Kant's Philosophy of Religion: The Relationship Between Ecclesiastical Faith and Reasoned Religion

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ABSTRACT

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It is my contention that Kant makes an apparent contradiction in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* with respect to the relationship between reason and Scripture. At the outset of *Religion* Kant states that he aims to discover whether reason can be found to be compatible and at one with Scripture. Kant goes about showing that reason and Scripture are united, however, he also maintains that reason and Scripture are distinct from each other. Hence, he seems to land himself in a contradiction. It is my intention to examine this apparent contradiction to see how and why Kant both unites and distinguishes reason and Scripture, and to see whether this contradiction poses a problem or is necessary to Kant's task.

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For Olive and Henry

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Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Preface to the Second Edition of *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*,[1] Kant states that his primary aim or intention is to determine whether the pure religion of reason, or, moral religion can be found to be compatible or *at one with* revealed religion, or, what may be called historical, practical, ecclesiastical faith or Scripture. Indeed, Kant attempts to establish how and why reason and Scripture can be shown to be united to the extent that "he who follows one...will not fail to conform to the other."[2] However, after establishing an apparent unity between reason and Scripture, Kant makes a clear and even adamant distinction between moral religion and ecclesiastical faith suggesting that ecclesiastical faith must be thought of in contradistinction to pure moral religion. He notes that there is only *one* true religion of reason which has to do

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[1] Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (First Edition published in 1793; Second Edition published in 1794), trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960), hereafter referred to as *Religion* and in footnote references as "R" followed by the standard page number in Greene and Hudson's edition.

[2] R, 11.

with moral disposition while ecclesiastical faith appeals only to the senses. In this respect, ecclesiastical faith remains always at a practical, phenomenal level, never capable of reaching the heights of truly rational, moral religion. Yet, Kant's aim is to show how revealed religion or Scripture can be *reasoned*; he is attempting to show how revealed religion can be brought *within the limits of reason* so that it can be united with the pure religion of reason. It is my contention that Kant seems to land himself in an apparent contradiction: on the one hand, he aims to demonstrate that reason is "not only compatible but at one"[3] with Scripture; however, on the other hand, he wants to maintain that ecclesiastical faith is subordinate to pure moral religion thereby rendering a clear distinction between reason and Scripture.

In order to understand how Kant establishes a unity and at the same time a distinction between reason and Scripture, it is necessary to place Kant's *Religion* in a philosophical context. Although it is possible to approach Kant's philosophy of religion from many different angles, it is my intention to remain focused on specific philosophical considerations. I will be interested in Kant's own approach to *Religion* to the extent that he extends his practical philosophy to the realm of religion and theology, an extension he already made in *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* and in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.[4]

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[3] R, 11.

[4] Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* in

It is my hope to determine and clarify how Kant works within the limits of his own philosophy; that is, his approach to religion within reason's limits seems to be another attempt to bridge the gap between the practical world and the theoretical world. Having already established God and the Highest Good as rational principles towards which all humans strive in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant is attempting to understand and justify our apparent need for a religion which consists of practices, rituals, and Scriptural narratives that are merely practical or sensory in the sense that they are often disconnected from morality. And, even when these practices are connected to morality, why do we require such practices when our reason already directs us to the Highest Good?

We should note that this question represents the characteristic thought of the late eighteenth century European Enlightenment. Philosophers of this time were

Ethical Philosophy (Published in 1785), 2nd ed., trans. James W. Ellington (Hackett Publishing Company 1994), hereafter referred to as *Grounding* and in footnote references as "G" followed by the universal page number; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Published in 1788), 3rd ed., ed. Lewis White Beck, (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1993). In Adina Davidovich, "How to Read *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*" (*Kant-Studien*, 85, 1994), Davidovich states that in order to understand *Religion* one must first read and be familiar with Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. While I agree that reading any of Kant's previous works will no doubt shed light on *Religion*, I disagree with Davidovich's thesis that reading *Critique of Judgment*, in particular, is absolutely necessary to or will help in approaching *Religion* any more than *Grounding* or *Critique of Practical Reason*, for example, is necessary or can help. It can be argued that any one of Kant's works can lead to a better understanding of any one of his other works. It seems obvious that this is how Kant's "philosophical system" works. Thus, given that *Religion* is Kant's last work, a case can be made that reading any of his previous works is *necessary* to some degree to understand *Religion*. However, exactly which of Kant's works is *more* necessary than others seems, to me, a matter of opinion.

preoccupied with trying to repair what rationalism in the Enlightenment had done to morality, faith and religion. Thus, the context of Kant's *Religion* was the philosophical spirit of the time: it was necessary to account for faith, morality and religion within the limits of reason in such a way that reason did not destroy them but rather made them necessary to the human condition.

Thus, Kant sets his sights on showing how reason and Scripture are compatible and united. I will examine how Kant establishes pure religious faith as moral disposition. Because human nature has a propensity towards evil, a moral disposition is required to constantly combat this evil. For Kant, moral decisions are based on well-reasoned principles: when one acts morally, one is acting rationally. So long as one constantly disposes oneself to moral actions in an attempt to fight off evil tendencies, one will become evermore morally disposed. One who is morally disposed is pleasing to God and thereby worthy of God's grace. Moreover, morally disposed individuals unite to form an "ethical commonwealth" which strives towards moral perfection and exhibits the moral Kingdom of God on earth. In this way, the ethical commonwealth directs itself towards a more fully reasoned disposition and, in the end, it is ruled by the pure religion of reason.

Kant unites moral religion and ecclesiastical faith by showing how ecclesiastical faith can serve as a necessary "vehicle" through which individuals can remain well-disposed. It is in this respect that Kant is able to claim that one who

follows the practices of ecclesiastical faith, "under the guidance of moral concepts,"[5] will not fail to conform to the requirements of moral religion.

Given that ecclesiastical faith can be a necessary vehicle to pure moral religion, one might ask why Kant goes to great lengths to show that ecclesiastical faith and moral religion are compatible, yet, at the same time maintains that the two are distinct. That is, in order for Kant to justify the need for the practices of ecclesiastical faith, he must keep these practices in their practical, sensory place. He cannot allow practices that fall in the realm of sensory perception to take on the role of an ultimate determining ground of moral knowledge. That is, what lies at the base of moral knowledge must be reasoned principles, or, the rational will. Moral knowledge cannot be based on sensory or empirical perceptions if we are trying to establish a pure religion of reason. Thus, there must remain a clear distinction between ecclesiastical faith and moral religion. In this respect, they can never be at one with each other. Ecclesiastical faith will always remain a practical vehicle waiting to be superseded by the pure religion of reason. Indeed, on Kant's account, it is precisely this supersession that well-disposed individuals must hope for; it is this supersession that characterizes true religious faith.

Given that Kant appears to both unite and distinguish ecclesiastical faith and moral religion, it seems that he lands himself in a contradiction. However, I will attempt to

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[5] R, 11.

clarify why this contradiction is necessary and unproblematic for Kant. Kant is justifying common religious practices by trying to account for them within the limits of reason. But, he is also ensuring that common practices are not confused with some kind of guaranteed attainment of moral religion. In other words, going to church does not, on its own, make one moral. Kant is careful to make common religion necessary to moral religion only in a very particular way: for Kant, it is crucial that whenever morality is in company with common religion, morality always appears as the parent rather than as the child of religion. Morality must always underlie religion and morality will always, in the end, supersede religion so long as reason has its way.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT OF KANT'S *RELIGION*

To properly contextualize what Kant is doing in *Religion*, I will discuss the limits that Kant, himself, seems to be placing on or working within in his text. First, I will briefly examine how reason was viewed during the time that Kant was writing *Religion* to shed light on why he may have been motivated to bring religion within the limits of reason. Second, I will discuss what Kant means by *reason* and the *moral law* by closely examining his discussion of the will[6] in the Third Section of *Grounding* wherein he moves from "a

[6] I note that in the original German text of *Religion* (*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*) Kant uses "Willkur" and "Wille" to refer to the human will. "Willkur" is translated as the "elective will" or the will that is "volitioned" or has the "power of choice"; "Wille" is translated as the "rational will" or "will." See John Silber's discussion in his essay, "The Ethical Significance of Kant's *Religion*" which is Part II of the Introduction to *Religion*, pgs. lxxxiii-lxxxiv n, xciv-cxxxiv, and in the Translator's Preface, p. cxxxix. Although the distinction between "Willkur" and "Wille" is important, an explanation of the justifications behind the distinction are far beyond the scope of this endeavor. As well, in *Grounding* and in the second *Critique*, Kant had not settled upon a distinct technical meaning for either "Wille" or "Willkur" but used them almost interchangeably (see Silber, p. lxxxiv). Hence, because I am relying on Kant's discussion of the moral law and the will as he presents it in *Grounding*, "will" can be taken as both or either the will that "chooses" freely, and/or the "rational will."

metaphysics of morals" to a "critique of pure practical reason."[7] I will argue that the supreme incentive or principle of reason upon which we act is the moral law or the categorical imperative. A clear understanding of what Kant means by the moral law is important if one is to properly understand his system of religion. Finally, I will discuss what Kant means by ecclesiastical faith and the pure religion of reason as well as what he means by "religion" in general. All of this will serve as a necessary back-drop or context for what Kant aims to do in *Religion* and it will also serve to clarify the relationship between reason and Scripture.

The Enlightenment and Reason

What characterized the Enlightenment in Europe during the eighteenth century was the authority of reason. Philosophers put all their faith in the authority of reason and used reason as their primary standard of truth. Reason was used to criticize and justify all things from morality and religion to the state and nature. However, towards the end of the eighteenth century, faith in the ultra-critical state of things began to waiver. Philosophers began to question the authority of reason because it seemed as though reason began to undermine those things that it originally aimed to justify. Reason gave reign to modern science and criticism leaving less and less room for freedom, God and

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[7] G, 446.

morality.[8] This was the environment in which Kant was working in Germany during the last decades of the century. Kant, like other philosophers, was faced with the problem of rescuing reason from its own destruction. While Kant still wanted to account for and defend the Enlightenment's view of reason, he was also sensitive to the attacks that reason was undergoing as the views of Romanticism became more and more attractive. The Romantic view was that reason was no longer simply accepted as authoritative. Rather, reason had to be shown to account for those things that were considered essential to good life conduct. If reason could only undermine religion, morality, freedom and those beliefs that were necessary for the conduct of life, how could, and why should, reason hold our faith?

If Kant's *Religion* is placed within this context, it may be said that *Religion* can be seen as an attempt to rescue reason by offering an account of morality and religion that falls within reason's limits. In *Religion*, morality and religion are not undermined by reason; rather, reason justifies them and makes them necessary to human life conduct. Kant begins this rescue of reason in *Grounding* and in the *Critique of Practical Reason.* In these works, Kant develops his notion of "the practical reason of the moral law."[9] It is through this notion that Kant attempts, in *Religion,* not only to justify moral and religious beliefs, but to bring religion within the limits of reason. Thus, an

[8] Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, (Harvard University Press) 1987, 1-2.

[9] Beiser, 5.

examination of Kant's discussion of reason and the moral law in *Grounding* is necessary if we are to understand what Kant is doing in *Religion*.

