the other hand, the only key that unlocks our knowledge of both."[54] Similarly, in the opening remarks of his *Meditations*, he says: "God revealed himself to human beings in nature and in his Word. One has not yet discerned the similarities and the relationships [that obtain] between these two revelations; nor has one sufficiently explained them or penetrated to [their] harmony, which could open a wide field [of investigation] for a healthy philosophy."[55]

Whether or not this passage would have been included in the collection of Hamann's writings that Schelling received on loan from Jacobi (when Schelling was a member of the academy of the sciences in Munich, and Jacobi was its president), it clearly suggests the path of Schelling's late philosophy. The same holds true of the following passage: "Both revelations explain [and] support one another, and cannot contradict one another, as much as the interpretations of reason concerning them might. It is, on the contrary, the greatest contradiction and misuse of reason, if it should wish to reveal *itself*."[56] In other words, it is the greatest misuse of reason if it should wish to find *itself* revealed in nature or in Scripture. And herein lies the crux of Hamann's (and by extension the late Schelling's) difference from Kant, Hegel, and all forms of transcendental philosophy, for which reason is not so much a faculty that interprets reality as one that lays down its rules, that *constitutes* it. Indeed, rather than displaying a greater worldliness by making reason rather than revelation the measure of reality, Kant and German Idealism precisely *shut out* the world, so that one no longer encounters anything foreign to reason and its domain except, in the case of Kant, a "transcendental = x" about which one can know nothing and which (as Hamann, Jacobi, and John Milbank all point out) might as well "be nothing."[57] By contrast, Hamann not only saves the reality of the phenomenal world (since it is not a revelation of nothing, but of God), but also prepares the way for Kierkegaard's doctrine of the paradox, as articulated most clearly in the *Philosophical Fragments*. But while Kierkegaard follows Hamann and to a lesser extent Schelling, the return to the aesthetic sphere (i.e., the return to the world) of religiousness B is bridged by no analogy or mediation, but is entirely dia-

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54. *Ibid.*, p. 411 (N I, p. 303). Whereas Hamann here speaks of Scripture as the key to nature and history, he also speaks of faith in such terms, as later in the *Socratic Memorabilia*. Cf. *Londoner Schriften*, p. 307 (N I, p. 246): "Without faith we cannot even understand creation and nature...."

55. *Ibid.*, p. 66 (N I, p. 8f.).

56. *Ibid.*, p. 67 (N I, p. 9). My emphasis.

57. See Milbank, "The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi," p. 26.

lectical, so that even here the world is shut out; whereas for Hamann (as for Clement of Alexandria), because the incarnate Logos is the same Logos who is revealed in types and shadows to the pagans (the λόγος σπερματικός), the mystery of the God-man is precisely the mystery that opens the world anew. And on this basis Hamann can say what a strictly dialectical theology cannot, namely, that "the study of nature and history are the two pillars of true religion," which makes him at once more mediating than Jacobi and Kierkegaard, but not therefore (given the centrality of Christ) more accommodating.[58]

Hamann's reading of Scripture is consequently anything but a narrow biblicism; on the contrary, it was precisely this reading that opened the otherwise "sealed" books of nature and history.

Hamann's reading of Scripture is consequently anything but a narrow biblicism; on the contrary, it was precisely this reading that opened the otherwise "sealed" books of nature and history.[59] In the words of Joachim Ringleben, "He found the one *verbum Dei* in the *copia verborum* of all literature. The Bible was to him precisely the book above all books, the book *of* books: *liber instar omnium.* What was said there opened his eyes to all speech; and the very one whom the Bible revealed he saw again everywhere." In short, "The Bible was his *Hen* because it disclosed the *Pan*,"[60] and it is in this particular order that one is to understand the intimate connection in Hamann's thought between Scripture and aesthetics, between a hermeneutics of the Word and a hermeneutics of the world.[61] It is also in such terms that one is to understand his later self-designation as a "philologist," i.e., a "lover of the Word," in the narrowest *and* the broadest sense of the term.

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But not only did faith, as inspired by the Word of Scripture, confer a vision for all things, for Hamann it also kept them from slipping into the void. Indeed, for Hamann, so fundamentally do all things depend upon the Word, so fundamentally is creation an address "to the creature through the creature,"[62] that in the absence of faith (Rom. 10:17),

58. *Ibid.*

59. Cf. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 209 (N I, p. 148): "What a sealed book is nature itself without the interpretation of its Spirit and creator."

60. Ringleben, "'Rede, daß ich dich sehe': Betrachtungen zu Hamanns theologischem Sprachdenken," in *Neue Zeitschrift fur Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 27 (1985), p. 222; "Gott als Schriftsteller: Zur Geschichte eines Topos," in *Johann Georg Hamann: "Der hellste Kopf seiner Zeit,"* ed. Oswald Bayer (Tübingen: Attempto Verlag, 1998), p. 37. Cf. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 132 (N I, p. 72): "God has revealed everything in his Word"; p. 136 (N I, p. 75): "What mysteries of our nature are clarified in God's Word. Without it, the whole human being seems to be nothing but earth, formless and void, darkness over the surface of the deep. Here is a depth, which no finite understanding can fathom...."; p. 146 (N I, p. 85): "The longer, the more he [or she] reads the Word of God, a true Christian finds it set apart from all other books by a miraculous work of God."; p. 230 (N I, p. 169): "What is the Word of God, and whence comes the wisdom, knowledge, joy, which it contains. Is it not a honey, cultivated by bees in a fallen animal...."

61. Cf. Northrop Frye's chapter "The Word within the Word," in *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

62. N II, p. 198: "Speak, that I might see you! — This wish was fulfilled by creation, which is a speech to the creature through the creature...."

in the eyes of reason alone, everything begins to vanish, to become illusory, to become *as nothing*:

> What a Nothing, what a smoke-screen [*Rauch*], what a pestilent Nothing are [our days] in our eyes when reason counts them! What an All, what a treasure, what an eternity, when they are counted by faith.... All is wisdom in your order of nature when our spirits are opened by the Spirit of your Word. All is labyrinth, all disorder, if we wish to see by ourselves. If we despise your Word, [we are] more miserable than blind.... [Yet] our eyes see as sharply as the eagle, receive the light of angels, when we see all things in your Word, loving God![63]

In view of this passage, it is no wonder that Jacobi spoke of the *Biblical Meditations* as "a veritable treasure." For it presents one with a choice: faith or nihilism, an aesthetic of the All or an aesthetic of the void.[64] Importantly, it is not that reason *must* end in nihilism, but that its alleged autonomy prevents it from seeing anything *more* (as is evident in the myopia of Kant's transcendental perspective, which mirrors the limited, real-life perspective of Immanuel Kant, who never left Königsberg). And it is ultimately this life-*denying* result of pure reason, which erects transcendental barriers to reality and inhabits illusory islands, to which Hamann opposes faith in the name of *life*.[65] Indeed, for Hamann it is Christianity that saves the world—not reason alone, which creates wastelands. This is not to say that after his conversion Hamann maintained only a critical distance *vis-à-vis* the world or, for that matter, other books—particularly given his frequent admission to Herder and Jacobi that he read to the point of gluttony.[66] Nor is it to say that Hamann was a simple fideist—which is evident enough in that he could inspire such a quintessential pagan as Goethe. Rather, it was precisely because of Scripture and the conversion it effected that he was able to embrace the world with a new abandon, like Dostoevsky's Alyosha, who embraced the ground; and it is in this sense that one is to understand his astonishing remark shortly after his conversion: "To me every book is a Bible."[67]

It was precisely because of Scripture and the conversion it effected that he was able to embrace the world with a new abandon, like Dostoevsky's Alyosha, who embraced the ground; and it is in this sense that one is to understand his astonishing remark shortly after his conversion: "To me every book is a Bible."

Inasmuch as he sees *everything* in light of Scripture, which reveals the one Word, the Logos, in the words of nature and history, analogy is the

63. *Londoner Schriften*, p. 131 (N I, p. 70f.). For a complete discussion of this theme (by a student of Rahner along Rahnerian lines), see Georg Baudler, *"Im Worte Sehen." Das Sprachdenken Johann Georg Hamanns* (Bonn: H. Bouvier Verlag, 1970).

64. For a recent and thorough development of Hamann's insights in this regard, see Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002).

65. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 257 (B 295).

66. Cf. Hamann's remark to Mendelssohn [13 September, 1770], "Meanwhile there still resides in my breast the original sin of learned curiosity, the addiction to reading, and a certain, indefinite pleasure for things that are not worth the effort or are beyond my current horizon."

67. ZH I, p. 309.

operative principle of Hamann's hermeneutics.[68] And in this respect he recalls the worldview of medievals like Alan of Lille, Hugh of St. Victor, and Bonaventure, all of whom saw nature as a book, a mirror of divine things, a ladder that ascends to God.[69] But in none of them, arguably, is the principle of analogy applied with the degree of historical consciousness one finds in Hamann. Thus, according to Hamann, not only does nature bear manifold witness, but history as well, which includes (as for Photius) even "the flowery language and phrases of the pagans."[70] Indeed, not only does he not "doubt for a minute the divine inspiration of Homer" or the truth hidden throughout Greek mythology, he even views Socrates as a forerunner of Christ, whose "genius" likewise led him to death and whose *docta ignorantia* is a prelude to Pauline wisdom (1 Cor. 8:2-3).[71]

According to Hamann, not only does nature bear manifold witness, but history as well, which includes (as for Photius) even "the flowery language and phrases of the pagans." Indeed, not only does he not "doubt for a minute the divine inspiration of Homer" or the truth hidden throughout Greek mythology, he even views Socrates as a forerunner of Christ.

But if these philological readings of history are inspired by earnest devotion, by a genuine attempt to take all things captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), others are inspired at least in part by Hamann's notorious sense of humor. After all, it was not without reason that Kierkegaard called Hamann "the greatest humorist in Christendom."[72] Thus he attends with special interest to the *unwitting* prophecies of history: whether they be uttered by a pagan author like Virgil in the fourth *Eclogue*, a high priest of Israel like Caiaphas, who thought it better for one man to die for the people (Jn 18:14), or a skeptic like Hume, who could provide an altogether legitimate definition of faith, saying with regard to Christianity that a continuous miracle is required in order "to believe what is most contrary to all custom and experience."[73] Yet here too, far from being desultory, as Kierkegaard was inclined to think, Hamann's various appropriations are given their measure in the depth of divine condescension in Christ (cf. Eph. 3:18), who does not shy from appearing *sub contrario* under all forms of disguise; and so it is to the glory of

68. See *Londoner Schriften,* p. 106 (N I, p. 47), where Hamann says, "The truth is single; yet it has countless analogies and expressions." Cf. *Socratic Memorabilia* (N II, p. 61), where he quotes from Young: *"Analogy,* man's surest guide below."