Reason and the Moral Law

In order to begin to understand Kant's system of religion, a clear understanding of what Kant means by reason and the moral law is necessary. For this, I will turn to the Third Section of Kant's *Grounding* to examine his argument that the supreme "principal of morality" is "the formula of categorical imperative."[10]

Kant begins the Third Section of *Grounding* by stating that:

> The will is a kind of causality belonging to living beings insofar as they are rational; freedom would be the property of this causality that makes it effective independent of any determination by alien causes.[11]

In other words, freedom is the property which the will has and through which the will has the power to act, independent of alien causes. In this sense, the will is a kind of causality that has the power to produce effects. As

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[10] G, 447. Kant also suggests that the determining ground for the maxims of the will is "practical reason as such" in Part I, Book I of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, entitled, "Analytic of Pure Practical Reason," p. 15-16. Also in this *Critique* Kant provides the fundamental law of pure practical reason or the first formulation of the categorical imperative: "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as the principle giving universal law" (30).

[11] G, 446.

well, the will, as independent from alien causes, is its own efficient cause; that is, the will determines itself to causal action; the will is itself "caused to act causally."[12] Freedom is the property or quality which belongs to this special kind of causality which is the will. So then, a free will acts in such a way which is not determined by anything external or alien to it.

This definition of freedom is negative in so far as Kant is describing what seems to be a freedom which is opposed to natural necessity.[13] Freedom under natural necessity is influenced by causes or external factors such as desires; however the freedom which belongs to the will "is something quite different: it can be present only if the will is a power to produce effects without being determined by anything other than itself." This concept of freedom is "purely theoretical [and] not based upon any moral considerations and in itself empty."[14] However, in order to include the concept of freedom and the will in the nature of our actual experience so that we can understand how it pertains to us, we must connect the negative conception of freedom to a positive one so as to show that freedom is equivalent to

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[12] H.J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative: A Study of Kant's Moral Philosophy*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), 208-9.

[13] G, 446-7. I note that Kant may not actually be opposing freedom and natural necessity in a way that suggests a real opposition. Rather, he is using freedom and natural necessity in an analogous way so as to equate freedom and autonomy in his concept of positive freedom. See Gideon Yaffe, "Freedom, Natural Necessity and the Categorical Imperative," in *Kant-Studien 86*, 1995, 446-458.

[14] Paton, 211.

autonomy. A positive concept of freedom means that the will, though free from alien causes, must have in its causality a concept of law which is binding. This lawfulness is self-determined and thus we are autonomous in our freedom and will. That is to say, a will, so long as it is free, "must be capable of imposing lawlikeness on [its] actions, that is of acting on universalizable maxims."[15] A will imposes a law on itself and is, in this sense, self-determined or autonomous. As a result, Kant concludes that freedom of the will just is autonomy, or "the property which the will has of being a law to itself."[16]

We see here the formulation of the categorical imperative taking shape. We can also begin to see the link between freedom and autonomy and rationality or reason. The ability to choose universalizable maxims is an expression of our freedom and a confirmation of our autonomy. This ability is necessarily grounded in and subject to our reason. More specifically, "we can begin to see why, if autonomous action is to be independent of everything "alien", it must be action determined by reason."[17] This is because autonomous action as defined by Kant in his Formula of Autonomy in the Second Section of *Grounding*, is an action in which a rational being chooses "in a such way that in the same volition the maxims

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[15] Onora O'Neill, "Reason and Autonomy in *Grundlegung III*" in her book, *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*, (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 53.

[16] G, 447.

[17] O'Neill, 1989, 54.

of [his] action are also present as universal law."[18] In this sense, maxims or autonomous action must hold equally for all rational agents, that is, they must be universalizable. The authority of these actions, "if they have any, cannot derive from any contingency of human life but only from the requirements of reason, whatever those may be."[19] Thus, if reason has any authority, it will apply to all rational beings.

We can see then that we must be rational in a specific sense; namely, our reason must rely on a capacity for freedom, autonomy and thereby, be bound by a law. In this sense, freedom and rationality are linked. However, if we are not rational in this specific sense, but in some other sense, there will be a gap between our rationality and freedom and so Kant's theory, as it pertains to morality, will have no relevance or significance for us. That is to say, if we do not have reason in the sense of having the capacity for autonomous action, our will is neither free nor bound to a law. In this case, no connection exists between reason and freedom or autonomy, and as a result, there exists no connection to or significance of any law, moral or otherwise. In order to assert that freedom and rationality are linked, more work is required "to prove that freedom…is [indeed] a property of the will of all rational beings."[20]

Kant states that "to every rational being possessed of a

[18] G, 431/440.

[19] O'Neill, 1989, 54.

[20] G, 447.

will we must also lend the idea of freedom as the only one under which he can act."[21] He goes on to say that:

> Reason must look upon itself as the author of its own principles independently of alien influences. Therefore as practical reason, or as the will of a rational being, it must be regarded by itself as free.[22]

All this is fine; however, to say that we must view ourselves as free is very different from saying that we are, in fact, free. Kant must show that the link between reason and freedom is an actual one if he is to affirm that freedom, autonomy and morality are in fact connected and have application to us. Kant admits that this tenuous account of freedom can only lead us into "a kind of circle, from which, as it seems, there is no way of escape."[23] In order to escape from this circle, we need also to escape from a metaphysics of morals:

> [We need to] inquire whether we do not take one standpoint when by means of freedom we conceive ourselves as causes acting *a priori*, and another standpoint when we contemplate ourselves with reference to our actions as effects which we see before our eyes.[24]

In other words, we need to clarify the standpoint from which we are (or should be) conceiving freedom by engaging in a critique of practical reason.

The main idea behind the notion of 'critique of reason' is to "find standards of reasoning by considering how we can

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[21] G, 448.

[22] G, 448.

[23] G, 450.

[24] G, 450.

and must discipline our thinking."[25] What we are looking for in our thinking is "self-discipline" or "autonomy." Reason, while disciplining all other endeavors, must at the same time, discipline itself if there is to be an authority of reason. Moreover, reason, as its own discipline, must be autonomous; for any alien "authorities [to reason] (e.g. state, church, experts, personal preferences) is not reason, but the abrogation of reason."[26]

Reason, as a way of disciplining thinking and acting, must meet three standards. First, reason must be "negative" in so far as it must lack all specific content; second, it must be "nonderivative" in the sense that it must not invoke authorities other than reason; and, third, it must be "lawlike" in so far as it must use principles that all can adopt.[27]

In this respect, any concerns regarding the connection between reason and freedom and autonomy can be addressed in a new way. That is, we do not have to establish that we are rational and then prove that we are free, and thereby autonomous and bound to a moral law. Rather, Kant, by means of a critique of practical reason, reverses his strategy. That is to say, instead of arguing from reason to autonomy,

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[25] O'Neill, 1989, 56.

[26] Ibid., 57.

[27] Onora O'Neill, "Kant on Reason and Religion" in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Volume 18, Edited by Grethe B. Peterson (University of Utah Press) 1997, 298.

he argues from autonomy to reason.[28] It is only because we are autonomous, self-disciplining beings that we have the capacity to act on principles which we can rightly call principles of reason. Reason is its own authority and can be justified only by showing through critique that autonomy is what characterizes our thought and action: "Autonomy does not presuppose but rather constitutes the principles of reason and their authority."[29]

So we see that the authority of reason as an unconditional principle can appeal to nothing except disciplined autonomy in thinking. We can begin to sense the return of the categorical imperative here in so far as we have seen that freedom in thinking means that reason can answer to no laws other than the ones it gives itself; that is, one's maxims are subject to a law which the will imposes on itself and which, in this respect, must be universalizable to all other rational beings: this just is the categorical imperative. Hence, the categorical imperative reveals itself to be that unconditioned principle of reason which has its grounds in freedom and autonomy. The categorical imperative is the supreme principle of all reason because it is the strategy that makes any activity, moral or otherwise, a reasoned one in so far as it disciplines any action or maxim to be autonomous. The categorical imperative guides us in our thought and action to those principles which *can* apply to

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[28] Here we have Kant's Copernican turn. See the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Published in 1781), translated by Norman Kemp Smith, (New York: St. Martin's Press) 1929, B xvi-B xix.

[29] O'Neill, 1989, 57.

everyone, that is, those principles or maxims that can be made universalizable:

> Both in thinking and in acting the self-discipline of reason is a matter of asking whether the ground of the assumption can be a universal principle. The supreme principle of reason, [i.e. the categorical imperative], both emerges from and disciplines human thought, action and communication. There is no gap between reason and autonomy because the authority of reason is grounded in autonomy.[30]

Moreover, the moral law tells us that we can act only on maxims that all rational beings, that is, all members of the Kingdom of Ends[31], could agree to act on. In other words, the categorical imperative and the law of the Kingdom of Ends which is the moral law appear to be the same in so far as they have the same formula.

We have seen that because we are autonomous and self-disciplined, we are rational beings. Reason is its own authority in so far as it is grounded in our freedom and autonomy. Freedom and autonomy ensure that reason abides by laws which reason imposes on itself and which are thereby universalizable to all rational beings. Hence, what serves as the unconditioned, supreme principle of reason is the categorical imperative in so far as it disciplines any action or maxim to be autonomous.

With respect to pure will, or a will that has a moral law, we have seen that freedom is the property that belongs to the will. As well, the will is autonomous in so far as it

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[30] O'Neill, 1989, 59.

[31] The Kingdom of Ends is for Kant that group of beings who in their duty to the moral law express universal reason or rationality. This Kingdom is the end that all rational beings ought to strive for.

has the property of being a law to itself. So long as the will is autonomous, it is rational and thus grounded in freedom and autonomy. Freedom and autonomy ensure that the will abides by those moral laws which it imposes upon itself, and which are thereby universalizable to all rational beings possessed of pure will. That is, a will binds itself to a moral law precisely because it can be made universal to all rational beings.

The will is bound to the moral law in so far as our reason relies on a capacity for freedom and autonomy. There is no gap between reason and autonomy. So long as we are free and autonomous we will act in such a way so as to ensure that the maxim upon which we act can at the same time be made a universal law. The law which the will imposes upon itself so as to be autonomous is the moral law and is the categorical imperative. The will, as its own efficient cause, has the property of freedom. The will is autonomous in so far as it imposes a moral law upon itself. Thus, the will is rational and expresses this rationality in it maxims which are statements of our freedom and autonomy. A free and autonomous will means being bound to the categorical imperative and to a moral law which the will itself imposes.

The Pure Religion of Reason vs. Ecclesiastical Faith

True moral religion or the pure religion of reason can be thought of in terms of that moral law within us which

expresses the freedom and autonomy of our will to bind itself to the duty of this law and serves as the only incentive that determines the maxims of our will. Moreover, these maxims are themselves contingent upon some supreme maxim that is universal to all maxims. Acting in this way demonstrates moral goodness and in this way we make ourselves pleasing to God and worthy of His grace. Acting in this way also demonstrates our reason at work, for when we act morally, we act rationally. Thus, so long as morality serves as the foundation of our actions, the universal aspect of this morality and our duty to the moral law makes us worthy of grace and leads to moral perfection. When morality is touched by grace the result can be thought of as a pure religion of reason and also as a true moral religion. In the pure religion of reason, our morality is able to extend itself to the idea of God so that we are able to achieve a universal religion wherein we can experience moral perfection and the Kingdom of God on earth.

Practical or revealed religion, historical or ecclesiastical faith, or Scripture can be thought of as those worldly, sensory, empirical religions in which religious tools may or may not aid us in maintaining our moral disposition. These tools comprise Scriptural narratives, common practices and rituals and can help us to attain moral perfection only if morality lies at their foundation. If this is the case, our belief or faith in common religion or ecclesiastical faith will fall within the limits of reason because it will have the moral law and reason as its guide.

This is what Kant means when he speaks of religion within the limits of reason alone. However, if morality is absent or does not serve as the foundation for common religion or ecclesiastical faith, the religious tools we follow become essentially useless in our quest for moral goodness. In this case, the belief and faith we hold will fall outside reason's limits.

Kant defines religion as "the recognition of all duties as divine commands."[32] It is important to note that this definition holds four very different senses of religion, all of which Kant refers to at various times and under the name "religion." I will be discussing Kant's definition as well as the different senses of religion at length in what is to come; but, for now, it will suffice to distinguish between: (1) revealed religion which is common, practical, historical, empirical religion, or ecclesiastical faith wherein Scripture is interpreted or revealed; (2) false (empirical) religion which is revealed religion that recognizes theology as its primary foundation; (3) true (empirical, universal) religion which is revealed religion that recognizes morality as its primary foundation; and, (4) the pure religion of reason or moral religion which is true (universal) religion that extends itself to the idea of God and unites its rational members under God's guidance and grace toward the goal of moral perfection and thereby achieves the Kingdom of God on earth.

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[32] R, 142-143.

It seems apparent that Kant, remaining within his own philosophical limits, is aiming to bridge the gap between the practical world of ecclesiastical faith and the theoretical world of the religion of reason. Indeed, he explicitly states in the Preface to the Second Edition of *Religion*, that his aim in *Religion* is to discover the rational conditions for the possibility of religion and then test one particular revealed religion, namely, Christianity, to see if it conforms to these conditions.[33] If all goes well, Kant suggests that we will be able say that reason and Scripture or ecclesiastical faith are not only compatible, but at one with each other. We will see whether Kant can successfully unite reason and Scripture to bridge the gap or whether reason and Scripture will prove to be too distinct from each other and, in the end, unbridgeable.

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[33] R, 11.

CHAPTER TWO

THE COMPATIBILITY AND UNITY OF REASON AND SCRIPTURE

To repeat, Kant states that his primary aim or intention in *Religion* is to argue that reason and Scripture are compatible and at one with each other to the extent that "he who follows one...will not fail to conform to the other." I will examine how Kant makes this argument from the following perspectives. I will map out what I take to be Kant's system of religion as he presents it in Books One to Three of *Religion*. Primarily, I will examine the relationship between what Kant calls "radical evil" and "moral disposition." As well, I will show how Kant establishes a need for ecclesiastical faith as a means to achieving moral perfection, thereby uniting ecclesiastical faith with the pure religion of reason.

Kant's System of Religion

Book One: Is Human Nature Originally Good or Evil?

Book one of *Religion* is concerned primarily with the question of whether human nature is originally good or evil. Kant shows that human nature can be considered to be originally good if we only look at the predispositions or "elements in the fixed character and destiny" of human beings. That is, within every human being resides the predispositions of "animality," "humanity" and "personality." Put another way, every human being is originally a "living," "rational" and "accountable" being.[1] These original predispositions are originally good in so far as they do not contradict the moral law within us. Moreover, these predispositions characterize the *potential* or possibility of every human being in so far as they are original and "enjoin the observance of the [moral] law" and are thereby aimed *"toward good."*[2] In this respect, these original predispositions can be thought of in terms of constituting what Kant calls the "disposition" of the moral agent.[3] Moreover, because this disposition is enjoined with our duty to the moral law, this "moral disposition" can be seen as that "ultimate subjective ground" which we freely choose and

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[1] R, 21.

[2] R, 21-23.

[3] R, 20.

by which we freely adopt the maxims of our will.[4] In this sense, a moral disposition is maintained in so far as we freely choose to abide by the moral law. In other words, the duty to the moral law and a moral disposition amount to the same thing.

However, if we put aside the potential of human beings to obey the moral law and regard, instead, the *actual* state of human beings in their moral decision-making and subsequent acts, we will be forced to conclude that human nature must possess an original and "radical" evil.[5] For even in one's very first moral act, one can adopt into one's maxim a deviation from the moral law even though one is conscious of the moral law. This is apparent "from what we know of man through experience."[6] We need only to look at the many instances of actions in which deviation from the moral law in the face of the moral law is apparent. Although we may possess a duty to the moral law, we most certainly fail to *always* act in accordance with it. In other words, Kant is trying to show that we have a propensity towards evil which while not a natural predisposition, still renders us morally evil by nature.[7]

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[4] R, 20; G.E. Michalson, Jr., "Moral Regeneration and Divine Aid in Kant" in *Religious Studies*, Volume 25, Number 1 (Cambridge University Press, March, 1989), 261.

[5] R, 28.

[6] R, 27.

[7] R, 24-25.

Radical evil is present in us in the following way. We have seen in *Grounding* that our reason is expressed through the autonomous freedom of our will to act on universalizable maxims.[8] This freedom binds us to the moral law. The moral law is the incentive of our will. Moreover, our freedom requires that our maxims themselves must be contingent upon some ultimate subjective ground or supreme maxim that is universal to all maxims, and thereby "entwined with and, as it were, rooted in humanity itself."[9] This supreme maxim is the moral law or what amounts to our moral disposition.

Evil does not reveal itself because we choose a maxim by which we reject or deny the moral law. Again, as Kant shows in *Grounding*, so long as we are free, we are bound to act in accordance with the categorical imperative or the moral law. The moral law imposes itself upon us by virtue of the fact that we are originally predisposed toward good or possess a moral disposition. However, given that the moral law is the incentive of our will, we might expect that when confronted with moral decision-making we would always simply adopt the moral law into our supreme maxim that serves as the sufficient determining ground of our will, and thus always do the morally good thing. But, we know from empirical experience that we do not always act in a morally good way. Thus, we must conclude that some other incentive in addition

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[8] G, 144.

[9] R, 28.

to and in opposition to the moral law is at work in the moral decision-making process.[10]

On Kant's account, the other incentive at work is the law of self-love. Just as we are predisposed to depend upon the incentive of the moral law in the determination of our will, we are equally predisposed to depend upon the incentives of our sensuous nature, as they accord with the law of self-love, to determine our will.[11] That is to say, in the same way we choose a moral disposition which depends on the moral law to serve as the ultimate subjective ground by which we freely adopt the maxims of our will, we can also freely choose the law of self-love as that ultimate subjective ground by which we freely adopt the maxims of our will. However, unlike the moral law, if we were to adopt the incentives of our sensuous nature into our maxim as the determining ground of our will, the result would be a morally evil act or a morally corrupt disposition. For as Kant has demonstrated, a morally good act is one that has the moral law (and no other law) as its incentive. In this sense, evil reveals itself because we choose an ultimate determining ground that results in maxims that adhere to the law of self-love instead of to the moral law.

Because we are naturally predisposed to adopt *both* the moral law and the law of self-love into our maxim as incentives of our will, we can occasionally run into problems. Because either incentive is, on its own, adequate

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[10] R, 26-31.

[11] R, 31.

for determining the will, a morally good act and a morally evil act will result not because the two incentives are different; the distinction between good and evil does not lie in the difference between the incentives which are adopted into the maxim, that is, not in the content of the maxim. Rather, the difference between a morally good act and a morally evil act is how we order the two incentives when we adopt them into our maxim.[12]

A morally good act is one in which we subordinate the incentive of self-love to the moral law and adopt the moral law into the universal maxim of our will as its sole incentive; the moral law is taken to be the supreme condition of obedience. A morally evil act is one in which we subordinate the incentive of the moral law to the law of self-love and adopt the sensuous incentives into the universal maxim of our will as its incentive; the law of self-love is taken to be the supreme condition of obedience. In this case, the morally evil act reveals a "radical" evil in so far as the very ground of all our maxims is corrupted. Thus, to say that we are morally evil by nature or that we have a natural propensity toward evil is to say that there is a propensity or tendency in human nature to reverse the order of incentives.[13]

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[12] R, 31.

[13] R, 31-32. We can begin to sense a problem with Kant's doctrine of radical evil. Namely, it is difficult to determine if Kant is suggesting that there *is* this radical evil in humans, or that there is only a *propensity* to this radical evil. In other words, does an expression of radical evil occur after we have actually chosen our sensuous nature over our moral nature? Or, is radical evil expressed

It is important to understand how Kant develops his doctrine of radical evil because his answer to the question of whether human nature is originally good or evil is fundamental to his whole theory of religion. That is, on Kant's account, religion is possible only if it is the case that human nature contains within it a predisposition toward good purpose together with an irresistible tendency towards evil which must constantly be combated. This tension between

when, in an attempt to do the right thing, we are weak and have a tendency to side with our sensuous nature? Although Kant does explicitly suggest that an act that is good in appearance, yet not a result of our moral disposition, cannot qualify as a morally good act (R, 32), surely, Kant cannot be saying that such an act is *radically evil*. That is, it seems difficult to comprehend that Kant could be suggesting that one who attempts to do a good action and succeeds, but does so out of some sensuous inclination or tendency, *is* radically evil or is engaged in a radically evil act. It may be that the action cannot qualify as a truly moral action, on Kant's terms, but does the action express a radical evil? Or, is this radical evil expressed only in the sensuous inclination whereby the act itself is not deemed radically evil, and the one who performs the action is not deemed radically evil *in general*, but only wrongly inclined on this particular occasion? Kant does not address such questions in *Religion*. Nor does Kant ever address the reason why we choose to adopt an evil disposition over a moral one, when, in his own words, we are originally and naturally predisposed toward goodness while we only possess a tendency or innate propensity towards evil. It may be that Kant avoids such a question because explaining why we freely choose an evil disposition "would invariably entail explaining an act of freedom - which would be to show what 'causes' an act of freedom" (Michalson, Jr., 262). Moreover, as we will see, in order to establish the need for empirical religion or ecclesiastical faith, Kant must presuppose the existence of radical evil. Practical religion can only be justified if it can be shown to help combat the evil inherent in humans who would otherwise be on a path to moral goodness. We do not see the emphasis on this notion of evil in any of Kant's previous ethical works. Only in *Religion*, where he attempts to account for morality and the church, does he necessarily require a doctrine of radical evil. See Alan Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, (Cornell University Press, 1970), 209-231 and Michel Despland, *Kant On History and Religion*, (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973) 169-172, wherein Despland quotes a letter from Goethe to Herder in which Goethe writes that: "Kant has ignominiously dirtied [his philosophical mantle] with the shameful spot of radical evil."

good and evil in human nature is what makes religion possible. Without this tension, religion would not be necessary; indeed, without this tension, religion would not exist. Without evil, we could easily fulfill the moral law to become well-pleasing to God simply by always relying on our moral incentive to determine our will.[14] Without evil we would have no problem always doing the morally good thing.