69. See Ringleben, "Gott als Schriftsteller," p. 35.

70. See N II, p. 172. See also Ringleben, "Rede daß ich dich sehe," p. 222.

71. N IV, p. 329.

72. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers,* ed. and tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1970), II, 1681 [*n.d.,* 1837], (*Pap.* II A 75). As Hamann confesses to Jacobi in 1784: *"The folly of Christianity* is entirely suited to my taste..." (ZH V, p. 275).

73. See David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals,* 3d. ed. ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 131: "...upon the whole, we may conclude, that the *Christian Religion* not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience."

All attests to one economy of divine condescension, which is revealed proleptically in the pagan authors of antiquity (as when the king of Ithaca appears in his own court in the form of a beggar), revealed more clearly in God's love for Israel, and revealed finally to the world, as a light to the Gentiles (Is. 49:6), in the humility [Knechtsgestalt] *of Christ.*

Christ (anticipating the Christocentrism—*contra* Heidegger—of Hölderlin's *Friedensfeier*) that Hamann's gathered historical witnesses redound. "That he is also the God of the pagans," he says in a letter to Lindner, "for that we also have opportunity to thank him, if with Thomas we entirely accept him alone and say: My Lord and my God."[74]

To be sure, for Hamann, it is Christ who holds the keys to the treasures of antiquity. As von Balthasar puts it, for Hamann, "both Judaism and paganism are oriented towards this one Word, which fulfills them both by revealing through the mystery of [his] own lowliness, the primal glory of God's self-abasing love...."[75] Or, as Hamann himself puts it in his mystery writing *Konxompax*, "The revealed name of [God] κατ' εξοχην [*par excellence*] is the single mystery of Judaism, and the Προληψις of his unspoken name the thousand-tongued mystery of paganism."[76] That is to say, all attests to one economy of divine condescension, which is revealed proleptically in the pagan authors of antiquity (as when the king of Ithaca appears in his own court in the form of a beggar),[77] revealed more clearly in God's love for Israel, and revealed finally to the world, as a light to the Gentiles (Is. 49:6), in the humility [*Knechtsgestalt*] of Christ. As he puts it in a striking passage that compares the God of the Old Testament to the gods of Greek mythology:

> Do we not find in Hosea: 'I am like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah (5:12).' Does he not often change himself into a golden rain in order to win the love of a people and a soul. Is his righteousness not jealous about the bowels of his mercy and his love for the children of men. And what great projects did he have necessary in order to blind — that I should speak so humanly — the first [his justice]. How many amorous pursuits does he engage in to make us sensitive and to keep us faithful. Must he not abduct us, must he not often use force against his will — Tell me, how could it have occurred to the pagans to convert the glory of Olympus into the image of an ox, which eats grass?[78]

Thus where Plato sees corrupting lies, Hamann sees a veiled understanding of divine condescension; where modernity sees little but ridiculous anthropomorphisms, Hamann sees allusions to the incredible

74. ZH I, p. 393.

75. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord,* vol. 1, p. 80f.

76. N III, p. 226. Hamann then goes on to say, "But the union of both *tinctures* is a *new man* according to the image of the creator—neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Barbarian or Scythian, plowman or freemason [*sic*]; αλλα παντα και εν πασι." Cf. Ephesians 1:23.

77. N II, p. 211; cf. N II, p. 68: "The pagans were accustomed to such contradictions from the *clever fables* of their poets; until their sophists, like our own, condemned them as a parricide committed against the first, basic principles of human knowledge."

78. Hamann, ZH I, p. 352. The "golden rain" is an allusion to the story of Danaë and the manner of Zeus' entrance into her chamber; the reference to God's righteousness is an allusion to Zeus' wife Hera, who represents justice and order and whom Zeus deceived by his transformations; the reference to the ox is to the rape of Europa. See Harry Sievers, *Johann Georg Hamanns Bekehrung* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1969), pp. 126-35.

measures — and apparent folly — of God's love. Moreover he does not hesitate to compare Zeus' "self-emptyings" to "that which our religion has revealed to us" (cf. Ph 2:7)[79] — bearing in mind that the comparison is one of analogy, since for Hamann, as also for the late Schelling, the self-emptying of Christ is a *factum* of history, whereas those of Zeus are the stuff of an inspired poetic imagination, i.e., mythology, and not, in any proper sense of the word, revelation. And so too he says, "Even the pagans knew to weave a little word of these mysteries into their mythology. Jupiter transformed himself into a miserable, shivering, and half-dead cuckoo dripping with rain in order to enjoy the favor of his lawful wife — And the Jew, the Christian rejects his king because he coos like a hen around his chicks, contending in a meek and lowly form for the rights of his love" (cf. Mt. 23:37).[80]

This is the central theme of Hamann's authorship: the folly of divine condescension.

From the time of his conversion to the inscription on his gravestone, this is the central theme of Hamann's authorship: the folly of divine condescension, of divine love, which is a "stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23). And for Hamann it is a folly that applies—according to a thoroughgoing triune logic — equally to the humility of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture. As von Balthasar observes, "The same wonder that fills Hamann at the depletion of God in the servant figure of Christ fills him when he contemplates it in the Holy Scriptures, for there 'old rags' are twisted into ropes to pull man out when he lies trapped like Jeremiah in the miry pit, and one must, with Paul, venture to speak of the foolishness and infirmity of God."[81] The only difference is that whereas the Son offends logic and good philosophy, the Spirit offends "good taste" and what counts as "good style." In either case, as Hamann (and von Balthasar, following him) realized, the operations of the economic Trinity call for an entirely new understanding of beauty and glory: "Glory, that is, as kenosis, not only of the incarnate Son, but also of the [Father], who by creating reaches into nothingness, and of the Holy Spirit, who conceals himself, as

Whereas the Son offends logic and good philosophy, the Spirit offends "good taste" and what counts as "good style."

79. *Ibid.*

80. ZH I, p. 394. It is noteworthy here and in many places throughout the *Biblical Meditations* that Hamann never faults the Jews for rejecting Christ without faulting Christians themselves. See, for example, *Londoner Schriften*, p. 125 (N I, p. 65): "How can we [speak] of the blindness of the Jews and their stubbornness without shame, without blasphemy, without fear, in view of our own—we Christians, to whom God has revealed infinitely more, do we not live in the same idolatry to which the Jews succumbed; in the same unbelief, in which they were stuck; in the same blindness, notwithstanding the testimony of their senses, the testimony of Moses and the express will of God as revealed through commandments, blessings, and chastisements. Oh God! If their judgment was so terrible, how [terrible] will ours be [?]. If Jerusalem came to such an end, what will be the fall of Babel?" Indeed, not only does Hamann never fail to see the Jews as God's chosen people, he never affirms a strict supersessionism whereby Israel is replaced by the Church. It is rather that the Church is grafted onto Israel following Paul in Romans 9-11. See the concluding section on prophecies below.

81. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 3, p. 251.

Not only did Hamann perceive that glory and kenosis *go hand in hand; he also perceived that this paradoxical identity (this* coincidentia oppositorum*), which is proper to Christ (and is evident in the title of Hamann's late writing,* Golgotha and Scheblimini*), is mysteriously proper to* all *the persons of the Trinity: that their shared glory consists precisely in their shared humility, their shared* kenosis*, which is but a figure, for the sake of the creature, of the kenotic life, the love they share, in eternity.*

Hamann strikingly puts it, 'under all kinds of rags and tatters,' [even] 'under the rubbish' of the letter of Scripture."[82] In other words, not only did Hamann perceive that glory and *kenosis* go hand in hand; he also perceived that this paradoxical identity (this *coincidentia oppositorum*), which is proper to Christ (and is evident in the title of Hamann's late writing, *Golgotha and Scheblimini*), is mysteriously proper to *all* the persons of the Trinity: that their shared glory consists precisely in their shared humility, their shared *kenosis*, which is but a figure, for the sake of the creature, of the kenotic life, the love they share, in eternity. What is more, for Hamann, their reciprocal *kenosis*, as revealed in the economy of salvation, is the paramount testimony that Scripture affords regarding the *unity* of the divine nature. In a passage of central importance to his authorship, which speaks of the unified action of the Trinity *ad extra*, he writes: "It belongs to the unity of divine revelation that the Spirit of GOd [*sic*] should have lowered himself and emptied himself of his majesty just as the Son of God did in assuming the form of a servant, and just as the whole of creation is a work of the greatest humility."[83] This is the fundamental intuition of Hamann's early thought, and one might even say that the *Biblical Meditations* are simply a series of reflections — occasioned by a particular story or verse — in light of this one theme:

> How much did God the Father humble himself when he not only formed a lump of clay, but also animated it with his breath. How much did God the Son humble himself: he became a man, he became the least among men, he took upon himself the form of a servant [*Knechtsgestalt*], he became the unhappiest of men, he was made sin for us.... How much did God the Holy Spirit humble himself when he became a historian of the most particular, contemptible, and insignificant events on earth in order to reveal to man in his own language, in his own history, in his own ways the plans, the mysteries, and the ways of the Godhead?[84]

No doubt, few Christian authors have ever reflected so thoroughly on the humility of *all* the persons of the Trinity; and perhaps none, with the possible exception of Origen, has ever attended so carefully to the humility of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture.[85] To be sure, for

82. *The Glory of the Lord,* vol. 1, p. 80f.

83. N II, p. 171; Cf. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 155 (N I, p. 95), where Hamann says that "all three persons have revealed themselves, since the beginning of the human race, for the sake of human redemption."; cf. p. 196 (N I, p. 135): "In order to indicate the unity of the divine persons we always find in Scripture a confusion [*Verwechselung*] of the works by which they reveal themselves. The triune God created the world, but the work of creation is attributed in a special way to the Father; the triune God was the redeemer of the world, [yet] the blessed Son alone became a human being and suffered on our behalf — without excluding the fellowship of the other two persons in the work of our redemption...."

84. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 151-152 (N I, p. 91).