But this kind of easy morality is insufficient to make us pleasing to God. That is, we cannot be judged to be morally good if our ability to do good is never challenged. Moral goodness can come only as a result of obeying our duty to the moral law which, through our own disposition and freedom, we impose upon ourselves. Obedience and duty to any law exists only if there is a possibility to act contrary to the demands of the law. In this sense, duty to the moral law exists precisely because there is an evil incentive which opposes and challenges our duty. This evil is necessary to us. If our will can only be determined in one way, by only one (good) incentive, then we are acting in the only way we can. We are not acting out of duty or because we *ought* to act in some way or other in order to obey the law. Being well-pleasing to God requires that we act as we *ought* to in every effort to obey the moral law.[15]

Moral perfection is achieved only when we become well-pleasing to God. However, because we are all necessarily

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[14] Stephen Palmquist, "Does Kant Reduce Religion to Morality?" in *Kant-Studien*, 83, 1992, 141.

[15] R, 40-43.

corrupted by radical evil (so that we can be dutiful), we cannot realize the goal of pleasing God through mere morality alone. To realize this goal we must determine what, in addition to morality, is required so that we can combat our tendency toward evil in order to become morally good enough to please God.[16]

Book Two: How Can Good Combat Evil?

In Book Two, Kant is concerned with the question of how good can combat evil. More specifically, he is interested in how one who has been corrupted by evil so as to possess an "evil heart" can undergo a change so that one's heart can become good.[17] One who has a good heart can then go on to achieve moral perfection. But because we possess a radical evil, a "change of heart" cannot come about simply by obeying the moral law and acting in a good way. Kant says:

> For despite the fall [i.e., the necessary existence of evil in our hearts], the injunction that we *ought* to become better men resounds unabatedly in our souls; hence this must be within our power, even though what *we* are able to do is in itself inadequate and though we thereby only render ourselves susceptible of higher, and for us inscrutable, assistance.[18]

What Kant is saying is that despite the strength of the *ought* within us, and, regardless of what we do, how good we

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[16] R, 40-43.

[17] R, 32.

[18] R, 40-42.

act, or how strictly we obey the moral law, we can never, on our own, fulfill the moral law to become good enough to please God in every one of our actions: "[W]hat *we* are able to do is in itself inadequate." However, Kant is not here suggesting that morality is a lost cause. Kant is saying that even though we cannot, by ourselves, bring about our own moral revolution, by acting morally and obeying the moral law we "render ourselves susceptible of higher...assistance."

Granted, such assistance is "inscrutable" to our reason; that is, we cannot conceive of how this assistance comes to us nor can we adopt this assistance into our maxims either for theoretical or for practical use;[19] yet we must realize that this assistance is a necessary condition of reforming an evil heart into a heart that is good and pleasing to God. Thus, what becomes crucial to achieving moral goodness is that one "must be able to *hope* through his *own* efforts to reach the road which leads thither...because he ought to become a good man."[20]

We must remain dutiful to the ought within us and "hope" that through these efforts we will arrive at that point where we render ourselves susceptible of higher assistance, or, more specifically, that we make ourselves worthy of God's "*grace*." We must always keep ourselves disposed to moral action in an ongoing attempt to ward off evil tendencies.

Here we have two important notions in Kant's religious system: grace and hope. Kant clearly suggests the notion of

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[19] R, 49.

[20] R, 46.

"grace" as a necessary addition to our good works:

> Here, then, is that surplus...over and above the profit from good works, and it is itself a profit which is reckoned to us *by grace.* That what in our earthly life...is ever only a *becoming* (namely, becoming a man well-pleasing to God) should be credited to us exactly as if we were already in full possession of it - to this we have no legal claim....thus the decree is always one of grace alone.[21]

Thus, in order for one to undergo a conversion of heart from evil to good, one must regard oneself as good in the eyes of God yet not fully good in one's own eyes. That is, one must do good in the belief that one will experience grace and thereby conversion. It is this belief that is tantamount to religious belief and religious salvation:

> Good works are necessary from the moral perspective of practical reason; and grace is necessary from the non-moral perspective of theoretical reason. Kant's view is that, if salvation is going to happen, both of these requirements must be met.[22]

Here we have what amounts to Kant's notion of practical faith. Because God's grace is inscrutable to us, we can neither know when this grace is manifested to us or if we have received and accepted this grace. All we have access to is our own moral duty and our own good works. Thus, we must do our best, practically speaking, and trust or have faith that God will lend his grace. We must never fool ourselves into believing that following our moral duty and the moral law is enough, on its own, to bring about salvation; we can never make *ourselves* worthy to be accepted by God. Rather,

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[21] R, 70.

[22] Palmquist, 142.

we must adopt a practical faith and try to live a good life so that we can make ourselves worthy *to be made* acceptable by God.[23] It is by doing good works that we can rationally conceive of ourselves as having received God's grace even though we will never know for certain when and if this grace has been rendered upon us. Through practical faith, we exhibit a hope in God's grace.[24]

Hope

It can be said that in *Religion* Kant is attempting to answer the third question which he believes characterizes the task of the philosopher, namely, the question of "What may I hope?"[25] In order to grasp how morality works within us, that is, in order to understand our moral ambitions, intentions

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[23] Palmquist, 143.

[24] Kant's notion of divine grace is also somewhat problematic. Kant states that because radical evil is "inextirpable by human powers" (R, 32), we require divine assistance. However, with this necessary appeal to divine aid, Kant seems to be repudiating his requirement for human autonomy and freedom. See Davidovich, 4 and Wood, 209, 232-248. Also, see Michalson, Jr., 264-266. Michalson suggests that Kant's appeal to divine aid does not "weaken our own moral resolve" or threaten our freedom and autonomy because Kant balances his claim that we are morally limited with the claim that: "we must strive to do all this is in our power to regenerate ourselves, even though that by itself is not enough - its not being enough does not relieve us of the responsibility to make the effort [and to use our freedom and autonomy as far as they can take us]. We might say that, for Kant, we 'merit' God's grace when we do our imperfect best."

[25] Palmquist, 135. Palmquist notes that Kant poses the first two questions of "What can I know?" and "What ought I to do?" together with this third question of "What may I hope?" in the *Critique of Pure Reason,* B 832-833.

and actions, Kant is suggesting that we must turn to the notion of hope. What commits us to moral action is seeking an answer to the question of "What may I hope?" We are compelled to act morally precisely because the answer to the question is that we may hope for God's grace.

However, Kant never says explicitly that we are *supposed* to hope for God's grace. He only says that we are to hope that through our own efforts we can make ourselves worthy to receive grace. Kant insists that we must transform our own "cast of mind" and "grounding of character" to become as good as we can.[26] Indeed:

> [M]an flatters himself by believing either that God can make him eternally happy without his having *to become a better man*, or else, if this seems to him impossible, that *God* can certainly *make him a better man* without his having to do anything more than to *ask* for it.[27]

We have seen already Kant's insistence that we obey our moral duty and trust in God's grace. However, because Kant is not clear about exactly what we may hope for, the question arises as to whether we are supposed to hope for our own worldly transformation or whether we are supposed to hope for grace. In other words, do we hope that we can transform ourselves through our own moral duty so that we may become good enough to receive grace? Or, do we strive to obey our moral duty and then hope for God's grace? These questions may not seem so distinct, however, they are important because within them lies the relationship between religion and morality, or more specifically, the relationship between what

[26] R, 47.

[27] R, 47.

Kant calls true moral religion, or the pure religion of reason and practical religion, or historical, ecclesiastical faith or Scripture.

To clarify, if our hope lies in transforming ourselves through the practices or actions of ecclesiastical faith in order to become good, we may concern ourselves with practical religion. We may follow some ecclesiastical faith or other believing that in doing so we are making ourselves good. The problem here is not that we place our hope in these practices, but rather that we may begin to place more importance on the practices themselves rather than on what these practices are supposed to help us achieve. Hope in our own transformation might be necessary so long as we remember that our duty is to morality and not to the practices themselves.

If our hope lies in God's grace then regardless of the historical Scripture we may follow, we are always looking beyond the practices to achieve some kind of truly moral state. That is, we do not consider that the practices in themselves make us good; rather, the practices serve only to keep us well directed so that we become well-pleasing to God. True moral goodness and true moral perfection is achieved only when God judges us to be good enough so that He lends his grace.

It seems that Kant is suggesting that we can hope both for our own transformation and for grace. However, so long as we hope for grace it seems that we keep our goal of moral perfection clear in mind and thus remain within reason's

limits. In hoping for transformation we must be cautious not to step out of reason's limits and we must constantly remind ourselves of our moral goal. In other words, Kant is not saying that religious practices or ecclesiastical faiths have no place in achieving moral perfection. In fact, he is saying just the opposite. Following religious practices and Scripture can help us to attain our goal of moral perfection so long as we realize that underlying these practices is morality itself. That is, if we engage in the practices only for the sake of the practices themselves, we are not acting morally and we are not acting rationally. For Kant, one acts rationally only when one is acting morally. And to act morally, we must obey the duty of the moral law within us for duty's sake; to act morally is to adopt the moral law as our only incentive in the determining of our will. Following religious practices out of duty not to the practices themselves, but out of duty to our moral law, brings not only the historical or practical religion within the limits of our reason, but also, such duty is essential to achieving the pure religion of reason.

It might be said that Kant leaves the answer to the question of hope open because he does not want to rule out practical religion as a legitimate means to achieving moral perfection. If he were to limit hope to grace, he would eliminate the possibility that religious practices can help us remain morally disposed. And of course, if he were to limit hope to worldly transformation, his whole notion of grace, and thereby his whole religious system would collapse.

Kant's task is to bring religion within the limits of reason, and he can do this so long as duty to the moral law remains at the foundation of every moral and/or religious act or practice.

It is at this point that we can begin to see how Kant makes practical, empirical religion a part of morality and the pure religion of reason. However, Kant makes another step before explicitly stating that moral religion and ecclesiastical faith are compatible and at one with each other.

Book Three: The Ethical Commonwealth

In Book Three, Kant shifts his concern from the religious salvation of the individual believer to the moral community or what he calls the "ethical commonwealth." It is in his notion of the ethical commonwealth that we can really begin to understand the role that practical religion or Scripture plays in attaining moral perfection or in "the founding of a Kingdom of God on earth."[28]

Kant recognizes that maintaining a moral disposition is difficult because we live in close proximity to others and, as a result, we tend to have a corrupting influence on each other due to the radical evil which we all possess.[29] However, because those of us who are trying to live good

[28] R, 92.

[29] R, 88.

lives have a commitment to moral action, we must join together and unite as individuals aimed towards moral perfection to form a whole system or society of well-disposed persons. In fact, Kant states that we have a duty towards the human race and a social goal to promote moral perfection as a social good.[30] We must view ourselves as a "people of God" who unite under what Kant calls a "visible" church.[31] The visible church can be thought of as an ecclesiastical faith wherein Scripture serves "as a group of narratives that offer a temporal *model* or *symbol* of a rational (hence atemporal) structure"[32] and, thereby, reveals an intrinsic moral foundation.