85. While the narratives of Scripture, as Origen retorts in his *Contra Celsum,* are never so offensive as the stories of Greek mythology, the story of Abraham and Isaac in Gen. 22 has often enough been a cause of offense to modern ethical sensibilities — presenting

Hamann, one must marvel not only that God became flesh, but also an author; what is more, that the Spirit, no less than the Son, would be subjected to the scrutiny and judgment of the world — in this case to the judgment of literary critics, whom Hamann elsewhere calls "high priests in the temple of good taste."[86] As he puts it, "The talk is not of a revelation that a Voltaire, a Bollingbroke, a Shaftesbury would find acceptable; that would most satisfy their prejudices, their wit, their moral and political fancies...."[87] Nor, one might add, though for somewhat different reasons, would it satisfy Nietzsche, whose critique Hamann anticipates by more than a century. For such people, "who trust their judgment enough to do without divine instruction, would have found a mistake in every other revelation and have none necessary. They are the healthy ones, who have no need for the physician" (Lk 5:31).[88] Which goes to say that Hamann's aesthetic of God's abasing glory in creation, Christ, and Scripture cannot be understood apart from the same humility it perceives.

One must marvel not only that God became flesh, but also an author; what is more, that the Spirit, no less than the Son, would be subjected to the scrutiny and judgment of the world — in this case to the judgment of literary critics.

For Hamann, then, who understands the entire economy of salvation in terms of a humility that is offensive to reason and appears, in Luther's words, *sub contrario,* it is almost to be expected that the divine "style" should meet with contempt: "God is accustomed to seeing his wisdom reproached by the children of men. The notion that the highest being himself would honor human beings with a special revelation seems to these jokers so alien and extraordinary that they inquire with Pharaoh what this God wants...."[89] But if the glory of God's style (in creation, Christ and Scripture) is hidden (μύω) *from* rational exegesis — to the point of confounding it — it is hidden precisely *for* those who love him in faith (1 Cor. 2:9-10). As Hamann puts it in one of his later writings:

> If the divine style elects the foolish — the trivial — the base — in order to put to shame the strength and ingenuity of all profane authors: then eyes that are illumined, inspired, armed with the jealousy of a friend, a

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the well-known topic of Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling.* As for the church fathers, while they appealed to Scripture as if to oracles, they never asserted the self-evidence of its divine inspiration; indeed, for them Scripture was not a literary and aesthetic masterpiece to be compared to the great works of the pagans but the Word of God veiled in an unassuming form.

86. See N II, p. 205. Here, in the *Aesthetica in nuce,* the reference is, specifically, to Voltaire, "the high priest in the temple of [good] taste, [who] deduces as validly as Caiaphas, and thinks more fruitfully than Herod." In other words, like Caiaphas, Voltaire is an unwitting exponent of the truth, in this case, that the form of Scripture is offensive to reason. The second reference is to Herod's words to the wise men in Mt. 2:8.

87. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 68 (N I, p. 10).

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.,* p. 67 (N I, p. 9); cf. p. 275 (N I, p. 214): "God! [How] great are your mysteries! Who can perceive them, who can fathom them! Not only the suffering of our savior, but also his rejection by the same people among whom he lived were the conditions of redemption and his glorious revelation."

> confidant, a lover are required to recognize in such disguise the beams of heavenly glory. DEI Dialectus, Soloecismus, as a well-known interpreter says. — It is true here as well: *Vox populi, vox DEI.* — The emperor says "schismam," just as the gods of the earth rarely bother to become linguists. — The sublime in Caesar's style is its negligence.[90]

Aside from indicating the "mystery" form of the divine style, this passage indicates at least three things. First of all, it goes to say that an understanding of Scripture, of the Cross, indeed, of all the works of the economic Trinity, is dependent upon a sympathetic disposition, which is given by the Holy Spirit. Secondly, it shows that "the divine style" has complete disregard for the "grammatologies" of the world; in other words, that God is in no way obliged to fit the bearings of a transcendental logic or what any finite consciousness presumes to delimit as possible. Thirdly, it points to Paul's understanding of the Word of the Cross and, in particular, to a passage in his first letter to the Corinthians that is profoundly significant to Hamann's thought and authorship: "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise ... what is weak in the world to shame the strong ... what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are" (1 Cor. 1:27f). Indeed, for Hamann, this verse not only defines the form of revelation, but even the manner of faithful discourse, the *modus loquendi theologorum* — and thus the peculiar style of his own mimetic authorship.

Yet Hamann takes Paul further, inasmuch as he looks everywhere— in Scripture, nature, and two millennia of history—for this precise "style," which reason finds offensive.

Yet Hamann takes Paul further, inasmuch as he looks everywhere — in Scripture, nature, and two millennia of history — for this precise "style," which reason finds offensive, if not outright absurd. And, for Hamann, one of the best examples of this style and its reception is (as we have seen above), the account of David's behavior before Achish, the king of Gath, in 1 Samuel 21:

> The Holy Spirit has become an historian of human, foolish, indeed, even sinful deeds in order to dupe Achish like David. David disguised himself; the Spirit of purity and wisdom — he makes signs on the doors of the gates ——— The Holy Spirit is not satisfied to speak and write like a man — but as less than a man — as a foolish, raving madman — but he poses this way only in the eyes of God's enemies — he paints the *doors* of the *gates* with signs that no Achish could make any sense of, signs people took for the handwriting of an idiot — what is more, he lets his spittle run down onto his beard. He seems to contradict and pollute himself by what he inspired as the Word of God. He has the lies of an Abraham, the bloodguilt of Lot, he distorts the man pleasing to God into the figure of one who, as is thought, lies under God's greatest punishment.[91]

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90. N II, p. 171. The allusion is to emperor Sigismund, who is supposed to have said at the council of Constance (1414-1417): "We don't want any schismam," i.e., schism, in the church. When the correct spelling was pointed out to him, viz., "schisma," he replied: "Well, I am an emperor and have greater authority than the grammarians. I can even make another grammar." Quoted in Martin Seils, *Johann Georg Hamann: Eine Auswahl aus seinen Schriften* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus Verlag, 1987), p. 268.

91. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 160 (N I, p. 99).

Clearly, for Hamann, this biblical text elicits more than the usual "fear and trembling," particularly when one realizes that what is being said is said not simply about an accident of the divine style but about God himself—which would account for Hamann's otherwise excessive use of dashes. At the same time, there is scarcely a comparable passage in all of Hamann's writings that says so much about the peculiar semiotics of *his own style* (i.e., his later authorship) and *its* reception. For like the Spirit of God, he too puts on faces and masks; he too hides behind the appearance of a madman, painting the doors of his writings with bizarre signs, allusions, and ciphers—not out of sheer eccentricity, but as an appropriate posture before *pure reason,* as a mimetic performance, an "aesthetic imitation," a faithful enacting of divine folly in the age of Enlightenment. In fact, so far does Hamann's imitation go that he wishes to incur the same judgment that Christ himself received from the teachers of the law (cf. Mk 3:20f.) and that Scripture receives at the hands of "enlightened" critics in every age. As he alarmingly puts it to Herder regarding one of his late writings, "The ideal of my embryo [i.e., my text], in case it should be born, will draw upon itself the unavoidable judgment: *He has an unclean spirit.*"[92] Whatever Herder may have thought of this statement, one is inclined to think that this is madness, that such stylistic eccentricities are a function of *Hamann's* personality and by no means essential attributes of the gospel he proclaims. But, of course, Hamann has already anticipated such judgments. For the same "reasonable" critic who would judge him in such terms would demonstrate thereby precisely that he or she does not understand the gospel *as* the Word of the Cross; or, for that matter, that Hamann's style is precisely an attempt to cure him or her of this very blindness, i.e., to show that one cannot understand love unless one is prepared also to understand the mad, ridiculous depths to which it will go in pursuit of the beloved. And this failure of the imagination, this failure to imagine a God who is *at least as poetic* as the best of human poets, moreover, a God who "finds the voice of clay, of earth and ash, as pleasant as the jubilation of the Cherubim and Seraphim,"[93] is why Hamann rejects outright any purely rational understanding of Christianity, like that of his neighbor Kant, who arrives at best at an idol of reason, a regulative idea, a necessary fiction.

Like the Spirit of God, he too puts on faces and masks; he too hides behind the appearance of a madman, painting the doors of his writings with bizarre signs, allusions, and ciphers—not out of sheer eccentricity, but as an appropriate posture before pure reason, *as a mimetic performance, an "aesthetic imitation," a faithful enacting of divine folly in the age of Enlightenment.*

But if Hamann's doctrine of "the strangeness of the Word" — to borrow Milbank's felicitous phrase — anticipates the judgment of rational critics, it also preempts (on the other side of the theological spectrum)

92. ZH III, p. 305. To Herder, 10-11 March, 1777. Cf. N II, p. 200: "Should this rhapsody come to the attention of a passing Levite of modern literature: I know in advance that he will bless himself, as did St. Peter before the great linen sheet bound at four corners, in which one look revealed to him four-footed animals of the earth and wild animals and reptiles and birds of the heavens — 'O no; *demoniac – Samaritan!*' — (thus will he berate the philologist in his heart) — 'for readers of orthodox tastes there can be no *common* expressions or unclean *vessels.*"

93. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 188 (N I, p. 127).

all debates concerning the alleged "inerrancy" of Scripture. For it shows that all such assertions belong squarely within the tradition of Enlightenment rationality they otherwise so avidly contest (for example, in defense of miracles), given that they too unwittingly deny the folly of the gospel and the super-rational form of revelation. What is more, such a position (of biblical inerrancy), insofar as it expects to encounter throughout Scripture a rational, discursive form — one that can be translated directly into the terms of modern science — inadvertently embraces a hermeneutics that would be just as well off *without* the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and thus a hermeneutics that requires no revelation beyond the scope of reason's native powers. Thus arise the typical debates — the *Scheingefechte* — concerning the scientific status of the biblical creation account, all of which might easily be resolved, as Hamann already realized in 1758, by a simple distinction between the genres of narrative and explanation — the first of which is proper to the condescension of the Holy Spirit, the second of which is proper to the natural sciences. As he puts it in his meditations on Genesis:

A narration, which would necessarily have been measured according to the concepts of human beings and, to a certain extent, according to the concepts of the time in which he wrote, can give little satisfaction to minds that demand an explanation, that prefer the conceivability of the matter to the truth.