To explain, a visible church is one in which Scripture is interpreted and read so as to reveal its underlying moral structure. Scripture interpreted as such keeps it within reason's limits and Kant demands that any Scriptural text of a visible church *ought* to be read in this way: "this [sacred] narrative must at all times be taught and expounded in the interests of morality."[33] For Kant, morality should never be expounded according to a Scriptural text; rather, a Scriptural text, if it is within the limits of reason, can be expounded, and, indeed, ought to be expounded according to the morality which is intrinsic to it. In this way, the people who unite together under the visible church always

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[30] R, 89.

[31] R, 88-93.

[32] O'Neill, 1997, 294.

[33] R, 123.

work under the assumption that a higher, more divine wisdom than their own is at the root of the moral legislation which they prescribe to themselves. The members of this church must believe that God is guiding them to unite and work together:

> We...require the presupposition of another idea, namely, that of a higher moral Being through whose universal dispensation the forces of separate individuals, insufficient in themselves, are united for a common end.[34]

Thus, what lays under the elements of visible church life and Scripture are the abstract demands of purely moral religion or what Kant call the "church invisible."[35] These demands stipulate that we cannot simply sit back and wait to realize our hope of God's grace. Rather, hope in our own transformation commits us to moral action. Therefore, even though we work under the assumption of God's guidance, we must act as though everything depended upon us:

> To found a moral people of God is therefore a task whose consummation can be looked for not from men but only from God Himself. Yet man...must proceed as though everything depended upon him....[A] true (visible) church is that which exhibits the (moral) Kingdom of God on earth so far as it can be brought to pass by men....Only on this condition dare he hope that higher wisdom will grant the completion of his well-intentioned endeavors.[36]

In this respect, the visible church can be thought of as a "vehicle" to the pure religion of reason. That is, we must

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[34] R, 89.

[35] R, 92.

[36] R, 92.

unite in the empirical determining ground, historical statutes and ecclesiastical faiths of the visible church in order to direct ourselves towards an evermore fully reasoned faith and ultimately towards the pure religion of reason.[37] However, though members of the ethical commonwealth are using the visible church as a vehicle to the pure religion of reason, they are not to act as though their church is merely a vehicle: they must act as though everything depends on them. Put another way, members must hope for God's grace but must assume that they are on their own in achieving the highest moral good. In this way, members will always do their very best to act morally.

As members move closer and closer to achieving this good, the elements of the visible church or their ecclesiastical faith become more and more dispensable until, at last, it is superseded by the pure religion of reason which will rule over them, "so that God may be in all."[38]

Reason and Scripture United

We can now understand what Kant means when he states that reason and Scripture are not only compatible but at one with each other, "so that he who follows one (under the guidance of moral concepts) will not fail to conform to the

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[37] R, 106-107.

[38] R, 112.

other."[39] Practical ecclesiastical faith serves as a means to keeping us morally disposed as well as a means to combating evil. To achieve moral perfection, we must hope for our own moral transformation and for God's grace. To undergo a moral transformation we must remain dutiful to the moral law. What aids in maintaining this duty to the moral law is engaging in practices and rituals that remind us of this duty in so far as morality underlies them. We engage in the practices out of duty to the moral law. Moreover, achieving moral perfection requires that we join together with other morally disposed individuals under a visible church in an effort to combat evil and promote moral goodness. By uniting under a visible church we put ourselves in a position whereby we can hope to receive God's grace and achieve not only moral perfection, but the pure religion of reason. In this way, ecclesiastical faith and reason are not only compatible but at one with each other in so far as following an ecclesiastical faith that has an underlying morality keeps us dutiful to the moral law and thereby serves as a vehicle to the pure religion of reason.

So long as reason guides us, we are compelled to act morally. However, obeying our duty to the moral law so that we remain morally well-disposed requires that we constantly combat evil. To combat this evil we must join forces with other well-intentioned individuals to form a commonwealth whose practices, by means of their intrinsic morality, enhance and encourage moral behavior and keep us directed

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[39] R, 11.

towards moral perfection. So long as we follow practices and Scriptures that are guided by moral concepts, we remain morally disposed and bound to the moral law within us. In this way, the ecclesiastical faith or visible church under which members of the commonwealth are united falls within reason's limits.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NECESSARY DISTINCTION BETWEEN REASON AND SCRIPTURE

We have seen in the previous chapter that Kant clearly unites moral or reasoned religion and ecclesiastical faith or Scripture to make them not only compatible but at one with each other. However, Kant makes two claims that seem to suggest a clear distinction between reason and Scripture.

First, Kant says that the pure religion of reason will eventually "rule over all" and free itself from "the agency of ecclesiastical faith" which "becomes bit by bit dispensable," so that we will achieve the Kingdom of God on earth.[1] In other words, Kant is saying that the pure religion of reason will, in the end, *supersede* or *take the place of* ecclesiastical faith, thereby rendering ecclesiastical faith nonexistent at some point. However, one thing can only take the place of or replace another thing if the two things are in some sense distinct from each other. It seems hard to imagine how two things that are united so that they are *at one* with each other can at the same time undergo a supersession so that one part of the union takes the place of

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[1] R, 112.

the other part. If this is what happens, then it seems the two things cannot be in union or at one with each other, for unity means the coming together of two things. Unity does not mean the replacement or consumption and demise of one thing by another thing. Thus we must examine exactly what Kant means when he suggests that the pure religion of reason and ecclesiastical faith are at one with each other yet the former will eventually supersede the latter.

Second, Kant is adamant in Book Four that we not make the mistake of reversing the priority of the morality that underlies true religion over the merely practical aspects of ecclesiastical faith that although a means to moral religion, are not themselves a condition for acceptance by God. That is, we must be clear that there is a distinction between "false religion" and "true religion." Kant does not want us to confuse moral religion with the practices of ecclesiastical faith. Moreover, we are never to confuse which of these must hold our priority. Thus, it does not seem that the union and compatibility of moral reason and Scripture guarantees that "he who follows one...will not fail to conform to the other." Kant says that following a good course of life by obeying the moral law is *alone* pleasing to God.[2] Moreover, Kant demands that a distinction be made between moral religion and ecclesiastical faith so that when we unite them, we do so in the proper order: "So much depends, when we wish to unite two good things, upon the order in which they are united! True *enlightenment* lies in

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[2] R, 167.

this very *distinction*..."[3] Again, it seems we need to clarify what Kant is doing when he claims that moral religion and ecclesiastical faith are at one with each other and, at the same time, demands that they remain distinct from each other.

To understand why and how Kant makes this distinction between moral religion and ecclesiastical faith I will examine the difference between what Kant calls false religion and true religion. As well, I will clarify the difference between theology, morality and religion so as to shed even more light on Kant's distinction.[4]

False and True Religion

Kant considers false religion to be the mistaken assumption that practices of ecclesiastical faith are in themselves pleasing to God. To clarify, Kant recognizes that these practices have their place in keeping us morally disposed. However, these practices are only "non-moral" aspects of religion; that is, they are activities or practices in our empirical religion which can be related to a

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[3] R, 167, emphasis added.

[4] Palmquist, 134-139. Palmquist examines this difference between theology, morality and religion to defend his thesis that Kant is not reducing religion to morality in a purely "eliminative" way. To understand Palmquist's distinction between what he calls "eliminative reductionism" versus "explanatory reductionism" see p. 129-131. Although I will be following his argument for the distinction between theology, morality and religion, I am doing so in the context of my own argument that Kant is making a clear distinction between moral religion and ecclesiastical faith.

moral end, but are not in themselves morally good or bad.[5] Engaging in these practices because we believe that these practices themselves are pleasing to God does not result in moral goodness. Because these practices alone have no moral worth, we can never achieve moral goodness so long as we view them as self-sufficient. Viewing practices in this way amounts to false religion or what Kant calls "religious illusion."[6] These practices only have a proper place in keeping us morally disposed and only take on a moral value when we keep them attached to morality by viewing them only as a means to a moral end. Non-moral religious activities are morally legitimate and part of true religion only if they serve as a means for keeping us morally disposed. And, they can only serve as a means for keeping us morally disposed if we engage in them not for their own sake, which detaches them from morality, but because we keep them attached to morality by recognizing them as a means by which we can uphold our duty to the moral law and become pleasing to God.

True religion is a manifestation of our pure moral judgment and reason. That is, in true religion we are aware that ecclesiastical practices or non-moral aspects of empirical religion are themselves arbitrary and contingent. None of these practices are essential to the service of God generally or universally because such practices are done only for the sake of one church which deems them divine and are therefore restricted to one people. Thus, true religion

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[5] Palmquist, 145; R, 157-158.

[6] R, 158.

comprises those laws and practical principles which are unconditioned and which have been revealed to us through reason to be intrinsically pleasing to God. Such laws and principles are universal in so far as they manifest the service that God, Himself demands.[7] In other words, in true religion, we maintain our obedience to the moral law within us. True religion recognizes morality as its primary foundation. We must be aware that this is our duty. By upholding this duty we fulfill a moral service which is first and foremost free and thereby the service that God demands.[8] Moreover, by obeying the moral law, we remain clear that our endeavors towards true religion always take priority over merely religious practices:

> Hence whoever assigns priority to obedience to statutory laws, [still] requiring a revelation, as being necessary to religion, and regard this obedience not merely as a means to the moral disposition but as the objective condition of becoming immediately well-pleasing to God, and whoever thus places endeavor toward a good course of life below this historical faith (instead of requiring the latter, which can be well-pleasing to God only *conditionally*, to adapt itself to the former, which alone is *intrinsically* well pleasing to Him) - whoever does this transforms the service of God into a mere *fetishism* and practices a pseudo-service which is subversive to all endeavors toward true religion.[9]

The point that Kant is trying to make here is that false religion and true religion have to be viewed as separate and distinct because without this division we run the risk of building our "visible" churches or various religions on the

[7] R, 156.

[8] R, 167.

[9] R, 166-167.

foundation of, what are essentially, non-moral activities. That is, we run the risk of making some arbitrary, non-moral activity the basis of morality - we make the mistake of believing that our morality is ensured by simply engaging in the religious activities. This is not to say that religious practices do not serve some purpose in morality; but, Kant wants to be sure that morality is the first basis. He wants to be sure that morality comprises the foundation of religion, so that any religious activity that we engage in will always have morality as its motivation. Thus, religious activities are never done for their own sake, but, rather, for the sake of the moral law that underlies them. In this way, we will not lose sight of our ultimate endeavor toward true religion which is universal in so far as it is guided by morality, by reason, and by God. This is what Kant means when he says that we must be careful to keep the non-moral practices and the practical moral principles of empirical religion in their proper order.

Theology, Morality, and Religion

To make the distinction between false and true religion even clearer, I move now to the difference between theology, morality, and religion. In order to understand the difference, I will return to the Preface of the First Edition of *Religion* to examine Kant's assertion that:

> [M]orality...stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over [man], for him to apprehend his duty, nor of an incentive other than the [moral] law itself....Hence for its own sake morality does not need religion at all...it is self sufficient....But although for its own sake morality needs no representation of an end which must precede the determining of the will, it is quite possible that it is necessarily related to such an end, taken not as the *ground*, but as the inevitable *consequence* of maxims adopted as conformable to that end....Morality thus leads ineluctably to religion, through which it extends itself to the idea of a powerful moral Lawgiver, outside of mankind, for Whose will that is the final end (of creation) which at the same time can and ought to be man's final end.[10]

In this assertion we can begin to see the structure of Kant's whole religious system. Kant is suggesting that even though morality is self-sufficient in so far as religion is not needed to explain it, morality is nevertheless *related* to religion to the extent that its final end or ultimate purpose cannot be realized if morality is limited to itself: we cannot realize the goal of moral perfection through mere morality alone. Thus, Kant is here making a distinction between the *ground* of morality and the *consequence* or end of morality. Indeed, the ground of morality is self-sufficient because all this requires is our own, human practical reason: reason is at work when we obey our duty to the moral law within us. However, with respect to the consequence of morality, we have already seen that, "what we are able to do is in itself inadequate."[11] Rather, we must look beyond mere morality to that "higher assistance" or "powerful moral Lawgiver" which can complete the goal of making us morally

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[10] R, 3-6.