> There has been no lack of philosophers of good will who have explained creation as [one would explain] a natural event; it is therefore no wonder that they assume the same of Moses, and expect him to give an explanation [*Erklärung*] instead of a narration [*Erzählung*] — I say a narration. [For] a narration, which would necessarily have been measured according to the concepts of human beings and, to a certain extent, according to the concepts of the time in which he wrote, can give little satisfaction to minds that demand an explanation, that prefer the conceivability of the matter to the truth.[94]

Against an explanatory model, Hamann thus affirms a narrative account of truth — which is not to say that, for him, there is no truth apart from human story-making, or that Scripture is not wholly inspired.[95] Rather it is to say that narrative is the divinely chosen form suited to disclosing truths that exceed reason's powers of comprehension. As he goes on to say, "That Moses should have explained himself according to Aristotelian, Cartesian, or Newtonian concepts, would be just as ridiculous a demand as that God should have revealed himself in a universal, philosophical language, which has been the philosopher's

94. *Ibid.*, p. 69 (N I, p. 11). See Oswald Bayer, "Erzählung und Erklärung. Eine Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Theologie und Naturwissenschaften," in *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 39 (1997), pp. 1-14.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 66 (N I, p. 8): "The great author of these holy books has the intention of making every sincere reader of them, through faith in his [or her] redeemer, *wise unto righteousness.* The holy men under whose name they were preserved were driven by the Holy Spirit; they received divine inspiration in the production of their writings, in order that they might be useful for teaching, for discipline, for reproof, for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:15-16)." And in this respect, as the effective Word of God — whose purpose is to perfect reason through faith, and in no way to satisfy rational expectations and prejudices — Scripture is indeed perfect or inerrant, as the Psalmist says, "Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven" (Ps. 119:89).

stone for so many learned minds."[96] The demand is fundamentally absurd because the ultimate truths of Scripture defy rational explanation, as attested by Paul's inability to relate his experience of the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2f.).[97] As such, they can be grasped only "through a glass darkly," according to the sensible (not purely rational) nature of the creature. This is why Scripture is written in a narrative form, and why Christ himself speaks in parables: "Scripture can speak to us in no other way than in parables [*Gleichnissen*], because all our knowledge is sensible, figural, and because the understanding and reason everywhere transform the images of external things into allegories and signs of abstract, spiritual, and higher concepts."[98] Accordingly, Hamann contends, though the learned, in their quest for a *mathesis universalis,* believe that they can do without a sensible narrative form, which is suited to all people, they can no more dispense with it anymore than they can dispense with the sun.[99] But if the form of Scripture is an anthropological necessity, tailored to the sensible nature of the creature and the *proper* operation of reason (which is designed not to fabricate *entia rationis* but to see concepts in a figure), for Hamann it is at the same time always a matter of divine election (1 Cor. 1:21f.), of that divine pleasure in hiding the kingdom from "the wise and learned" and revealing it to little children (Mt. 11:25-26): "For aside from this [first] consideration, we see that it pleased God to hide his counsel [from] us human beings, to reveal to us only so much as is necessary for our salvation and comfort, but at the same time in such a way so as to go behind the wise of the world, the Lords [*sic*] of the world; thus did God make the lowly, the despised, indeed, the things that are not, as the apostle says, into instruments of his secret counsel and hidden will."[100]

If the form of Scripture is an anthropological necessity, tailored to the sensible nature of the creature and the proper *operation of reason (which is designed not to fabricate* entia rationis *but to see concepts in a figure), for Hamann it is at the same time always a matter of divine election (1 Cor. 1:21f.), of that divine pleasure in hiding the kingdom from "the wise and learned."*

Hamann's authorship is thus, fundamentally, an *ironic* one, inasmuch as it testifies to a God of history — a God who condescends to the impurity of the senses and even to folly out of sheer love for his people — in an age that could find God only in abstract principles, a "God" that at best amounted to a metaphysical *ens entium,* if not a transcendental *ens rationis.* Thus he marvels, "God! By a counsel that no reason can

96. *Ibid.*, p. 70 (N I, p.12). Cf. p. 69 (N I, p. 11): "Who would suppose that one should look for a history of the world in the books of Moses. Many seem to scoff at him simply because he does not provide them with the means of ... refuting the fables of Herodotus. How laughable — how unbelievable would this story of the [origin] of the world perhaps appear to them if it had been handed down to us in as complete a form as they wish." For a more extensive treatment of this topic, see Ulrich Moustakas, *Urkunde und Experiment: Neuzeitliche Naturwissenschaft im Horizont einer hermeneutischen Theologie der Schöpfung bei Johann Georg Hamann* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003).

97. *Ibid.*

98. *Ibid.*, p. 219 (N I, p. 157f.). Cf. p. 173 (N I, p. 112): "Finite creatures are able to see the truth and the essence of things only in parables."

99. *Ibid.*, p. 70 (N I, p. 12).

100. *Ibid.*, p. 219 (N I, p. 158).

The abasement of the Father in creation and the abasement of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture both testify to the abasement of the Son in redemption. What is more, they witness to one another — the Holy Spirit to the Son (Jn 16:14), the Son to the Father (Jn 17:6), the Father to the Son (Mt. 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22) — in such a way that, remarkably, none ever witnesses to himself (Jn 5:31-40; 8:54).

sufficiently admire..., your wisdom has made the folly of men, the sins of men, into a pedagogue, which leads to Christ.... God! How did pride come into the human heart [when] all Scripture is written in a way whereby you willingly humbled yourself in order to teach us humility."[101] Indeed, what reason could not permit and even Lessing (who was otherwise attentive to divine pedagogy) could not fathom, Hamann saw as testimony to the humility of the Holy Spirit, who abased himself to communicate the ways of God in human terms:

> God condescended as much as possible to accommodate human inclinations and concepts, indeed, even prejudices and weaknesses. This marvelous characteristic of his love, of which Holy Scripture is full, is ridiculed by weak minds, who place a human wisdom or a satisfaction of their curiosity..., an agreement with the taste of the time..., ahead of the divine Word. No wonder ... if the Spirit of Scripture is dismissed with just the same indifference, indeed, if the Spirit seems just as mute and useless as the savior did to Herod, who, notwithstanding his great curiosity and expectation to see him, readily sent him ... back to Pilate (Lk. 23: 7-11).[102]

Once again, what Hamann finds interesting is that the Son's treatment at the hands of his judges should be repeated in the case of the Holy Spirit, whose writings were *dismissed* by Voltaire as the crude and foolish imaginations of human authors who impiously ascribed their work to the Supreme Being.[103] For Hamann, however, the pattern does not stop with the rejection of the Son and the Holy Spirit, but extends even to the rejection of creation as the self-abasing declaration of the Father's love (keeping in mind that Hamann maintains an ultimate unity of the operations of the Trinity *ad extra*). Thus, each of the persons of the Trinity is mysteriously subject to human rejection. But in this way, through their reciprocal *kenosis*, through their giving and receiving, they reveal something about the nature of eternal life. For the abasement of the Father in creation and the abasement of the Holy Spirit in the writing of Scripture both testify to the abasement of the Son in redemption. What is more, they witness to one another — the Holy Spirit to the Son (Jn 16:14), the Son to the Father (Jn 17:6), the Father to the Son (Mt. 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22) — in such a way that, remarkably, none ever witnesses to himself (Jn 5:31-40; 8:54). And if this is the kenotic life of the immanent Trinity as revealed in the economy of salvation, then the

101. *Ibid.*, p. 161 (N I, p. 100).

102. *Ibid.*, p. 68f. (N I, p. 10f.)

103. The sentiment of the Enlightenment is notably expressed by Voltaire in his *Sermon of the Fifty*, ed. J. A. R. Séguin, 1962: "...if one can dishonor the Divinity with absurd fables, may these fables perish forever.... My bretheren, you know what horror seized us when we read the writings of the Hebrews together, directing our attention only to those traits that violated purity, charity, good faith, justice, and universal reason, traits we found not merely in every chapter but which, to make things worse, were sanctified in all ... but ... it is not here that I wish to examine the ridiculous and the impossible; I concentrate on the execrable."

latter is but an externalization, for the sake of the creature, of the kenotic love within the Trinity itself. Indeed, one might venture to say that the economy of salvation is simply that movement, whereby all of creation, which the Father loved out of nothingness, is restored by the Son, in the Spirit, to the fold of trinitarian love (cf. Lk 15:11f.).

Although one might be inclined, following the late Schelling, for instance, to develop Hamann's reflections into a full-blown doctrine of the relation between the immanent Trinity (i.e., the relations of the persons *ad intra* in eternity) and the economic Trinity (i.e., the persons of the Trinity *ad extra,* as manifest in the temporal economy of salvation), Hamann never takes matters this far.[104] In fact, his reflections always seem to follow the other (non-metaphysical) direction, that is, to follow the movement whereby God continues to introduce himself into the world, into the most ordinary events of human life, where he vies for our love. As he put it to Lindner, "Every Phoenomenon [*sic*] of natural and civic life, every appearance of the visible world is nothing but a wall behind which ... he stands, a window through which ... he sees, a lattice through which ... he peers; ...He watches our coquetries just like the king of the Philistines (Gen. 26:8)."[105] In other words, if God is like a

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104. At this point, since Hamann has (with some justification) been identified as a source for various kenotic theologies within 19th century Lutheranism, and since these theologies have more or less defined the speculative trajectory of Lutheran theology ever since, it is of considerable importance to distinguish him from them. In one recent article, for example, Matthew Becker, "The Self-Giving God: The Trinity in Johannes von Hoffman's Theology," PRO ECCLESIA 12 (Fall 2003), pp. 417-446, Hamann is identified as a precursor to Johannes von Hoffman (p. 421ff.). While this is no doubt true—so much so that Hamann can be read as *the* father of modern, speculative Lutheran theology, having little patience for the God of classical metaphysics and stressing instead the kenosis of God in history—Hamann would scarcely have made the further *metaphysical* move to say that God not only empties himself in creation and human history, but constitutes his very being thereby. Indeed, for Hamann, *in no sense* is God relationally dependent upon the creature in such a way that one must affirm "a fundamental connection or relation between the Trinity and human beings..." (p. 421). Not even (the late) Schelling, for all his speculative daring, would make such a claim, for one is then left with a necessary process in which God is necessarily implicated (and one is back in the grip of Hegel). Rather, for Hamann (and for the late Schelling) God freely empties himself and, indeed, has no need for creation whatsoever (even if, for Schelling, who never broke entirely free from the grip of Jacob Boehme, this free self-emptying in creation initiates a subsequently necessary process of divine self-recuperation). Were it otherwise, God's self-emptying would no longer be what it is: an act of perfect agape. Instead, it would become an act whereby God had something to gain (following the pattern of every heterodox Gnosticism, from Valentinus to Boehme to Hegel). Indeed, to take Hamann's doctrine of kenosis further (following the trajectory of modern, speculative Lutheran theology) is inevitably to transform the meaning of kenosis altogether: to make it (and time and history and the creature) something essential to God himself, and so inevitably (as Cyril O'Regan has pointed out) to transform the movement of kenosis from a movement from more to less into a movement from less to more—at which point (following O'Regan), one must speak of a "metaleptic" swerve from the grammar of Christian orthodoxy.