[11] R, 40; Palmquist, 134.

perfect. Because this "higher assistance" is inscrutable to us or lies beyond our practical reason (though it is not outside of (pure) reason), we must hope to discover something other than mere morality and higher assistance which can bridge the gap between the practical and the theoretical. For Kant, this "something other" is religion in so far as through religion, morality extends beyond itself to the idea of God.[12] In this way, "morality leads ineluctably to religion."

To, clarify, Kant is saying that morality is "the final end (of creation)" or "man's final end." In this sense, morality serves the interests of humanity in so far as it provides humankind with its purpose. However, for morality to *best serve* humankind, or, for our moral purpose to best be fulfilled, we must view morality as something "outside of mankind." That is, *the idea* of God must be conceived, not only as a necessity, but as an *actuality*, if morality is to fulfill its teleological purpose.[13] The "idea" of God is, for Kant, conceived through religion; thus, the goal of morality becomes a reality through religion. In other words, we can only hope to achieve moral perfection and receive grace if we can conceive of a Being who guides us and shares our goal.[14]

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[12] Palmquist, 134.

[13] Ibid., 135. Here we have Kant's moral proof of the existence of God. For a discussion of Kant's rejection of the ontological, cosmological and teleological proofs, see Theodore M. Greene's essay, "The Historical Context and Religious Significance of Kant's *Religion*" which is Part I of the Introduction to *Religion*, p. xlii-xliii.

[14] Ibid., 135.

It is important to realize that Kant is not suggesting that religion is identical to, or a sub-category of morality. Rather, Kant is saying that morality, as a self-sufficient, practical ground, can only realize its purpose when the knowledge of God (i.e., theology), serves as its theoretical, inscrutable consequence. What brings ground (morality) and consequence (theology) together is religion.

Kant's Definition of Religion: Revealed vs. Natural Religion

Although we can now begin to understand the distinction between morality, theology, and religion, in order to really be clear about the distinction, we will examine the definition of religion that Kant gives in *Religion*. Kant states:

> Religion is (subjectively regarded) the recognition of all duties as divine commands. That religion in which I must know in advance that something is a divine command in order to recognize it as my duty, is the *revealed* religion (or the one standing in need of a revelation); in contrast, that religion in which I must first know that something is my duty before I can accept it as a divine injunction is the *natural* religion.[15]

Here we can understand Kant to be saying that revealed religion takes theology as its foundation: we must know first that the command is divine or comes from God before we obey it as a duty. Revealed religion means that the idea of God is interpreted and presented through Scriptural narratives and practices which we regard as God's commands.

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[15] R, 142-143.

We follow the narratives and practices because we view them as commands from God. Thus, our sense of duty or morality depends on religion or the idea of God as it is revealed. Our morality depends on the narratives and practices to show us that God wants us to obey His duties. Revealed religion constitutes what we might think of as common, everyday religions or ecclesiastical faiths which conform to their own Scriptural interpretations, practices and rituals which their members follow out of duty to God.

Natural religion, in contrast, takes morality as its foundation: we must know first that the command is a duty before we can accept it as a divine command. Natural religion means that our sense of duty or morality comes from our own moral law within us and depends on our reason. Thus, our duties to the moral law are regarded as commands from God only because they conform to the moral law. In this case, ecclesiastical faith or revelation is not necessary to know what our duties are.

Kant distinguishes between revealed and natural religion to make the following points. Although the essence of all religion is constituted by "the (subjective) performance of all human duties as divine commands,"[16] if we must know that these commands are divine in order to view them as our duty, the result is that we rely on a religion which has theology or revelation as its sole basis. This means that we do not rely on reason and the moral law to guide our morality; thus, the religion we conform to runs the risk of being only a

[16] R, 100.

false religion. Moreover, the characteristic of this religion is that it has to be "learned."[17] That is, this religion can only spread among people to the extent that its elements can be taught or learned. In this sense, it may not be objective or universal. And we know that for Kant, true religion is universal in so far as morality or duty to the moral law must serve as its foundation. If we rely only on revealed religion to inform us of our duties and moral actions, we reject the need for reason. Thus, we end up following revealed religion for purely dogmatic reasons: we do what we are told to do, not out of duty to our own reason and internal law but out of obedience to some externally imposed law. We express neither our freedom or autonomy, but only our "tutelage."[18] Thus, no matter how good our actions appear to be and regardless of how many good acts we perform, if our duty is only a result of knowing first that something is a command from God through revelation, our actions lack reason and moral goodness, and thus can only be considered expressions of radical evil and a "perversity of the heart."[19]

Again, the essence of all religion is constituted by "the (subjective) performance of all human duties as divine commands." Now, if we must know that something is a duty (to the moral law) in order to view it as a divine command, the

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[17] R, 143.

[18] This is a reference to Kant's motto in his essay "What is Enlightenment?" (first published in 1784) that we release ourselves from our "self-incurred tutelage" and "[h]ave the courage to use [our] own reason!"

[19] R, 32.

result is that we rely on a religion which has morality and reason as its sole basis. This means that we rely on reason and the moral law to guide our morality. The characteristic of this natural religion is that "everyone can be convinced through his own reason."[20] In this sense, natural religion is universal in so far as it requires no teaching or learning of revelation. It is accessible to any *reasonable* person. However, as I have already said, natural religion means that we need only know that something is a duty to the moral law before we can regard it as a command from God. But, the question arises as to how we are to conceive of God's commands without the actuality or the reality of the idea of God. That is, if natural religion has morality as its sole foundation, how do we come to accept our duties as divine commands if we do not allow that the idea of God is revealed? When Kant says that morality can only extend itself to the idea of God through religion, he means, through *revealed* religion. Mere morality does not, on its own, present us with the idea of God. The idea of God is only made available to us when it is revealed through Scriptural narratives, practices and rituals.

What Kant is trying to show is that revealed religion alone cannot lead to moral perfection. And, indeed, revealed religion can run the risk of being simply a false religion. Likewise, natural religion alone cannot lead to moral perfection: we get stuck within the limits of morality. When Kant says that the essence of religion is the recognition of

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[20] R, 143.

all duties as divine commands, he means that the pure religion of reason is constituted by revelation which rather than being learned, has morality at its foundation so that it can be universally apprehended through reason. In this way, we recognize that our duties to the moral law are the commands of God. But priority must be given to our duty to morality. That is, morality must serve as the primary foundation to which revelation is added. Only when morality and revelation work in this way can we hope to achieve moral perfection or the pure universal religion of reason. Moreover, only when morality and revelation work in this way can revealed religion fall within the limits of reason and be considered a true (empirical) religion. So long as a revealed religion or ecclesiastical faith has morality as its foundation, it can be considered a "visible" church whose Scripture, practices and rituals legitimately help to keep its members morally disposed and united under God for a common end.

The Distinction Between Reason and Scripture

We can understand now why Kant makes a necessary distinction between moral religion and ecclesiastical faith, true religion and false religion, and, theology, morality and (reasoned) religion. Ecclesiastical faith will amount only to a false religion if it takes theology as its sole foundation. Kant makes a clear distinction between

ecclesiastical faith and moral, reasoned religion to show that ecclesiastical faith does not simply guarantee a path to moral goodness or moral perfection. If ecclesiastical faith only amounts to a false religion, then regardless of how strictly we may follow its commands, we will never undergo the change of heart that is necessary for moral goodness and acceptance by God. Ecclesiastical faith in this sense can never be at one with reasoned religion because it lacks the moral foundation that is necessary to transform it into a true religion. Therefore, revealed religion or Scripture that takes only theology as its sole basis must be thought of as distinct, not only from true religion, but from reasoned religion as well--on this point, Kant is adamant. Moreover, because the narratives and practices of revealed Scripture or ecclesiastical faith are, on their own, dispensable and not necessary in the pursuit of moral perfection, true religion must free itself from "the agency of ecclesiastical faith" so that the pure religion of reason can "rule over all." The pure religion of reason must take the place of or supersede ecclesiastical faith if we are to achieve the Kingdom of God on earth.

So it seems that what Kant leaves us with, at this point, is that moral religion and ecclesiastical faith are compatible and at one with each other, while at the same time, separate and distinct from each other. Thus, it appears that Kant lands himself in a contradiction. However, in what is to come, I will argue that this apparent contradiction is unproblematic for Kant. As well, I will

show why this apparent contradiction is necessary for Kant if he his to complete his task.

CHAPTER FOUR

REASON AND SCRIPTURE: UNITED AND DISTINCT

We have seen that Kant establishes reasoned religion and ecclesiastical faith as both united and distinct. To understand how Kant can suggest these two seemingly contradictory views, it is necessary to examine and emphasize exactly what kind of *union* Kant has in mind when he suggests that reason and Scripture are united. Based on how Kant unites reason and Scripture, we will determine whether Kant's system of religion is successful in bringing religion within the limits of reason alone. That is to say, we will determine whether Kant is able to show how revealed religion can conform to the conditions of the pure religion of reason in such a way that bridges the gap between the practical world of ecclesiastical faith and the theoretical world of the religion of reason.

What Kant Means by Unity

Based on what I have presented up to now, I will approach *unity* in two ways. First, I will examine the particular way in which Kant views morality. It seems clear to me that his view of morality dictates exactly how or in what way he attempts to unite reason and Scripture. That is to say, in order to understand how Kant unites reason and Scripture, we must be clear about how Kant views morality, and, more importantly, *where* Kant places morality. Second, I will argue that when Kant suggests that reason and Scripture can be united, he means this in somewhat loose or open sense. That is, Kant is not suggesting that reason is strictly united to one particular Scripture (namely, Christianity). Rather, reason can be united with any Scripture that meets the moral and rational requirements.

Unity Based on the Place of Morality

In Book One of *Religion* or in the first stage of Kant's religious system, we saw that moral action depends on properly ordering the incentives of our will: the incentive of the moral law must be taken as the supreme condition of obedience and subordinate the incentive of the law of self-love. So long as we adopt the moral law into the universal maxim of our will as its sole incentive, the result will be a morally good act. Thus, to be morally good, we must do our

best not to reverse the order of incentives. The moral law must be our primary incentive.

In Book Two or the second stage of Kant's religious system, we saw that in order to make ourselves worthy to receive God's grace, we must hope both for our own transformation or change of heart and for God's grace. However, we must be careful that in our attempt to transform ourselves, we keep morality as our primary duty. We must not make the mistake of placing too much importance on the ecclesiastical practices that serve as aids in our transformation so that we forget what these practices are helping us to achieve. Again, we see here a suggestion of priority or proper ordering: morality must remain our primary duty over mere ecclesiastical practices.

In Book Three or the third stage, we saw that an ethical commonwealth is united under a visible church and guided by God towards a common end. Scripture plays a key role in the visible church in so far as it is interpreted and read so as to reveal its underlying moral structure. It is this intrinsic moral structure of Scripture that helps to keep the members of the commonwealth well-intentioned and morally disposed. And, it is only when morality serves as the foundation of the visible church that this church can be thought of as a vehicle to the pure religion of reason. Again, Kant makes clear the priority of morality as the sole foundation for visible church life.

Finally, in Book Four, Kant distinguishes between true and false religion to ensure that moral religion is not

confused with practices of ecclesiastical faith that are disconnected from morality. Yet again, Kant is adamant that we do not reverse the priority of the morality that underlies true moral religion over the merely practical aspects of ecclesiastical faith.

In other words, Kant makes it clear that at every level of his system of religion morality holds a crucial place: in the ordering of things, morality must always serve as the primary foundation and duty to morality must always be the first priority if religion is to fall within reason's limits and if we are to achieve moral perfection. Thus, in his system of religion, the particular way in which Kant views morality is that morality is seen as primary; the particular place that Kant gives to morality is that it serves as the foundation.

It is in Book Four or in the final stage of his religious system that Kant, after suggesting that reasoned religion and ecclesiastical faith are *at one* with each other, clarifies exactly what kind of union he has in mind based on the place he gives to morality. Let us return to Book Four to examine more closely how Kant completes his religious system by uniting, yet, at the same time, distinguishing reasoned religion or the highest moral good and ecclesiastical faith or common church life.

Completing Kant's System of Religion: Book Four: Visible Church Life in Service to the Moral Good and the Pure Religion of Reason

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Kant suggests that uniting reasoned religion and ecclesiastical faith "depends...upon the order in which they are united."[1] As well, Kant suggests that a distinction must exist between reasoned religion and ecclesiastical faith precisely so they can be united in the proper order: "True *enlightenment* lies in this very distinction..."[2]

It is clear that the kind of union Kant has in mind is one in which the two things united maintain their own distinctive identity. In other words, by union Kant does not mean that the two things blend into each other in a way that makes them indistinguishable from each other. Thus, when Kant suggests that reason and Scripture are "not only compatible but at one" with each other, he does not mean that reason and Scripture are so identical that they cannot be distinguished from each other. He only means that they are united to the extent that "he who follows one...will not fail to conform to the other."

We can think of unity in terms of how a pit is united to the flesh of a peach to the extent that eating the flesh will reveal the pit and without the pit the flesh could not grow; together the pit and the flesh make the peach, yet the pit and flesh are not so identical to each other that they cannot

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[1] R, 167.

[2] R, 167.

be distinguished as "pit" and "flesh"; pit and flesh maintain a separate identity in their union as "peach." Now, reason and Scripture are not entities like "pit" and "flesh." However, the analogy gets at the kind of unity Kant has in mind when he suggests that reason and Scripture are at one with each other. Indeed, in the Preface to the Second Edition Kant states that he regards ecclesiastical faith or revealed religion as "the *wider* sphere of faith, which includes within itself" the pure religion of reason as a "*narrower* [sphere] (not like two circles external to one another, but like concentric circles)."[3] Thus, we get the idea that although ecclesiastical faith and reasoned religion are united as one circle within another, they remain distinct as two circles that make up the one wide sphere. If we remind ourselves of Kant's view of morality, we can begin to clarify how unity depends on the proper ordering of two distinct things.

Kant has said time and time again that ecclesiastical faith or revealed Scripture can only fall within the limits of reason and keep us morally disposed and well-pleasing to God if our belief in ecclesiastical faith and its practices or rituals are connected to morality. What must underlie ecclesiastical faith and Scripture is our duty to the moral law within us. Ecclesiastical practices and narratives can only serve as a means to keeping us directed to our moral end and as an aid to remaining dutiful to the moral law when morality serves as the primary motivating factor behind the

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[3] R, 11

practices and narratives. Only when the moral law lies at the foundation of religious actions can they take on a moral value and be expressions of our freedom, autonomy and rationality. And, it is only when ecclesiastical faith has morality as its sole foundation that it can qualify as a true visible church and as a vehicle to the pure religion of reason.

So, to repeat, to engage in moral action, we must properly order and choose the moral law over the law of self-love as the primary incentive of our will. To become morally good by transforming our hearts and hoping for God's grace we must properly order our duty to the moral law over duty to the mere practices of ecclesiastical faith. To be a member of the ethical commonwealth and strive towards moral perfection, we must properly reveal the intrinsic morality in Scripture and view the visible church as a vehicle to achieving the moral Kingdom of God on earth. And, finally, an ecclesiastical faith can only serve as a vehicle to the pure religion of reason when the ecclesiastical faith in question has united, *in the proper order*, revealed religion or theology with natural religion or morality to form a true universal religion that can lead to the pure religion of reason. And, of course the proper order of this union has the morality that is intrinsic to natural religion as the primary foundation. In this way, the revealed religion added to this moral foundation is ensured to reveal morality in its Scripture. The result is an ecclesiastical faith or visible church that uses Scripture based on morality and reason to

unite its members under the guidance of God toward the pure religion of reason. The result is an empirical religion that falls within the limits of reason alone.

To clarify, we remember from the previous chapter that Kant made a clear distinction between false and true religion, and theology, morality and religion. These distinctions helped to clarify his distinction between moral religion and ecclesiastical faith. Kant insists on this distinction for two reasons. First, he wants to be sure that we do not assume that revealed religion which takes theology as its sole foundation leads to moral perfection. In other words, going to church every Sunday and adhering to the rules of some ecclesiastical faith out of duty to God does not, on its own, constitute a morally good life or make us well-pleasing to God. Second, Kant also wants to be sure that we do not assume that natural religion which takes morality as its sole foundation leads to moral perfection. That is, acting in accordance with our reason and following our duty to the moral law can only take us so far. Moral perfection cannot be achieved through mere morality alone. What is required is a *coming together* first of natural (reasoned) religion or morality which sets the foundation, and second, revealed religion or Scripture which extends morality to the idea of God. Thus, when natural religion and revealed religion, moral religion and ecclesiastical faith, reason and Scripture are united, they are done so in a very particular way: they must be united in the proper order so that morality is the first basis or the foundation of religion,

while the rules, rituals and revelations are the structure or those aspects of religion that keep us morally well-disposed in so far as they are built on top of the moral foundation. Another way to think of this is that reason and the moral law represent the "core" around which revelation is added or formed. In this way, reason and Scripture are united, but they also remain distinct; that is, in order for them to be united in the proper order so that morality serves as foundation or core and revelation serves as the added structure, it must be possible to distinguish between them.

In this sense, unity can be thought of in a somewhat looser sense than what it may have initially seemed. Not only does the unity that Kant has in mind allow for an internal distinctness, but Kant is also suggesting that a union between reason and any ecclesiastical faith can occur so long as the ecclesiastical faith unites morality and revelation in the proper order. In other words, although Kant uses Christianity as his test case to determine whether Christianity, as a revealed religion, can be brought within reason's limits, he is not suggesting that the union between reason and revelation is strictly limited to Christianity. Instead, Kant is suggesting that the union between reason and Scripture depends on the structure or form of the set of beliefs and hopes which Scripture lays out and the possibility that this is open to reasoned interpretation or lies within the limits of reason. And, the only structure or form of Scripture that can be interpreted within reason's limits is one which has morality as its primary basis.

A Looser Sense of Unity

We know that Kant is using Christianity as his Scriptural test case to determine whether revelation falls within reason's limits. It can be said that Kant is assuming the role of a "philosophical theologian." That is, he is not merely attempting to defend "ecclesiastical faith by appealing to church authority to guide his reading of Scripture"; such is the role of the "biblical theologian...whose defense of faith does not appeal to reason."[4] Kant is discussing Christian Scripture to determine whether it can be *reasoned*. He is approaching "religion within the limits of reason alone by way of interpretation of the sacred texts of one tradition," namely, Christianity.

We recall that Scripture, as Kant is using it, may be understood "as a group of narratives that offer a temporal *model* or *symbol* of a rational...structure."[5] In this sense, it may be said that Kant is using Scripture in a symbolic way. For example, Kant uses the story of Adam's sin and the expulsion from Eden in a symbolic way to demonstrate how moral principles are subordinated to natural inclinations:

> Holy Scripture (the Christian portion) sets forth this intelligible moral relationship in the form of a narrative, in which two principles in man, as opposed to one another as heaven is to hell, are represented as persons outside him; who not only pit their strength against each other but also seek (the one as man's

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[4] O'Neill, 1997, 291.

[5] Ibid., 294.

> accuser and the other as his advocate) to establish their claims *legally* as before a supreme judge.[6]

Kant also outlines the fall of the Evil Lord who becomes God's traitor. Again, it may be said that Kant uses this story in a symbolic way to show how a Kingdom of evil set up in defiance to the good principle gave rational beings the possibility of freedom, and more importantly, the possibility to overturn evil (which, as descendants of Adam they all possessed), in favor of the disposition to goodness and the moral worthiness of God.[7] Kant is trying to show how these Biblical dramas may be read as symbolizing the conflict between the moral principle and the principle of subordinating morality to desire. Moreover, he is trying to explain that the subordination of morality to inclination is a freely chosen evil just as the return to moral awareness and a moral predisposition is a freely chosen good. Through these stories we can symbolically understand the interrelationship between freedom, knowledge, and morality in ourselves. Kant reminds us, with reference to Horace, that, "Under another name the tale is told of you."[8] In other words, Kant recognizes that "a story does not have to be literally true, or even...taken from the Bible, in order to be read in the interests of morality."[9]

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[6] R, 73.

[7] R, 73-4.

[8] R, 37; O'Neill, 1997, 295.

[9] O'Neill, 1997, 295. See also Despland, 151.

It is not difficult to understand that myths, Biblical stories, or Scripture *can* be interpreted symbolically so as to reveal the relation between knowledge, morality and hope. However, as we have seen, Kant suggests that not only *can* we read Scripture as a symbol of morality, but interpreting Scripture within religion within the limits of reason demands that Scripture *ought* to be read in this way. Again, the point here, for Kant, is not simply that Scripture ought to be interpreted "in the interests of morality;" but, rather, his point is that bringing out the moral meaning of Scripture presupposes that a text of Scripture has this intrinsic, moral meaning.[10] But, although he makes use of Christian references, Kant is not suggesting that Christian Scripture, in particular, holds some special moral wisdom. Indeed, he states that the Bible is no more than a book that has "fallen into men's hands."[11] He is simply using Christian Scripture as his choice of example and point of reference to explain that sacred texts ought always to be interpreted in the interests of morality if they are to be connected to morality and if they are to prove useful in the pursuit of moral perfection. Perhaps, if Kant was not influenced by his eighteenth-century European concerns, but was instead writing amidst an Asian culture for example, his use of Christian Scripture would have been replaced by Islamic, Hindu or Buddhist Scriptures. Thus, what is important to Kant is not the specific Scripture

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[10] O'Neill, 1997, 297.