105. ZH I, p. 352. Cf. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 95 (N I, p. 36): "One has to be amazed to see how God enters into all minor circumstances and prefers to reveal his kingdom [*Regierung*]

This, at least, was what Hamann experienced amid his destitute circumstances in London: that no path to the human heart is too lowly for the searching love of the Holy Spirit.

lover, and the phenomena of nature are "the lattice through which he peers," then no aspect of experience, however base or trivial, can be considered beneath the workings of providence. This, at least, was what Hamann experienced amid his destitute circumstances in London: that no path to the human heart is too lowly for the searching love of the Holy Spirit: "Like earthly lovers, this Spirit of love searches out solitary places, darkness, shadows, and mystery. He speaks through glimpses, winks, and sighs." To be sure, such "plays of his wit" are initially obscure; but, according to Hamann, they "are like names etched in trees; with the first cut of the bark they barely catch the eye, but with the years they grow out so that every passerby can read them."[106]

In sum, then, Hamann discovered God's radical condescension everywhere: in nature, in history, and, last but not least, in his own life; and for this reason one finds throughout the *Biblical Meditations,* almost in the form of a mantra, expressions like the following: "Who is not amazed by God's condescension, when...."[107] Indeed, Hamann marvels everywhere over the depth of God's love, which causes him to deny, or so it would seem, his own divinity. But if his exegesis is guided by the theme of divine condescension (or if, rather, the former gave rise to the latter), it is also guided by the patristic principle that what is revealed in the New Testament is hidden in the Old: *vetus in novo patet, novum in vetere latet.* (And in this respect he maintained the practice of allegorical interpretation, even though his own Lutheran tradition tended to reject it). Thus he says, in perfect keeping with the church fathers, "The entire law of Moses was simply a figure of the knowledge and the truth that would be revealed in Christ."[108] And similarly, "*The Spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.* (Rev. 19:10). Throughout all of Holy Scripture, this rule serves as the cornerstone and must be the touchstone for all exegetes."[109]

The most important yield of Hamann's allegorical exegesis, however, was what it suggested to him about divine condescension. For what he discovered was that the same pattern of kenosis, *the* Knechtsgestalt *of Christ, is apparent throughout the Old Testament.*

The most important yield of Hamann's allegorical exegesis, however, was what it suggested to him about divine condescension. For what he discovered was that the same pattern of *kenosis,* the *Knechtsgestalt* of Christ, is apparent throughout the Old Testament — and, often enough, precisely in those stories that reason finds the most offensive or at least the most irrelevant (as we have seen already from the story of David in 1 Samuel above). For example, Hamann notes that the creation of Adam is already an act of divine condescension (Gen. 2:7); moreover, that cre-

in common events of human life rather than in rare and extraordinary ones." As for the apparent misspelling of "phaenomenon" — assuming Ziesemer and Henkel are correct in their reading of the manuscript — it would seem to be intentional, since it accords wholly with Hamann's verbal understanding of reality, not as a mute "appearing" of nature, but as a "speech (φωνή) to the creature through the creature" (N II, p. 198).

106. ZH I, p. 344f.

107. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 96 (N I, p. 37).

108. *Ibid.,* p. 291 (N I, p. 230).

109. *Ibid.,* p. 97 (N I, p. 39).

ation and humility go mysteriously hand in hand—a theme that is pivotal to understanding the outward form of all his later publications.[110] But nowhere does he find the theme of condescension so poignant—and so moving—as in God's condescension to the fallen Adam in Genesis 3. As he puts it, "God conceals from the man the very attribute that could terrify him as a sinner. He denies here his omniscience; he condescends to the blindness of Adam. [He asks,] 'Adam, where are you?'"[111] Likewise, he finds God's mercy in the clothing of Adam's and Eve's shame with "garments of skin" (Gen. 3:21), as a "prophetic comfort" that one day human beings will be clothed with the Holy Spirit. And from here he proceeds to discover God's condescension to human beings and human blindness throughout the economy of salvation, culminating in the self-abasement of the Son of God in the incarnation (cf. 1 Jn 1:3; Jn 9:6).

He marvels over the story of Abraham's obedience (Gen. 22) and the mystery hidden therein that God, the Father, would one day imitate Abraham, the father of faith, and by this imitation of a human being *exalt the human race.*

But the chief allegorical content of the Old Testament Hamann discovered in God's election of and dealings with Israel. And so he marvels over the story of Abraham's obedience (Gen. 22) and the mystery hidden therein that God, the Father, would one day imitate Abraham, the father of faith, and by this imitation *of a human being* exalt the human race; over the story of Joseph, whose life is virtually a transparent allegory of Christ; over Joshua, who is likewise a type of Christ; over the book of Ruth, which by itself is rich enough to preserve the entire Bible; and over Samuel, whose apparition prefigures Christ's resurrection (1 Sam. 28:13).[112] But "in no story did it please the Holy Spirit to reveal himself so much as in that of David," for here "every chapter is a story of human redemption."[113] Indeed, as the *Biblical Meditations* amply attest, the entire movement of divine condescension, which began with creation (but points back to the kenotic life of the immanent Trinity) aims at the redemption of human beings from the consequences of the fall. As Hamann puts it, "God had to teach human beings to stand aright again; he had to condescend to perform the minor services of a wet nurse until they grew up, in order to lead them into all truth by his Spirit."[114]

The ultimate aim of divine condescension is — what one would not ordinarily expect from a (non-Finnish) Lutheran — our deification.

But as is especially clear from his *Reflections on Church Hymns* (to which I now turn), the ultimate aim of divine condescension is — what one would not ordinarily expect from a (non-Finnish) Lutheran — our deification. For "Just as God came down in order to be like us in all things...,

110. See p. 127 (N I, p. 67): "In order to create man, he came down...."

111. *Ibid.*, p. 77 (N I, p. 18). Cf. p. 144 (N I, p. 83): "God feels a human sympathy when human beings wrestle with him; he forgets that he is God, he forgets his omnipotence...."

112. *Ibid.*, p. 94 (N I, p. 35); pp. 98-100 (N I, pp. 41-43); p. 121 (N I, p. 60); p. 146 (N I, p. 85).

113. *Ibid.*, p. 164 (N I, p. 103); p. 163 (N I, p. 102). Cf. p. 159 (N I, p. 98): "The friendship of David and Jonathan is a type of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ and of the fellowship it allows us to enjoy. The Son of God divests himself like Jonathan and gives to human beings not only his own clothes, but his victorious sword, his bow, and his belt."

114. *Ibid.*, p. 116 (N I, p. 55).

What is most interesting here, and arguably most profound about Hamann's early thought as a whole, is that he combines this patristic emphasis upon theosis *with his own emphasis upon* kenosis, *and that he does so in Luther's felicitous image of a marvelous exchange,* commercium mirabile.

so should man be exalted, rapt above all finite creatures and transfigured into God himself. God became a son of man and heir to the curse, death, and fate of human beings; so should man become a son of God, a sole heir of heaven, and be as closely united with God as the fullness of divinity dwelled bodily in Christ."[115] Or again, "How human, how weak, how lowly does God make himself on our account? ... He himself became a human being in order to transform us into gods. — He gives us everything that he has — What could be more dear to him than his Son and his Spirit — Everything that God possesses is mine — and for what in return? Give me, my son, your heart."[116] Clearly, Hamann does not hesitate to use precisely the language of divinization (*theosis*) that is common among the early church fathers. But what is most interesting here, and arguably most profound about Hamann's early thought as a whole, is that he combines this patristic emphasis upon *theosis* with his own emphasis upon *kenosis*, and that he does so in Luther's felicitous image of a marvelous exchange, *commercium mirabile*: "Is it possible to conceive of a greater exchange, a greater trade. Is anything more amazing than the union of Jesus Christ and of God with us, since he made himself nothing [*sich vernichtigt*] in order to exalt us to the throne and seat of God...."[117]

For Hamann, then, Luther's understanding of exchange (*commercium*) need not be limited to the exchange that takes place between *homo peccator et Deus iustificans,* whereby God's righteousness becomes our own, but may also, in its most proper mystical depths, be understood in terms of our participation in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). For, as Hamann naturally concluded, only this astonishing height of glory properly corresponds to the depth of divine condescension: "Who would believe that God would find his honor in our obedience and the pleasure of his glory in our fellowship and participation?"[118] In fact, Hamann not only says that "this participation in the divine nature was the ultimate purpose of the incarnation," but that it is prefigured in the relation between the body and the soul.[119] The difference is that the union of the soul with God — which Scripture indicates as the purpose of creation already through Adam's direct animation by the breath of God (Gen. 2:7) — is "incomparably more perfect."[120] As Hamann puts

115. *Ibid.*, p. 375 (N I, p. 272). Reflection from 29. April on the hymn, *Ich bin Gottes Bild und Ehr[e]* (*I am God's Image and Glory*).

116. *Ibid.*, p. 356 (N I, p. 253).

117. *Ibid.*, p. 103 (N I, p. 40). Herein, then, lies the logic of Hamann's doctrine of divine kenosis, as contrasted with every heterodox transformation of it: It is not that God himself has something to gain hereby—as though he had yet to be completed through an encounter with death, finitude, the void, etc.—but that he makes himself nothing for the sake of *our* exaltation.

118. *Ibid.*, p. 74 (N I, p. 16).

119. *Ibid.*, p. 370 (N I, p. 268).

120. *Ibid.*, p. 73 (N I, p. 15).

it, "Let us never forget that the nature, whose existence we receive from the breath of life, belongs intimately to God, is closely related to him, that it therefore can reach perfection and happiness in no other way than that it return to its origin, its source...."[121] And this leads Hamann into an excursus, which shows that Christianity, rather than restraining his "monstrously excessive imagination" (in Dilthey's words), actually inspires it: "If [the soul], in comparison with God, is itself nothing but a breath of God, how great must we become through him, how blessed in him.... As the limits of our members and organs of sense, together with their sensations, compare to the flight of which our souls here already are capable, what excessive imaginations must we have of a being — that is to be One in God, as the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father (Jn 17:21)."[122]

Let us never forget that the nature, whose existence we receive from the breath of life, belongs intimately to God, is closely related to him, that it therefore can reach perfection and happiness in no other way than that it return to its origin, its source.