[11] R, 98.

itself, but, rather, that the Scripture holds an intrinsic moral meaning which can be revealed symbolically.

Thus, we see that what is important is not specifically Christian Scripture, but sacred texts of any tradition. What is at issue for Kant in interpretation is the question of "whether morality should be expounded according to the Bible or whether the Bible should not rather be expounded according to morality?"[12] We can understand here that in the place of "Bible" can appear the name of any sacred text. The point is that the same question will apply. The point is also that the answer to this question will always be the same for Kant: morality rather than Scripture will always comes first.[13]

In this respect, Kant is defending moral religion. However, to understand how he defends religion within the limits of reason alone we must remind ourselves what reason, for Kant, comprises. Reason, as a way of disciplining thinking and acting, must meet three standards. Reason must be "negative," "nonderivative," and "lawlike." All reasoned ways of interpreting, if there are any, have to meet these three standards.[14]

The first two standards are met by the philosophical theologian in interpretation. Kant states that:

> Scriptural exegesis "within the limits of reason" may not appeal to revelation, state or ecclesiastical authority, or historical scholarship, let alone authorial intentions on which traditions of biblical

[12] R, 101.

[13] R, 102.

[14] O'Neill, 1997, 298.

> theology may build. Equally, scriptural exegesis within the limits of reason does not appeal to the no less suspect "authority" of individual religious experience, conscience, or feeling--a mode of interpretation that Kant thinks leads to enthusiasm or fanaticism.[15]

However, to understand why Kant believes that reference to Scripture and accepted traditions plays an important part in achieving reasoned religion, we must turn to the third standard of reason, namely, lawlikeness.

Kant states that the philosophical theologian needs to engage with Scripture because:

> [T]he authority of Scripture...as...at present the only instrument in the most enlightened portion of the world for the union of all men into one church, constitutes the ecclesiastical faith, which, as the popular faith, cannot be neglected, because no doctrine based on reason alone seems to the people qualified to serve as an unchangeable norm.[16]

In other words, Kant is recognizing that "the philosophical theologian has to reason in ways that engage with actual religious conceptions as they are held and cherished by the people"[17] of a certain time and in a certain place. In order for reasoned religion to be lawlike, it must be sensitive to the audience which happens to be adherents of particular religious traditions; it must appeal to its audience in a universal way. Thus Kant notes that "it is...possible that the union of men into one religion cannot feasibly be brought about or made abiding without a holy book

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[15] O'Neill, 1997, 299; R, 101, 104-5.

[16] R, 103.

[17] O'Neill, 1997, 300.

and an ecclesiastical faith based on it."[18] So it seems that reasoned religion must engage with popular sacred texts and traditions if it is to have a wide appeal. Again, we see here that Kant is justifying practical religion as a necessary aid to achieving reasoned religion. Sacred texts must be interpreted in a way that not only reveals their intrinsic morality but also appeals to their audience in a universal way if they are to fully meet the requirements of reason. That is, "religion within the limits of reason not merely *may* but *must* interpret accepted texts, and their ordinary reception."[19] In this way, interpretation meets the three standards of reason and supports religion within the limits of reason. More specifically,

> [W]hen Kant speaks of his approach to religion as lying *within the limits of reason* he does not mean that he identifies a unique set to reasoned beliefs or hopes, but only that he identifies a range of beliefs or hopes whose structure places them within the limits of reason.[20]

Again, he is not claiming that a particular sacred text or a particular religious tradition and its Scripture lies within the limits of reason. Rather, he is claiming that faith and hope in some popular ecclesiastical tradition holds the possibility of reasoned interpretation. Moreover, the structure of some set of beliefs or hopes can be viewed as coinciding with reason or falling within the limits of reason when that structure reveals an intrinsic morality. Thus,

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[18] R, 123.

[19] O'Neill, 1997, 301.

[20] Ibid., 302.

when Kant says that reason and Scripture are compatible and at one with each other, he is not suggesting that reason is strictly united to Christian Scripture in particular. He is saying that so long as any Scripture can be revealed to exhibit its intrinsic moral foundation it will fall within reason's limits; and, so long as we follow some Scripture or ecclesiastical faith that has this moral foundation, our belief, faith and hope in this Scripture is open to reasoned interpretation.

We must remember that Kant is using Christian Scripture only as an example of how we can determine whether a Scripture falls within the limits of reason. He is not saying that reason and Christian Scripture are strictly at one with each other to the exclusion of all other Scriptures. He is only saying that because Christian Scripture can be identified as a range of beliefs and hopes that hold the possibility of reasoned interpretation, it can be considered a "visible" church that can act as a "vehicle" to the pure religion of reason. So long as Scripture is guided by moral concepts or has morality at its foundation, "he who follows [it]...will not fail to conform to the other [i.e., reason]."

Thus, when Kant says there is a union between reason and Scripture, he means it in a somewhat loose sense. By "loose" I mean only that Kant is not suggesting a strict union between reason and one particular Scripture. Rather, Kant is saying that reason and (any) Scripture are united only if the Scripture in question can act as a vehicle to the pure religion of reason. And, Scripture can only act as a vehicle

if it can be revealed to hold an intrinsic moral meaning which unites people under God for a common end.

A Necessary Contradiction?

So it seems that the apparent contradiction that Kant makes by uniting and distinguishing reason and Scripture is really unproblematic for him. It seems that the apparent contradiction may not be a contradiction at all in so far as Kant seems to account for how reason and Scripture are to be combined so that they can work together as two separate parts that make up one union. Indeed, if the way in which Kant unites reason and Scripture is, in fact, a contradiction then it seems that such a contradiction is *necessary* for completing Kant's system of religion.

I suggested at the outset that Kant seems to be attempting to bridge the gap between the practical world of ecclesiastical faith and the theoretical world of the religion of reason. His task in *Religion* is to establish the rational conditions for the possibility of religion and to test one particular revealed religion to see if it conforms to these conditions. In other words, he is hoping to demonstrate that reason and Scripture can be united in a way that bridges the gap between them.

What Kant has shown by means of his religious system is that revealed religion or ecclesiastical faith can unite with reason and the moral law to result in a true, empirical

religion that qualifies as a visible church and as a vehicle to the pure religion of reason only when the moral law serves as the foundation. Thus, the test case of Christianity as a revealed religion is shown to qualify as a legitimate true religion only in as much as it is shown to be contingent upon morality. Christianity, as a true empirical religion, has morality as its primary foundation. This means that Christian Scripture, practices, rituals, etc., must be followed not out of duty to God, but out of duty to the moral law within us. If Christianity places too much emphasis on its theology so that good actions become defined as duties to God, Christianity runs the risk of disengaging itself from its moral foundation. Once it is separated from a moral basis, it can no longer qualify as a visible church or as a vehicle to reasoned religion and its members cannot achieve moral perfection or God's grace.[21]

What bridges the gap between the practical world of

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[21] It is here that we can sense the uproar of Christians in response to Kant's *Religion* when Books One and Two were first published in 1792. Kant is not suggesting that Christianity has no place in moral life - indeed, he is trying to establish the very opposite by showing how Christianity can be brought within reason's limits and remain connected to morality. However, in Kant's system of religion, Christianity is threatened to the extent that it is made contingent upon morality. Christianity is equated with any or all other revealed religions that must take morality as foundational if they hope to qualify as a true empirical religion. In this sense, Christianity holds no special importance over any other revealed religions that maintain morality as a basis. As a result, Kant was severely reprimanded and much of his work on religion was censored (under King Frederick William II) because his views, as he expressed them in *Religion* were seen as being subversive to the established Church's interpretation of Christianity. See Greene's discussion in Part IV, "The Publication of "Religion within the Limits of Reason alone" of his introductory essay to *Religion*, p. xxxii-xxxvii.

ecclesiastical faith and the theoretical world of reasoned religion is a true empirical religion that unites revelation, practices and rituals together with our duty to the moral law and takes morality or the moral law as its primary motivating foundation. Ecclesiastical faith and the pure religion of reason are united in so far as a true empirical religion bridges the gap between them in such a way that ecclesiastical faith can serve as a vehicle to the pure religion of reason

Members united under a true religion do their best to remain well disposed. Their efforts are aimed towards exhibiting the moral Kingdom of God on earth so far as they can bring it to pass in the hopes "that higher wisdom will grant the completion of [their] well-intentioned endeavors."[22] In this way, the members move closer toward moral goodness until the practical elements of their ecclesiastical faith become more and more dispensable. Eventually, the members are ruled by the pure religion of reason which supersedes their ecclesiastical faith and all are met by God.

This supersession of the pure religion of reason over ecclesiastical faith does not mean that Kant is completely doing away with ecclesiastical faith. It may be the case that eventually, when we have finally become well-pleasing to God, ecclesiastical faith becomes dispensable. However, to reach that level of moral goodness where we are pleasing to God requires the practices of ecclesiastical faith. In other words, ecclesiastical faith or revealed religion is necessary

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[22] R, 92.

to keep up morally disposed. The practices, rituals and Scriptural narratives extend our morality to the idea of God. Kant is trying to show that practical religion plays its part in our quest for moral perfection so long as the practical religion has duty to the moral law at its foundation. In this way, practical religion, ecclesiastical faith or Scripture is united to the pure religion of reason in so far as ecclesiastical faith keeps us morally disposed and united with other well-intentioned individuals so that we are directed towards moral perfection, the hope of God's grace and achieving the Kingdom of God on earth. However, ecclesiastical faith and reasoned religion are distinct from each other in so far as ecclesiastical faith can sometimes be disconnected from morality and, as a result, can play no part in achieving moral perfection. Thus it is never the case that ecclesiastical faith, on its own, will fall within the limits of reason. Kant wants to be clear about this.

CONCLUSION

It can be said that in *Religion* Kant is taking what he did in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and in *Grounding* one step further. In these two works, Kant establishes that God and the Highest Good are rational principles towards which all rational humans strive. However, in *Religion*, Kant wants to address the question of how and why our reason holds these goals. In *Religion* Kant establishes that through our reason we have the *ground* of morality. But this morality is not enough by itself to achieve the Highest Good. Moreover, this morality must be related to some *end* or *consequence* towards which it is directed. This end is God and the Highest Good or moral perfection. Thus, as we know from Kant's two previous works, reason and morality have God and the Highest Good as their rational end. But, the question remains as to how we get from ground to consequence? How do we unite morality and God to demonstrate that they are necessarily related? In *Religion* Kant shows that *ground* and *consequence* are brought together by a true empirical religion or an ecclesiastical faith that infuses us with a teleological purpose by extending its moral foundation to the idea of God. In other words, what bridges the gap between our practical

moral foundation or grounds and the theoretical end of a "powerful moral Lawgiver, *outside of mankind*"[23] is a true empirical religion which unites reason and the moral law with revelation or ecclesiastical faith so that morality extends itself to the idea of God. In this way, ecclesiastical faith or Scripture is united to reasoned religion, and, more importantly, practical religion is brought within the limits of reason alone. Reason justifies the need for religion; it does not undermine it. We can only hope to complete the task that morality sets for us when we can interpret our moral experience as being guided by God. Thus, through religion we can interpret our duties as divine commands from God based on our knowledge that these duties are first and foremost duties to the moral law.

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[23] R, 5-6.

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