Such statements go a long way toward dispelling notions of Christianity as a species of neo-Kantian Protestantism (of the kind one finds in Ritschl, for example, and for which Nietzsche — perhaps rightly — displayed such contempt). At the same time, they inevitably raise questions as to whether Hamann himself was a mystic and what relation he may have had to the mystical tradition.[123] To be sure, here it is not a question of mysticism *à la* Schleiermacher (as Dilthey argued), but of mysticism in the tradition of the early church (e.g., in Paul and Ignatius of Antioch), continuing through the Byzantine period (e.g., in Gregory

121. *Ibid.* For all his emphasis upon divine condescension, Hamann is, therefore, not opposed to notions of mystical ascent as such; he is opposed only to an ascent that is not borne on the wings of divine condescension, i.e., a theology of glory in Luther's sense of the term. In fact, one could say that he affirms as one and the same the mystery of divine *kenosis* and human *theosis*, i.e., of God's temporal journey into our humanity and our eternal journey (*epektasis*) into the divine fullness. Cf. p. 363 (N I, p. 261): "By a mysterious, more intimate relationship with the highest being, the smallest, most finite, and weakest creature is capable of becoming happier and greater than the cherub or seraph, which makes itself into God."

122. *Ibid.*, p. 370 (N I, p. 268).

123. Lutheran scholarship, in keeping with its own tradition, has for the most part tended to deny such claims, if not to ignore them altogether, pointing precisely to Hamann's doctrine of divine condescension and to his own "sensualism." See, for example, Helmuth Schreiner, *Die Menschwerdung Gottes in der Theologie Johann Georg Hamanns* (Tübingen: Katzmann Verlag, 1950), pp. 46-47. Thus, Schreiner can say, "Absorption of humanity into divinity, the dissolution of divinity in the human soul [...], identity of God and soul—of all this there is not a trace to be found in Hamann." No doubt, this is a correct assessment *if* mysticism is taken to mean absolute identity, which orthodox mystics of the Christian tradition, despite the suggestiveness of their language, have never maintained. (For the analogical interval is never removed; the creature never becomes the Creator.) At the same time, it does not address the question as to whether Hamann's "sensualism" is not first and foremost a product *of his mysticism*; and whether his notion of exchange (based on ample textual evidence from his *Reflections on Church Hymns*) is not fundamentally related, beyond Luther, to the tradition of mystical marriage. Indeed, Hamann raises questions as to whether Luther's own theology of *commercium demands* to be taken in this direction, beyond—without displacing—the language of justification, as Tuomo Mannermaa and other Finnish Lutherans, such as Risto Saarinen, have suggested.

Palamas) and the Spanish golden age (e.g., in Teresa of Avila). Of course, it would be difficult to say whether Hamann had much awareness of these latter figures, and given the disparity of contexts (Hamann, a Lutheran, writing in the middle of the Enlightenment), even their association seems odd. Nevertheless, one should not be surprised that he should speak of such mystical *topoi* of the Eastern church as the indwelling of God in the soul (Jn 14:23) and the possible transfiguration of all Christians in Christ (Mt. 17:1f.); or that he should address God in the language of mystical marriage more common in the West: "Without You I am nothing; You are my entire self [*mein ganzes Ich*]."[124] Indeed, while he more often speaks of divine adoption, he too speaks of himself as the "treasure and bride of Christ."[125] But again, what makes Hamann such a powerful spokesman of the Lutheran tradition is his insistence that none of this is possible apart from God's prior condescension, apart from grace, in the absence of which Christianity is readily distorted into a kind of Promethean asceticism. And nowhere, for Hamann, is this so palpably expressed as in the story of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11): "Come, says God, let us come down from heaven. This is the means by which we have come closer to heaven. The condescension of God to the earth; no tower of reason whose spire reaches to heaven...."[126] To be sure, for Hamann, there is no Scheblimini (Ps. 110:1) apart from Golgotha (Mt. 27:33), no glory apart from abasement (cf. Jn 12:24) — just as there is no exaltation of the creature apart from the humility of Christ, which is the key to the entire economy and the logic of every ascent (cf. Ph. 2:6-11). And so it is with this notion of divine condescension that he begins his *Biblical Meditations*, and to this notion that he ever again returns.

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FRAGMENTS AND PROPHECIES

Whereas in the *Biblical Meditations* Hamann went so far as to interpret *everything* allegorically, and in the *Reflections on Church Hymns* he speaks of mystical union even in this life, in the *Fragments*, which were composed toward the end of his London period, he returns to the limits of the senses. The focus of attention is now the story of the feeding of the five thousand and the words of Christ to the disciples, which serve as the work's subtitle: "Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost" (Jn 6:12). As with everything in Hamann, the title and the story have multiple meanings. At one level, the story certainly appeals to Hamann's distinctively Christian sense of humor: "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But

124. *Ibid.*, p. 157 (N I, p. 96); p. 390 (N I, p. 287). Cf. Gal. 2:20.

125. *Ibid.*, p. 358 (N I, p. 255).

126. *Ibid.*, p. 89 (N I, p. 30).

what are they among so many people?" (Jn 6:9).[127] At another level, it indicates the mimetic form he would soon give to his published writings, beginning with the *Socratic Memorabilia* (1759), which are likewise small, seemingly insignificant, a mere collection of fragments, but which, by the Holy Spirit, the true *bricoleur*, he hopes will be transformed, indeed transubstantiated, into a plentiful defense of Christianity in an age of unbelief.

In his discussion of the story, however, Hamann gives it another and surprising reading. He reads the five barley loaves as a figure for the five senses, and their multiplication as the miraculous yield of the arts and sciences over time: "What a storehouse of knowledge is the history of learning.... Is it not a wonder of our spirit that it is able to transform the poverty of the senses into such great wealth that one must marvel over it [?]"[128] On the one hand, Hamann thus recognizes the dignity of the arts and sciences and in this respect stands *with* his contemporaries (which must be said in light of Isaiah Berlin's intractable, but mistaken reading of Hamann as an irrationalist). On the other hand, he refuses to entertain such exalted notions of reason as persisted in his day, e.g., notions of reason as a faculty independent of the senses. For "Upon what [are all the sciences] founded? Upon 5 barley loaves, upon 5 senses; and *these* we share with the non-rational animals. Not only the entire warehouse of reason, but even the treasury of faith rests upon this stock."[129] In so many words, Hamann gives the touchstone of his anthropology and epistemology, which carries over into all his later works: human beings may very well share in the world of ideas as creatures made in the image of God, but the very power of reason, which distinguishes us from the animals, is likewise based on the information of the senses — with this difference, that it transfigures the information of the senses "into allegories and signs of abstract, spiritual, and higher concepts."[130] In short, we are not angels, we have (save for the workings of grace) no immediate intuitions, and reason cannot be divorced from the senses or from its interpretive function *vis-à-vis* the given texts of Scripture, nature, and history without spinning its wheels in the autonomous fabrication of *entia rationis.* And in this regard, interestingly enough, aside from their substantive disagreement on other matters, Hamann's position is not dissimilar to that of Kant. Indeed, he suggests *before* Kant (though in a reversal of his friend's famous maxim) that apart from the testimony of the senses, reason is blind: "Our reason is like that blind Theban prophet, Teiresias, to whom

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127. *Ibid.*, p. 406 (N I, p. 298). This verse also serves as one of the mottos to Hamann's *Five Pastoral Letters concerning School Drama* (N II, p. 351).

128. *Ibid.*, p. 406f. (N I, p. 298f.).

129. *Ibid.*, p. 406 (N I, p. 298).

130. *Biblical Meditations,* p. 219 (N I, p. 158).

his daughter, Manto, described the fight of the birds, and who [then] prophesied on the basis of her report."[131]

According to Hamann, even from a strictly philosophical perspective, reason is not fundamentally autonomous, *as Kant maintains, but fundamentally* dependent, *namely, upon history, language, and* a prior *textual tradition; and to this extent reason is precisely* not *free of the senses.*

At one level, therefore, Hamann simply repeats in a figure the classical maxim, which derives from Aristotle, *nihil in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu.*[132] And certainly his philosophical position to the end is roundly empiricist. But, more profoundly, his position derives from Paul's teaching on faith and from the overall implications of the incarnation. Thus he refers to the apostle's words, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17); and to the words of Christ to the disciples of John the Baptist, "Go and tell John what you *hear* and *see*" (Mt. 11:4).[133] This, in a nutshell, is the source of Hamann's profound anti-Gnosticism; and it is ultimately upon this *theological* basis that he carries out his later "meta-critique" of Kant's transcendental philosophy — notwithstanding Kant's doctrine of the *Ding an sich* and his efforts (especially in the B edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*) to avoid charges of idealism. For, according to Hamann, even from a strictly philosophical perspective, reason is not fundamentally *autonomous*, as Kant maintains, but fundamentally *dependent*, namely, upon history, language, and *a prior* textual tradition; and to this extent reason is precisely *not* free of the senses. Hamann does not, however, on this account criticize reason's dissatisfaction with the senses (which again makes him similar to Kant); on the contrary, he says that this is a sign of the nobility of our origin. He does, though, criticize the Gnosticism that leads reason to spurn the senses and even, as in Plato's *Phaedo*, the body itself:

> How much more does man sin in his complaints over the prison of the body, over the limits imposed by the senses, over an insufficiency of light.... In the eyes of a spirit made for heaven, *the visible* world may be ever so desolate, the bread that God serves us here may be ever so meager and poor, [nevertheless] *they are blessed*, and with them we ourselves [are blessed] by an all-powerful, wonder-working, mysterious God, whom we Christians call our own; because he has revealed himself in the greatest humility and love.[134]

It is not, therefore, because Hamann disparages reason in itself that he contends with his age, but because the *misuse* of reason, which one might call its Gnostic aberration, ultimately ends up missing the revelation afforded to the senses in Christ — which not only falls below

131. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 75: "Concepts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind." Since this section of the *Critique* pertains to the concepts of the understanding, it would be more accurate to speak here, as Kant does in the transcendental dialectic, of transcendental illusion, which is peculiar to the misuse of reason. Teiresias is a figure of Greek mythology, who, among other things, prophesied the patricide of Oedipus. See Bayer's and Weissenborn's commentary, *Londoner Schriften*, p. 539.

132. See ZH VII, p. 166.

133. *Ibid.*, p. 406 (N I, p. 298).

134. *Ibid.*, p. 406 (N I, p. 299).

every transcendental gaze, but is hidden from reason under the most unlikely guise, i.e., *sub contrario*: God in the flesh; God in the weakness and folly of the Cross; God in the fragments of the Eucharist; God in the writing of Scripture. At a certain level, of course, this is quite understandable, for in such places, apart from grace, reason would never expect to find the *ens infinitum, perfectissimum,* etc.[135] But even if reason, in its quest for unity and totality, is already disposed to despise the *manifold* of the senses,[136] its inability to see God in the flesh, in fragments, is exacerbated by the presumption that it can attain to some kind of unity on its own — the most meager instance of which is Kant's transcendental unity of apperception; the most grandiose and, therefore, comical instance of which is Hegel's absolute knowledge. Admittedly, Hamann stands at the beginning of this generation, but already he points to its end — to Kierkegaard and the ironization of all universal systems of reason. But to do so, he need only refer to Paul, who in so many other respects is the source of his thought: "For now we see in a glass darkly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). Or, as Hamann puts it, "*We live here on scraps. Our thoughts are nothing but fragments.* Indeed, our knowledge is patchwork."[137] Such is the essence of his *Fragments,* and so he proposes in the present work to do no more than "collect the fruit of his reading and reflection in loose and miscellaneous thoughts."[138]

But even if reason, in its quest for unity and totality, is already disposed to despise the manifold *of the senses, its inability to see God in the flesh, in fragments, is exacerbated by the presumption that it can attain to some kind of unity on its own—the most meager instance of which is Kant's transcendental unity of apperception; the most grandiose and, therefore, comical instance of which is Hegel's absolute knowledge.*

Fittingly, the *Fragments* betray no obvious organizing principle, no hint of a method or system, except that they are numbered one through ten and, somewhat analogous to Kierkegaard's own *Philosophical Fragments,* deal with questions that are more philosophical in nature—such as self-love and self-knowledge, human freedom and happiness, the problem of evil, and the relationship between the body and the soul. But they are equally theological. For, in addition to touching upon such themes as prophecy, natural theology, and the workings of providence, Hamann believes that the former philosophical questions cannot be sufficiently answered except in light of God.

The first topic he discusses, in the first and longest fragment, is self-love; and his point here is that what we commonly understand by freedom is, essentially, a function of self-love: "This self-love is the heart of our will, from which all inclinations and desires, like the veins and the arteries, arise and to which they return. We can just as little *think* without self-

135. Thus even such a rational theologian as Anselm prays for the grace of illumination before proceeding to discover the *id quo maius cogitari nequit* in Christ.

136. As Aristotle puts it in book XII of the *Metaphysics* (1076a), quoting the *Iliad,* "The rule of many is not good; one ruler let there be."

137. *Ibid.*, p. 407 (N I, p. 299).

138. *Ibid.*

If freedom serves the interests of self-love, according to Hamann this natural necessity cannot be fulfilled apart from self-knowledge. For one must know oneself in order to love oneself. But, of course, herein lies the problem, since we precisely do not *know ourselves* (contra *Rousseau), nor* can *we know ourselves apart from God.*

consciousness, as we can *will* without it."[139] It is incidental that Hamann anticipates the "I think," which, for Kant, accompanies all our representations. More interesting is what he has to say about the nature of freedom: that it exists, paradoxically, for the sake of an *involuntary* desire, i.e., self-love. In the words of his favorite English poet, Edward Young, "Man love thyself / In this alone free-agents [*sic*] are not free."[140] But if freedom serves the interests of self-love, according to Hamann this natural necessity cannot be fulfilled apart from self-knowledge. For one must know oneself in order to love oneself. But, of course, herein lies the problem, since we precisely *do not* know ourselves (*contra* Rousseau), nor *can* we know ourselves apart from God. Hence the law of self-love, which requires a self-knowledge we do not possess, leads us naturally beyond ourselves to God. As Hamann puts it, "*One thus sees* how necessarily our self is grounded in its Creator, that the knowledge of ourselves is not in our power, *that in order to measure it out we must penetrate to the seat of the Godhead, which alone can ascertain and resolve the mystery of our nature.*"[141] In this respect, then, Hamann stands in the venerable tradition of the *desiderium naturale* — even if this natural desire is corrupted by the Fall and must now be elicited externally by grace. For if we naturally love ourselves, but cannot do so apart from a knowledge of ourselves, and if we cannot know ourselves apart from God, then God is essential to human happiness, since it is God alone who reveals who we are — the *imago Dei* — and thus God alone who enables us to love ourselves *as* we are. But if we come to self-knowledge *through* God, according to Hamann, God has also ordained that we come to this knowledge *through* our neighbor, whom we are called to love as ourselves and in whom we also encounter God himself (cf. Mt. 25:40); and so he says that "God and my neighbor belong to my self-knowledge and my self-love."[142]

In the third fragment Hamann continues his meditations on God's profound condescension to human affairs, which extends even to the spinning of goats' hair (Ex. 35:25f.); and on this account he cannot help but see God at work throughout nature and history: "In the histories, laws, and customs of all people we find, if I may say so, the *sensum communem* of religion. Everything ... is full of winks pointing to our vocation and the God of grace."[143] If this is true even in the case of the smallest blade

139. *Ibid.*, p. 407 (N I, p. 299f.).

140. *Ibid.*, p. 408 (N I, p. 300).

141. *Ibid.*, p. 409 (N I, p. 301). In this way the very self-love, which is the ground of the possibility of concupiscence, naturally and (in the absence of ultimate defiance) inevitably unites the creature to God; indeed, the very self-love which leads to sin (as, essentially, an *incurvatio in se ipsum*) is also — almost ironically — the motor of ecstasy. Thus Bernard of Clairvaux not only begins his stages of love with self-love but in the end returns to it: to a love of *oneself* for the sake of God. See *On Loving God* in *Works* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978).

142. *Ibid.*, p. 410 (N I, p. 302).

143. *Ibid.*, p. 411 (N I, p. 303).

of grass, he goes on to ask, should the most minor of human actions be any less significant? Indeed, for Hamann, everything is significant:

> An English divine first attempted to introduce the unction of grace into the doctrine of nature; we are still waiting for a Derham who would reveal to us in the kingdom of nature not the God of naked reason, if I may say so, but the God of Holy Scripture, who would show us that all its treasures are nothing but an allegory, a mythological painting of heavenly systems — just as all historical events are the shadow-images of secret deeds and revealed wonders.[144]

Taken by itself, this passage could give the impression that Hamann was a Platonist in the traditional sense of the term, i.e., an idealist who denies the reality of this world.[145] In point of fact, however, it speaks to the contrary and attests to his abiding sense for the remarkable depth of divine condescension, which leaves nothing mundane and everything a sign of God's presence. For rather than pointing to a beyond, or to an insuperable divide (a χωρισμός) between the finite and the eternal, nature attests everywhere to the kenotic presence of transcendence. Indeed, for Hamann, "because God enters the world and human history and *there* speaks to human beings," in the words of a recent scholar, "this world [*das Diesseitige*] is of unsurpassable importance and significance."[146]

All *the appearances of nature are dreams, faces, riddles, which have their meaning, their secret sense. The book[s] of nature and history are nothing but* ciphers, *hidden signs, which require [for their understanding] the same key that interprets Holy Scripture and is the point of its inspiration.*

At the same time, the very same passage could be taken to deny any real distinction between natural and revealed theology; and, doubtless, Hamann gives this impression when he discovers none other than "the God of grace" throughout nature and history. Nevertheless, as his own experience confirmed, such revelations are mediated by the Holy Spirit, who first opens Scripture and *then* opens the analogous books of nature and history. As he famously puts it in his eighth fragment: "*All* the appearances of nature are dreams, faces, riddles, which have their meaning, their secret sense. The book[s] of nature and history are nothing but *ciphers,* hidden signs, which require [for their understanding] the same key that interprets Holy Scripture and is the point of its inspi-

144. *Ibid.*, p. 412 (N I, p. 304). As Bayer and Weissenborn point out (p. 540), the reference here is to William Derham (1657-1735), an English divine whose work, *Physico-Theology: A Demonstration of the Being & Attributes of God, from His Works of Creation,* appeared in 1712. The popular work was translated into German in 1764 and is, undoubtedly, one of the targets of Kant's refutations of the physico-theological proof in his *Critique of Pure Reason.*

145. See Hans-Martin Lumpp, *Philologia Crucis: Zu Johann Georg Hamanns Fassung von der Dichtkunst* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1970), p. 135. I mean here „traditional" as opposed to more recent accounts—by John Milbank, for example—that affirm the realm of the senses not as *de facto* fallen from an ideal realm, but as the very radiance and glory of the Forms themselves in their "appearing."

146. *Ibid.* Thus, from a Hamannian perspective, Nietzsche's critique of Christianity as an inversion of "the true world" can be viewed only as a complete misunderstanding of the Christian faith and, in particular, of the ultimate consequence of the incarnation, which consists—as the fathers and Hamann readily perceived—in the most radical *ennobling* of the creature imaginable.

ration."[147] That is to say (as we have seen above), apart from the illumination of the Holy Spirit, these texts, like the Scriptures themselves, are sealed: nature is mute, affording no testimony to its author; and history is likewise silent, offering no evidence of the providential immanence *of transcendence.* If, then, Hamann seems to conflate the natural with the revealed, the order of nature with the order of grace, it is only by virtue of the Holy Spirit, who reveals such a *commercium* and in whose absence this distinction is strictly to be maintained: "What is the difference between natural and revealed religion? If I understand it properly, it is the difference between the eye of a man who sees a painting without understanding the least about painting, drawing or the history that is represented and the eye of an artist, between the natural and the musical ear."[148]

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In the fourth fragment Hamann ventures to discuss the problem of good and evil. For the most part his account is not particularly original: good is what maintains or restores the health of the body, the soul, and their connection; evil, on the other hand, is what diminishes or destroys them. What is original, however, at least during this time, is his reversal of the standard question. For "rather than asking: where does evil come from? we should ... reverse the question and marvel that finite creatures are capable of being good and happy. In this consists the true mystery of divine wisdom, love, and omnipotence."[149] At face value, Hamann's answer seems rather superficial. His point, however, is that the problem of evil takes on a different light in view of divine providence, which allows human beings for the most part to be happy; and that even our natural disquiet over the problem of evil is an obscure premonition of our dignity as the *imago Dei.* Hamann knew, of course, that such assurances are not a matter of reason, but of faith; he also knew that the peace of the Christian is bitterly contested in this life, in spite of his apparent quietism, stemming ultimately from Christ's discourse in the Gospel (Mt. 6:25f.; Lk 12:22f.). And this is why he concludes the fragment with an allegory of the Christian life as the only way for reason to make sense of the matter.[150]

The rest of the fragments are less substantial, touching occasionally upon themes already discussed. For example, in the fifth fragment, Hamann discusses the topic of freedom and self-love — this time in order to say that true freedom consists of true self-love and that laws, rather than opposing or limiting freedom (and self-love), are, in fact, conducive to this end. In the ninth fragment he treats the relation be-

147. *Londoner Schriften,* p. 417 (N I, p. 308f.).

148. *Ibid.,* p. 411 (N I, p. 303f.).

149. *Ibid.,* p. 413 (N I, p. 305).

150. The allegory is of a monarch and his favorite child, who is temporarily abandoned to a realm of foes, but indelibly bears the royal seal and, moreover, is rescued in every danger by an unseen friend, who will render justice at the appointed time.

tween the body and the soul, which he sums up by saying, "the body is the clothing of the soul." (At one level, such a statement seems unexceptional, but it testifies once again to the importance of form and to the peculiar physiognomy of Hamann's later publications.) And in the final fragment he simply says, as a form of self-justification, as it were, *vis-à-vis* the political system of Frederick the Great, that what is "universally best in a given state is upheld by the alms of its servants. [For] every shard of industry is blessed by God for the wealth and sustenance of the whole."[151]

In view of Kierkegaard's own *Philosophical Fragments,* however, one fragment in particular stands out, namely, the sixth; and given Kierkegaard's almost certain knowledge of this text (which was included in the first volume of the Roth edition), it is quite possible that this fragment inspired his lyric on Abraham. The fragment consists of only one sentence: "When one considers how much strength, presence of mind, and alacrity, of which we otherwise are not capable, the fear of an extraordinary danger inspires in us: then one can understand why a Christian is so superior to the natural, secure man, because he seeks his blessedness with constant fear and trembling."[152] Next to this passage and its obvious import, there is another fragment, the third, concerning unwitting prophecies that evidently caught Kierkegaard's attention and to which he refers in his journals. As we have already seen in the context of the *Biblical Meditations,* the theme of unwitting prophecies goes hand in hand with Hamann's understanding of divine condescension, which is so radical as to exclude the possibility that anything could escape God's ultimate designs: that all things testify, despite themselves, to divine truth (in radical application, as it were, of the doctrine of the *privatio boni*). But while Kierkegaard was generally enthusiastic about Hamann, whom he pairs with Socrates, calling them "two of the perhaps most brilliant minds of all time,"[153] he thinks that the following passage from the third fragment goes too far — even to the point of blasphemy:

When one considers how much strength, presence of mind, and alacrity, of which we otherwise are not capable, the fear of an extraordinary danger inspires in us: then one can understand why a Christian is so superior to the natural, secure man, because he seeks his blessedness with constant fear and trembling.

> Could one not say of Socrates, when he refers to his guardian spirit, what [Scripture] says of Peter: he did not know what he said (cf. Mk 9:6); or of Caiaphas, who prophesied and proclaimed divine truths without himself or his listeners having the slightest perception of what the Spirit of God spoke through him. This is illustrated in the strange story of Saul and Balaam; that even among the idols, indeed, in the very instruments of hell, the revelation of God is manifest; and that he himself uses them as his servants, like Nebuchadnezzar.[154]

151. *Ibid.*, p. 417 (N I, p. 309).

152. *Ibid.*, p. 416 (N I, p. 308).

153. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety,* ed. and tr. with introduction and notes by Reidar Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 198; *JP* II 1555 [*n.d.*, 1844], (*Pap.* V B 45); [*n.d.*, 1844], (*Pap.* V B 55:14).

154. *Ibid.*, p. 412 (N I, p. 304).

If the enemies of God unwittingly speak the truth, how much more, Hamann claims, are God's willing servants prophets of divine things. As he puts it in the eighth fragment, "We are all capable of being prophets." Indeed, for Hamann, the vocation of the human being is nothing less than to reveal God.

Whether or not Kierkegaard's judgment is fair cannot be decided within the scope of this essay.[155] But if this passage is, in Kierkegaard's view, seen to derive from Hamann's excessive humor, it is noteworthy that Hamann is quite serious: that all things serve God, whether consciously or not. And if the enemies of God unwittingly speak the truth, how much more, Hamann claims, are God's willing servants prophets of divine things. As he puts it in the eighth fragment, "We are all capable of being prophets."[156] Indeed, for Hamann, the vocation of the human being is nothing less than to reveal God. And given this emphasis of his thought, it is not surprising that he should have been interested in Thomas Newton's *Dissertations on the Prophecies,* which he read during this time.

Hamann begins his *Observations* by restating what he discovered through his own experience, namely, that "every biblical story is a prophecy"; then he goes on to make an interesting connection between the dual (literal-allegorical) aspect of the scriptural stories and the composite nature of the human being, so that Scripture, as the work of God, is oddly analogous to the *imago Dei*: "Every story bears the image of the human being, a body, which is trivial, composed of earth and ashes, the sensible letter, but also a soul, which is the spirit of God, the breath of his mouth, the light and the life, which shines in the darkness and cannot not be comprehended by it."[157] On the one hand, by his allusion to John 1:5, Hamann means to indicate the incompetence of rational exegesis when it comes to Scripture, which eludes such exegesis just as Christ eluded the crowd (Lk 4:30). On the other hand, he means to indicate the humility of the Holy Spirit, who is similarly hidden beneath a humble form, in this case, beneath the form of the sensible letter. As he puts it, "The Spirit of God reveals himself in his Word ... in the form of a servant [*Knechtsgestalt*] — is flesh — and dwells among us full of grace and truth."[158]

Thus, Hamann returns to the theme that fascinated him from the beginning of his *Meditations*: the condescension of the Holy Spirit, whose work in the writing of Scripture is analogous to the condescension of the Son. And just as one can find in Christ "all the treasures of wisdom" (Col. 2:3), Hamann finds a similar wealth in the allegories of the Holy Spirit—in the stories, most notably, of Noah, Ishmael, and the history of Israel. In the story of Noah, for example, he finds hidden as in a seed "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."[159] Thus the patriarch himself is an image of God (cf. Ps. 78:65), whose drunkenness points

155. *Journals and Papers* II 1693 (*Pap.* II A 105): "Humor can therefore approach blasphemy; Hamann would rather hear wisdom from Balaam's ass or from a philosopher against his will than from an angel or an apostle."

156. *Ibid.*, p. 417 (N I, p. 308).

157. *Ibid.*, p. 421 (N I, p. 315).

158. *Ibid.*

159. *Ibid.*

to the mystery of the vine (Jn 15:1). Shem is the body of which Christ is the head. The blessing of Japheth represents the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Church and their share in the Holy Spirit. The nakedness of Noah is the mystery of our shame (cf. Gen. 3:7). Ham laughing at his father is a type of the same spirit that ridiculed the disciples on the day of Pentecost. By walking backwards in order honorably to cover their father (Gen. 9:23), both Shem and Japheth represent the noble attempts of the Jew (through the law) and the Greek (through philosophy) to restore the human condition from its fallen condition. But "they did not know of the corruption of their nature — and so they did no more than to spread a cover over it, like a cloak. This was all that their shoulders were able to bear. Their righteousness, their strength, their wisdom could do nothing more."[160] And — it almost goes without saying—the ark is a type of redemption through Christ (and his church).

In the Biblical Meditations *he had already affirmed Israel's election: "God undeniably found it most suited to his wisdom to bind this greater revelation of himself first to a particular human being, then to his offspring, and then to a particular people.... We can no more fathom the reasons for this election than we can know why it pleased him to create [the world] in 6 days, which his will could just as easily have accomplished in a moment."*

Following the order of Newton's *Treatise,* Hamann then discusses the prophecies concerning Ishmael, who is simply "a name, a shadow, a type, a sign, which God has posited."[161] And in this connection he reiterates a notion that occurs with some frequency throughout the *Biblical Meditations*: that the human race ultimately divides into two according to God's initial prophecy in Genesis 3:15. Of course, this division is not limited to Isaac and Ishmael, but can be found in types already in Cain and Abel, in the blessing of Shem and Japheth and the cursing of Ham (and Canaan), etc. And, for Hamann, it is important that this division is reflected not simply in the history of nations but in every individual person, so that each person embodies in miniature the entire human race.

The final section of the *Observations,* which skips over the bulk of Newton's *Treatise,* is titled "Prophecies concerning the Jews"; and it is here that Hamann makes some of his most significant remarks about the election of Israel and the relationship between Jews and Christians. In the *Biblical Meditations* he had already affirmed Israel's election: "God undeniably found it most suited to his wisdom to bind this greater revelation of himself first to a particular human being, then to his offspring, and then to a particular people.... We can no more fathom the reasons for this election than we can know why it pleased him to create [the world] in 6 days, which his will could just as easily have accomplished in a moment."[162] Indeed, "the history of this people is in itself of greater importance with regard to our religion than that of any other."[163] And, here again, his first point is that the history of Israel is a

160. *Ibid.*, p 422f. (N I, p. 316f.). Needless to say, Hamann does not mean to say that the law is not divinely revealed or that it is a merely human invention.

161. *Ibid.*, p. 424 (N I, p. 318).

162. *Biblical Meditations,* p. 68 (N I, p. 10).

163. *Ibid.*, p. 69 (N I, p. 11).

running type of human redemption. Thus, "The Jews will always remain a mirror in which we see, as in an enigma, the mystery of God in the redemption of the human race."[164]

For Hamann, however, as for Paul, whom he exactly follows (Rom. 9-11), Israel is not simply a type of redemption, still less is it simply a type of the church (as a strict supersessionism would have it). Rather it is an historical reality, the olive tree onto which the Gentiles are grafted.

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The lament of Friedrich Schlegel may serve as a guide: "With Kant we have wasted years that ... will never return. This immensely wise *and profound thinker, this seer, we did not recognize and heed."*

Of course, it is no longer possible to recover Hamann's thought in its entirety — as if one could ever do anything more than, to borrow a phrase from Nietzsche, "pluck from his wreath." But given that *his* views of reason and language have prevailed, given that *his* prophecies about nihilism (in the absence of faith) have been fulfilled, given, moreover, the richness of his theological aesthetic — e.g., his vision of creation as the continuous miracle of God's abasing glory and love — is it not perhaps time to heed the voice of this prophet, whose humility has spared him a greater audience? In this regard, the lament of Friedrich Schlegel may serve as a guide: "With Kant we have wasted years that ... will never return. This immensely *wise* and profound thinker, this seer, we did not recognize and heed."[168] □

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164 *Londoner Schriften*, p. 425 (N I, p. 319).

165. *Ibid.*

166. *Ibid.*

167. *Ibid.*

168. *Deutsches Museum* vol. 3, p. 151.